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**In search of an individual identity: A psychoanalytical examination of  
motivational forces behind the identity development of female  
characters in the selected works of Violette Leduc and Eileen Chang**

**By**

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## **Abstract**

Violette Leduc (1907-72) and Eileen Chang (1920-95) are writers from different societies (France and China respectively) and distinctly different backgrounds. They are brought together in this thesis for their portrayal of women characters in pursuit of a sense of identity and fulfilment in societies where gender roles can function as pseudo-destinies, which can, to varying degrees, be relativized, questioned and resisted.

The study will be based on close readings of both authors, and will first and foremost consist in new findings concerning their treatment of the aforementioned issues in literary form. However, the juxtaposition of these particular authors serves to throw light, more generally, on various questions of concern to researchers in French Studies, Oriental Studies, and Comparative Literature. Techniques familiar to critics will be used in conjunction with concepts drawn from the work of Abraham Maslow, in particular his 1943 theory concerning the 'Hierarchy of Needs'. This theory is widely used as a marketing tool in present-day companies, although it is less actively used in the literary world.

On the one hand, feminist and psychoanalytic theories will help to throw light on the kind of obstacles to fulfilment which the women characters are portrayed as encountering. On the other hand, a post-Maslowian perspective affords a useful reference point, since Maslow's 'Hierarchy of Needs' resonates with the frustrations and fulfilments of women characters in Leduc and Chang. Moreover, Maslow's theory attempts to find a body of principles of needs and fulfilment that harmonizes with eastern as well as western traditions, and his approach is ahead of its time in that it is interdisciplinary. Now that many disciplines are seeking to redefine themselves as interdisciplinary, to bring together these various strands in a literary thesis is to make a contribution not only to the study of Leduc and Chang, but the study of methodology in interpreting literature.

In each chapter, we will juxtapose texts by Leduc and Chang in the light of the method set out in the Introduction. Chapter 1 will focus on individualism and sexual attachments; Chapter 2 will address the significance of motherhood for mothers and daughters; Chapter 3 will look at motivational forces behind identity development and Chapter 4 will explore individualism and the taboo of death and sex.

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## INTRODUCTION

Freud states in *Femininity* (1933) that what may be described as feminine *par excellence* are ‘the functions of rearing and caring for the young’.<sup>1</sup> The practice of designating the role of nurturing and caretaking to women is, according to Nancy Chodorow, further perpetuated by the importance society places on educating girls ‘toward nurturance and responsibility’.<sup>2</sup> Current statistics relating to French and Chinese societies show that a vast majority of nursing positions, pre-school and primary teaching positions remain predominantly occupied by women. According to Daniel Sicart, 87.4% of nursing positions in France were found to be held by women in 2010.<sup>3</sup> Statistics published in 2006 by The Bureau of Nursing and Health Care in Taiwan confirm that 99% of nurses are female.<sup>4</sup> Two thirds of teachers in France in 2011 are women. Of those teaching in ‘le premier degré’, over 80 percent are women whereas in ‘second degré’, the percentage of women teachers falls to 57. Figures published by the Ministry of

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<sup>1</sup> Sigmund Freud, ‘Femininity, *On Freud’s ‘Femininity’*, ed. by Leticia Glocer Fiorini and Graciela Abelin-Sas Rose (London: Karnac, 2010), pp. 112-135 (p. 115).

<sup>2</sup> Nancy Chodorow, *Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), p. 55. In further references, this edition is abbreviated to *Feminism*.

<sup>3</sup> Daniel Sicart, ‘Les professions de santé au 1er janvier 2010’, *DRESS*, 144 (mai 2010); *L’État de l’école: 30 indicateurs sur le système éducatif français*, 21 (2011).  
<<http://www.education.gouv.fr/cid57102/1-etat-de-l-ecole-30-indicateurs-sur-le-systeme-educatif-francais.html>> [accessed May 2012] (p. 26).

<sup>4</sup> ‘Summary of All Education Levels SY2000-2012’, *Ministry of Education in Taiwan*.  
<<http://english.moe.gov.tw/ct.asp?xItem=946&ctNode=1184&mp=1>> [accessed May 2012].  
My reasons for focusing on statistics from Taiwan, rather than from China, will be explained in section 4.4 of this chapter.



Education in Taiwan show, from 2009 to 2011, over 98 percent of pre-school and primary posts were occupied by women. These figures appear to validate women's role as nurturer and carer in society.<sup>5</sup> They also indicate that not only are present-day women indeed developing within restricted boundaries, but highlights also that their identity is significantly associated with nurturing and caring. In other words, they are collectively recognized as an essential category for the survival of society yet (feminists, certainly, would argue) do not play a sufficiently significant role in society to be accorded the right to an individual recognition beyond their ability to nurture and care.

This does not suggest that external factors such as social, political, religious or economic influences are the dominant cause of such limitations. For example, the promotion of equal opportunities both in education and employment is precisely a socio-political attempt at narrowing the gap between the two sexes and at providing greater freedom of choice for women. This, however, appears not to be fully effective since statistics from France in 2010 show the percentage of girls who voluntarily choose to study humanities, arts or nursing courses outweighs the percentage of girls who voluntarily choose technological, manual intensive or scientific courses.<sup>6</sup> This suggests that young women have internalized the tendencies of patriarchy as well as the expectations of society to the extent of limiting their own options.

Simone de Beauvoir remarks that a woman is capable of defining her identity and her role in society, but if her decisions are influenced by social, political, religious and economic factors, as well as by being predisposed, at an early age, to the ideologies of a patriarchal society, breaking away from being 'l'objet, l'autre' to achieve a recognized individual identity must necessitate first and foremost an

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<sup>5</sup> 'Summary of All Education Levels SY2000-2012', *Ministry of Education in Taiwan*. <<http://english.moe.gov.tw/ct.asp?xItem=946&ctNode=1184&mp=1>> [accessed May 2012].

<sup>6</sup> According to 'Menjva-MESR DEPP-Enquête IVA', in 2010 the percentage of girls in France in classes preparing for 'fonctions sociales' was 79 percent, whereas the percentages of girls in France in classes preparing for 'universités de technologie and d'ingénieurs were 25 percent and 27 percent respectively. <[http://media.education.gouv.fr/file/2011/38/2/Filles\\_et\\_Garcons\\_2011\\_170382.pdf](http://media.education.gouv.fr/file/2011/38/2/Filles_et_Garcons_2011_170382.pdf)> [accessed may 2012]; In 'Summary of Education at All Levels SY2000-2012' published by the Ministry of Education in Taiwan, 64 percent of girls were studying for humanities and social sciences whereas only 32 percent were studying for science and technology courses in 2010. <<http://english.moe.gov.tw/ct.asp?xItem=14476&ctNode=11429&mp=1>> [accessed May 2012].

examination of her own beliefs and internal influences.<sup>7</sup> Beauvoir effectively addresses the question: are the many modes of living for woman the result of repression exerted upon her or has she come to identify her existence with these repressions and forfeited the choice to develop an identity of her own?

This thesis examines the depiction of women characters in the works of two female authors: Violette Leduc and Eileen Chang. The reasons for choosing Leduc and Chang will be explained later in the chapter. Focus is particularly placed on how the characters are portrayed to respond to explicit and implicit internal influences. To choose two female writers from different societies offers several advantages. First, it provides the opportunity to point up striking contrasts, whilst being constrained by neither a purely western nor a purely eastern corpus. Second, it allows the drawing of even more striking comparisons, however different their methods, between these writers and how they explore the problem of identity development for women. Third, it offers the opportunity of understanding the degree of confidence women feel towards their own identity development, particularly when they are confronted with predetermined roles that are exerted by culture, class and gender. This allows for an assessment of the degree of hope which Leduc and Chang express for their own sex when it comes to the possibility of developing individuality.

One methodological problem immediately arises: how to define ‘individuality’? One solution might be to conceive it as whatever traits, attitudes or behaviours might develop against social pressures towards (for instance) gender roles. But this is potentially self-defeating, for clearly, it might be argued that when an individual (which is to say, an individual character, in fiction) defies predetermined roles, the mode of ‘rebellion’ or ‘defiance’ might still be read as socially and psychologically conditioned. I have adopted an original methodology in order to solve this problem. I have tested the individual characters of the works of the corpus against a range of theories belonging conventionally to different disciplines, but above all I have prioritised a theory that cuts across traditional disciplines, and aims even to transcend cultural differences between eastern and western world-views: Maslow’s ‘Hierarchy of Needs’. It is above all the ideas put

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<sup>7</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *Le Deuxième sexe I: Les faits et les mythes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1949; repr. 1969), p. 93. In further references, this edition is abbreviated to *Le Deuxième Sexe I*.

forward by Abraham Maslow, a humanistic psychologist who published his theory on the Hierarchy of Needs in 1943 that have been used here to analyse how, in our corpus, women characters are psychologically motivated to develop an individual identity.

## 1 Maslow and the Hierarchy of Needs

At this point, I would like to explain in some detail the Hierarchy of Needs.<sup>8</sup> This theory was created by Maslow in the 1940s in answer to his findings that some human needs take precedence over others. In this Hierarchy of Needs, there are five categorized levels. The first or lowest level consists of physiological needs which are the most basic of all. This includes all the needs to be active, to rest, to sleep, to release waste, to avoid pain, and to have sex. The second level comprises of needs in relation to a sense of safety or security such as stability and protection – referred to by Maslow as the ‘safety need’. This is succeeded by the need for love and belonging such as the need for friendships and for relationships. Maslow identifies this as the ‘love need’. The fourth level is the need for esteem – termed by Maslow as the ‘esteem need’. This particular need is divided into two forms: the lower form being the need for respect from others such as recognition, glory and fame, and the higher form consisting of the need for self-respect, confidence, competence, achievement, independence and freedom. These four levels of needs are categorized by Maslow as ‘deficiency needs’ or ‘D-needs’ due to his argument that when such needs are not sufficiently gratified, the individual will feel a sense of anxiety. The final level and also the least basic of all, is the need for self-actualization. Unlike the lower four levels, the fifth level (where the gratification of certain needs lead to the experience of a more delightful and intrinsically satisfying feeling that is ‘self-justifying, self-validating’) is the highest of all levels of need.<sup>9</sup> The fifth level allows the individual to become a more complete being and to discover the self.

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<sup>8</sup> Maslow, ‘Psychological Data and Human Values’, *Toward a Psychology of Being*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1968), pp. 152-66.

<sup>9</sup> Maslow, *Toward a Psychology of Being*, p. 45.

As mentioned above, Maslow argues that, in essence, all needs are survival needs genetically built into an individual as instincts are, and the fulfilment of needs is essential for the maintenance of health. He also suggests that only when needs from a lower level have been sufficiently gratified can an individual proceed to the next level. For example, an individual can only proceed to the need for safety and security once the majority of his or her physiological needs have been sufficiently satisfied. In this Hierarchy of Needs, the lower four levels – that is to say the physiological, safety, love and esteem needs – are deficiency or homeostasis needs. In other words, the individual will put all his or her efforts into fulfilling a need found in the lower four levels but once these needs have been sufficiently gratified, the individual would no longer be conscious of these needs until the next time a similar deficiency is felt.

There are four major reasons for drawing on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs here. First, Maslow's conviction that decisions taken by all individuals are bound by the personal desire to fulfil, to their benefit, their physiological and psychological needs and that the different categories of needs are an important factor in understanding human behaviour. Maslowian theory argues that humans will display both socially strong (generally considered as good) and socially weak (generally considered as bad) behaviours as well as personally strong (directly beneficial to the individual) and personally weak (directly damaging to the individual) qualities. He adds that a person can only achieve a state of general well-being when he understands who he is, and in order to understand who he is, he must know firstly what he wants.<sup>10</sup> Maslow's confidence in human nature – that an individual will instinctively choose the 'best route' for himself since he is biologically and psychologically conditioned to seek actions and behaviours which are ultimately beneficial to him – is echoed in the following sentence: 'in principle, any baby may become anything. It has vast potential and, therefore, in a certain sense, is anything'.<sup>11</sup>

Based on his respect of individual qualities and needs as well as his belief in human nature, Maslow's approach to human psychology will help to illuminate the motivations behind the identity developments of female characters studied, as

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<sup>10</sup> Maslow, *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature* (New York: Penguin, 1971), p. 107.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 111.

well as provide an explanation to the question: do women make decisions out of choice, or out of fear? Indeed, although his Hierarchy of Needs is not extensively used in the literary world, and as yet to be applied to academic research on the two chosen female writers, it is currently widely used in the commercial world as a marketing tool to understand the reasons behind a consumer's choice of action, irrespective of gender. This, to an extent, facilitates the study of motivational needs behind an individual's identity development without being limited to specific traits or characteristics which a gender from a particular culture is generally perceived to represent or need – a method which, in some ways, complements feminists' fight for women to be acknowledged as individuals.

Without citing a full list of feminists, I will quote two women authors of the twentieth-century – Simone de Beauvoir and Julia Kristeva – who highlight women's oppression in the West and in China. Beauvoir claims that 'toute l'histoire des femmes a été faite par les hommes'.<sup>12</sup> Julia Kristeva writes that in Chinese societies, 'les femmes – ça n'existe pas'.<sup>13</sup> Both Beauvoir's and Kristeva's examinations of female identity are cited frequently in this thesis since Beauvoir probes the question of female identity from a more cosmopolitan perspective, and Kristeva's examination of women in Chinese societies is particularly relevant here.

Maslow's confidence in a person's ability to choose the most beneficial route must bring a new perspective to women's identity, an identity which has, hitherto, been recognized as a collective category and not as a singular entity. In other words, women are not acknowledged as individuals but are, instead, collectively identified as the category of 'women': a category that is perceived to be dependent on others and lacking in action or power. When a woman is said to have chosen what is in her best interest, she cannot be said to be 'lacking in action' and she cannot be 'I'-less.

Second, Maslow developed a rigorous distinction between types of fulfilment through his now often-mentioned, but not always fully understood, Hierarchy of Needs. Therefore, his terms and concepts can be used as an instrument for the analysis of themes of identity and fulfilment – with the proviso that we should not

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<sup>12</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *Le Deuxième sexe I*, p. 216.

<sup>13</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Des Chinoises* (Paris: Des Femmes, 1974), P. 18.

assume they have truth-value. In other words, we will be using Maslow's concepts to analyse our texts, but also using our texts to probe Maslow's concepts – in particular the extent of their usefulness for literary studies that are situated in the interdisciplinary sphere (as they increasingly are).

The third major reason to use Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is that, *prima facie* at least, it is intrinsically suited to a study of a corpus that straddles eastern and western cultures. For Maslow strives to open his western habits of thought to eastern influence, especially when he invokes Taoism. For instance, he writes:

What if the organism is seen as having “biological wisdom”? If we learn to give it greater trust as autonomous, self-governing, and self-choosing, then clearly we as scientists, not to mention physicians, teachers, or even parents, must shift our image over to a more Taoistic one. This is the one word that I can think of that summarizes succinctly the many elements of the image of the more humanistic scientist. Taoistic means asking rather than telling. It means nonintruding, noncontrolling. It stresses noninterfering observation rather than a controlling manipulation. It is receptive and passive rather than active and forceful.<sup>14</sup>

Fourthly, Maslow's perspective that ‘values are defined in many ways, and mean different things to different people’ further emphasizes the practicability of his theoretical framework to illuminate the study of motivational forces behind the actions and behaviours of female characters from two different cultural backgrounds.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, as Maslow's system also takes into account differences in external factors such as socio-political influences, it is an effective tool in the exploration and comparison of the needs of individuals from different environments.

As I will show in the chapters that follow, both Leduc and Chang suggest, explicitly or implicitly, ways in which women (or their female characters, at least) might achieve a kind of self-determining, higher-level fulfilment.

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<sup>14</sup> Maslow, ‘Toward a Humanistic Biology’, *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature*, pp. 14, 65 and 66.

<sup>15</sup> Maslow, *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature*, p. 106.

## 2 Complementary Approaches

### 2.1 Defining identity

However useful it is to focus on Maslow's Hierarchy for the present purpose, some account must be taken of the broader context formed by a range of theories of identity. Below, I will mention some of the theorists, predominantly of the twentieth century, who provide the most useful points of comparison or contrast.

The psychologist Erik Erikson, whose famous works from the 1960s include his theory on the psychosocial development of human beings, remarks that 'a man's character is discernible in the mental or moral attitude in which, when it came upon him, he felt himself most deeply and intensely active and alive'.<sup>16</sup> Jean Miller combines psychological thought with relational-cultural theory and refers to identity as being linked very early with the individual's sense of being as a female or male person.<sup>17</sup> Nancy Chodorow adopts a more inter-relational approach to identity development by proposing it to be an attempt to achieve a sense of wholeness and to gain the feeling of being alive but in relation to others.<sup>18</sup> Erich Fromm offers a more egoistic explanation for the need for individualism in his suggestion that the only real interest for a human being is 'to know one's own self in order to understand what the interests of this self are and how they can be served.'<sup>19</sup> Constantine Sedikides and Marilyn Brewer provide a more comprehensive approach towards the definition of an identity:

Do not equate the individual self with material self-interest, [...] do not equate the individual self with egocentrism, selfishness, arrogance, and disregard for others, although the individual self can give rise to such phenomena, [...] do not advocate that the individual self is asocial or that it exists in a social or cultural vacuum [...] The issue, then, is about balance and relative importance. It is about experiencing the individual self and what this experience means to humans. It is about the degree to which the individual self is subjectively valued, and about the ways in which a threat to this type of self [...] is

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<sup>16</sup> Erik Erikson, *Identity, Youth and Crisis* (London: Faber, 1968), p. 19.

<sup>17</sup> Jean Miller, *Toward a New Psychology of Women* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), p. 74.

<sup>18</sup> Chodorow, *Feminism*, p. 106.

<sup>19</sup> Erich Fromm, *Man for Himself: an Inquiry into the Psychology of Ethics* (New York: Rinehart, 1947), p.134.

handled psychologically.<sup>20</sup>

The development of an individual identity is therefore interwoven with the need to achieve a sense of physical and psychological well-being which, according to Maslow, can only be achieved through the maximization of personal attributes. He further adds that only by maximizing individual potential can one ‘discover the self and answer the ultimate question, who am I? What am I?’<sup>21</sup>

Maslow highlighted one direction in which his thinking needed to be developed: gender. In ‘The Creative Attitude’, he remarks:

Practically all the definitions that we have been using of creativeness, and most of the examples of creativeness that we use are essentially male or masculine definitions and male or masculine products. [...] I have learned recently (through my studies of peak experiences) to look to women and to feminine creativeness as a good field of operation for research, because it gets less involved in products, less involved in achievement, more involved with the process itself, with the going-on process rather than with the climax in obvious triumph and success.<sup>22</sup>

It is beyond the scope of this discussion to inquire whether Maslow succumbs here to (unconscious) gender essentialism, or whether he believes that ‘female creativeness’ is socially conditioned. But his comment highlights the need to relate his thinking to gender. It is possible to ‘update’ his thinking by viewing it through the lens of gender, and by invoking how far this requires us to rethink his analysis of the importance of external factors concerning identity-formation and the fulfilment of needs. Here follow some of the feminist theories that form the most useful complement to Maslow. At the same time, I will indicate how Maslow’s ideas might inflect feminist theory.

## 2.2 Feminism

History has shown that women have not enjoyed the same recognition as men.

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<sup>20</sup> Constantine Sedikides and Marilynn Brewer, *Individual Self, Relational Self, Collective Self* (Philadelphia: Psychology Press, 2001), p. 8.

<sup>21</sup> Maslow, *Psychology of Being*, p. 45.

<sup>22</sup> Maslow, *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature*, p. 59.



Women's identity as mothers, wives or workers were principally the result of the demands of the patriarchal system. For example, women of post-war France had no control over their own reproductive function in response to the *dépeuplement* crisis. Françoise Thébaud states that 'les hommes sont faits pour combattre et conquérir, les femmes pour enfanter et materner'.<sup>23</sup> On the other side of the world in China, post-dynastic women were officially recognized as the equal of men under the rule of Chairman Mao. But one can argue that this was caused primarily by the need for women to replace men lost during the Chinese civil war.

Although the recognition of women's identity differs between the two societies, it is nevertheless evident that French and Chinese women were called upon to replenish or replace existing population. To encourage them to voluntarily offer their assistance in the population crisis, it became necessary for the patriarchal society to accentuate the importance of women by according them respect. This granting of respect, either by emphasizing the importance of the maternal role or by according women more rights, was not established directly as the result of women's desire to gain a recognized identity but reflects rather the patriarchal need to maintain its population size.

Where Chinese women were denied the right to an acknowledged existence, their French counterparts were made to feel inferior. For instance, Michael Lynch writes that 'Chinese women in Imperial China were given numbers and not names'.<sup>24</sup> On French women and their rights, Claire Goldberg Moses explains that they did not have legal control over their person and their possessions until the early 1900s.<sup>25</sup> Awareness of the rights of women only began to be acknowledged publicly in France during the eighteenth century with the demand for citizenship for women. It took some two hundred years for China to follow suit with the Chinese feminist suffragettes after the rise of the Republic.

The reason for China's slow response to the rights of women is discussed by Lynch who remarks that slow development of progress in China is the effect of being under the rule of emperors whose belief that China was a self-sufficient

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<sup>23</sup> Françoise Thébaud, 'Introduction', *Histoire des femmes en occident: V. Le XXe siècle*, ed. by Geroges Duby and Michelle Perrot (Paris: Plon, 1992), p. 72.

<sup>24</sup> Michael Lynch, *Teach Yourself: Modern China* (London: Hodder Education, 2006), p. 149.

<sup>25</sup> Claire Goldberg Moses, 'Republican Feminism' in *French Feminism in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: State University of New York, 1984), pp. 197-228.

country led to a determined reluctance to accept change.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, Chung-tien Yi remarks that ‘for thousands of years, China only recognized the male sex and the only acknowledged male is the emperor’.<sup>27</sup> Although the struggle for women’s rights since Condorcet has not been easy, present-day women in France appear to have more legal control over their own social, political and personal life than their counterparts in China who are still battling for control over their own reproductive system.<sup>28</sup> One of the key factors in raising the issue of women’s rights and their identity is the existence of many feminist critics in the west who have expressed their thoughts on female identity.

Beauvoir suggests that the repression of women is the result of the interpretation and reification of the female body by patriarchal society. Alison Fell asserts that the process is as follows: woman is presented as a ‘passive sexual object at a particular historical moment, which is then accepted as destiny by the majority of both men and women’.<sup>29</sup> Miller criticises the formation of social structures as the barrier which prevents women from being recognized as representatives of their respective cultures.<sup>30</sup> Not unlike Miller, Kristeva highlights the detrimental influence which patriarchal dominance has upon the identity of women since, ‘pour avoir voix au chapitre de la politique et de l’histoire’, an individual must have ‘une identification censée être masculine, paternelle’.<sup>31</sup> Women’s identity development, or at least women’s significance in society, appears to be the product of patriarchal society.

In response to the conviction that the patriarchal system is the principal cause of subordination in women, Beauvoir suggests breaking free from traditional female roles so that women might refuse ‘les limites de leur situation et cherch[er] à s’ouvrir les chemins de l’avenir; la résignation n’est qu’une démission et une

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<sup>26</sup> Lynch, *Teach Yourself: Modern China*, pp. 4-5.

<sup>27</sup> Chung-tien Yi, *中國的男人和女人 Chinese Men and Women* (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing, 2007), p. 44. I have translated *中國的男人和女人* as *Chinese Men and Women*. All further references to this book will be to my own translation.

<sup>28</sup> For example, the one-child policy in China which has led to the killing of unborn or newly born baby girls.

<sup>29</sup> Alison Fell, *Liberty, Equality, Maternity in Beauvoir, Leduc and Ernaux* (Oxford: Legenda, 2003), p. 86.

<sup>30</sup> Miller, *Toward a New Psychology of Women*, pp. 76-66.

<sup>31</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Des Chinoises*, p. 43.

fuite; il n'y a pour la femme aucune autre issue que de travailler à sa libération'.<sup>32</sup> Fell quotes Luce Irigaray as advocating the disruption of the patriarchal system or the symbolic order so that women can be given 'droit au plaisir, à la jouissance, à la passion. Lui donner droit aux paroles, et pourquoi pas parfois aux cris, à la colère'.<sup>33</sup> In other words, twentieth century women were called to question and revolt against traditional female roles. For instance, the campaign for women's right to control their maternity in France in the 1960s, and the 'second-wave' French feminist movement after 1968.<sup>34</sup>

On this argument that woman is a 'man-made' product, Maslowian theory provides a more optimistic angle. Although Maslow does not agree nor disagree with feminists thoughts, his theory on the supposition that an individual has vast potential and can be anything does, to an extent, reflect a degree of agreement with feminists views. Beauvoir states that 'on ne naît pas femme: on le devient'.<sup>35</sup> Similarly, Maslow suggests that once free of restrictions, such as patriarchal ideologies or social limitations, and with the principal goal of maximizing her potential, a woman can become a product of her own making.

Not only is patriarchal society often held responsible for confining women within traditional nurturing or caring roles, women's physical attributes have also contributed to the perception that women are naturally weaker than men. Beauvoir remarks that 'en moyenne elle est plus petite que l'homme, moins lourde [...] la force musculaire est beaucoup moins grande chez la femme'.<sup>36</sup> Women's physical size is also commented on by Eileen Chang who explains that women are involuntarily forced into subordinating roles due to their 'lack of physical strength'.<sup>37</sup>

This is, however, questioned by Erikson who suggests the comparison of physical strength should be relative to the performance of each physical action

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<sup>32</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, 'Situation', *Le Deuxième sexe II: L'expérience vécue* (Paris: Gallimard, 1949), p. 522. In future references, this edition is abbreviated to *Le Deuxième sexe II*.

<sup>33</sup> Fell, *Liberty, Equality, Maternity in Beauvoir, Leduc and Ernaux*, p. 28.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 71 and 104.

<sup>35</sup> Beauvoir, *Le Deuxième sexe I*, p. 285.

<sup>36</sup> Beauvoir, *Le Deuxième sexe I*, pp. 49-50.

<sup>37</sup> Eileen Chang, *Written on Water*, trans. by Andrew F. Jones (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), p. 85.

and not purely on isolated muscles.<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, the assumption that women, as a gender group, have always been ‘inferior’ to men as the direct result of their lack of physical strength is challenged by Kristeva who highlights historical evidence where women in ancient China were in control of their sexual activities and were, in fact, the stronger of the two sexes in sexual performance.<sup>39</sup>

From this perspective, the predominant factor in the power struggle between men and women is not, then, a measurement of muscle strength but the condition of a ‘social structure that is also a biopolitical economy of desire, and sexuality’.<sup>40</sup> On the other hand, and again Maslowian theory on the maximization of an individual’s potential cannot be neglected here, rejecting traditional modes of female roles as a matter of principle carries the potential risk that a woman might not be able to achieve a more complete individual identity through the maximization of her potential. Chodorow remarks that ‘women’s mothering as a feature of social structure [...] has no reality separate from the biological fact that women bear children and lactate’.<sup>41</sup>

Maslow argues, however, that biological function is an integral part of ‘what the person already is, though in a potential form. The search for identity means very much the same things, as does becoming what one truly is’.<sup>42</sup> Kristeva’s statement in ‘Le Temps des femmes’ also appears to support Maslow’s argument: ‘La majorité des femmes aujourd’hui trouve sa vocation dans la mise au monde d’un enfant’.<sup>43</sup> Although Kristeva immediately follows this statement with ‘à quoi correspond ce désir de maternité?’, the refusal to incorporate biological attributes in the development of an identity is nevertheless implied to be damaging to the overall well-being of a woman.

It is, however, the notion that biological functions are merits in the existence of an individual which Beauvoir contests. She argues that ‘de toute façon, engendrer, allaiter ne sont pas des activités, ce sont des fonctions naturelles; aucun

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<sup>38</sup> Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis*, p. 280.

<sup>39</sup> Kristeva, ‘Les Manuels sur l’art de la chambre à coucher’, *Des Chinoises*, p. 61.

<sup>40</sup> Yan Haipin, *Chinese Women Writers and the Feminist Imagination 1905-1948* (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 3.

<sup>41</sup> Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), p. 14. Hereafter referred to as *The Reproduction of Mothering*.

<sup>42</sup> Maslow, *Motivation*, p. 95.

<sup>43</sup> Julia Kristeva, ‘Le Temps des femmes’, *De l’Égalité des sexes*, ed. by Michel de Manassein (Paris: CNDP, 1995), pp. 23-38 (34).

projet n'y est engagé; c'est pourquoi la femme n'y trouve pas le motif d'une affirmation hautaine de son existence; elle subit passivement son destin biologique'.<sup>44</sup> The inappropriateness of incorporating biological functions with self-development (at least, for a woman) is also raised by Irigaray, who questions, first and foremost, the authenticity of the woman's image in society: 'La valeur de la femme lui viendrait de son rôle maternel, et, par ailleurs, de sa "féminité". Mais, en fait, cette "féminité" est un rôle, une image, une valeur, imposés aux femmes par les systèmes de représentation des hommes'.<sup>45</sup> This encourages therefore the renunciation of 'female' attributes as the way forward for women to be recognized as the equal of men.

To suggest, however, that a woman needs to sacrifice her female attributes to gain acknowledgement does, nevertheless, pose two apparent threats to her overall well-being. Firstly, to reiterate Maslow's theory on the development of a more complete individual, this remark clearly supports the argument for the maximization of personal 'potentials' – a term used by Maslow to refer to possibilities – for positive growth: 'first be a healthy, femaleness-fulfilled woman [...] before general-human self-actualization becomes possible'.<sup>46</sup> This carries the implication that a woman searching for a wholeness of self must acknowledge her biological qualities and allow them to function. Once her 'potentials' are maximized, 'no healthy woman need feel guilty or defensive about being female or about any of the female processes'.<sup>47</sup>

Secondly, persistent denial of her biological abilities implies, for some theorists, the woman's sense of shame of her own sex, suggesting subsequently the belief that her sex is inferior. It also highlights the possibility of losing the traits which identify her as an individual. Fromm argues that the desire for equality is 'equivalent to interchangeability, and is the very negation of individuality. Equality, instead of being the condition for the development of each man's peculiarity, means the extinction of individuality'.<sup>48</sup> For example, a female nurse gifted in caring for babies is recognized by her peer as 'the wonderful

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<sup>44</sup> *Le Deuxième Sexe I*, p. 110.

<sup>45</sup> Luce Irigaray, *Ce Sexe qui n'en est pas un* (Paris: Minuit, 1977), p. 80.

<sup>46</sup> Maslow, *Psychology of Being*, p. 210

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 156-57.

<sup>48</sup> Fromm, p. 74.

paediatric nurse' and not as a woman who is a wonderful nurse. If she were to deliberately hide her gift to become the same as all her other colleagues, not only does she risk losing her recognition as 'the wonderful paediatric nurse', but also the likelihood of not being singularly identified.

From this perspective, it is in demanding equality that a woman ironically forfeits the possibility of achieving a recognized individual identity. However, one could also argue that equality helps to further distinguish individualism. Taking the previous example of 'the wonderful paediatric nurse', in this case it would be 'we are all women, we are all nurses. yet I am a better nurse than the rest. I am recognized as "the wonderful nurse", and wherever I go, I will be singularly acknowledged. I have become "the" wonderful nurse'.

Prior to the 1950s in oriental communities, particularly in Chinese society, women were discouraged from being anything other than objects or properties defined or identified by their male partners. For example, Grace Kuo highlights the restrictions women in Taiwan face since the promulgation of the Civil Code in 1929, requiring women to 'adopt the husband's surname after marriage, and live in the husband's place of residence'.<sup>49</sup> Not only were they required to belong to their husbands, any children they had would also by law belong to their legal male partners. Attitudes, however, are changing, as Hung-En Liu explains: 'since 1996, custody has been overwhelmingly awarded to mothers, whereas before 1996 fathers were favoured by the courts.'<sup>50</sup>

Society's attitude towards women in present-day Taiwan appears to remain nevertheless prejudiced, particularly at work. This can be mainly due to 'clauses implemented by banks, airline companies and government-affiliated cultural centres, requiring that women be single and not become pregnant'.<sup>51</sup> The threat to equality is however not restricted to modern oriental societies, as many examples of gender-based discrimination in contemporary Europe appear to demonstrate. For instance, and here I have chosen two court cases provided by Darren Newman

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<sup>49</sup> Grace Kuo, 'Breaking Down Patriarchy: Advancing Women's Status in Taiwan', *Taiwan Today*, (March 2011), para. 3. <<http://taiwantoday.tw/ct.asp?xItem=157684&ctNode=428>> [accessed 27 November 2013].

<sup>50</sup> 'Mother or Father: Who Received Custody? The Best Interests of the Child Standard and Judges': Custody Decisions in Taiwan' (*International Journal of Law Policy and The Family*, (2001) 15 (185).

<sup>51</sup> Kuo, 'Breaking Down Patriarchy', para. 10.

which, in my view, are examples of discrimination at work in present-day Europe: the demand for equal pay in ‘North V. Dumfries and Galloway Council’ where female school staff claim to be employed under less favourable terms and conditions than certain male employees. The second example being the challenge against sexual discrimination in ‘Riežniece v Zemkopības ministrija’ where a female employee was unfairly treated whilst on maternity leave.<sup>52</sup>

Regardless of women’s achievements and successes, which are constantly overlooked, societies remain more readily open to accept and celebrate men’s accomplishments. This is a tendency which many communities, including the French ‘Haute autorité de lutte contre les discriminations et pour l'égalité’ (an independent French administrative authority established in 2005 to fight against discrimination and to promote equality) attempt to highlight through ‘equal opportunities schemes’. Yet the reality of having to enhance public awareness of the importance of equality only further emphasizes its precarious existence.

Although individual development may depend on the identification and gratification of personal needs, Maslow suggests that achieving overall well-being is not only interwoven with external elements such as cultural influences, but also relies greatly on the probability of being able to fulfil individual desires.<sup>53</sup> Though Maslow never made this kind of association, we could reasonably connect his theory to the question of abortion. Contrary to France where it is legally possible for a woman to seek the termination of her foetus of less than 12 weeks of gestation, the majority of Taiwanese state clinics or hospitals will not undertake such an operation even at an early stage of gestation.<sup>54</sup> Private medical intervention is possible but only when consent is given, not only by the pregnant woman but also by her male sexual partner. Society’s attitude and treatment implies that the woman must eventually acknowledge the reality that she is not in control of her body and that she cannot explore her sexuality without the fear of

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<sup>52</sup> Darren Newman, ‘Highlights of key cases: North V Dumfries and Galloway Council’, and ‘Riežniece v Zemkopības ministrija’, *Equal Opportunities Review*, 239 (2013), 21-25.

<sup>53</sup> Maslow, *Motivation and Personality* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), p. 31.

<sup>54</sup> According to a report by Taiwan Women’s Health in 2004 (a not-for-profit advocacy for women’s rights in Taiwan), abortion is legal in Taiwan but principally for women with medical or mental health conditions. Furthermore, to be permitted to terminate a pregnancy, she must also be accompanied by her partner who needs to give his consent.  
([http://www.twh.org.tw/article\\_word.asp?artid=00028&artcatid=00003&artcatnm=%A5%CD%A8%7C%B0%B7%B1d&artcat2id=00022&nouse=1054](http://www.twh.org.tw/article_word.asp?artid=00028&artcatid=00003&artcatnm=%A5%CD%A8%7C%B0%B7%B1d&artcat2id=00022&nouse=1054)) [accessed Nov 2013].

being punished. It is being confronted with this realization which, with reference to Maslowian theory, draws her attention to her socially imposed limitations and subsequently heightens her sense of inadequacy.

### 3 Psychoanalysis

Interwoven with feminist reflection on gender is a strong tradition of feminist thought on psychoanalysis. As previously mentioned, educational statistics demonstrate that women continue to prefer more expressive or nurturing academic courses. This preference is a direct manifestation of the fact that women remain indoctrinated into accepting their suitability for roles such as primary teachers or nurses and which, to an extent, allow them to perceive this as a means of maximizing their personal capability. Chodorow argues however that ““female” virtues or qualities – nurturance, for instance, – are nevertheless seen as acquired, a product of women’s development or social location, and acquirable by men, given appropriate development, experience and social reorganization’.<sup>55</sup>

Chodorow’s suggestion that the important training of being a wife and a mother is ‘embedded in the girl’s unconscious development’ is also explored by Toril Moi.<sup>56</sup> Moi quotes Beauvoir saying that ‘women are conditioned [...] by the traditional image of women’.<sup>57</sup>

This traditional image of woman is further enforced by mothers who, as Judith Arcana explains, embark on a journey ‘to prepare their children to maintain society as it is’.<sup>58</sup> This highlights further the principal reason behind the inculcation of the female role which is not to maximize personal desires nor potential but to ensure instead the survival of society – patriarchal society. This is however contested by Foucault’s belief that ‘man is driven to plant his seed, women to nurture’, as cited by Precilla Choi.<sup>59</sup> Choi argues that Foucault’s remark suggests that women are in reality instinctively driven towards caring for

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<sup>55</sup> Chodorow, *Feminism*, p. 99.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55

<sup>57</sup> Toril Moi, *French Feminist Thought: A Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), p. 29.

<sup>58</sup> Judith Arcana, *Our Mothers’ Daughters* ((London: Women’s Press, 1981), p. 54.

<sup>59</sup> Precilla Choi, *Female Sexuality: Psychology, Biology and Social Context* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994), p. 161.



others and are therefore educated accordingly so as to satisfy this instinctive need. Such a supposition is certainly open to challenge. For instance, Irigaray's remark on women's role vis-à-vis men's sexual demands certainly suggests that women are not in reality instinctively driven to nurture:

les caractères de la sexualité (dite) féminine en découlent: valorisation de la reproduction et du nourrissage; fidélité; pudeur, ignorance, voire désintérêt du plaisir; acceptation passive de l'“activité” des hommes; séduction pour susciter le désir des consommateurs, mais s'offrant comme support matériel à celui-ci sans en jouir'.<sup>60</sup>

If women are responding to an instinctive drive to care or to nurture, then to be able to provide a degree of comfort or care to others must grant them a sense of fulfilment. Yet Irigaray's remark that women care 'sans en jouir' clearly challenges this assumption.

In this context, it can be argued that women have had the conviction inculcated in them by patriarchal society that they are better suited for nurturing or caring professions, and that for women to enter into traditional female roles is simply an expression of adhering to the needs of patriarchal society without being conscious of their true desires. To suggest that women are obeying the rules of patriarchal society implies that they perceive themselves as part of a collective group and not as individuals with unique needs and qualities. Consequently, to achieve an individual identity, it is critical for women to become conscious of their true desires and to understand whether their attitudes reflect a need to prioritize society's demands over the need of the self or whether their beliefs, actions and desires are motivated by a stronger need to benefit first the self.

In the chapters that follow, psychoanalysis and humanistic psychology are applied to the discovery of motivational needs in the female characters of Leduc and Chang. This seems entirely conventional in a European perspective, but is fairly radical in a Chinese context. Although psychology is now a widely used means of human analysis, its influence and presence, as Jingyuan Zhang explains, were very limited in dynastic China and insubstantial in post-colonial Chinese

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<sup>60</sup> Irigaray, *Ce Sexe qui n'en est pas un*, p. 181.

society.<sup>61</sup> He remarks that ‘psychoanalysis never became a professional field in China’ as ‘traditional Chinese education tended to consider human desires and instincts harmful to the growth of man’.<sup>62</sup>

This is further aggravated by the teaching of Chinese literatures that were written by influential scholars of imperial China and which contain depictions of heroic or pious acts, acts that could be diagnosed as neurotic symptoms in today’s practice. For example, in *The Dream of the Red Chamber* (one of China’s four great classical novels written during the 18<sup>th</sup> century by Cao Xueqin), the female protagonist is depicted as a sensitive, beautiful girl and is revered for her emotional sensitivity and compassionate nature which are so pronounced that she can cry at the fall of Autumn leaves (death of the leaf) or upon the death of an ant.

The introduction of psychology in China, mainly Freudian theories, was not a smooth ride in the beginning. Although psychological theories were considered to be a necessary path towards modernization, it was nevertheless, as Wendy Larson argues, mistrusted in China.<sup>63</sup> Zhang adds that after Freud wrote a preface praising the book *A Young Girl’s Diary* by an anonymous writer (translated by Eden and Cedar Paul and published in 1921 by Thomas Seltzer in New York), he became ‘associated by most common readers with the promotion of sexual liberty’.<sup>64</sup> It is still common practice for any symptom or illness not responsive to physical medical treatment, either traditional or western, to be regarded superstitiously in modern China. For example, the continuous crying of infants may be linked to the wrath of earthly gods.

This has led to limited critical works on the psychological study of characters written by Chinese authors such as Chang. Although both Chih-ting Hsia and Chuan-chih Kao have written extensively on Chang, their critical writings mainly discuss the sociopolitical and socio-economic issues found within her works.<sup>65</sup> Furthermore, and as mentioned previously, the application of western psychology

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<sup>61</sup> Jingyuan Zhang, *Psychoanalysis in China* (New York: Cornell University, 1992), pp. 2-3.

<sup>62</sup> Zhang, *Psychoanalysis in China*, p 31.

<sup>63</sup> Wendy Larson, *From Ah Q to Lei Feng: Freud and Revolutionary Spirit in 20th Century China*, (California: Stanford University Press, 2009), p. 60.

<sup>64</sup> Zhang, *Psychoanalysis in China*, p 33.

<sup>65</sup> C.T. Hsia, ‘Eileen Chang’, in *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), pp. 389-431 (393); Chuan-chih Kao, *Eileen Chang Reconsidered* (Taipei: Rye Field, 2003). My own translation from the original text. All future translations of quotations from this work will be my own.

to the exploration of identity development in women raises a significant concern in that western psychological theories were originally developed by men.

Melanie Klein and Joan Riviere, in their attempt to highlight the importance of the presence of nurturing love during the early years of an individual, suggest that different psychological developments in men and women are not the direct result of their sexual differences but are instead the consequence of their relationships with their childhood carers.<sup>66</sup> Although this approach implies that biological differences do not develop into sexual inferiority, it does however question the possibility of achieving a degree of positive psychological growth since, according to feminist critics, nurturing is principally undertaken by women under conditions of oppression. In other words, the implication that positive identity development is associated with the experience of positive nurturing is undermined by the presumed negative psychological state of the nurturer.

These considerations are designed to show why it makes sense to use a combination of feminist criticism, psychological theories and the Maslowian Hierarchy of Needs to analyse and highlight how two women authors from different societies challenge established perceptions of female status and suggest other ways for women to achieve an identity. This involves understanding how women in the works of Leduc and Chang are depicted to perceive themselves as well as the motivational forces behind their approach to life.

## **4 About the authors**

### **4.1 Violette Leduc**

Violette Leduc, born in Arras, Pas de Calais, France on 7 April 1907, was the illegitimate daughter of Berthe Leduc and André Debaralle, the son of Berthe's wealthy protestant employer. Leduc spent her childhood years suffering from sickness, poverty and a hostile mother. The only kindness she found was from her grandmother who died when Leduc was around ten. After her mother's marriage, Leduc was sent to a boarding school where she began a lesbian affair with her

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<sup>66</sup> Melanie Klein and Joan Riviere, *Love, Hate and Reparation* (London: Hogarth Press, 1937).

classmate. An account of this affair later became the basis of her work *Thérèse et Isabelle* (1966) – a novel initially censored by the publishing house Gallimard in 1954 for being too explicit in the depiction of youthful homosexuality. The affair ended and shortly afterwards, Leduc embarked on another affair – which lasted around nine years – with her music instructor. After her formal education ended, Leduc worked as a press cuttings clerk and secretary at Plon publishers, then as a writer of news pieces. In the 1940s, she met Maurice Sachs and Simone de Beauvoir, both of whom encouraged her to write.

When Leduc first met Beauvoir in St-Germain-des-Prés in Paris in 1945, Beauvoir was already a well-known figure in the French post-war intellectual circle, having published *L'Invitée* in 1943 and *Pyrrhus et Cinéas* in 1944. Together with Jean-Paul Sartre – a leading figure in the philosophy of existentialism – Beauvoir challenged the social and cultural expectations and assumptions of her time. Leduc, on the other hand, had just been spurred on by Sachs to write her first novel based on her childhood memories of her relationship with her mother and grandmother; this later became her first novel *L'Asphyxie*. With the help of Beauvoir, *L'Asphyxie* was published in 1946 by France's premier publishing house, Gallimard, and it soon earned her praise from Jean-Paul Sartre, Jean Cocteau and Jean Genet. Describing Leduc as a writer with a unique 'tempérament, un style', Beauvoir took Leduc under her wing, and not only encouraged the latter to write on female sexuality but was also instrumental in helping Leduc publish her autobiography *La Bâtarde* (1964) – the novel that made Leduc's literary reputation in post-war Paris.<sup>67</sup> This mentor-protégé relationship would last their entire lives.

With the success of *La Bâtarde*, which became a best seller and nearly won the Prix Goncourt, Leduc was able to publish her previously censored work *Thérèse et Isabelle*. Other works by Leduc include *L'Affamée* (1948), *Ravages* (1955), *La Vieille fille et le mort* (1958), *La Folie en tête* (1970), *La Chasse à l'amour* (1972). Leduc died from breast cancer on 28 May 1972.

## 4.2 Eileen Chang

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<sup>67</sup> Violette Leduc, 'Préface', in *La Bâtarde* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), p. 7.

Eileen Chang was born Zhang Ying in Shanghai, China on 30 September 1920. She was the first child of Zhiyi Zhang and Suqiong Huang who were both descendants of prominent members of the Chinese imperial court. Although China had, by that time, witnessed the fall of the last imperial dynasty of China and was transitioning towards a new governing system – the People’s Republic of China, Chang’s illustrious background meant that, in comparison with her peers, she was able to live a privileged life.

Her childhood was, however, marred by family conflicts – she was caught between a mother who refused to adhere to traditional ways of living, a father who was intent on maintaining the old ways of life, and a step-mother (who was initially her father’s concubine) who disliked Chang from the start. Chang’s parents divorced in 1930 and Chang, with her younger brother, was then raised by their father who would beat and lock Chang in her room for a long period of time for what he perceived as inappropriate behaviour. Shortly after she turned eighteen, Chang ran away to live with her mother – the woman she admired and aspired to the most.

It was, however, whilst living with her mother that Chang became aware of her maladroit behaviour in society. This awareness became more acute after her mother tried but failed to turn Chang into what she perceived as a socially acceptable young lady who could thrive in society with a degree of ease. Chang reflects on her mother’s critical and judgmental behaviour by describing herself as a piece of garbage in ‘My Dream Genius’.<sup>68</sup> In 1941, with only one term left before graduating with a degree in English Literature from the University of Hong Kong, the Sino-Japanese War broke out and Chang’s university was shut down. She remained in Hong Kong and it was whilst working as a nurse that Chang was able to experience first-hand the effects of war on human behaviour. She came to the conclusion that stripped off all superficial qualities, ‘only two things remained constant: sex and food.’<sup>69</sup>

When Hong Kong fell to the Empire of Japan, Chang was forced to return to her native China, but continued to write without publishing any of her works.

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<sup>68</sup> Eileen Chang, ‘My Dream Genius’, *The West Wind Monthly*, 48 (1940), 542-543; repr. in *Zhang’s Outlook* (Taipei: Crown, 1977), pp. 277-279 (279).

<sup>69</sup> Eileen Chang, ‘Embers’, *Gossip* (Taipei: Crown, 1982), p. 53.

Chinese literature had, by then, transitioned from writing in the classical language (a dominant literary style used prior to the fall of the Chinese Empire) to the vernacular ‘guoyu’ (the national living) language. The tradition of writing poetry and stories promoting heroic deeds and virtues were also gradually replaced with a more critical approach towards the social conditions of the time. Both were to play an important role in the New Culture Movement for cultural and sociopolitical reform in post-dynastic China.

In 1943, Chang met the editor Shoujuan Zhou, and soon afterwards, published her novels *Love in a Fallen City* (1943) and *Jingsuo Ji* (1943), both written in Chinese. They were well received and overnight, Chang became a literary star in Shanghai. In 1944, she married her first husband but they were to divorce three years later due to his infidelities and his political activities (he was a Japanese sympathizer in occupied Shanghai). She continued to write in Chinese, publishing *Half a Lifelong Romance* in 1948, but after the formation of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, which saw an increase in didactic and propagandistic literature, Chang’s works were banned as the result of her apolitical views and her association with her ex-husband who was, by then, pursued by the newly formed government for being a traitor.

Finding it increasingly difficult to survive as a writer in China, Chang left for Hong Kong in 1952 and worked as a translator for the United States Information Service. It was while she was in Hong Kong that she wrote her first novel in English, *The Rice Sprout Song* (1954); a novel commissioned by the United States Information Service as anti-Communist propaganda. In 1955, Chang migrated to the United States and wrote another anti-Communist propaganda in both Chinese and English, *Naked Earth* (1956), again commissioned by the United States Information Service. In 1956, she married her second husband, the American screenwriter Ferdinand Reyher, in New York City. In 1967, she published *The Rouge of the North*, an expanded English version of *Jingsuo Ji*, followed by *Lust, Caution* (1979). She never returned to mainland China and was found dead in Los Angeles on September 8, 1995.

### 4.3 Further Considerations

The writers have been selected as both are women authors whose works focus on women characters and whose writing careers coincided with the political, social and economic changes that both France and China were undergoing during the early part of the twentieth century. Their texts are used not only to identify differences and/or commonalities between the roles of women in French and Chinese societies, but also to explore how, set in their specific social contexts, their female characters identify themselves or develop an identity. My reasons for selecting French and Chinese texts are not only related to personal interest but also to the question of why, after being some two hundred years ahead of Chinese society in women's rights movements, women in France continue to select traditional female roles.

One of my reasons for selecting Violette Leduc to examine the depictions of identity development in French women is her strong sense of the self. In a radio interview in 1970, Leduc comments:

Je ne peux pas me placer dans le monde des respectables, je ne peux pas me placer dans le monde des bandits, je ne peux pas me placer dans le monde des prostituées, je ne peux pas me placer dans le monde des intellectuels, car je ne suis pas assez intelligente [...], je ne peux pas me placer dans le monde des artistes, je ne peux pas me placer dans le monde des femmes de ménage. [...] Où me placer? Je n'ai pas de place.<sup>70</sup>

By emphasizing her strong acknowledgment of who she is not, this seemingly tragic description of a placeless identity reflects, quite the contrary, a very strong sense of the self or the 'I'. It is also interesting that she feels the need to expand on not being an intellectual. One could argue that it is as if she expects to be contradicted which, in turn, suggests she hopes to be recognized as one and is seeking confirmation.

My choice for selecting Chang derives in part from her remark:

Although people the world over vary in terms of their customs, habits [...], the majority of women are still looking after their

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<sup>70</sup> J. Chancel, 'Violette Leduc 1970', *Radioscopie*, France Inter, April 28, 1970.

homes and tending to their children. There is only this single, traditional mode of living...'<sup>71</sup>

The implication that women can only acquire an identity as a collective group is further endorsed by her suggestion that 'no matter what stage of cultural development we reach, a woman always remains a woman'.<sup>72</sup> It is interesting to explore why, after having written so many works centering on the survival abilities of her female protagonists, she remains unconvinced of women's ability to acquire an individual identity.

Although the only commonalities between these two writers may appear to be limited to their gender and support for equal rights between men and women, there are three main reasons why I have chosen the works of these two authors. Firstly, their works were completed during a time when both societies were undergoing changes and were forced to redefine their political, social and economic values. On the one hand, France was recuperating from the two World Wars, and the French Feminist movements after the 1950s encouraged women to take a stand for their own rights. China, on the other hand, was recovering from civil war and its subsequent transition from dynastic rule to communism. Traditional ways of life were politically and socially challenged and under the leadership of Chairman Mao, women were officially accorded more rights (although, in practice, this was much harder to implement in everyday life). Such changes inevitably reflect the recognition of female roles.

Secondly, the authors' predominant use of female protagonists facilitates the comparison of identity development in female characters. It is interesting to note that although both Leduc and Chang came from different background, their mothers were comparatively similar in their attitude towards motherhood; they were both judgmental of their respective daughter, and they both attempted to alienate themselves from their daughter. The depiction of critical mothers can be found in the characters of Berthe in *La Bâtarde*, of Yindi in *The Rouge of the North* and of Ch'i-chi'ao in *Jingsuo Ji*.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Chang, *Written on Water*, p. 84.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87.

<sup>73</sup> Eileen Chang, *The Rouge of the North* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); 'Jingsuo Ji 金鎖紀', *傾城之戀* (Taipei: Crown, 1968; repr. 2008), pp. 139-186. All quotations and



Thirdly, the selected works bear similar backgrounds: *La Bâtarde* and *Jingsuo Ji* are works which brought momentary success to Leduc and Chang and helped to establish them as literary writers in their respective country. *L'Asphyxie* is selected as it appears in a section of *La Bâtarde* and, similarly, *The Rouge of the North* is the expanded English version of *Jingsuo Ji*.<sup>74</sup> Both *L'Asphyxie* and *The Rouge of the North* are chosen to examine how the writers explore themes which they have already developed. *Thérèse et Isabelle* and *Love in a Fallen City* are both novels depicting love.<sup>75</sup> Although Leduc's love story between two school girls differs from Chang's heterosexual love between a young woman and her male lover, love is, nevertheless, depicted to transcend culturally acceptable norms in both novels. It is with this commonality in mind that I have selected what appears quite contrasting novels for examination.

By conducting a closer examination of their works, in particular Leduc's works *La Bâtarde*, *L'Asphyxie* and *Thérèse et Isabelle*, and Chang's fictional works *Jingsuo Ji*, *The Rouge of the North* and *Love in a Fallen City*, I wish to confirm that the various developments of identity in women characters can be traced back to similar, if not identical, psychological motivations.

At this point, I would like to add that although Chinese literature dates back thousands of years, it was not until the twentieth century during political and social changes (for instance the end of dynastic rule and the development of feminism in China) that fictional works by women writers such as Eileen Chang began to emerge in China. This is principally due to the misogynistic attitude influenced by Confucian philosophy which dictates that women should be without talent, as well as to a general preference for poetry (considered to be a more respectable form of aesthetic expression) in mainstream Chinese literature. Despite the emergence of female writers, it has been difficult to find one whose literary focus lies predominantly in the autobiographical or semi-biographical depiction of women. I have therefore selected works by Chang which, although

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references will be from these editions unless specified otherwise.

<sup>74</sup> Violette Leduc, *L'Asphyxie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1946; repr. 1973). All quotations and references will be from these editions unless specified otherwise.

<sup>75</sup> Violette Leduc, *Thérèse et Isabelle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966); Eileen Chang, 'Love in a Fallen City', *傾城之戀* (Taipei: Crown, 1968; repr. 2008), pp. 187-231. All quotations and references will be from these editions unless specified otherwise.

fictional, do focus on women's relationships with men and their subsequent sufferings.

The differences in choices of literary style as well as background and experience between Leduc and Chang could arguably challenge the compatibility of the comparisons made between their works. However, these discrepancies only serve to further highlight, irrespective of cultural, social or political differences, the probability of a common motivational force in identity development for women as depicted in literature. This will help to shed light on why traditional female roles remain popular amongst women in both France and China (as previously cited statistics demonstrate).

#### 4.4 Statistics

From time to time, I consider statistical evidence in order to provide some social and economic context for these readings. However, although I am focusing on women from France and China, I do not believe educational statistics from communist China can give a true reflection of women's desires, in particular when an authentic self involves 'developing a sense that one is able to affect others and one's environment, a sense that one had been accorded one's own feelings'.<sup>76</sup> Or as Abraham Maslow explains, 'psychological freedom' is when the 'wishes and plans are the primary determiners, rather than stresses from the environment'.<sup>77</sup> Under the rule of a communist government where the predominant goal is to try and provide welfare for all using a totalitarian system, the level of freedom individuals are able to exercise for the benefit of the self is inevitably restricted.

Furthermore, the reliability of official data is undermined when we take into account a statement presented at the UN Statistics Division in 2005.<sup>78</sup> The statement concludes that China's official statistics are 'facing severe challenges. We (China) have a long way ahead of us in the course of reforming and developing a(n) efficient statistical system'.<sup>79</sup> The accuracy of official data from

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<sup>76</sup> Chodorow, *Feminism*, p. 106.

<sup>77</sup> Abraham Maslow, *Toward a Psychology of Being*, p. 35.

<sup>78</sup> Deshui Li, 'China' Official Statistics: Challenges, Measures and Future Development'. <<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/sc2005.htm>>, [accessed July 2013].

<sup>79</sup> Deshui Li, 'China' Official Statistics: Challenges, Measures and Future Development'.

China continued to be questioned in 2013 when the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission published its findings, stating that ‘China’s statistics undergo large and frequent revisions even after they are made public’ and that ‘manipulation remains an important cause of unreliable statistics’.<sup>80</sup>

Therefore, I have relied on statistical data from Taiwan, a neighbouring island which declared itself a politically independent country in 1950 but which China regards as a rebel region.<sup>81</sup> In his article ‘Taiwan: China’s Other Hong Kong’, Philip Lin states that these three countries, namely Taiwan, Hong Kong, and China, ‘are linked through a common heritage’.<sup>82</sup> Indeed, history shows that people living in China (referred to as Chinese) and the people of Taiwan (referred to as Taiwanese) are ethnically the same. They share the same 5000 year history; the same language (although current day China uses a simplified version of written Mandarin whereas Taiwan continues to use the traditional version); the same ancestry – the majority of Taiwanese are descended from Chinese immigrants. Even though religious belief is less openly expressed in China today, both the Chinese and the Taiwanese hold similar religious beliefs.

Taiwan is currently governed by the Republic of China which was first established in mainland China in 1912 but, following its defeat at the hands of the now People’s Republic of China, retreated to Taiwan in 1949. Its current political status remains ambiguous and although the government of the Republic of China has changed leadership numerous times since 1949, Taiwan continues to be an island governed under a system that is based on the principle of democracy. Compulsory education was implemented in Taiwan in 1968 and, similar to the education system in France, learning is presumed to be carried out under liberal conditions that work in favour of personal interests.

#### 4.5 Dissertation structure

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<sup>80</sup> Jacob N. Koch-Weser, ‘The Reliability of China’s Economic data: Analysis of National Output’ (USA: US-China Economic and Security Review Commission, 2013), p. 4. <<http://origin.www.uscc.gov/Research/reliability-chinas-economic-data-analysis-national-output>>, [accessed July 2013].

<sup>81</sup> Under the government of the Republic of China, Taiwan exercises freedom of the press, public education and human development.

<sup>82</sup> Philip Lin, ‘Taiwan: China’s Other Hong Kong’, in *Ethics of Development in a Global Environment (EDGE)*, autumn (1999). <[https://web.stanford.edu/class/e297c/war\\_peace/asia/htaiwan.html](https://web.stanford.edu/class/e297c/war_peace/asia/htaiwan.html)>, [accessed September 2017].

The principal texts examined in the chapters that follow are *La Bâtarde*, *L'Asphyxie*, and *Thérèse et Isabelle* by Leduc and *The Rouge of the North*, *Jingsuo Ji* and *Love in a Fallen City* by Chang.

Chapter One examines how women in *La Bâtarde* and *The Rouge of the North* take advantage of their sexuality in personal relationships to develop an identity. This chapter first focuses on intimate attachments, followed by an examination of how marriage can affect the identity development of female characters. It concludes with an analysis of commonalities or discrepancies between the characters and (I hope) highlights the different motivational force behind the development of an individual identity as depicted by the female characters of Leduc and Chang. Chapter Two looks at *L'Asphyxie* and *Jingsuo Ji* to examine the significance of motherhood for mothers and daughters, and how the female characters depicted are motivated to approach motherhood differently. Focus is particularly placed on identifying the reasons why women refuse (or accept) the role of mother, a role which has been condemned by feminist critics as passive. Theories of motherhood, particularly by Elizabeth Badinter, Nancy Chodorow, Judith Arcana and Judith Butler are cited. In Chapter Three, *La Bâtarde* and *Love in a Fallen City* are used to explore how motivational needs encourage the discovery of an individual identity. Particular attention is paid to the depicted character's perceived value in society, and theories proposed by psychologists such as Sigmund Freud and Karen Horney are quoted to support the findings. I also offer an examination of how socio-political repression influences characters' individual motivations. The final chapter discusses the effects of repression and focuses on how prohibitions and taboos are used to achieve an individual identity by the female characters in Leduc's *Thérèse et Isabelle*, Chang's *The Rouge of the North* and *Love in a Fallen City*. To provide a psychological overview of the topic of death, theories proposed by Derek Wright and Rosemary Gordon, to cite only two psychologists of many that are quoted, are examined. On the topic of sex, I explore the social aspects of sexual activities by citing writings by various philosophers such as Michel Foucault and Georges Bataille. It is precisely how sex is perceived by a particular society that has an

influence on how the characters depicted perceive their own sexuality.

This thesis seeks to contribute to the growing body of literature concerned with political, social, and psychological aspects of the traditional role of a woman. I hope to highlight that, although they are writing in different cultures, Leduc and Chang both voice an intelligent protest against the patriarchy that prevails in each society. By examining perceptions of women as presented by Leduc and Chang, and by analysing how the actions and thoughts of women depicted are psychologically motivated using Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, I hope to provide a more 'humanistic' approach to reading the works of Leduc and Chang than has previously been offered. This thesis aims to offer a better understanding of why women choose to (or refuse to) identify with existing norms and to consider the possibility that, although the achievement of a recognized individual identity is influenced by external elements such as social, political, cultural, economic or religious factors, it is predominantly the psychological needs within women which motivate their desire and their determination to challenge existing repression.

## **CHAPTER I:**

### **Identity Development: The search for an identity of the self through intimate attachments**

‘Who am I?’ has long constituted a central question in the development of an individual identity, and yet it is still no nearer to reaching a definite or clearly defined answer. Critical discourses from various fields of study offer different suggestions which make defining the ‘I’ a problematic process. For instance from a psychosocial perspective, Erik Erikson states that ‘I’ appears when the individual feels ‘most deeply and intensely active and alive’.<sup>1</sup> Jean Miller refers to identity as being linked very early with an individual’s sense of being as a female or male person.<sup>2</sup> This is, however, challenged by Dianne M. Tice and Roy F. Baumeister who argue that ‘before a baby becomes self-aware, and sometimes even before he or she is born, the baby often has a specially defined place in the social world, marked by a name, a social security number, a connection to others’.<sup>3</sup>

This chapter is concerned with examining how an individual is motivated

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<sup>1</sup> Erik Erikson, *Identity, Youth and Crisis*, p. 19.

<sup>2</sup> Jean Miller, *Toward a New Psychology of*, p. 74.

<sup>3</sup> Dianne M. Tice, Roy F. Baumeister, ‘The primacy of the Interpersonal Self’, *Individual Self, Relational Self, Collective Self*, ed. by Constantine Sedikides and Marilynn Brewer (Philadelphia: Psychology Press, 2001), p. 71.

into achieving an identity in relation to others, and will explore how characters in Violette Leduc's *La Bâtarde* and in Eileen Chang's *The Rouge of the North* develop an inter-relational identity.<sup>4</sup> The first section will focus on identity development and intimate attachments in *La Bâtarde* and *The Rouge of the North*. The second section will explore the theme of marriage and heterosexual relationships, and how they influence the female characters' identity development. The chapter concludes by comparing the female characters of Leduc and Chang.

## 1 Inter-relational approach to identity development

Tice and Baumeister suggest that self-perception cannot simply be defined as how one sees one's own self, since they argue that 'before a baby becomes self-aware [...] the baby often has a specially defined place in the social world marked by a name, a social security number, a connection to others'.<sup>5</sup> Society's recognition of a person is, according to this view, an instrumental factor in the development of his or her sense of the 'self'.

Different modes of developing self-identification vis-à-vis society emphasize further the importance the angle of self-perception plays in the establishment of an identity. Understanding how the establishment of a self-identity is approached helps to distinguish between a socially conditioned self, that is to say an identity developed under the influence of social elements, and a self-perception that is more inclined to place the values and beliefs personal to the individual before the interests of others.

Identification of the self necessitates, first of all, the process of having a personal interest in the self. Mario Jacoby asserts that self-interest may be manifested through the projection of one's desire or wish onto another to represent 'anything that has a meaning for life and which fulfils or inspires us'.<sup>6</sup> He also

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<sup>4</sup> *La Bâtarde*; *L'Ashpyxie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1946; repr. 1973); *The Rouge of the North*; '金鎖記 Jingsuo Ji' in 傾城之戀 *Love in a Fallen City* (Taipei: Crown Publishing, 1968). All quotations and references will be from these editions unless specified otherwise.

<sup>5</sup> Dianne M. Tice and Roy F. Baumeister, 'The Primacy of the Interpersonal Self' in *Individual Self, Relational Self, Collective Self*, pp. 71-92 (p. 71).

<sup>6</sup> Mario Jacoby, *Individuation and Narcissism: The Psychology of the Self in Jung and Kohut*,

notes that ‘we all need repeated acknowledgment of our existence and our worth’, suggesting therefore that the individual reinforces his or her existence only through the recognition of others.<sup>7</sup> The importance of others in the development of self-identity is highlighted by Nancy Chodorow who, in adopting a more inter-relational approach to identity development, proposes it to be an attempt to achieve a sense of wholeness and gain the feeling of being alive but in relation to others.<sup>8</sup>

The German social psychologist Erik Fromm offers a more self-orientated explanation by stating that the only real interest for a human being is ‘to know one’s own self in order to understand what the interests of this self are and how they can be served.’<sup>9</sup> The humanistic psychologist Abraham Maslow takes on a more self-enhancing approach and suggests that identity development is achieved only through the maximization of personal attributes, and that only by maximizing individual potential can one ‘discover the self and answer the ultimate question, who am I? What am I?’<sup>10</sup>

Another classical approach to the discourse of an inter-relational self-identity is Charles Horton Cooley’s concept of the ‘looking glass self’.<sup>11</sup> According to Cooley, the way in which the individual perceives the self plays a prominent role in dictating personal behaviour and thoughts which, in turn, play a deciding role in influencing how others perceive the individual. This leads to the question of to what extent others influence the identity development of an individual and vice versa.

Constantine Sedikides and Marilynn Brewer provide a more comprehensive approach towards the definition of identity:

Do not equate the individual self with material self-interest,  
[...] do not equate the individual self with egocentrism,  
selfishness, arrogance, and disregard for others, although the

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trans. by Myron Gubitz (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 80.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 67.

<sup>8</sup> Nancy Chodorow, *Feminism*, p. 106.

<sup>9</sup> Erik Fromm, *Man for Himself: An Inquiry into the Psychology of*, p. 134.

<sup>10</sup> Abraham Maslow, ‘The Instinctoid Nature of Basic Needs’, *Motivation and Personality* p. 95; *Toward a Psychology of Being*, p. 45.

<sup>11</sup> Charles Horton Cooley, *Human Nature and the Social Order* (New York: Scribner, 1902), pp. 179-85.



individual self can give rise to such phenomena, [...] do not advocate that the individual self is asocial or that it exists in a social or cultural vacuum. [...] The issue, then, is about balance and relative importance. It is about experiencing the individual self and what this experience means to humans. It is about the degree to which the individual self is subjectively valued, and about the ways in which a threat to this type of self [...] is handled psychologically.<sup>12</sup>

The development of individual identity is therefore interwoven with the need to achieve a sense of physical and psychological well-being within a socio-cultural context. I argue that the most influential form of self-projection is through the intermediary of sexual relationships since copulation is the closest and most intimate form of connection between two people.

One conclusion which can be drawn from comparing these various approaches to the development of identity is that behind each action or thought, there is a decision, made either consciously or in the sub-conscious mind, which must predominantly benefit the overall well-being of the individual concerned. It is with this in mind that Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is applied to determine the motivational force behind an individual's identity development. The various levels of need within the Hierarchy of Needs are explained in some detail in the 'Introduction'. In brief, we can regard Maslowian theory as a set of tools which explains what makes a person feel more complete psychologically.

### **1.1 Narcissistic love in *La Bâtarde* and *The Rouge of the North***

*La Bâtarde*, published in France in 1964, is Violette Leduc's best-known book. It nearly won the Prix Goncourt and brought Leduc momentary fame when it became a bestseller in France. *La Bâtarde* is a recording of the experiences and encounters the illegitimate heroine Violette has from infancy to adulthood. The story begins with the birth of Violette Leduc, the illegitimate daughter of a servant girl Berthe who was seduced then abandoned by the son of her employer. Violette's childhood is marked by poverty, sickness and a harsh mother. The only

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<sup>12</sup> Constantine Sedikides and Marilyn Brewer, *Individual Self, Relational Self, Collective Self*, p. 8.

tender moments are spent in the company of her aunt Laure and her loving grandmother, who later dies when Violette is a young child. Her teenage years are spent at boarding school where she experiences her first lesbian relationship with another boarder called Isabelle. *La Bâtarde* then follows her life as an adult: working unsuccessfully at various establishments, embarking on an affair with Hermine which ends, meeting Gabriel who she eventually marries, meeting Maurice Sachs a homosexual who inspires her to write, and becoming a successful black-market trader during the Occupation. The story ends with Violette in a seeming state of euphoria, a state of mind which Elizabeth Houlding explains as being able to ‘recast the narrative of a failed life in the form of a collaborator’s wartime success story’.<sup>13</sup>

Violette’s first sexual relationship begins at boarding school with Isabelle. The heroine Violette articulates her admiration for Isabelle, ‘la meilleure élève’ (p. 97), who not only excels in academic achievements with apparent ease, being ‘studieuse sans zèle et sans suffisance’ (p. 101), but also benefits from an attractive physical appearance. Contrary to Isabelle, Violette is not only ‘la mauvaise élève’ (p. 97) but is, in her own view, ugly. This is how she describes herself in the presence of a male interlocutor, whom she also describes:

La merveilleuse couturière pour l’ourlet de ses lèvres, le sculpteur pour le modelé de la fossette au milieu du menton, le drapier pour le coup de ciseaux des yeux allongés, le ciseleur pour les cheveux bouclés [...]. Chassé-croisé de modestie et de vanité, je voyais mes petits yeux, ma grande bouche, mon gros nez sur le glacis du col de la chemise. (p. 157)

Juxtaposing her self-proclaimed unattractive appearance with the elegant interlocutor emphasizes the contrast between her common features and his classical beauty. Also, the use of descriptive and complimentary adjectives for her interlocutor (as opposed to the brief and lacklustre descriptions of her own features) further undermines Violette’s sense of self-confidence.

In attaching herself intimately to the physically attractive Isabelle, it can be

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<sup>13</sup> Elizabeth Houlding, ‘L’envers de la guerre: The Occupation of Violette Leduc’, *Gender and Fascism in Modern France*, ed. by Melanie Hawthorne and Richard J. Golsan (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1997), p. 100.

suggested that Violette is hoping to gain a share of the admiration which she believes Isabelle receives constantly. This cannot, however, be interpreted as being in love with Isabelle. On the idea of equating love with physical intimacy, Maslow writes that ‘consummatory love making may actually be seeking self-esteem rather than sexual gratification’.<sup>14</sup> Considering that Violette eventually abandons Isabelle for another lover, it can be argued that the need to be emotionally attached to her first lover is less powerful than her desire to achieve an alternative goal. For this, I turn to Freud and his theory on love. In *On Sexuality*, Freud describes two types of love: narcissistic and anaclitic love. Freud explains that narcissistic love is based on a desire to identify the self with a person one wishes to be or to resemble, whereas anaclitic love is the expression of love towards an object.<sup>15</sup> Given that Violette describes Isabelle’s physical appearance as something that ‘plaisait’ (p. 138) and given that Violette is perpetually concerned with her own features with her ‘petits yeux’, ‘grande bouche’ and ‘gros nez’ (p. 157), it can be argued that Violette’s attachment to Isabelle is a manifestation of Freud’s narcissistic love: she is motivated by a desire to experience a sense of wholeness that is achieved by identifying with a partner whose positive attributes Violette desires but lacks, and which Isabelle is able to provide.

Narcissistic love is also present in the female characters of Chang’s *The Rouge of the North*, in particular in the heroine Yindi.<sup>16</sup> First published in 1967, *The Rouge of the North* is Chang’s English version of *Yùannǚ* which she wrote and published in Chinese a year earlier. Both works derive from her novella ‘Jingsuo Ji’ written in 1943.<sup>17</sup> There are various differences between her English and Chinese works but they all follow the same plot of a young girl (called Yindi in *The Rouge of the North*) trapped in an unhappy marriage with a bedridden

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<sup>14</sup> Abraham Maslow, *Motivation and Personality*, p. 26.

<sup>15</sup> Sigmund Freud, *On Sexuality: Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality and Other Works*, trans. by James Strachey (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1997), p. 337. In future references, this edition will be abbreviated to *On Sexuality*.

<sup>16</sup> Further references to *The Rouge of the North* are given after quotations in the text.

<sup>17</sup> Eileen Chang, *怨女* (Taipei: crown, 1966; repr. Taipei: Crown, 2007). Both *The Rouge of the North* and *怨女* derive from her novella ‘金鎖記’ (in Chinese) or the translated version ‘The Golden Cangue’ found in *Modern Chinese Stories and Novellas 1919-1989*, ed. by Joseph S.M. Lau, C.J. Hsia and Leo Ou-fan Lee (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981).

disabled husband from a wealthy traditional Chinese family, and eventually driven insane.

The story takes place at the end of the Qing Dynastic power in 1912 when traditional ways of life under centuries of imperial dynastic system of government were conflicting with the new Communist ideologies. Chang's young heroine finds herself being wed to the second son of a prominent but traditional family headed by the widow of the long-deceased Old Master. Her new mother-in-law is known throughout the fiction as the Old Mistress. The powerful mother-in-law endorses Confucian ideology – an ideology that was developed by the classical scholar (widely held to be misogynistic) more than two thousand years ago and then fervently followed by his disciples to restrict and oppress Chinese women through patriarchal subordination.<sup>18</sup> The insignificance of women in Imperial China is highlighted by Michael Lynch who describes the usual practice of giving girls numbers instead of names, citing as an example Chairman Mao's own mother who was known as Mao Qimei (seventh girl/sister).<sup>19</sup> Even women in post-dynastic China have not experienced a dramatic change in their way of life. Yan Ming and Fan Qi write that although 'Chinese women (especially female intellectuals at the beginning of the twentieth century) began to awaken and to struggle for the basic privileges of equality between male and female', they (Chinese women) nevertheless have a tendency to 'quietly retur[n] to traditional roles by finding a way to transcend it'.<sup>20</sup> Although Chang's fiction takes place in the 1900s, the social status of her protagonist remains strongly influenced by Confucian ideology.

Following her journey to China in May 1974, Julia Kristeva wrote about her travel experiences, focusing in particular on the lives of women in post-colonial China while condemning Confucian ideologies.<sup>21</sup> She emphasizes the cause of Chinese women's suffering as being the fact that they are 'soumise à toute une série d'autorités - celle de sa mère et de son père, celle de la belle-mère et du

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<sup>18</sup> Siew Chey Ong, *China Condensed: 5000 Years of History and Culture* (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish, 2005), pp. 111-17.

<sup>19</sup> Michael Lynch, *Teach Yourself: Modern China*, p. 149.

<sup>20</sup> Yan Ming and Fan Qi, 'Eastern and Western Feminist Literary Criticism: A Comparison', in *Centre Mandala: The Bulletin of the Centre for East-West Cultural and Economic Studies*, 3 (August 1999): 21-28 (p. 23).

<sup>21</sup> Julia Kristeva, 'Confucius – un mangeur de femmes', in *Des Chinoises*, pp. 79-106

beau-père, celle du mari et enfin celle du fils’, and explains that Chinese women are status-less because they live in a society where they have no right to ‘la hiérarchie humaine’.<sup>22</sup> To this, Chung-tien Yi explains that since ‘the birth of a daughter in (modern) China is considered unlucky’, and that since ‘there is only one acceptable form of identity: that of being a virtuous wife and a kind mother’, Chinese social condition dictates that any form of recognition is unacceptable except under patriarchal conditions.<sup>23</sup>

Chang reflects this oppression, so firmly implanted into the daily consciousness of Chinese women, by beginning *The Rouge of the North* with a maiden Yindi of marriageable age. She is the ideal choice, being young and therefore potentially fertile. She is also a virgin which demonstrates that she has maintained moral sanctions such as the virtues of morality. In fact, all of the women characters in *The Rouge of the North* are depicted by Chang to experience no sexual intimacy except with their respective husbands. The maiden Yindi is also parentless which, to an extent, not only helps to facilitate her relationship with her future mother-in-law, but more importantly and in accordance with tradition, leaves her in the care of her brother and his wife who are, as the story unfolds, being offered an unspecified bride price by the wealthy Yao family for Yindi. After a brief discussion and much persuasion, Yindi becomes the bride of the Yao family’s disabled second son, known throughout the fiction as the Second Master.

Yindi’s situation is, however, presented to be less fortunate than her two other sisters-in-law who are wed to the First Master and the Third Master respectively. She is not only scorned by the servants for her lowly family background (coming from a family of sesame sellers, and not from wealthy and reputable families like the two other daughters-in-law of the Old Mistress), but is also scoffed at for being the wife of a bedridden blind man. The significance of his physical disability to her identity development will be discussed below, but at this juncture, it suffices to say that she is depicted to be very dissatisfied with her married life, as demonstrated by her remark ‘What to do? I’ll hang myself, I’ve

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., pp. 79 & 85.

<sup>23</sup> Chung-tien Yi, *Chinese Men and Women*. The translations are my own from the original text: ‘女人的出生是認為不幸,不祥’ and ‘中國傳統社會中的女性類形要多一點賢妻良母’, p. 45.

had enough of this anyway' (p. 61). Furthermore, as she is socially forbidden from engaging in adulterous activities, there appears to be no possibility of Yindi's gaining a degree of emotional or physical comfort. Chang does, however, give the unfortunate girl a glimmer of hope by bringing in two male characters who have the potential to fulfil Yindi's emotional needs, but in an implicit and non-sexual manner.

The first male character is known as Young Liu who works in a Chinese pharmacy shop near the sesame store where Yindi lived and worked with her brother and his family prior to her marriage. We are informed that, prior to receiving the wealthy Yao's marriage proposal, Young Liu had already expressed an interest in Yindi, and it is through him that we are given an insight into Yindi's general opinion of men:

Men are all alike. There was one who seemed a bit different though, Young Liu at the pharmacy across the street, tall, pale and as pretty as a girl in his long dark gown, not a speck of dust on his white cloth socks. It was a wonder how well-groomed he was, living in the shop with nobody to look after his things. (p.8)

Similar to Violette's attractive Isabelle, Young Liu is described as a gentle person who is 'tall, pale and as pretty as a girl' (p. 8) and unlike other men. Although his gender is clearly defined (being given the title Young followed by his surname which is a traditional and informal manner of addressing a man), he is nevertheless presented as a person lacking in masculine physique. For a Chinese man to be described as 'pale' implies either delicate health or an inadequate amount of time spent outdoors which, in an agricultural society that is heavily dependent on healthy manual labour in the field, is indirectly associated with poor accomplishment. But since Chinese women are socially conditioned to follow the fate of their husband, it is not surprising that Young Liu's physical attributes is less significant to Yindi than his social status.

When Young Liu informally sends a match maker to Yindi's household, it then becomes clear that he is not the ideal candidate, as Yindi's remark suggests: 'a strange sense of loss in the midst of her happiness. She need not wonder any more about the future. Her fate was sealed' (p. 16). It is ironic that marriage,

perceived as the sealer of fate, can arouse both sadness and happiness. One can argue that if Yindi voluntarily forfeits the freedom to decide for herself (hence the sadness), she must anticipate a greater reward in return. As the story develops, it becomes clear that mutual attraction is the reason for her silent acceptance. And as a token of his affection, Young Liu offers her a free gift of dried white chrysanthemum.

Although dried chrysanthemum is regarded as a herbal medicine which can help soothe the respiratory system, hence a suitable gift for Yindi who suffers from such symptoms, it is nevertheless used predominantly in Chinese funerals. Furthermore, although white symbolises purity, it is also a colour of mourning.<sup>24</sup> To offer something which represents death, both in colour as well as in function, can therefore be interpreted as a gift of ill omen. Chiung-Chu Chen writes that ‘Chang uses dried white chrysanthemum to suggest a beautiful but hopeless love, and to link life with death’.<sup>25</sup> We are forewarned that despite the attraction they have for each other, any long-term relationship between the two will not last.

Yindi’s feelings for Young Liu remain strong even after her marriage, as demonstrated when she reflects on the resemblance between a set of drawers attached to her marital bed and his store:

The tiers of tiny drawers inlaid with mother-of-pearl figures waving swords – the hundred and eight brigands – reminded her of all those little drawers at the pharmacy, especially the smell of one of the sweetmeats he kept there, plums cured by the sweet herb used to sweeten all medicines. [She is a little afraid of the smell] (p. 55).<sup>26</sup>

To evoke memories of Young Liu after her marriage is significant in the sense that they met when Yindi was still unmarried and enjoyed a level of freedom – freedom to leave her house on errands, to work at the counter in her brother’s shop and to accept possible marriage proposals. He is, consequently, associated

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<sup>24</sup> Lingwei Shao, ‘Color Me Confused: Colors and Meaning in Chinese Culture’, <<http://www.theworldofchinese.com/2011/12/color-me-confused-colors-and-their-meaning-in-chinese-culture/>> [accessed 16 August 2016].

<sup>25</sup> Chiung-Chu Chen, *The Development of Female Consciousness in the Fiction of Eileen Chang and Fay Weldon* (unpublished PhD thesis in Comparative literature: University of South Carolina, 2003), p. 128.

<sup>26</sup> The words ‘she is a little afraid of the smell’ are found in the Chinese text but omitted in the English version.

with her single status.

The fear derived from her reminiscence suggests, however, a reluctance to relinquish what she has obtained so far in becoming the wife of the Second Master. In other words, the reason behind her acceptance of a marriage to a blind invalid is the desire for material wealth. She remarks that:

Young Liu was not the pushing kind. He would probably remain a shop-assistant to the end of his days. They had clerks with whiskers in the same store, much respected. They wore long gowns while her brother with his messier job wore jacket and trousers like a labourer, but he owned his business. People would say it was a pity, she could have done better. (pp. 16-17)

Young Liu may be able to provide her with some emotional comfort, but she is clearly not in search of that, nor does she feel she can or should choose to prioritize her emotional need. From a Maslowian perspective, Yindi is seeking to gratify a desire for financial security and social recognition.

After years of marriage, Yindi learns of Young Liu becoming the owner of the pharmacy store and, ironically, his accomplishment serves to mock her choice of husband. In *The Rouge of the North*, he is depicted as the only man in her life who is working to ensure continuous financial independence as opposed to her husband who is physically unable to do so, and her brother-in-law (her next amorous attachment after Young Liu) who prefers to live off his family. The realization that she has chosen unwisely is apparent in the following passage: ‘she had always liked the smell of a pharmacy, the acrid sweetness of preserved herbs chilled in the stone-paved large dark interiors [...]. She liked to watch him [Young Liu] turn to the rows of little black drawers with set-in brass rings curled like a stylized cloud’ (p. 9). Young Liu is depicted as a man working in an orderly and harmonious world, and to state that ‘she had always liked the smell’ can be interpreted as a manifestation of her regret at having made an erroneous choice. In evoking Young Liu even after her marriage, Yindi is manifesting a desire to be able to live like him, an individual living in harmony and able to accomplish something in life through hard work. In other words, her desire to identify her life with Young Liu’s resonates with Freudian theory of Narcissistic love.



Violette also exhibits a desire to resemble an intimate other in the Violette/Hermine relationship – a sexual affair which begins shortly after the end of the Violette/Isabelle relationship. When Violette first meets Hermine, the latter is working as a *surveillante* at the boarding school in which both Violette and Isabelle are boarders. She is, in Violette's account, a musically gifted girl who is studying with the *directeur du Conservatoire* in the hope of pursuing a career as a 'professeur de piano' (p.147):

Hermine s'est remise au piano, elle a joué le 'Concerto Italien' de J. S. Bach dans la sale de solfège. [...]. Hermine me parlait du lapin apprivoisé de la famille, d'une semaine de vacances sur une plage où le vent, le froid, les dunes... Leurs bains ressemblaient au deluge après le déferlement d'arpèges du dernier Prélude de Chopin. [...]. Elle revenait dans le couloir avec une reproduction de la tête de Beethoven. (pp. 141-42)

It is interesting that the passages which introduce Hermine to readers contain references to a number of famous composers such as Bach, Chopin and Beethoven as if, by juxtaposing Hermine with these well-known musical geniuses, she, by association, is or should be recognized as one as well.

This approach of introducing Hermine can be interpreted as a way of explaining Violette's abrupt abandonment of Isabelle. In other words, she abandons Isabelle since, in her view, Hermine is musically gifted. Following Freud's theory on Narcissistic love, Violette's attachment to Hermine will allow her to become a (more) gifted person. Yet, it is precisely this manner of introduction (instead of simply stating that she is no longer emotionally attached to Isabelle) which raises the question of why Violette feels she must justify her decision. This, then, leads us to query in what capacity Violette loves Hermine. In her account, Violette states that she is 'séparée de celle que je commençais d'aimer' (p. 144), but uttered after their relationship is found out (and not before or during), this confirms that perhaps she is not in love with Hermine to begin with. Furthermore, the adjectives which Violette uses to recount her sexual activities with Isabelle and Hermine suggest a difference in emotional attachment. For instance, physical pleasure is implied when Violette describes her first intimate contact with Isabelle as follows: 'c'est ainsi qu'elle m'apprit à

m'épanouir. La muse secrète de mon corps, c'était elle' (p. 106). In contrast, her first intimacy with Hermine is not romanticized:

Une nuit, je tournai la poignée de la porte. Je réussis. J'étais dans son dortoir. Il y a des victoires qui sont des pressentiments. Elle ouvrit les yeux, elle sourit, j'entraï dans son lit. Je suis revenue dans mon box avant le lever du jour, Isabelle me manquait. (p. 143)

The ambiguous use of 'victoires' leaves us wondering who is victorious? What contrasting elements are at play here? Is it a more general victory of homoeroticism over heterosexual relationships? Is it a young girl's victory for being able to enter into a hitherto forbidden domain? Or is it a reference to a play of power between two lovers? Alex Hughes writes that 'in the course of the account Leduc's narrator provides of this lesbian liaison, very little space is given over to descriptions of pleasures, of desire or of physical intimacy. What we get instead is a tortuous chronicle of power games'.<sup>27</sup> By focusing on the assumption that 'des victoires' relates to power play, then can it be suggested that being the one who made the first move, Violette has the upper hand? This is, however, challenged since Violette is only allowed to climb into bed with Hermine because the latter has agreed for her to do so with a smile.

This oscillation of power is repeated numerous times during the nine-year relationship, taking as an example the episode at Rue Godot-de-Mauroy where Violette persuades a reluctant Hermine to make love to her in front of a voyeur who, in return, pays Violette and allows her to purchase an expensive green lacquer table. Prior to Rue Godot-de-Mauroy, we are told that Violette is forced to resign from her work at Plon due to ill health and is subsequently financially dependent on Hermine. We are also informed that Hermine refuses to buy the green lacquer table which Violette, now unemployed, desires so much. The manner in which Violette obtained the money to buy her desired item may appear inappropriate; she has, nevertheless, demonstrated that she is determined to achieve a goal. What, specifically, is her goal is a more complex topic.

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<sup>27</sup> Alex Hughes, *French Erotic Fiction: Women's Desiring Writing, 1880-1990* (Oxford: Berg, 1996), p. 74.

Taken at face value, her goal is the green lacquer table. From a psychological perspective, one can argue that in forcing her reluctant lover to perform their love making in front of a voyeur, she is prioritizing her need before the wish of her lover. She is, therefore, not seeking to become like Hermine but is, instead, using the lover to gratify her sense of self-esteem. Hughes provides a more sinister perspective by suggesting that ‘in actual fact, her (Violette’s) desire for the table – which significantly contains a mirror-panel – serves as a pretext for the vengeance she seeks to wreak upon the previously ascendant Hermine’.<sup>28</sup> Both suppositions reveal that her behaviour is more focused on personal gains and is in non-compliance with Freudian theory on Narcissistic love.

In *La Bâtarde*, we are given an account of what attracts Violette to Hermine. Firstly, Violette is drawn towards Hermine’s enthusiasm for life: ‘elle vivait ardemment avec peu d’argent, beaucoup de curiosité, de courage, d’élan pour les livres, la nature, une cigarette, un corsage à couper, un concert, une conférence, une lime à ongles’ (p. 142). This optimistic view of life is further mirrored in Hermine’s energy for life. According to Violette, Hermine is ‘satisfaite de sa journée de classe, de la directrice, de ses élèves, de ses collègues, de Paris, de Vincennes, de son sommeil, de son réveil, de ses nuits courtes, de ses projets de leçons de solfège’ (pp. 225-226). Violette’s lover is content with her life and appears to carry out her responsibilities with competence. In short, Hermine is shown to adapt well to her chosen life.

To express this in Maslow’s terms, Hermine’s optimism, curiosity and courage would normally reflect the psychological health of an individual who had been given sufficient guidance, comfort and security during childhood to venture out and explore the unknown.<sup>29</sup> Maslow further comments on the need of the child for safety and love so that ‘he is not crippled by fear, to the extent that he feels safe enough to dare’.<sup>30</sup> Ghyslaine Charles-Merrien writes that *La Bâtarde* is about ‘le rejet de la mère, la bâtardise, l’affection de la grand-mère, la désertion du père et toute une série de portraits de visages familiers dont la constante est la

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 82.

<sup>29</sup> Maslow, *Toward a Psychology of Being*, p. 57.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., pp. 57-58.

frustration'.<sup>31</sup> Although we are not given Hermine's past, Violette's past is certainly the opposite of Maslow's ideal.

However, when we consider Hermine's enthusiasm and her ability to adapt to her environment from a psychological perspective, we might hesitate to interpret her apparent zest for life as her desire to live fully. Joan Riviere writes that 'the fundamental aim in life is to live and to live pleasurably', and that it is achieved by 'infinitely various, subtle and complicated adaptation'.<sup>32</sup> Although adjusting to the environment may lead to a happier existence, Maslow argues that this is a characteristic mostly found in the oppressed who accept complacently the rules of society.<sup>33</sup> For example, a slave who executes the orders of his master with competence is said to adapt well to his life of servitude. Hermine's apparent ability to adapt to her environment may be a sign of total contentment, but it can equally be argued that she adapts to her environment because she fears change or punishment (for any transgression).

Maslowian theory proposes that socially repressed individuals tend to exhibit a greater sense of insecurity and that they tend to lack artistic expressions.<sup>34</sup> In contrast, creative individuals 'were certainly less enculturated; that is, they seemed to be less afraid of what other people would say or demand'.<sup>35</sup> Of the two lover, Hermine is portrayed as lacking the imagination of Violette who displays a more artistic appreciation of life. With this in mind, I will now focus on a particular item of clothing which makes clear the creativity in Violette as depicted by the writer.

## 1.2 Creativity and identity development

Hermine buys an eel-coloured suit from the fashion house Schiaparelli with the majority of her savings for the then unemployed Violette. The expensive suit is

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<sup>31</sup> Ghyslaine Charles-Merrien, 'Une conception "virile" de l'écriture féminine' in *Violette Leduc*, ed. by Paul Renard and Michele Hecquet (Lille: Université Lille 3, 1998), pp. 19-36 (p. 23). Future references to this text will be abbreviated to 'Une conception Virile'.

<sup>32</sup> Joan Riviere, 'Hate, Greed and Aggression', in *Love, Hate and Reparation*, ed. by Melanie Klein and Joan Riviere (London: Hogarth, 1937), pp. 3-56 (p. 4).

<sup>33</sup> Maslow, *Motivation and Personality*, p. 268.

<sup>34</sup> Maslow, *Motivation and Personality*, p. 136.

<sup>35</sup> Maslow, *Toward a Psychology of Being*, pp. 140-41.

colourfully described by Violette as follows:

avec un costume de cette couleur-là, je promenais une nuit couleur de châtaigne à la fin d'un après-midi d'été. Un autre m'a dit que j'étais le plus séduisant, le plus doux des automnes en Ile-de-France lorsque les roses fleurissent encore, un autre a ajouté je n'oublierai jamais votre féminité d'androgynisme, le triangle vivant de vos épaules avec votre taille. (p.272)

Hermine, in contrast, replies with 'on ne parle pas ainsi. On tricote, on lit, on réfléchit, on a des soucis. Ils cherchent des appartements, ils font des plans pour leurs vacances. Dans mon tram, on est fatigué' (p.272). She is laconic, matter-of-fact, and does not shy away from exposing the negativity or the realities of life. This is in contrast with the charming description of natural beauty which Violette, the narrator, gives Hermine of how she appears to others in her eel-coloured suit: summer, autumn and chestnut-coloured darkness are radiating from the well-cut triangular shoulders, suggesting the wearer in her designer suit is also an item of natural beauty. However, her effort at creating an artistic imagery not only goes unnoticed or unappreciated (in Violette's account, Hermine is bored by her description) but provokes a disappointingly short and somewhat aggressive reply.

The two lovers' contrasting sense of creativeness is further highlighted by their preferred form of transportation. Violette is depicted to prefer taking the bus and describes her daily route back from work as follows:

Je sortais avec les autres employés, la lumière pétillait dans mes yeux, les ailes des pigeons claquaient, le receveur de l'autobus 'S'criait 'Complet', les cloches de l'église se mariaient pour un mariage. J'attendais l'autobus suivant. Je préférais la plate-forme, je me penchais, je me tenais sur la pointe des pieds, je recevais de l'air vif, je souhaitais être remarquée par les fidèles de la plate-forme, j'oubliais d'aimer et d'admirer Paris tout bouillant d'autos, de passants. (p. 190)

Violette's enjoyment on her bus journey home is clearly in contrast with Hermine's languid 'dans mon tram, on est fatigué' (p.272).

On the one hand, there is Hermine, the matter-of-fact lover who views the world through problems and struggles and, on the other hand, we have Violette

who either sees past or chooses to ignore life's complications. Thus, following Maslowian theory on the relationship between the possibility of fulfilment and the individual's sense of confidence in achieving gratification, it can be argued that as Violette is more likely to interpret her experiences as possibilities of attaining some degree of satisfaction, the likelihood of her venturing out and accepting new or different challenges is comparatively greater than Hermine who views the world through its limitations. This undermines the previously suggested assumption that Hermine is leading a full or pleasurable life. Her apparent ease in adapting to life implies, in this context, a conscious decision to avoid unsettling the familiar.

It cannot, however, be said that Violette's creativeness demonstrates a less enculturated behaviour or that she seeks to change things. This is particularly the case when we take into account her constant anxiety concerning her physical appearance, her illegitimacy (hence the title *La Bâtarde*) and her desire for recognition as a woman. What is nevertheless distinctive between the two lovers' approach to life can be explained using Maslow's theory on the correlation between creativity and the absence of fear. Violette is more creative, hence less afraid which implies that she is more likely to embrace life. In an interview, Leduc said 'j'essaie de déblayer, de libérer, il y a encore trop de préjugés à notre époque. Il faudrait que les femmes puissent parler aussi franchement que les hommes'.<sup>36</sup> To an extent, her character talking openly about lesbianism and black-market trading is indeed less restrained by what cannot or should not be said or done. Hermine, in contrast, can be considered a realist who views the world through a relatively negative lens.

What is undoubtedly true is that what Hermine cannot offer Violette in terms of creativity and spontaneity, she makes up in her acceptance of Violette as her lover. It cannot be denied that Isabelle's love is equally important and worthy to Violette, in particular when we consider the pivotal role Isabelle plays in Violette's sexual discovery. Yet, if a positive relationship adds value to one's sense of worth, then to be intimately attached to a socially superior individual must be even more self-enhancing. From this perspective, Hermine's implied social status

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<sup>36</sup> Charles-merrien, 'Une conception virile', p. 22.

– being a *surveillante* and therefore an employed adult as well as her apparent talent (which is comparable to famous classical musicians) – highlights the difference in implied recognition between Hermine and Isabelle. In other words, the Violette/Isabelle relationship is not the equal of the sexual relationship between the talented and independent adult Hermine and the school girl Violette. But can this relationship be truly perceived as positive to Violette’s identity development?

### 1.3 Intimate attachment and individual growth/independence

What is clearly presented is Hermine’s ability to secure a degree of financial independence, regardless of the situation. For instance, when her love affair with Violette is exposed and she is forced to leave the boarding school, she is nevertheless able to secure a teaching post shortly afterwards, albeit ‘dans un village’ (p. 144). Although it can be argued that the consequence of being forced to resign from her post as *surveillante* is giving up her dream of becoming a music teacher, Hermine does not appear too troubled by this. Let us take as an example her reply when Violette exclaims ‘votre carrière est brisée!’ (p. 147). Hermine replies with ‘ma carrière? Ma carrière n’est pas brisée. [...] Je suis institutrice’ (p. 147). This suggests that she would be quite happy being a school teacher since she would be a music teacher. Her reply implies the belief that having a career takes precedence over what career path to follow and certainly, in the months and years which follow this episode, Hermine does not cease paid employment. Her determination to maintain her financial independence is in direct contrast with Violette’s apparent lack of ability to obtain a sustained income.

Throughout the text, we witness Violette experiencing continuous struggles in financial security. For instance, as a child, her sense of financial security is threatened with the realization that, when away from public eyes, her salad bowl becomes her night pot: ‘vase de nuit se transforme en saladier au début des repas’ (p. 32). We also witness Violette being made aware of her illegitimacy and the greater wealth which is denied her. That is to say, she can only imagine what could have been had she been recognized as the legitimate ‘héritière de cette

grande maison' (p. 80). Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs argues that all basic needs such as the need for love and for security must be sufficiently gratified before an individual becomes aware of his/her desire to move forward.<sup>37</sup> Maslow further adds that all individuals are bound by an inherent need to progress upwards which, when applied to Violette, implies that the heroine's sense of financial insecurity must be rectified before she can proceed forward to achieve a more self-enhancing identity.<sup>38</sup>

It can therefore be argued that the displacement of her affection from Isabelle to the financially independent Hermine is a manifestation of her subconscious desire to gratify her need for financial security. Certainly, Hermine is depicted as more independent as opposed to Violette who, although she claims '[je] ne cédaï pas à Hermine' (p. 243), nevertheless resigns from her job and becomes 'la petite femme qui fait les courses, le ménage, qui prépare le dîner, qui se laisse vivre' (p. 243). Violette must give up her financial independence and perform the traditional role of a housewife whereas Hermine has taken up the traditional masculine role of providing for the family.

Jean Baker Miller writes that a woman is not 'encouraged to act on her own behalf', and Judith Arcana argues also that she is encouraged to trap a man into providing financial and social security.<sup>39</sup> Of course, since Miller's and Arcana's arguments, women's social condition has changed significantly, but this image of a woman who must depend on an other for survival resonates with the social condition of women at the time *La Bâtarde* was published. Violette's behaviour after Hermine's abandonment can be interpreted as her manifestation of a total acceptance of a (culturally) 'feminine' role that is moulded at first by Hermine, but eventually becomes part of Violette's identity (though she will evolve further in future episodes). In other words, through her attachment with Hermine, her initial open-ended search for an individual identity gradually evolves into the adoption of a gendered identity which conforms to the social expectations of a woman.

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<sup>37</sup> Maslow, *Toward a Psychology of Being*, pp. 26-27.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.

<sup>39</sup> Jean Baker Miller, *Toward a New Psychology of*, p. 108; Judith Arcana, *Our Mother's Daughters*, p. 47.



By way of parenthesis, it is worth noting that, at this stage of her development, Violette's perception of what or who she should be recalls Cooley's concept of the looking-glass self: a concept which argues that how a subject perceives him or herself influences how he or she is recognized by society, and society's recognition of the individual is consequently nothing more than a reflection of the individual's self-perception.<sup>40</sup> He further adds that 'how one's self appears in a particular mind, and the kind of self-feeling one has is determined by the attitude toward this attributed to that other mind'.<sup>41</sup> Although Cooley's theory does not place great emphasis on external elements such as political influences which can have a profound effect on how the individual perceives the self, Violette's identity development does, however, resonate with Cooley's theory. Hermine's desire for a feminine lover – the 'female' to Hermine's 'male' – is influenced by Violette's (unvoiced) desire to be acknowledged as passively feminine.

#### 1.4 Are intimate attachments beneficial?

After Hermine and the heroine are expelled from the boarding school, and the latter is on the train by herself heading towards Paris, she remarks: 'mon premier grand voyage toute seule. J'étais libre, libre avec des naseaux de cavale. Tout se présentait, tout se proposait, j'allais au-devant de tout, je l'atteignais' (p. 151). This clearly presents the image of a young girl filled with hope; hope for a future which, unknown to the heroine, will see her mocked by others, for instance in the episode when a female passer-by viciously laughs at her physical appearance. However, at this juncture when her relationship with Hermine is just beginning, Violette is clearly unperturbed by the behaviour of others as her comment suggests: 'mon expérience, ma supériorité me venaient de mes sens' (p. 158).

This optimistic view of the future soon decreases when Hermine expresses her willingness to feed Violette should the latter become too ill to work. Hughes writes that Violette 'is consigned, as a result of her lover's (seemingly) self-sacrificial stance, to a subordinate state; a state that is symbolized by her role

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<sup>40</sup> Charles Horton Cooley, *Human Nature and the Social Order*, pp. 179-85.

<sup>41</sup> Cooley, *Human Nature*, pp. 183-84.

as Hermine's whore /putain'.<sup>42</sup> Indeed, and as previously suggested, Violette eventually becomes financially dependent on Hermine and plays the housewife to Hermine's 'male'. And certainly, the response that Violette gives presents an individual unhappy with this generous gesture: 'qu'est-ce que je devenais? Qu'est-ce que je deviendrais? Qu'est-ce que j'étais? Qu'est-ce que je serais?' (p. 244). This is a sharp contrast to the younger and more confident Violette sitting on a train headed for Paris.

Following her unemployment, Violette becomes financially dependent on Hermine. Her days are spent reading fashion magazines to improve her self-perceived unattractive physical appearance. This obsession with how she appears to others is not without reason when we consider Beauvoir's argument that 'elle [la femme] est jugée, respectée, désirée à travers sa toilette.'<sup>43</sup> Arcana also remarks that 'all of us [women] are encouraged to disguise our appearance with cosmetics, costumes that reshape our bodies, even surgery'.<sup>44</sup> Indeed, through her heroine's constant fear of being perceived as ugly, Leduc suggests that being physically acceptable to society is the key to a sense of recognition and that any unattractive features imply alienation or marginalization, as highlighted by Schrader who writes that 'Violette Leduc (the author) est obsédée par sa laideur, elle s'est enfermée.'<sup>45</sup>

Certainly, from Violette's account, she is identifying herself with Beauvoir's, as well as Arcana's, definition of a socially acceptable woman who must, first and foremost, be presentable. She remarks on how she spends her days reading up on 'les bienfaits du tonique, de l'astringent [...], de la mousse à nettoyer' (p. 245), trying to rejuvenate herself through exercise and, at a much later time in her life, of turning to plastic surgery to try to reshape her nose so that it becomes 'un peu tendu, un peu sur la défensive' (p. 592). Her desire to be recognized as a woman cannot, however, be condemned when we take into account Annie Woodhouse's comment that 'sex, gender and appearance form a sort of trinity which runs deep

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<sup>42</sup> Alex Hughes, 'Desire and its Discontents: Violette Leduc / La Bâtarde / The Failure of Love', in *French Erotic Fiction: Women's Desiring Writing, 1880-1990*, p75.

<sup>43</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *Le Deuxième sexe II*, p. 602.

<sup>44</sup> Arcana, *Our Mothers' Daughters*, p. 47.

<sup>45</sup> Sabine Schrader, 'Le Bonheur était une façade', in *Violette Leduc*, ed. by Paul Renard and Michele Hecquet (Lille: Université Lille 3, 1998), pp. 38-53 (49).

in our social and psychological expectations of how our lives should be.’<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, Schrader highlights that ‘l’importance accordée à la beauté humaine est presque exclusivement réservée à la femme. Comme la femme est définie comme “le beau sexe”, le défaut d’apparence, la laideur, sont décisifs pour l’amour, le mariage et la profession’.<sup>47</sup> From this perspective, it can be argued that Violette’s trying to be presentable is a manifestation of her desire to maintain Hermine’s attention.

On the subject of how Violette wishes to appear before others, Alison Fell proposes that the protagonist is frequently cast ‘as a kind of vaudeville actress, a representation of selfhood that subscribes to a somewhat anti-essentialist view of identity’.<sup>48</sup> For instance, Violette is depicted as Berthe’s abused child at the beginning, then as a Hermine’s glamorous kept woman in one scene, then as Gabriel’s patriotic wife in another. Let us explore in detail the episode where Violette is depicted as Hermine’s kept woman. As mentioned previously, physical appearance is important to Violette but the steps she is depicted to take appear exaggerated. For instance, spending her entire day reading up on various lotions and tonics, or parading herself on the boulevard des Capucines in her eel-coloured ensemble (suit, hat, shoes and bag) and torturing herself in her ‘escarpins anguille’ (p. 264) that are too tight: ‘elles (les chaussures) me tuent. C’est trop étroit’ (p. 269). Mireille Brioude writes: ‘A lire l’œuvre de Leduc on a l’impression, en effet, de se trouver devant un théâtre de glaces où chaque événement, à l’image de la perception que le “je” a de lui-même, se trouve grossi, amplifié, dramatisé’.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, this exhibition of a glamour girl resembles a scene taken from a black and white movie where every gesture is exaggerated.

When we consider Fromm’s arguments that it is ‘not the internalized voice of an authority whom we are eager to please and afraid of displeasing; it is our own voice, present in every human being and independent of external sanctions and rewards’, Violette’s choice of lover then reveals a heroine whose

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<sup>46</sup> Annie Woodhouse, *Fantastic Women: Sex, Gender and Transvestism* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1989), p. IX.

<sup>47</sup> Sabine Schrader, ‘Le Bonheur était une façade’, p. 49.

<sup>48</sup> Alison S. Fell, ‘Literary Trafficking: Performing Identity in Violette Leduc’s *La Bâtarde*’, *MLR*, 98 (2003), 870-880 (p. 871).

<sup>49</sup> Mireille Brioude, *Violette Leduc: la mise en scène du ‘je’* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000), p. 64.

self-interpretation challenges her sense of individual identity.<sup>50</sup> Fromm's suggestion that there is a distinct line between actions which are for the principal purpose of pleasing the self and are therefore self-enhancing, and those which are, as a priority, aimed at satisfying the need of others is also highlighted by Kurt Baier who follows this psychological approach by adding a more detailed description of the natural make-up of self-interest. He states that a distinction must be made between 'those who need not always choose between pleasing themselves and pleasing others, who can please themselves by pleasing others, [...] and those who always or often have to choose between pleasing themselves and pleasing others.'<sup>51</sup>

These psychological theories place focus principally on the individual's decision to either please the self or please others. In relation to Violette in *La Bâtarde*, it is clear that her anaclitic-type relationship with Hermine is predominantly influenced by a desire to please others. This is by no means detrimental to her personal development since, to recapitulate Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Violette is able to gratify her sense of belonging and security by pleasing others. Doing so will allow her to progress from her 'deficiency needs' towards a more self-enhancing or self-validating need. It is, however, detrimental in the sense that she is delegating the power to gratify her sense of belonging to an 'other'. Maslowian theory emphasizes the risk of dependency on others, and an inauthentic need to please others – an argument which is also highlighted by Beauvoir – when the individual is seeking fulfilment in his/her need for belonging.<sup>52</sup> Violette's artificial role-playing in this anaclitic-type relationship with Hermine therefore is not, and cannot be, successful, as Hermine's eventual rejection of Violette demonstrates.

On the day the two lovers are supposed to go away on holiday together, Hermine sends Violette a telegram to terminate their relationship. Prior to receiving this confirmation, Violette already senses that Hermine will leave her: 'c'est (their relationship) fini, ce sera bientôt fini, c'est la fin' (p. 307). The arrival

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<sup>50</sup> Erik Fromm, *Man for Himself: An Inquiry into the Psychology of*, p. 158.

<sup>51</sup> Kurt Baier, 'Why Should We Be Moral?', in *Morality and Rational Self-Interest*, ed. by David P. Gautier (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1970), pp. 156-176 (p. 156).

<sup>52</sup> Maslow, *Toward a Psychology of Being*, pp. 140-41.

of the telegram is nevertheless depicted as ‘un cauchemar éveillé’ (p. 313). Violette’s subsequent exclamation ‘Manman! Au secours! Manman, soulage-moi. Je l’aurais tant aimée. Elle va revenirrr...’ (p. 314) clearly demonstrates her anguish. This implies that her attachment to Hermine has developed beyond her desire to be a socially acknowledged woman. I suggest that she now identifies herself as Hermine’s kept woman, or as her whore (to use Hughes’ word), and any change to her identity will cause her grief.

It is interesting that she should call on her mother Berthe at this point, and not on her *ange Fidéline*, when throughout *La Bâtarde*, Berthe is presented as a cold and distant (but only to Violette) mother. The caring maternal substitute Fidéline is evoked when Violette first detects Hermine’s lack of emotional commitment to her. However, at the crucial point when Violette is only left with a telegram from Hermine, Fidéline is replaced by Berthe. The juxtaposition of the cold maternal figure with Violette’s cries for help is, however, a technique at highlighting the total devastation the heroine feels when she receives her lover’s rejection.

Emotional reactions are not only an indication of the degree of attachment each lover has for the other, but also give clues to the level of self-confidence each individual has achieved as the result of being in an intimate relationship. With reference to Maslowian theory on how an individual can become vulnerable to the opinions of others, it can be suggested that the more attached the characters in *La Bâtarde* are to their lover, the more eager they are assumed to want to gratify their lover’s need and desire. This will then leave the individual at risk of becoming too eager to please that, to use Maslow’s words, ‘the self is lost.’<sup>53</sup>

Let us turn our attention to the three characters’ (namely Violette, Isabelle and Hermine) emotional responses to the termination of a sexual relationship. Isabelle is depicted to be more affected by the end of their relationship than Violette. This suggests that she is now more emotionally dependent on Violette than Violette is on Isabelle. With this suggestion, it is plausible to argue that Isabelle must also fear being rejected by Violette. Heinz Kohut argues that ‘the more secure a person is regarding his own acceptability, the more certain he is of

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<sup>53</sup> Maslow, *Toward a Psychology of Being*, p. 58.

who he is'. In this context where Isabelle is depicted to be more fearful of rejection, her sense of self-confidence must also be negatively affected.<sup>54</sup>

Hermine, however, is the one who terminates their relationship with a simple 'ne m'attends pas. Je ne reviendrai plus. Tu dois être courageuse' (p 313). Violette is the anguished lover who re-reads the telegram over and over again, claiming it to be 'un faux' (p. 313). Frantz points out that 'in dramatizing her awkwardness, in portraying the humiliation and suffering that she has experienced and even inflicted upon herself,' Leduc's autobiographical narrator looks for 'martyrdom'.<sup>55</sup> Indeed, the pleas for compassion ('pitié', 'la charité' (p. 314)) and the depiction of physical pain give an image of the narrator heroine completely overwhelmed by this rejection: 'je sanglotai', 'une gifle, deux gifles, trois gifles, des gifles, encore des gifles, toujours des gifles' (p, 314).

Charles-Merrien writes that throughout her life, Violette is made to feel unwanted, explicitly by the mother and implicitly by the father. She adds that the only continual emotion for Violette is 'la frustration'.<sup>56</sup> In this context, to be unwanted by an intimate companion can only frustrate Violette further, and her behaviour is an amplified psychological reaction to becoming too dependent on Hermine for personal validation. In other words, being rejected and therefore alienated from the source of her sense of self-esteem amplifies Violette's negative perspective on this particular experience.

This appears to contradict my previous suggestions that Violette progresses by gaining a sense of self-confidence (through Isabelle) to becoming a more confident individual as the lover of the more mature and independent Hermine. It can be argued that, in fact, moving from one lover to another has left Violette more disintegrated than before. On the subject of changing lovers, Hughes writes:

Violette's erotic liaisons with Isabelle, Hermine and Gabriel are all potentially functional bonds. If they fail, it is because their participants (especially, but not exclusively, Violette) never manage to achieve an equilibrium in which the needs of the self and the

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<sup>54</sup> Heinz Kohut, *The Analysis of the Self: A Systematic Approach to the Psychoanalytic Treatment of Narcissistic Personality Disorders* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971; repr. 2009), p. 298.

<sup>55</sup> Frantz, 'The Repentance of a Bastard', *Sens-public* (2009): 1-15 (p. 6).

< [http://www.sens-public.org/article.php3?id\\_article=718](http://www.sens-public.org/article.php3?id_article=718) > [accessed 29 Nov. 2013].

<sup>56</sup> Ghyslaine Charles-Merrien, 'Une Conception virile', p. 23.

demands of the other are harmonized, so that a mutual 'recognition' of equal, desiring subjects is realized.<sup>57</sup>

The implication that the needs of the self and the demands of the other can be harmonized is, however, difficult to achieve when, on the one hand, the depiction of Violette's excessive need for reassurance suggests that there can be no equilibrium between two people in a relationship when one party, in this case Violette, is always needing to please her lover to attain a sense of self-validation.<sup>58</sup> This is also explored by Maslow, who argues that the feeling of being loved and respected can only be fulfilled with the help of others.<sup>59</sup> This, inevitably, results in an even more anxious tendency to please those who have the power to give love. There can, therefore, never be an equilibrium between the needs of Violette and the demands of Hermine since Violette is dependent on the 'power' she has delegated to Hermine and is influenced by a need to prioritize the demands of Hermine before her own in an attempt to 'please' the lover.

On the other hand, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs proposes that to achieve a level of harmony, the individual must have sufficiently fulfilled his or her desire for basic lower needs such as the need for belonging/security in order to progress towards a more self-enhancing need, for instance the need for self-esteem. In the case of Violette, although changing sexual partners can arguably be a manifestation of her desire to progress from a need to be physically acceptable to others, to desiring a sense of self-esteem with the independent and musically talented Hermine, her reaction to Hermine's abandonment is clearly not reflective of an individual who has achieved this solid basis of satisfied lower needs. She cannot, therefore, progress beyond her basic lower needs and must oscillate between the need for belonging, the need for love and the need for security in search of equilibrium.

### **1.5 Identity development and intimate attachments in *The Rouge of the North***

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<sup>57</sup> Hughes, 'Desire and its Discontents: Violette Leduc / La Bâtarde / The Failure of Love', p. 85.

<sup>58</sup> Knee, 'Relationship-Contingent Self-Esteem and the Ups and Downs of Romantic Relationships', p. 624.

<sup>59</sup> Maslow, *Toward a Psychology of Being*, pp. 30-34.

Earlier in this chapter, although my analysis of the emotional attachment between Yindi and Young Liu suggested that this is an anaclitic type of relationship, it is nevertheless a brief and platonic one. Her next emotional attachment, however, is neither brief nor sensible in the strict sense as we discover that the character in question is her husband's younger brother, known throughout the text as the Third Master.

The first task is to determine whether Yindi digresses from socially acceptable behaviour. On the one hand, in her study of Chang's depiction of married women in Chinese societies, Leng writes that Yindi has an incestuous affair with her brother-in-law and that she is the one who 'once sang a ballad to him in the middle of the night, and had rendezvoused with him at a Buddhist temple.'<sup>60</sup> Leng's suggestion that Yindi initiates the incestuous affair and is bold enough to sing to him and meet with him at the temple is somewhat misleading. First of all, intimacy between Yindi and her brother-in-law is implied only. Although there is an episode where Yindi is sexually aroused by the Third Master, no sexual intimacy takes place between the couple throughout the text. Whether these two characters can be acknowledged as a couple is also a matter of debate, particularly as we are only given a one-sided account of how Yindi feels towards the Third Master. Secondly, Yindi sings the ballad hidden from view on the balcony so that the Third Master could hear, but his reply (which Yindi does not hear) clearly suggests his ignorance of her effort: 'funny there're street singers in this weather. A heroin addict out begging' (p. 53).

Leng's statement that they met (deliberately) at a Buddhist temple is also a bold declaration when, in my view, their encounter is presented by Chang as a strategically placed coincidence. This episode happens when, after the birth of Yindi's son, the entire Yao household travels to a Buddhist temple to celebrate 'the sixtieth birthday of the long-dead master of the house' (p. 72), a ritual his widow always holds in the temple with guests and the entire Yao family. During the party, Yindi 'wandered across the courtyard around the huge iron incense pot. [...] she saw Third Master coming' (p. 79). It is convenient and crucial that Yindi

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<sup>60</sup> Rachel Leng, 'Eileen Chang's Feminine Chinese Modernity: Dysfunctional Marriages, Hysterical Women, and the Primordial Eugenic Threat', *Quarterly Journal of Chinese Studies*, 2 (2014), 13-34 (p. 23). Hereafter referred to as 'Eileen Chang's Feminine Chinese Modernity'.



should wander away from the party and find the Third Master as this is the first time since becoming the Second Mistress that Yindi is depicted alone with her brother-in-law. Yindi is finally able to disclose her feeling towards the Third Master: ‘since we’re not meant to meet in this life let’s tie a knot for the next incarnation’ (p. 81). On this episode, David Der-wei Wang highlights Yindi’s culpable behaviour. He writes: ‘should Yindi transgress the conventional boundary of feminine virtue by succumbing to the seduction of her brother-in-law? Or should she follow the model of those women who led a pious, decent life?’<sup>61</sup> His subsequent remark ‘Yindi chooses the first option’ demonstrates his view that Yindi intentionally wanders off in the hope of running into the Third Master.

Irrespective of whether and when Yindi has an intimate moment with the Third Master, her choice of attachment is a socially unacceptable one. Yet he is seen as the principal object of love for Yindi. Indeed, the attention Chang gives him cannot be ignored when we take into account the lengthy complimentary descriptions concerning his physical qualities. There are also numerous dialogues between him and Yindi which are emotionally revealing. For instance:

‘Going to pray, Second Sister-in-law?’  
 ‘What’s the use of praying, with such a fate as mine? All I ask is for Buddha to take me back. [...] Now that I have him I’ve done my duty to you Yaos, I’m free to die.’ (p.81)

Given that this episode takes place during the period when the new Chinese governing party is encouraging an iconoclastic rejection of traditional values amongst its people, Chang’s use of words ‘duty to you Yaos’ highlights Yindi’s determination to observe the traditional way of life.

In his study of Chang’s works, Hsia writes that Chang’s ‘imagery [...] suggest[s] the persistence of the past in the present, the continuity of Chinese modes of behaviour in apparently changing material circumstances.’<sup>62</sup> A detailed reading of Yindi’s behaviour towards her husband does reveal her conflicting attitudes towards tradition. For instance, Yindi accepts her arranged marriage, and in accordance with custom, she does not meet her husband until after the wedding

<sup>61</sup> David Der-wei Wang, ‘Foreword’ in *The Rouge of the North*, p. XXV.

<sup>62</sup> C. T. Hsia, ‘Eileen Chang’, in *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction*, p. 389.

ceremony. Her show of obedience to tradition, including the rule of obeisance and respect to the man of the household, is soon ruptured by her insolent remark to her husband just three days after the wedding: ‘are you deaf as well as blind?’ (p. 28).

Chang frequently juxtaposes traditional behaviours with modern actions. Unlike Leduc who depicts Violette changing lovers, Chang depicts a Yindi sandwiched between the old and the new ways of life. For instance, like her sisters-in-law, Yindi has ‘stunted bound feet’ (p. 37) and must wait on her mother-in-law as tradition dictates. In contrast, the Yao household begins to open up to a modern, or in this case a foreign, world, as demonstrated in one episode when the Big Mistress (the eldest sister-in-law) remarks on a foreign word which she had embroidered on her shoe without understanding the meaning: ‘I asked your Third Master to write me a foreign word when I was making these shoes. When Big Master saw them he said it says “horse hoof. And that’s the fitting word for you”’ (p. 37). The Yao family may be embracing a modern world, but like all female characters, Yindi must adhere to tradition. Modernization is shown by Chang to apply to male members of the Yao household only, and to a certain extent, Hsia’s comments that Chang juxtaposes traditional behaviours with modern actions does not appear to apply to this particular work.

A closer look at the energetic Third Master reveals a confident character. This is expressed in his gestures: ‘he pulled a chair around, neatly flipped up the back hem of his gown, sat down astride the chair and started to pop almonds into his mouth’ (p. 44). It is also demonstrated through his disregard for social etiquette when after the death of the Old Mistress, he visits Yindi in a ‘thin padded suit of dark blue silk’ with a ‘wide stiff slate-coloured fringed belt’ (pp. 123-24). In a society where only coarse linen or cotton were respectable materials for mourning, and where black or white were considered acceptable colours for children to wear following the death of a parent, to wear silk in fashionable colours demonstrates a certain defiance.

The Third Master’s evident non-conformity to acceptable rules of conduct is a subtle reminder of the country’s gradual change from a tradition-based society to what Carole Hoyan describes as a society with ‘the essence of western culture.’<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Carole H.F. Hoyan, *The Life and Works of Aileen Zhang: A Critical Study* (Unpublished thesis,

It also resonates with Maslowian theory on the correlation between an individual's sense of self-confidence and his or her lack of regard for social demands. In other words, a higher sense of self-confidence leads to a greater disregard for social etiquette. The representation of the Third Master demonstrates this.

As the third son of a prominent family, his influence within the household is not expected to supersede that of his two elder brothers. However, given that his second older brother is disabled, and that he is the treasured son of the Old Mistress who heads the Yao family, he can enjoy an elevated status. Little is known of the First Master who rarely makes an appearance and who does not address the female ladies of the household except to answer with 'ai' (a sound he utters to acknowledge their presence) and by 'bobbing his head vaguely in their direction without looking, as was proper' (p. 35). The physical absence of this male authority figure to the characters within the fiction, as well as to the readers, is an effective technique used to distance the First Master from the daily (and perhaps mundane) lives of the characters in *The Rouge of the North*. In this work, Chang ensures that attention is focused on her female heroine.

The implied social power which the First Master enjoys as the eldest son is, on one occasion, publically shared with his youngest sibling, and has the effect of elevating instantly the Third Master's importance within the Yao household. This episode takes place when the Old Mistress 'insisted that both her sons (the First and Third Masters) should be in' to entertain 'their grandfather's "pupils", examinees that he had passed in imperial examinations. Some were very old' (p. 48). In a short sentence, Chang has managed to concomitantly highlight the important social status of the two brothers and the Second Master's relative insignificance, even to his own mother. To entrust her two sons with the role of entertaining respected students of their deceased grandfather implies their high social status as respectable descendants who are qualified to represent their family on a public platform. These guests are not just students but are old examinees who have passed the imperial examinations and are therefore wealthy and respectable men who have worked for the imperial government. The Old Mistress's decision demonstrates her belief in the Third Master as a man of quality.

Juxtaposing this man of importance and virility with the weak and withdrawn Second Master, it is no wonder that Yindi seeks his attention and encourages flirtatious dialogues with him. He is depicted as a healthy and virile man, as opposed to the Second Master. Ironically, though, it is her handicapped husband who fathers a son while the Third Master is childless: ‘they (the prostitutes from the singsong houses) not only ruined Third Master but left him childless’ (p. 146). To a certain extent, the implication that irrespective of their physical conditions, those who do not digress from social norms are rewarded accordingly is suggestive of Chang’s acceptance of what is generally perceived as socially correct behaviour.<sup>64</sup>

The Third Master’s charm is further marked by the elaborate adjectives used to describe the surroundings in which Yindi finds herself when he is near:

The hem of his gown brushed the top of her feet, so sweetly it seemed a long while to her. The room stood around. The sun just touched a feather duster in a tall light blue crackle-china vase. Sunlight showed up the film of dust on the broad shafts [...]. The all too fleeting moment of privacy had gone to her head like wine. (pp.46-7)

Shirley Paolini and Chen-Shen Yen write that Chang associates ‘motifs of moon’ with ‘madness and mutilation’. It can be argued then that motifs of sun are associated with health and happiness.<sup>65</sup> In this context, this scene in which Yindi is basked in sunlight when the Third Master is around clearly implies her love for him.

Although the Third Master initially responds to her, this mutual attraction does not, however, progress. Sexual gratification is not achieved: ‘You have the wrong person, Second Sister-in-law. You may not think it from looking at me, the Third Yao, I’m still not that kind of man’ (p. 83). He has no intention of transgressing the established law and his conscience. His rejection forces Yindi to acknowledge once again the reality of living a life over which she has very little control and in which her desires can never be fulfilled except when they benefit

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<sup>64</sup> Leng, ‘Eileen Chang’s Feminine Chinese Modernity’, p. 26.

<sup>65</sup> Shirley Paolini and Chen-Shen Yen, ‘Moon, Madness, and Mutilation in Eileen Chang’s English Translation of *The Golden Cangue*’, *Tamkang Review*, 19 (1988): 547-557 (p. 547).

others. Her desolation increases and she turns away from the Third Master: ‘just as she kept thinking of him, coldly but always going back. She felt it now, the chill dead weight creeping up, pulling her along, endless, two big snakes half-heartedly wringing each other to death’ (p. 141). The metaphorical snakes symbolize her sexual desire and imply the death of her sexual needs.

This does not, however, suggest she no longer entertains feelings of romantic love for him. Chodorow argues that love for a man is based on an idealized fantasy stemming from the girl’s childhood desire to be loved by the father, or the paternal figure which represents ‘an escape from maternal omnipotence.’<sup>66</sup> She continues by adding that:

Second, his distance and ideological position of authority in the family makes his real strengths and weakness difficult to grasp. Third, the girl does not receive the same kind of love from her mother as a boy does, thus she turns to the father looking for this kind of confirmation.<sup>67</sup>

The need for love from the absent father inevitably leads the girl to deny more willingly his limitations, and this is easier to execute as she knows less about him than about her mother. Love for a man is, as Chodorow puts it, ‘on a level of fantasy and idealization’, and when this is applied to Yindi, it suggests that the Third Master’s flaws are unconsciously suppressed by Yindi so as to enable her to achieve a sense of emotional gratification.<sup>68</sup>

The Third Master has many flaws, one of which is his gambling addiction. We are given this information shortly after Yindi enters the Yao household as the newly wed Second Mistress. The extent of his gambling addiction is, however, not fully disclosed until a month after the birth of Yindi’s son. The household is getting ready to celebrate his first month, and a piece of Third Mistress’s valuable jewellery goes missing. This catalyses a succession of finger pointing amongst the ladies of the house as well as their respective servants, and the servants decide to hire a round lighter to find the culprit.<sup>69</sup> The Third Master hears of this from his

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<sup>66</sup> Chodorow, *Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory*, p. 72.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*, p. 72.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*, p. 72.

<sup>69</sup> A ‘round lighter’ refers to a person who is believed to have mystical powers in finding the

own wife and shows his disapproval: ‘I’m not going to have all this hocus-pocus in the house’ (p. 68). Despite his skepticism, he nevertheless decides to play safe, and follows the advice of a hanger-on by smearing pig’s blood on his face for the whole day in the hope of breaking the round lighter’s mystical powers: ‘Pig’s blood is one of the filthy things used as antidotes for withcraft. It seems that only filth can kill the mystery, the aura’ (p. 68). The culprit is never identified by the round lighter, but given the insight readers now have, we are left in no doubt as to who the thief is. He is, however, left unscathed and continues with his gambling addiction.

On the surface, this is a derisory scene which highlights the lengths the Third Master is willing to go to fund his gambling debts. However, a deeper reading reveals a society that is lax on men yet finds faults in women: only women and the servants are accused of stealing the valuable jewellery. It can also be argued that Chang uses this scene to highlight the social condition of women in traditional Chinese Societies, that is to say, men in Chinese societies may escape reproach but not women.

Hsia notes that Chang uses Freudian theories for ‘psychological sophistication and metaphorical enrichment of her stories.’<sup>70</sup> Yindi’s desire to be attached to the Third Master resonates with the Freudian penis envy complex – she desires him because the Third Master is virile and has the necessary biological construction to be acknowledged as a man, unlike her physically disabled husband who is implied to be less manly. Maslow’s take on this would be less focused on biological essentialism but more on whether individuals can ‘respect and accept’ themselves by optimizing personal attributes.<sup>71</sup> In other words, Maslowian theory does not suggest that ‘man’ is better due to his biology or that ‘woman’ is less significant. Instead, he highlights that an individual is better because he/she maximizes his/her potential. This resonates with Chang’s writing which is, in her

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culprit. The ‘round lighter’ first sprays a mouthful of sacred water onto a piece of round white paper in front of an audience. He then asks a boy chosen at random from the observing crowd to stare at the sprayed white paper. It is believed that the boy will eventually see the image of the guilty person appear on this white paper.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 391.

<sup>71</sup> Maslow, *Toward a Psychology of Being*, p. 5.

own words, about ‘little things between men and women.’<sup>72</sup> She is not explicitly taking a stand against socio-political treatment of women (although it is implied throughout the fiction) but her emphasis on the unreasonable ‘benefits’ which the male characters in her work enjoy and the misfortunes which befall her female characters clearly implies that women in traditional Chinese societies are not given the opportunity to maximize their potential.

### **1.6 The benefits of intimate attachments in *The Rouge of the North***

Chang highlights that the Third Master is accepted by society because he is physically appealing and respected (coming from a wealthy and powerful family). Yindi wishes to be attached to a generally loved person (irrespective of gender) and, in her attraction to the Third Master, is manifesting a desire to be accepted for who she is rather than for what (in terms of gender) she is.

The Third Master is also clearly distinguished from his reclusive and disabled brother in self-confidence, which suggests that the Third Master’s physical attractiveness permits him to enjoy a sense of psychological freedom in knowing that he will generally be welcomed by society. By choosing the Third Master over her own husband, Yindi not only attests to the desire for physical attractiveness, but also highlights the association between freedom and beauty. That is to say, although she is aware that ‘beauty in a woman is not an advantage unless used to better her prospects in life’ (p. 17), she is confined within her allocated quarters and on the rare occasion when she can exhibit her beauty, it is ‘to no purpose’ (p. 73). Furthermore, it is doubtful how she benefits from her beauty when it is wasted on a blind husband, but when Yindi was riding through the street in an open carriage, she remarks: ‘she was acting too and enjoying it, posing as the loved and admired one’ (p. 72). Her desire to be recognized as an attractive woman cannot be denied.

Of course, the one character who can exert the utmost influence in Yindi’s search for a sense of belonging in her marital family is her husband. In the

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<sup>72</sup> Stephen Cheng, ‘Themes and Techniques in Eileen Chang’s Stories’, *Tamkang Review*, 8 (1977), 169-200 (p. 174).

following section, marriage and identity development is discussed.

## 2 Heterosexuality, society and marriage

Marriage is generally understood as the legal joining of two individuals from two different families. Gary S. Becker asserts that it ‘has been followed by practically all adults in every society [...] although its pattern differ[s] among societies and change[s] over time in a variety of ways that challenge any single theory.’<sup>73</sup> On the subject of the need for a legal union of two individuals, various arguments have been proposed. On the one hand, western theorists such as Georges Bataille state that ‘le mariage est tout d’abord le cadre de la sexualité licite’ whereas Michel Foucault writes that ‘les relations de sexe ont donné lieu à un dispositif d’alliance’.<sup>74</sup> From a social perspective, licit sexual activity is also associated with the theory concerning conjugal bonds raised by Chodorow in her study of heterosexuality.<sup>75</sup> Riviere’s psychological approach to marriage places it as a medium in which ‘satisfaction of the harmonizing and unifying life instincts, the self-preservative and sexual, is gained.’<sup>76</sup>

The direct association of sex with marriage is, on the other hand, less apparent in Chinese societies. Although Kristeva notes that marriages in China during the twentieth century function primarily as ‘un contrat symbolique et de production’, licit sexual activity remains repressed, as Yi points out when he writes that a model woman in Chinese society is one who is virtuous – therefore sexually passive.<sup>77</sup> In her study of female consciousness in the works of Chang, Chiung-chu Chen writes that, in Chang’s fiction, ‘pursuing a stable life through marriage is more important than happiness’.<sup>78</sup> I argue below that a sense of

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<sup>73</sup> Gary S. Becker, ‘A Theory of Marriage’, in *Economics of the Family: Marriage, Children, and Human Capital*, ed. by Theodore W Schultz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), pp. 299-351 (299-300).

<sup>74</sup> Georges Bataille, *L’Érotisme* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1957; repr. 2011), p. 11; Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité I: La volonté de savoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), p. 140.

<sup>75</sup> Chodorow, ‘Oedipal Asymmetries and Heterosexual Knots’, in *Feminism*, pp. 68-78.

<sup>76</sup> Joan Riviere, ‘Hate, Greed and Aggression’, p. 44.

<sup>77</sup> Kristeva, *Des Chinoises*, p. 154; Chung-tien Yi, *Chinese Men and Women*, p. 46.

<sup>78</sup> Chiung-chu Chen, *The Development of Female Consciousness in the Fiction of Eileen Chang and Fay Weldon*, pp. 112-13.



security is indeed the predominant motivation for marriages in Chang's fiction. I will also argue that Violette in *La Bâtarde* embarks on marriage for different reasons.

## 2.1 Gabriel and Violette

Let us first examine Violette's marriage to Gabriel. On first reading, it seems to contradict her homosexual orientation. Prior to and even after the appearance of Gabriel, very few men feature in her life. Violette states that she grew up 'entre jupons' (p. 65), with her grandmother and mother being the central figures of this predominantly female community. She also describes how she is warned, on a daily basis, by the mother of the evil ways of men: 'je devais le comprendre et ne pas l'oublier. Des cochons. Tous des cochons' (p. 49). In Violette's account, Berthe warns her daughter of the sins of sex with 'une imprécise précision' (p. 49) which is too abstract for the young heroine to comprehend fully, but Violette does understand that men are strangers and cannot be trusted: 'je vivais sur une terre sans hommes depuis que ma mère m'avait mise en garde contre eux' (p. 72).

Far from idealizing men (as Chodorow's theory suggests), the mother has instigated in her daughter a feeling of repulsion towards the opposite sex to the extent that when Violette visits the fishmongers', 'des anguilles' conjures the grotesque image of the male sexual organ: 'la virilité sinueuse sous le pantalon, depuis le nombril jusqu'à la cheville'(p. 45). Fear of the phallus is expressed metonymically when Violette remarks: 'j'avais peur. Une peur panique depuis toujours. Le sperme' (p. 353). It is, therefore, all the more surprising to find her reciprocating and even demanding sexual favours from Gabriel.

She refers to Gabriel as follows: 'un homme inoffensif à qui je plais et je plais rarement. Un homme plutôt petit, mal habillé, un homme étriqué' (p. 165). This points to an element of sacrifice: she renounces the prospect of a pleasing object because she needs so much to be seen as a pleasing object herself – which is to say, she needs to be so seen by a man. Yet before, she had understood (and, as narrator, still understands) that her sexual preference for other women is a form of rebellion against the accepted sexual norms which she challenges openly. For

instance, she repeats three times to Gabriel ‘j’ai une amie’ (p. 162) when they first met to discourage any sexual interest he might have of her.

There is, however, a kind of synthesis. Being able to be truthful about her sexual preference for Gabriel increases Violette’s trust in him, all the more so when he seemingly understands and accepts her choice, thus allowing her to step out of the traditional gender type and become a non-‘feminine’ female. Violette remarks that ‘j’étais son homme, il était ma femme dans ce corps à corps de l’amitié. [...] Hermine me féminisait, cela le mettait hors de lui’ (p. 244). For a woman to be ‘son homme’ and the man to be ‘sa femme’ in a relationship, here at least, appears to be the ultimate sign of a perfect partnership where one complements the other. His pet name for her, which is repeated numerous times, indeed in virtually every dialogue between Gabriel and Violette, is ‘bonhomme’. Fell suggests that this pet name for Violette put her ‘on a subject-position with Gabriel’ and that she plays ‘the role of a homosexual partner in their relationship.’<sup>79</sup> Ironically, it is in this heterosexual relationship that Violette can discard the image of a ‘hyper-feminine role’ witnessed in her lesbian relationship with Hermine.<sup>80</sup>

Gabriel is supportive and does not restrict her within a feminine environment, unlike the mother who desires an attractive daughter, or the lesbian lover who seeks a well-dressed kept woman. Mireille Brioude points out that Violette’s remark ‘j’entendais une voix: celle de Gabriel, celle d’un absent’ (p. 244) gives Gabriel ‘le registre aérien de l’ange.’<sup>81</sup> He is, at this stage, her guardian angel and Brioude argues that it is an especially valuable position since, up until then, Violette had only accorded this angelic status to Fideline.<sup>82</sup> And in Violette’s account, Gabriel executes his role well: ‘sacré bonhomme. Il faut mettre un pied devant l’autre, il faut prendre son temps pour tout. [...] Tu imagines le soin, la patience, son amour du texte et de la difficulté? Tu recommenceras ton écho demain’ (p. 203). His understanding and encouragements reinforce the trust Violette has for him and her desire for self-esteem becomes more attainable.

<sup>79</sup> Fell, ‘Literary Trafficking: Performing Identity in Violette Leduc’s *La Bâtarde*’, p. 871.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p. 871.

<sup>81</sup> Mireille Brioude, *Violette Leduc: la mise en scène du ‘je’* (Amsterdam: Rodopi B.V., 2000)p. 83.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p. 83.

Gabriel demonstrates that he also desires her as a sexually active woman. For instance, Gabriel has sexual intercourse with Violette as soon as he returns from his military duty. He then takes Violette out to dinner but after the meal, he announces that ‘il partait le soir même’ (p. 390). I argue that this verges on prostitution. That is to say, Gabriel seeks her sexual service, pays for it with a meal then leaves. Gabriel desires her as a heterosexual man desires a woman; yet as his ‘bonhomme’, he respects her as a non-feminine individual. Furthermore, his decision not to allocate his military grant to Violette suggests a desire to see Violette survive in a patriarchal society without having to depend on men, particularly on him, for financial or material comforts.

It is helpful at this point to refer to Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs which stipulates that sufficient gratification of the need for esteem (or the need to feel respected) is paramount when the individual seeks to progress towards a self-enhancing need. From this perspective, it can be argued that Violette’s emotional attachment to Gabriel is linked to an unconscious effort to build an image of independence and individuality whilst maintaining her femininity. In other words, Violette wishes to be recognized by society as an individual with a specific gender, and not as the extension of another being.

Her attitude towards her biological characteristics is, however, ambiguous. Freud provocatively suggests that ‘the lack of a penis’ is seen as a punishment to a woman and after she ‘has become aware of the wound to her narcissism, she develops, like a scar, a sense of inferiority.’<sup>83</sup> This leads to what Freud proposes as her ‘contempt for a sex which is the lesser’.<sup>84</sup> Though of course Freud’s theory, and its tendency towards biological essentialism, is open to criticism, it has the merit of capturing a widespread patriarchal attitude with a catchy phrase ‘penis envy’. That Violette may initially have internalized the judgment that women are inferior is implied by her decision to accept Gabriel as her lover despite her apparent preference for women; or at least, it is when we consider the opening pages of *La Bâtarde* in which Violette relates how she was raised by women who were either subordinate to or rejected by men, and therefore more likely to accentuate the women’s sense of ‘inferiority’:

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<sup>83</sup> Freud, *On Sexuality*, p. 337.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid*, p. 337.

Non. Ma mère et ma grand-mère sont intelligentes, elles ont de la personnalité, elles ont été écrasées l'une et l'autre à vingt ans, elles veulent combattre la malchance quand elles enrubannent une petite fille. Le Jardin public est l'arène, je suis leur petit torero. (p. 32)

To declare her mother and grandmother as women of intelligence and character then to use the adjective 'écrasées' suggests an interesting perspective: that of seeing the mother and grandmother as weaker than the men who had abandoned them.

The young Violette's subsequent reference to herself as their 'petit torero' implies that in becoming a bullfighter (and a male one), she is stronger and therefore more able to play the role of the saviour and bring victory back to her mother and grandmother. The tacitly assumed superiority of man or the traditionally male-dominated role is evident. This has an influence upon Violette, who attempts to distance herself from the so-called weaker sex and develop her sense of self-worth by becoming (culturally) masculine – even if it requires being 'the man' in a lesbian relationship, or by engaging in a relationship with a man despite her obvious repulsion for the male sex. In these various ways Violette is portrayed by Leduc as having been conditioned to regret her 'lack of a penis', as well as her inability to become the dominant partner in a lesbian relationship. She must therefore attempt to regain her sense of confidence by attaching herself to a man who, in refusing to give Violette money, forces her to develop more perceived masculine characteristics such as financial sufficiency.

Violette does more than attach herself to Gabriel. She decides to do so legally and marries him – after much consultation with her mother. She asks Berthe three times 'est-ce que je dois l'épouser?' (p. 380). This suggests that Violette may not be marrying for love, or that she questions her feelings towards Gabriel. A closer reading of the text suggests that her marriage to Gabriel is motivated by her desire to conform to the judgment of the society of her time concerning sexual orientations. Riviere comments on the settled relation of marriage to be a 'great recognition of goodness in ourselves'.<sup>85</sup> Violette may be unconsciously projecting

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<sup>85</sup> Riviere, 'Hate, Greed and Aggression', pp. 43-44.

her desire to be recognized as worthy of a stable relationship.

This requires us, nevertheless, to nuance the viewpoint mentioned earlier that Violette is rebelling against accepted sexual norms, particularly when we take into account the remark that ‘je [Violette] me fiche de tout le monde’ (p. 224). The first impression is of her disregard for social pressures. However, this disregard is clearly a façade, since she says of herself: ‘j’étais, je serai toujours emmaillotée dans le qu’en-dira-t-on’ (p. 159). She does not (or cannot) escape social criticism, as demonstrated when she describes her fears: ‘la peur de devenir une vieille fille, la peur qu’on se dise: elle ne trouvait pas, elle était trop laide’ (p. 385).

With reference to Violette’s disgust at phallic-shaped objects mentioned earlier, the fear of the phallus pushes the young Violette away from heteroeroticism but a mature Violette accepts it for fear of social rejection. Her desire to be part of the female community is clearly evident when she remarks: ‘je toisais les femmes pendues au bras de leur amant, je leur lançais: moi aussi c’est dans un lit que je serre un homme dans mes bras. J’étais rentrée dans le troupeau. La belle affaire!’ (p. 376). The image we are given by the heroine at this point is that, in her view, a socially successful woman cannot avoid heterosexual activity.

Her desire to be successful makes it necessary for Violette to worry consciously and consistently about the socially acceptable qualities of the female gender which, as Beauvoir states, are primarily derived from society’s demand for physical beauty.<sup>86</sup> To this argument, Schrader adds that it is ‘une si flagrante illustration de la condition féminine’ that women fear non-conformity.<sup>87</sup> It can be argued that marriage is Violette’s way of convincing a society steeped in prejudice, as well as herself, that she is a physically presentable woman and worthy of recognition. Clearly, in all these respects Violette is an individual depicted with contradictory desires within herself, and not simply a rebel.

Her choice of action, when examined using Maslow’s theory of motivational forces, reveals a character struggling to come to terms with social demands. Maslow states that a need authentic, or true, to an individual must be ‘unintentional, unforced, unpretending, not artificial’; and Violette’s attachment to

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<sup>86</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *Le Deuxième Sexe II*, p. 602.

<sup>87</sup> Sabine Schrader, ‘Le Bonheur était une façade’, in *Violette Leduc*, p. 49.

Gabriel is arguably an act against her sexual preference.<sup>88</sup> This separation between Violette's need to fulfil authentic and pseudo-desires is further revealed when we juxtapose the detailed descriptions of her sexual experience with Isabelle and Hermine with the brief, generally sketchy details of sexual acts with Gabriel (or even with other male characters).<sup>89</sup> Violette evidently enjoys her lesbian experiences, which suggests that heterosexual activity is perceived by Violette as a necessary means of attaining a sense of recognition. Gabriel is, therefore, her safety net in a conditioned society.

Monique Wittig defines lesbianism as follows: “‘lesbienne’ est le seul concept que je connaisse qui soit au-delà des catégories de sexe (femme et homme) parce que le sujet désigné (lesbienne) n'est pas une femme, ni économiquement, ni politiquement, ni idéologiquement.”<sup>90</sup> She further adds that lesbianism provides ‘la seule forme sociale dans laquelle nous (les femmes) puissent vivre libres.’<sup>91</sup> To a certain extent, the sexual pleasures which Violette achieves with her lesbian lovers can be interpreted as having achieved the freedom to discover, as well as enjoy, her erogenous zones. Wittig's definition of lesbianism does not, however, reflect the society in which the narrator heroine finds herself. Despite having two lesbian lovers, Violette does not (or cannot) escape from the reality that she continues to perceive herself as a woman. This is demonstrated when she remarks ‘moi aussi c'est dans un lit que je serre un homme dans mes bras’ (p. 376). Choosing a male lover is clearly not made with the predominant aim of satisfying her sexual desires nor to achieve a sense of identity, but to comply with a need to be acknowledged by society as a woman.

If Gabriel epitomizes her conscious search for the fulfilment of basic belonging needs, and if Violette has consciously forfeited the opportunity of gratifying her true desires, it can be suggested that this is the approach of an individual acutely aware of the impossibility of fulfilling her true wishes. In other words, her basic physiological and belonging needs depend on her voluntarily giving up her ‘own desire for the desire of others in order to receive the approval

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<sup>88</sup> Maslow, *Toward a Psychology of Being*, p. 107

<sup>89</sup> For example, her sexual act with the almond seller is described by Violette as ‘répugnant’, not only because he disgusts her, but the act itself is also ‘dégoûtant’ (p. 454).

<sup>90</sup> Monique Wittig, ‘On ne naît pas femme’, in *Questions Féministes*, 8 (1980): 75-84 (p. 83).

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84.

of others'.<sup>92</sup> It can also be said that this is the attitude of a survivor attempting to satisfy her needs as well as she can. Isabelle de Courtivron writes that near the end of her life, Leduc 'ait finalement commencé à se libérer du jugement d'autrui et des perceptions négatives qu'elle avait d'elle-même'.<sup>93</sup> The author's determination to survive social prejudices is certainly reflected in her autobiographical heroine.

## 2.2 Yindi and the Second Master

Let us now turn our attention to Chang's use of marriage in *The Rouge of the North*. The marital tie between Yindi and the Second Master of the Yao family is arranged by a matchmaker who gloats over her success at being able to arrange the marriage of Yindi, a parentless girl working as a sesame seller, to the second son of a rich and noble family. Her triumphant reaction is a logical one when we consider Kristeva's remark that women in China are:

sans droit à la hiérarchie humaine, c'est-à-dire masculine, et par conséquent sans instruction dans la majorité des cas; contraintes à des humiliations permanentes surtout lorsqu'elles ne sont pas 'premières épouses', et chargées de travaux écrasants quand elles n'appartiennent pas aux familles riches.<sup>94</sup>

Chang's work was published many years before Kristeva's *Des Chinoises*, yet women's status in traditional Chinese societies remains relatively unchanged. For instance, Yindi and her sisters-in-law are either waiting on the Old Mistress, or attending to their respective husbands, and are not permitted to leave the house without permission. Important official work is also reserved for men in *The Rouge of the North*: 'Any Yao boy would be given a post when he came of age, in memory of the late premier. Big Master had resigned after serving as a district governor. Third Master had not been interested' (p. 74). Not only has the matchmaker successfully secured Yindi's future but she has also minimized the physical suffering Yindi may experience were she to marry into a less noble or

<sup>92</sup> Maslow, *Toward a Psychology of Being*, p.51.

<sup>93</sup> Isabelle de Courtivron, *Violette Leduc* (Boston: Twayne, 1985), p. 40.

<sup>94</sup> Kristeva, *Des Chinoises*, p. 85.

wealthy family. The matchmaker therefore has good reasons to feel triumphant, according to her own terms of reference.

Emotional suffering appears to be of little consequence to the characters involved, as the title *The Rouge of the North* suggests: in Chinese society, the ‘rouge’ refers to prostitutes, and not to beautifully made-up women. As Leng suggests, the title implies that ‘women like Yindi peddle their beauty and youth for wealth through marriage, and are not dissimilar from prostitutes capitalizing on the female body as a transactional commodity.’<sup>95</sup> She further adds that ‘Chang, being a confirmed pessimist, averred that all human conflicts rise from the wickedness of the heart’ and indeed, the plot appears to support this reading: Yindi is sold by her brother for an unspecified amount to the unknown son of a wealthy family.<sup>96</sup>

Through this marriage, Yindi instantly rises in social status from being a working-class girl to a wealthy young mistress and from a sexually innocent girl to a married woman. As her changing status derives primarily from becoming the lawful wife of the second son of an influential family, it is not surprising to find great emphasis being placed upon the importance of her husband to her future life. Indeed, when Yindi returns to her maternal family for the homecoming feast three days after her wedding, her sister-in-law consoles her with the following comments:

What is there to worry about in a family like theirs? He depends on you for everything, and that’s more than most married couples can say. Gu Nana (a polite term for addressing Yindi) has always wanted to be the best. So many people envy you now. You’d be a fool not to know. (pp. 26-27).

Her consolation implies that her husband’s social status is Yindi’s gateway to a lifetime of happiness from a materialistic perspective. She does not, however, consider how it may affect Yindi psychologically to be married to a disabled man.

Freud comments that ‘the significance of a woman’s first sexual act bears great influence on her psychological mind in that she is usually especially

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<sup>95</sup> Leng, ‘Eileen Chang’s Feminine Chinese Modernity’, p. 22.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.



attached to the man who performs the first act of penetration.’<sup>97</sup> According to such a traditional view (which straddles eastern and western societies), a woman’s sexual and emotional life is believed to be predominantly influenced by her first lover, and in Yindi’s case, the role of her husband is particularly important, especially since social restrictions of Yindi’s time forbid her from seeking extramarital sex. The Second Master is, consequently, made doubly important for being the first man and the only acceptable lover in her life.

Hoyan comments on how ‘Zhang’s female protagonists take for granted the status quo and spend their efforts making their way within the given situation.’<sup>98</sup> The status quo in question is exacerbated by the reality that ‘most Chinese women of her (Chang’s) time had neither the skills nor the resources to change their own destinies.’<sup>99</sup> Even Chang describes her own sex as ‘becoming slaves of a patriarchal system’.<sup>100</sup> This remark was made some twenty years before the publication of *The Rouge of the North*, which indicates that the subordination of women in traditional Chinese societies has been an important subject to Chang, at least for twenty years. And it is through her female protagonist Yindi, who eventually goes insane, that Chang sets to highlight the dangers a woman faces in an oppressive society.

Let us return to *The Rouge of the North*. Yindi is soon disillusioned when she realizes that her husband would never be able to help her attain a degree of positive recognition within the Yao household. For instance, as the bride of the second son of a wealthy family, the wedding should have been quite illustrious yet ‘it had been such a quiet wedding’ (p. 28). As the Second Mistress of the household, she should have been accorded a degree of respect but ‘the (derisive) attitudes of the servants and relatives were plain to see’ (p. 28). Furthermore, she is made to feel ashamed for even contemplating being ‘rapacious and inconsiderate’ (p. 34) to her delicate husband who cannot even walk by himself, as we are informed by the narrator: ‘The cloth soles of his shoes stood out snow-white in the yellow-brown gloom. They stayed new because he never

<sup>97</sup> Freud, *On Sexuality*, pp. 272-73.

<sup>98</sup> Carole H F Hoyan, *The Life and Works of Aileen Zhang: A Critical Study*, p. 72.

<sup>99</sup> David Wang, ‘Foreword’ in *The Rouge of the North*, p. XIX.

<sup>100</sup> Eileen Chang, *Written on Water*, trans. by Andrew F. Jones (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), p. 86.

stepped on the floor' (p. 49).

The realization that she has married the wrong man is explicitly formulated after only three days of marriage, when she remarks: 'so here they were, trapped across the border in the land of the living, smaller than she remembered but still the only real world with people she knew, and she could kill them all looking down from her window' (p. 29). Although she is now superior to her maternal family members, the idea that 'she could kill them all looking down from her window' suggests two possible explanations. From a materialistic perspective, the great power she has gained through her husband is influential enough to suppress others. From a psychological angle, her desire to harm family members implies that she resents being sacrificed for their personal gains.

For a young, beautiful and healthy woman to be married to a blind, bedridden opium addict in order to achieve a sense of recognition does present the image of a woman performing a role which can never bring her a positive recognition. In other words, she appears to be wasting her time and efforts on a worthless man. On her observation of Chinese women during her travels in China, Kristeva writes that 'la femme est introduite dans l'ordre phallique mais en tant que déchet: fétiche, équivalent de la monnaie ou de toute autre prestation (économique, esthétique, psychologique) d'échange.'<sup>101</sup> Furthermore, we are informed that prior to their marriage, the Second Master had 'difficulty of making a suitable match' (p. 7). This implies the reluctance of families to accept him as a son-in-law. Given the Second Master's physical appearance, he is, by no means what Kristeva argues to be a body that is 'le propre' or 'le possible'.<sup>102</sup> Any person connected to the 'Second Master' will also be inadvertently regarded as a damaged human being. In Yindi's case, she is not only a woman introduced to the phallic order as the waste product, she is also made to feel even more worthless by society for being the wife of an insignificant invalid.

Contrary to Yindi's emotionally revealing dialogues with the Third Master, conversations between her and her husband are full of anger. For instance, when the Second Master notices that their baby boy has caught a cold after Yindi returns from the temple (following the episode where she declares to the Third Master her

<sup>101</sup> Kristeva, *Des Chinoises*, p. 92.

<sup>102</sup> Kristeva, *Pouvoirs de l'horreur: Essai sur l'abjection* (Paris: Seuil, 1980), p. 87.

love for him), and makes a comment to Yindi, implying that his baby son has not been taken care of, she replies:

‘Huh! Who indeed?’ Yindi said. ‘Nobody was around, I had to hold him and go looking for Old Hsia, had no idea where she lay dying [...]. Both amah and slave girl got a scolding from Second Master. His flat hen’s squawk finally grated on her preoccupation.

‘All right, all right, which baby doesn’t catch cold now and then?’ she (Yindi) said. ‘The way you go around beating chickens, scolding dogs. Don’t make much of him if you want him to live.’ [...].

‘You still have to curse him? You could have been more careful to begin with, a baby this big and he’s not strong. Shouldn’t have taken him in the first place,’ (Says the Second Master).

‘Was it me who said to take him? (replies Yindi).’ p. 85

Her snappish conversation with her husband reveals a notion of blame, but instead of asking the Second Master to pity or forgive her for potentially giving their baby son a cold, words relating to violence and death suggest a much more hateful existence. Let us examine, for example, the following remarks Yindi makes to her husband: ‘had no idea where she (Old Hsia, the servant) lay dying’ and ‘you go around beating chickens, scolding dogs’ (a Chinese idiom to mean being abusive in order to vent out one’s discontentment). These remarks can be interpreted as Yindi directing blame at the old servant Old Hsia for not working diligently enough, and at the Second Master for being unreasonable. Yindi refuses to blame herself. Instead, she blames all those around her.

If we view this behaviour in conjunction with Hsia’s argument that ‘traditional sensibility evolves slowly; old manners die hard even during a period of unprecedented technological and economic change’, then Yindi’s behaviour is a reasonable reaction to an awareness that although the country may be changing with the new political power, the Yao household remains the same.<sup>103</sup> The Old Mistress still demands obedience from her daughters-in-law, and Yindi is still expected to attend to her husband and produce a child.

Hatred henceforth plays a dominant role in the marital life of Yindi. Seeming rather to confute than confirm Freudian theory on the significance of a woman’s

<sup>103</sup> C. T. Hsia, ‘Eileen Chang’ in *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction*, p. 392.

first sexual penetration, instead of being positively bound to The Second Master for his role as the first man in her sexual life, she transforms his violation into hate. This hatred for her new husband is further strengthened by his inability to gratify Yindi emotionally throughout the text. Her feeling of repulsion is so strong that she expresses hate by describing his voice as a 'flat hen's squawk' (p. 85). In so doing, she has not only taken away his identity as a man but also as a human being. He has now become unimportant, dispensable and inhuman. This, in turn, allows her lack of love (either narcissistic or anaclitic) to be accepted by others as a logical response to her situation. Furthermore, it is interesting that Yindi feminizes her husband's voice by describing it as a hen's squawk and not, for example, as a cockerel's crow. In an attempt to endow The Second Master with a feminine image, it can be argued that Yindi is demonstrating the logic behind her lack of emotional attachment to her 'feminine' husband, since any expression of love or affection by a woman for another woman is condemned by her society.

Despite her husband's limitations and Yindi's confession to her sisters-in-law that they are 'really almost never' (p. 76) a loving couple, Yindi fulfils her role as a wife and as a mother by producing a son. Leng writes: 'in a sardonic twist, the fact that the bedridden Second Master is even able to have children, when eugenic laws would have prevented his marriage and reproduction, insinuates something sinister and barren about the trajectory of Chinese modernity.'<sup>104</sup> However, I would argue that giving The Second Master a son is not just a political statement but also an expression of essentialism. On Chinese women's identity, Kristeva writes: 'mais alors, qu'allez-vous faire d'une femme si elle n'est même pas mère?'<sup>105</sup> This suggests that a woman can only be acknowledged if she is recognized as a fertile woman. To this, Edward Shaughnessy adds that in China, 'a wife's prime duty was to produce sons for her new family. [...] If a wife did succeed in producing sons then her status was raised.'<sup>106</sup> Regardless of the Second Master's physical condition, Yindi must be allowed to have a child, particular a son, in order for her to be acknowledged.

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<sup>104</sup> Rachel Leng, 'Eileen Chang's Feminine Chinese Modernity', p. 18.

<sup>105</sup> Kristeva, *Des Chinoises*, p. 225.

<sup>106</sup> Edward Shaughnessy, *China: Empire and Civilization* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 59.

When Yindi gives birth to a son, we are told that she is ‘happy for the first time since she was married’ (p. 54). She is finally acknowledged by her mother-in-law who is very pleased that ‘even her poor blind misshapen son had an heir’ (p. 54). Her happiness is however overshadowed by her hatred for her husband. For instance, during one episode when her husband could not find his favourite rosary made of carved peach stones and asks Yindi to help, she reluctantly agrees. Having found it ‘hanging on the knob of one of the built-in little drawers where he kept his sweets’ (p. 50), she then ‘went to the cupboard, opened a drawer and took out a nut-cracker. She sat down at the table and cracked the peach stones open one by one.’ (p. 50). This is all happening with the Second Master in the room and upon hearing the sound of cracked nuts, he asks Yindi nervously ‘What are you doing?’ (p. 51), to which she replies simply: ‘Eating walnuts. Want some?’ (p. 51).

Her malicious destruction of the beads discloses a violent tendency toward her husband. On the one hand, if her actions are interpreted as direct acts against her husband, then it can be argued that his physical appearance disgusts her and that she must destroy this representation of him, and by extension, kill her own image as the Second Mistress. If her destructive acts are, on the other hand, a revolt against the condition in which she finds herself as the wife of an invalid, destroying the Second Master can be perceived as destroying the source of her marginalization.

However, whilst hating her husband, she is enclosed within restrictive social customs which disapprove of change, and any direct manifestations of rebellious acts against the authoritative system can only further deteriorate her standing within the family: ‘But ever since [her attempted suicide] Old Mistress never wanted her around much. It seemed that Second Master needed more nursing now’ (p. 90). Riviere proposes that the well-being of an individual suffers if an outlet of anger is not available.<sup>107</sup> She adds that ‘unfulfilled desires within us can, if intense enough, create a similar sense of loss and pain, and so arouse aggression in exactly the same way as an attack’. Maslowian theory claims that ‘destructiveness or hurting is secondary or derived behaviour rather than primary

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<sup>107</sup> Riviere, ‘Hate, Greed and Aggression’, p. 5.

motivation.’<sup>108</sup> Both Riviere and Maslow contend that individuals do not generally attack out of pleasure or without reason, which suggests that Yindi consciously avenges herself because she needs to.

Although society as well as her own family cannot escape total blame for having pressured her into this situation in the first place, the Second Master is nevertheless made a scapegoat. Even though Yindi may perceive him to be the cause of her pain, and I argue that it is precisely due to her perception that all her sufferings stem from her husband, to vent her anger on the Second Master is the only appropriate solution to her sanity. From this perspective, he is finally becoming a worthy husband by being the saviour of her sanity.

As the story progresses, it becomes clear that Yindi, overwhelmed by her hate and disappointment, is gradually turning insane. This is first apparent when she ‘almost laughed aloud’ (p. 51) at her husband’s astonishment upon hearing the clattering sounds of the remaining beads on the string. It also results in her lack of love for life and body:

A person dies as a lamp goes out. What the eyes do not see is clean. What if the world was still here in the morning, carrying on like the concubine out of the wife’s sight. Everything had become tiresome even distasteful, now that there was no more for her and she alone had to go. (p. 88)

The lamp dying out and the final sentence ‘she alone had to go’ evoke the image of a desolate person contemplating suicide. Yet, even at the moment of death she still attempts to alienate her husband:

Now she just did not care what they thought. If she still did, at least she had the satisfaction of knowing it looked as if she had something dark and horrible in her life – him [The Third Master] if they liked, anyway, some man other than Second Master. (p. 88)

At this seemingly final moment of her life, Yindi continues to blame her husband for the frustrating situation of being unable to alter her life. Moreover, being part of a society influenced by a culture of honour and which censures promiscuity, her

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<sup>108</sup> Riviere, ‘Love, Hate and Greed’ p. 6; Maslow, *Motivation and Personality*, pp. 125-26.

willingness to be disgraced is an indication that she continues to blame her husband for all her unhappiness. In other words, even after her death, she wants him to suffer the disgrace of being cheated on, or at least, the illusion of being cheated on.

Insofar as monogamy limits the possibility of finding the gratification of the desire for basic or physiological need from different partners, Yindi is forced to refrain from focusing her attention on the fulfilment of emotional love with her disabled husband and to jump upwards on the hierarchy of need. This will not be successful as Maslow points out that ‘by-passing an ungratified basic need’ is an unreliable pseudo-growth.<sup>109</sup> He also highlights that ‘the human being is simultaneously that which he is and that which he yearns to be’.<sup>110</sup> When this is applied to Yindi and her decision to by-pass her basic need for physiological gratification – a need which precedes all other needs on the Hierarchy of Needs, it can be suggested that she cannot and will not achieve any psychological growth.

Chen Sio-ping states that the female characters of Chang have ‘difficulty finding their own identity and their main purpose’.<sup>111</sup> Yindi certainly represents this image of a lost woman. She seeks to fulfil her need for social acceptance by sacrificing her body yet is marginalized by her husband’s deformity. She seeks to fulfil her physical need, but is unable to find satisfaction from her only lover. Chen writes that in the Second Master, Yindi finds ‘a son, a father but never a husband; not a man, just a comma, a title.’<sup>112</sup> Indeed, all she has gained from her marriage is just the title ‘the Second Mistress’. But to add insult to injury, she is rarely addressed as such throughout the work.

### 3 Concluding remarks: Leduc and Chang compared

Both *La Bâtarde* and *The Rouge of the North* suggest that intimate attachments can serve to enhance personal self-worth. For example, in the relationship

<sup>109</sup> Maslow, *Toward a Psychology of Being*, p. 66.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 160.

<sup>111</sup> Chen Sio-ping, ‘批判男性世界的女性書寫：論張愛玲小說中的女性主義’，in *江苏社会科学*, 5 (2001): 177-180 (p. 178).

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 177.

between Violette and Gabriel, the physical appearance of Gabriel can be said to be inferior to that of Violette who is not only well-dressed by her fashion-conscious mother but also fashionably clothed by Hermine. Violette's heritage is also superior. Although she is illegitimate, she is fathered by 'un fils de famille' (*La Bâtarde*, p. 31). From this perspective, Violette is able to gain a sense of self-worth from the perception that she is 'fathered' by an aristocrat, has a mother who is able to overcome obstacles and achieve relative wealth and status, and by a lover who is willing to sacrifice for her. Although Violette's sense of achievement is brought about by the efforts of others, it can be argued that she has 'gained' more than Gabriel who has only Violette as lover/wife. Of course, it must also be noted that this work is a one-sided account of experiences encountered by Violette and, therefore, does not shed light on other characters, other than how they have an effect on the narrator heroine.

Similarly, in *The Rouge of the North* the three men in Yindi's life bring to prominence the superiority complex that can arguably be said to play a dominant role in her choice of men. Firstly, she is superior to her husband in physiological function and physical appearance. The juxtaposition of Yindi with the Third Master brings to prominence her moral virtues against the morally and financially corrupt gambling addict. Her choice of men may exhibit a downward trend in the family hierarchy (from her husband to the Third Master), but it can be suggested that her sense of superiority has achieved an upward movement, from basic bodily functions to moral behaviour. Finally, Young Liu's complaisant and timid attitude contrast with the materialistic and outspoken Yindi.

In a society where reticence in women is encouraged, juxtaposing the timid Young Liu with the forthright Yindi highlights her determination to achieve a sense of individuality or recognition through adopting a more masculine character. Her choice of men, consequently, serves to expose her practicality and sense of survival in a society dominated by the financially and socially privileged few. At the very least, her techniques, though negatively perceived by her society, serve to assure her a place within her community.

The need to feel superior allows individuals to ignore or reject the evil or weakness in themselves. To an extent, Violette and Yindi both manifest a desire to



project themselves as superior so as to conceal their self-proclaimed weakness which, in the case of Violette, is her self-perceived undesirable physical appearance and her illegitimacy. For Yindi, her humble origin and unfortunate marriage are the cause of her misery. However, I argue that the need to feel superior is an indirect manifestation of their acknowledgement that they do possess certain defects. I argue that by confronting these self-proclaimed defects, the characters are seeking a means of rectifying the situation.

One method which Violette and Yindi adopt to attempt to satisfy their need for self-worth is by testing the degree of tolerance which they believe to be permitted to them by their respective partners as well as by society. For example, it can be said that Violette's sexual experimentations and her open display of sexual preferences test, to a certain degree, her ability to obtain approval from both society and her partners.<sup>113</sup> The greater her ability at escaping rejection, the higher her power of escape as such. In the example of Hermine's reluctant acceptance of the 'ménage-à-trois', Violette's power over her is evident. It can be suggested that Hermine's tolerance allows Violette to experiment, to an extent, with new ideas without feeling rejected. Similarly, the offensive attitudes and aggressive retaliations found in Yindi are tests of the degree of tolerance her family and the community can accord her.

It can be seen that both Violette and Yindi arguably test the level of freedom permitted to them within their respective societies, although the motivational need for sexual tolerance in Violette is clearly distinguished from the motivational need for a sense of safety and belonging within the family unit for Yindi. With reference to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, this divergence suggests that Violette is seeking to fulfil her desire for physiological need whereas Yindi is significantly more interested in fulfilling her need for a sense of power within the family.

When we consider the consequences that arise from testing how far they can exercise the power of escape, it is evident that where in one society the search for love is an acceptable form of self-growth, it is less tolerable in another. Violette is depicted as entering into personal relationships that would normally be condemned by society; yet as no catastrophic consequences ensue, it is implied

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<sup>113</sup> For example, Violette performs a sexual act with Hermine in front of an old voyeur, and much later has sex with an almond seller in order to arouse Gabriel's jealousy.

that the search to fulfil one's need for love is, after all, a socially acceptable form of self-growth, at least in this case. Similarly, Yindi is seeking love and security from her family but where she differs from Violette is that she does not approach the fulfilment of her need for love directly. Instead, she delays satisfaction of this need and attempts to secure her status within the family and society first – with the expectation that this achievement will bring forth the fulfilment of her need for love and security. Yindi gradually becomes neurotic, which implies that her approach for individual growth is an unviable form of self-growth. What is evident is that the desire for love must be approached directly for positive personal growth to take place. Violette is clearly at an advantage.

Such differences can certainly be explained by the different social backgrounds found in *La Bâtarde* and *The Rouge of the North*, in particular the freedom and opportunity to explore sexual possibilities enjoyed by Violette as opposed to the limitation on sexual experimentation for Yindi. Where Violette and other female characters in *La Bâtarde* are allowed to experiment with sexual activities to achieve sexual gratification, Yindi, like other female characters in *The Rouge of the North*, is confined within a monogamous and generally unhappy relationship. As previously suggested, this is counter-productive to personal growth. Certainly, with Yindi depicted at the end of the text as a lonely character yearning for the days when she was young and single, this is evidence that she has not achieved positive growth. Her case resonates with Maslow's theory on the unreliability of 'pseudo-growth' – that growth cannot be achieved by bypassing a preceding need.

It is interesting to note that Leduc places so much emphasis on sexual love. This is a possible reflection of the link between higher and lower needs. Maslow comments that 'an individual going through the whole process of sexual desire, courting behaviour, and consummatory love making may actually be seeking self-esteem rather than sexual gratification.'<sup>114</sup> He also adds that if self-esteem cannot be attained through this process, then sexual gratification could be a shortcut to achieving temporary feelings of self-integration or, as he terms it,

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<sup>114</sup> Maslow, *Motivation and Personality*, p. 26.

‘moments of peak experience.’<sup>115</sup> In this context, being able to transfer her sexual interests from Isabelle to Hermine then to Gabriel implies that Violette is open to unconventional solutions and is therefore more likely to develop her sense of self-esteem. In contrast, Yindi is in a rigid and unfulfilling relationship and cannot achieve a sense of self-esteem through her sexual partner. Although sexual love as a means of developing self-esteem is approached from different angles, it is nevertheless evident that both works emphasize flexibility as a paramount element in the development of an individual’s general well-being.

There is also a certain consistency in the representation of marriage between the works of Leduc and Chang. Both Leduc and Chang depict characters who are primarily pressured into marriage by their respective society or family and not by mutual attraction. Their motivational needs are strongly suggestive of an unconscious need for love, belonging and acceptance. Maslow comments that ‘if the only way to maintain the self is to lose others, then the ordinary child will give up the self’.<sup>116</sup> It is apparent that marriage represents for Violette and Yindi a means of obtaining approval from their respective societies, even at the expense of sacrificing or repressing their own desires. For example, Yindi remarks on her marriage as based on convenience and Violette comments on her wedding cake as ‘le plus sombre et le plus minable’ (*La Bâtarde*, p. 384), thereby implying her marriage to Gabriel is doomed from the start. Their decision to fulfil their need for belonging does show clarity and practicality; this may facilitate their acceptance by society but it is an unsatisfactory means of self-preservation, and unfortunately only increases their sense of insecurity.

Both clearly reach a level of sense of self but there are significant differences. On the one hand, Violette appears to bravely accept her solitude at the end: ‘forte du silence des pins et des châtaigniers, je traverse sans fléchir la cathédrale brûlante de l’été. Il est grandiose et musical mon raidillon d’herbes folles. C’est du feu que la solitude pose sur ma bouche’ (p. 607). On the other hand, Yindi finally remarks to herself that ‘twenty years was as a day to them (all members of the Yao family) even if they flourished only in numbers’ (p. 181) and that ‘nothing much had happened to her yet’ (p. 185). Contrary to the use of phrases such as

<sup>115</sup> Maslow, *Toward a Psychology of Being*, p. 104.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

‘forte du’, ‘sans fléchir’ and ‘grandiose et musical’ to evoke the image of a Violette who courageously accepts and prepares to face her solitary future, Yindi’s lucid acknowledgment of the emptiness in her life and the realization that she has remained stagnant since marrying into the Yao family clearly reflect her discontent with her own achievements. In short, we are given the impression that for Yindi, life is meaningless.

Riviere remarks that aggression and sexuality are integral parts of human nature and it is interesting to find Violette embracing sexuality and Yindi adopting aggression as a tool of self-exploration.<sup>117</sup> It can be argued that in creating a neurotic Yindi, Chang discloses a distinct disapproval for the use of sexual partners in the development of a self-identity. In contrast, Leduc implies the possibility of finding an integrated self through the fulfilment of needs brought upon by the peak experiences obtained through sexual activities. In other words, Leduc does not negate sexual attachments if they can be used to benefit an individual in the development of a self-identity, whereas Chang implies that individualism should be achieved solely through one’s own efforts.

Maslowian theory emphasizes the need for individuals to seek self-growth regardless of the level of fulfilment already attained, and since a closer examination of both characters reveals that neither has sufficiently satisfied their basic physiological need through intimate attachments, it can only be assumed that Violette and Yindi must attempt to achieve a sense of self (if they can) through other means. In the following chapter, I examine the influence of motherhood on female characters’ self-development.

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<sup>117</sup> Riviere, ‘Hate, Greed and Aggression’, p. 47.

## CHAPTER II

### Motherhood and Identity development in *L'Asphyxie* and *Jingsuo Ji*<sup>1</sup>

Mothers are romanticized as life-giving, self-sacrificing, and forgiving, and demonized as smothering, overly involved and destructive. They are seen as all-powerful – holding the fate of their children and ultimately the future of society in their hands – and as powerless – subordinated to the dictates of nature, instinct and social forces beyond their ken.<sup>2</sup>

#### 1 Introductory comments

In these introductory comments, we will consider a range of theories (mainly feminist and psychoanalytic) related to motherhood; this will provide a framework within which to consider identity development through the mother roles in *L'Asphyxie* and *Jingsuo Ji*, which will be analyzed in the central part of the chapter. Finally, in a closing section, we will return to theories of motherhood, with the aim of relating our findings to Maslowian as well as feminist perspectives. Before

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<sup>1</sup> Violette Leduc, *L'Asphyxie*; Eileen Chang, '金鎖記 Jingsuo Ji', in *傾城之戀*.

<sup>2</sup> Evelyn Nakano Glenn, 'Introduction', in *Mothering Ideology: Experience and Agency* (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. II.

approaching the topic of maternal identity development, I would first like to clarify that although the term ‘mother’ includes a variety of the mother figure such as the biological mother, the substitute mother, the substitute carer and/or the legal guardian, in this chapter, the term ‘mother’ is used to refer in principle to the biological mother who is also the primary carer.

The responsibility of early childhood care mostly falls to the mother and, as a result of this day-to-day interaction with her child, there is a general consensus that she is the dominant influencer in the physical and psychological development of her child. Let us consider, firstly, Jean Baker Miller’s argument that woman is normally identified by her primary role as a child bearer and that, in most societies, this role leads to the automatic assumption that she will continue with her involvement by also being the primary carer, especially during the first phase of her child’s life.<sup>3</sup> Miller adds that even though the mother may not necessarily undertake rearing, childbirth or direct care giving herself, she is nevertheless perceived as responsible for the overall growth of the child under her care.<sup>4</sup> The idea of motherhood being the realm of women is echoed by Donald Winnicott who claims that ‘whenever one finds an infant, one finds maternal care, and without maternal care there would be no infant’.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, Nancy Chodorow highlights that the child’s development is intertwined with the mother’s input by writing that ‘post-Freudian psychology ascertains that the early mother-infant relationship is central to later psychological development and to the psychological, emotional, and relational life of the child’.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, the involvement of the mother role has evolved from being simply the child bearer to playing a significant role in influencing the emotional development of her

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<sup>3</sup> Jean Baker Miller, *Toward a New Psychology of Women*, p. 22.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>5</sup> Donald W. Winnicott, ‘The Theory of the Parent-Infant Relationship’, in *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 41 (1960): 585-595 (p. 586).

<sup>6</sup> Nancy Chodorow, *Feminism*, p. 89.

child as well as to deciding the child's ability in relating to society, or as Marilyn Yalom summarizes: 'attachment to the mother, or to a surrogate caretaker, is believed to form the foundation for all of life's further attachments'.<sup>7</sup>

Arthur Aron and Tracy McLaughlin-Volpe, however, take a different approach by suggesting that a self emerges 'from the individual's experience with his or her bodily and mental experiences, close others, and social groups', and not exclusively, or even primarily, with the mother.<sup>8</sup> Of course, it should be noted that their arguments were published at the beginning of the twenty-first century when 'universal social group' – a term coined by the American anthropologist George Peter Murdock to refer to the nuclear family which comprises one adult couple with or without children – was already gaining popularity as the result of industrial capitalism.<sup>9</sup> Structural changes in the family, as well as geographical mobility, have led to a shift from the traditional mother role (where the mother is the sole carer of her children) to sharing this task with other carer substitutes; a shift which Chodorow argues 'has a tendency to exclude, on a daily basis, the formation of a primary relationship'.<sup>10</sup> In this context, I would argue that although the likelihood of developing a level of attachment with the mother during the first phase of the child's life is significantly reduced, when it is developed it becomes much more valuable and much more likely to have a greater influence on the overall development of the child.

This exclusivity carries benefits as well as risks. Of course, it is desirable that the mother should nurture with a healthy attitude, as Simone de Beauvoir suggests

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<sup>7</sup> Marilyn Yalom, 'They Remember Maman: Attachment and Separation in Leduc, de Beauvoir, Sand and Cardinal', in *Essays in Literature*, Spring (1981): 73-90 (p. 80).

<sup>8</sup> Arthur Aron and Tracy McLaughlin-Volpe, 'Including Others in the Self', in *Individual Self, Relational Self, Collective Self*, ed. by Constantine Sedikides (Philadelphia: Psychology Press, 2001), pp. 93-110 (p.104).

<sup>9</sup> H. James Birx, *21<sup>st</sup> Century Anthropology: A Reference Handbook* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2010), p. 170.

<sup>10</sup> Chodorow, *Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory*, p. 78.

when she writes: ‘il serait évidemment souhaitable pour le bien de l’enfant que sa mère fût une personne complète et non mutilée’.<sup>11</sup> This, however, is not an easy task. Firstly, Beauvoir states that ‘elle ne saurait être mère sans essayer de jouer un rôle dans la vie économique, politique, sociale’.<sup>12</sup> Yet this is problematic since, as Chodorow argues, a woman’s place is ‘outside the ongoing action’.<sup>13</sup> Miller also contends that since the mother is in ‘an unpaid occupation outside the world of public power’, she is perceived to have ‘less power and less control of resources than those in paid work’.<sup>14</sup>

The potential danger of leaving the mother, who is perceived to be ‘outside the ongoing action’, in charge of her child’s education, is raised by Judith Arcana and Claire Goldberg Moses. On the one hand, Arcana states that although mothers encourage their daughters to make more of themselves than they have been able to do so, this message is ‘obscured in the years of feminizing’ and the creation of the proper daughter who can ‘maintain society as it is’.<sup>15</sup> Arcana further challenges this perception of the less powerful mother which is reinforced by the mother herself who, in identifying with this image, ‘embrace(s) the widely held belief that all this education (for the daughter) is somehow extra’ and that at best, ‘education is something to fall back on’.<sup>16</sup> Moses, on the other hand, points out that ‘the mother is the first educator of the child. To teach, she must know; to instruct, she must understand.’<sup>17</sup> Yet, to follow on from Arcana’s argument, the implication of not considering education as a priority for her daughter is that the mother will not have acquired sufficient knowledge to guide her child. Ironically, the mother is expected to

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<sup>11</sup> Beauvoir, *Le Deuxième sexe I*, p.199.

<sup>12</sup> Beauvoir, *Le Deuxième sexe I*, p. 200.

<sup>13</sup> Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering*, p. 31

<sup>14</sup> Miller, *Toward a New Psychology of Women*, pp. 37 & 78.

<sup>15</sup> Judith Arcana, *Our Mothers’ Daughters*, pp. 45 & 62.

<sup>16</sup> Arcana, *Our Mothers’ Daughters*, p. 60.

<sup>17</sup> Claire Goldberg Moses, ‘Republican Feminism’, in *French Feminism in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Stage University of New York, 1984), p. 201.



encourage her child to become a useful member of society, yet she inadvertently undermines her own teaching, and perpetuates her own powerlessness, when she upholds society's perception that roles that are part of the 'ongoing action' are more significant than the seemingly unremunerated mothering role.

If the woman is able to overcome the hurdles associated with social, as well as her own, perceptions of the importance of mothering to her child, Elisabeth Badinter argues that fulfilling her role as a mother remains a challenge. This is due partly to society's expectation that she should nurture, as well as educate, her child to be 'un bon chrétien, un bon citoyen, un homme enfin qui trouve la meilleure place possible au sein de la société'.<sup>18</sup> However, this only further highlights the paradox which confronts a mother when she undertakes her role as nurturer and carer: being perceived as insignificant yet expected to undertake the nurturing of the next generation – one of the essential tasks in the survival of society. As mentioned earlier, Arcana writes that 'the job of mothers is to prepare their children to maintain society as it is', highlighting thereby this need for motherhood as a tactic which society uses for its own survival.<sup>19</sup>

Whether the mother is in the best social position to instruct her child on the values of good citizenship and being the best that the child can be is disputable, since culturally sanctioned motherhood needs to be learnt. When we consider that a woman generally learns from her mother who, as Arcana notes, is herself 'conditioned' towards behaviour that is safe, then the mother's teachings may lead the child into a labyrinth of social etiquettes without maximizing personal attributes.<sup>20</sup> In other words, the mother's knowledge is not only prejudiced but is based upon a mixture of personal experiences and beliefs of what could be improved

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<sup>18</sup> Elisabeth Badinter, 'L'Amour forcé', in *L'Amour en plus* (Paris: Flammarion, 1980), p. 233.

<sup>19</sup> Judith Arcana, *Our Mothers' Daughters*, 54.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

upon, as well as expectations from society.

Chodorow points out that women are designated the mothering role simply due to the reality that they ‘bear children and lactate’.<sup>21</sup> Beauvoir goes further by stressing that, even if she does mother, she does so unwillingly: ‘la mere à qui on le confie pieds et poings liés est presque toujours une femme insatisfaite’.<sup>22</sup> She adds that the mother’s unwillingness inevitably has a negative impact upon her ability to fulfil her child’s emotional need. This apparent lack of enthusiasm to nurture her child is in contrast with what Arcana notes as the general social perception that ‘the proper woman has these maternal inclinations’.<sup>23</sup> On the subject of maternal inclinations, Badinter argues that the belief that women are best suited for the mothering role due to their maternal instinct is nothing but a myth.<sup>24</sup> She further argues that, were a woman endowed with an instinctual love for her child, then considering the high infant mortality rate throughout history, particularly prior to the twentieth century, then surely ‘à coup sûr [la mère] serait morte de chagrin’.<sup>25</sup> Badinter’s assumption that maternal instinct does not exist is, nevertheless, challenged by Toril Moi whose suggestion that mothers who have to consciously shield themselves from the emotional turmoil of losing a child, whilst remaining receptive to the idea of the continuity of motherhood, highlights the instinctual love a mother has for her child: ‘love may vary in intensity depending on the external difficulties, but [that] it always exists. Mother love thus becomes a constant throughout history’.<sup>26</sup>

Although Maslow does not question the existence (or non-existence) of the maternal instinct, he does, nevertheless, state that ‘no healthy woman need feel guilty

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<sup>21</sup> Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering*, p. 14.

<sup>22</sup> Beauvoir, *Le Deuxième Sexe I*, p. 182.

<sup>23</sup> Arcana, *Our Mothers’ Daughters*, pp. 175-76.

<sup>24</sup> Badinter, *L’Amour en plus*, pp. 72-83.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73.

<sup>26</sup> Moi, *French Feminist Thought: A Reader*, pp. 150-51.

or defensive about being female or about any of the female processes'.<sup>27</sup> In highlighting the importance of maximizing one's potential 'toward full function of all (her) capacities', Maslowian theory openly challenges many feminists' arguments, such as Beauvoir's, Chodorow's and Badinter's, that a woman is culturally forced to mother due to her biology.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, in stating that an individual in search of a sense of wholeness is compelled towards achieving 'full function of all his capacities', Maslow implies that a woman should not neglect her ability to reproduce if it can assist her in achieving a sense of wholeness.<sup>29</sup> Contrary to Judith Butler's argument that being a woman is not about preserving 'a binary restriction on gender identity', Maslow argues that a woman should not deny the possibility of increasing her sense of fulfilment if she can do so by maximizing her biological functions.<sup>30</sup>

The polarity of theories not only challenges the perceived suitability of the woman as a mother, but also raises questions regarding the identity development of a woman, and it is within this framework that the mother and daughter relationships in *L'Asphyxie* and *Jingsuo Ji* are analyzed.

### 1.1 *L'Asphyxie*: Synopsis

In *La Bâtarde*, Violette Leduc gives an account of how she began her autobiographical novel, *L'Asphyxie*, in Normandy in 1942 after having exasperated her companion Maurice Sachs with her 'malheurs d'enfance' (*La Bâtarde*, p. 523). These *malheurs d'enfance* are chronicled in *L'Asphyxie* through the eyes of the child heroine of an undetermined age, and retells the child heroine's relationships with her

<sup>27</sup> Abraham Maslow, *Motivation and Personality*, pp. 156-57.

<sup>28</sup> Maslow, *Toward a Psychology of Being*, p. 46.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

<sup>30</sup> Judith Butler, 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory', in *Feminist Theory Reader: Local and Global Perspectives* (Florence: Taylor and Francis, 2013), p. 472.

mother, her maternal grandmother and a number of individuals who inhabit the provincial French town. The novel starts by describing the troubling mother/daughter relationship, and as the story unfolds we are given more details of the pain and neglect the child heroine suffers at the hand of the mother.

The novel consists of a number of episodes, and sections detailing the mother/daughter relationship are broken up by the injection of other individuals who inhabit the provincial town in which the work is set. Alex Hughes points out that the organization of these episodes is ‘associative rather than chronological’.<sup>31</sup> According to Eileen Boyd Sivert, this is so that it provides the child heroine with some relief from the mother.<sup>32</sup> In contrast to the brutal mother who looks upon her child with a ‘regard dur et bleu’ (p. 12) and causes the child to be clumsy in her presence, the maternal grandmother ‘souriait avec ses yeux’ (p. 75). It is with the maternal grandmother that the child heroine appears to regain her sense of self-confidence, as is apparent when she replies to her grandmother’s warning of running with a precious plate and possibly breaking it: ‘mais le bonheur n’est pas maladroit’ (p. 133). The gentleness and love of the maternal grandmother are the only relief the child heroine encounters and serve to magnify the coldness of the mother figure which will be discussed in detail later.

We learn of the grandmother’s death a few episodes into the story, and following her death the child heroine is left in the sole care of the mother who rejects this responsibility by sending her to boarding school and, more selfishly, has her kept at the boarding school when all her classmates have left for home for three days of holiday. The mother eventually marries and has a legitimate son, but the child

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<sup>31</sup> Alex Hughes, ‘Violette Leduc’s *L’Asphyxie*: The Double Face of Maternity’, in *Modern Language Review*, 88.4 (1993): 851-863 (p. 851). Referred hereafter as ‘Violette Leduc’s *L’Asphyxie*’.

<sup>32</sup> Eileen Boyd Sivert, ‘Permeable Boundaries and the Mother-Function in *L’Asphyxie*’, in *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature*, 11 (1992): 289-307 (p. 292).

heroine remains excluded from the mother's new life. The novel ends with the child heroine realizing that she will never be the child her mother desires nor will her mother ever be the loving type that her grandmother was to the novel's child heroine – her grandchild. Let us consider the child heroine's remark when she leaves her mother: 'un corset de fer tomba à mes pieds quand je la quittai' (p. 188), with 'la' being her mother. This mother-daughter relationship is clearly presented 'as a state which is fraught with tension'.<sup>33</sup>

## 1.2 *Jingsuo Ji*: Synopsis

*Jingsuo Ji* was published in Shanghai in 1943 when Chang was 23 years old, and depicts the life of a fictional young woman called Ch'i-ch'iao. This novella is written in Chinese and was very well received, with one critic claiming this fictional tale as 'the most perfect work so far'.<sup>34</sup> Another critic, Xun Yu, remarks that *Jingsuo Ji* 'should at least be ranked among the most beautiful fruits of our literary garden'.<sup>35</sup> C.T. Hsia gives this particular work by Chang the most credit by regarding it as 'the greatest novelette in the history of Chinese literature, [...] bearing the author's skillful appropriation of the elements of both the native and the Western tradition'.<sup>36</sup>

This work was written after the second Sino-Japanese war in 1939 and the subsequent fall of Hong Kong to the Empire of Japan in 1941. These two events had a profound effect on Chang's literary career, since she was forced to abandon her studies at the University of Hong Kong and turn to writing to earn a living. In *Jingsuo Ji*, Chang uses 'spatial time' – a term suggested by Carole H.F. Hoyan to

<sup>33</sup> Hughes, 'Violette Leduc's *L'Asphyxie*', p. 853.

<sup>34</sup> Yu-wen Guo, 'A Comparative Study of "*Jingsuo Ji*" and "*Yuan Nu*"', in *Humanitas Taiwanica*, 65 (2006): 151-182 (p. 153).

<sup>35</sup> Xun Yu, '論張愛玲的小說', in *張愛玲研究資料*, ed. by Yu Chin and Jin Hong (Fuzhou: The Straits Publishing, 1994), p. 121.

<sup>36</sup> Hsia, 'Eileen Chang', in *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction* p. 393.

refer to Chang's modernist use of long, descriptive paragraphs – to slow down plot developments.<sup>37</sup> Hoyan points out that the use of anti-romantic themes and the search for new narrative forms in Chang's short stories 'can be considered as pioneering [working of Modernism] in China'.<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, Hsia argues that her psychological treatment of her characters adds a 'sophistication and metaphorical enrichment to her stories'.<sup>39</sup> Indeed, Chang writes that: 'in my novels, all the characters do not have a thorough character, all except Ch'i-ch'iao in *Jingsuo Ji*'.<sup>40</sup>

*Jingsuo Ji* is divided into two tableaux: the first describes her life as a married woman to an invalid and her love for her brother-in-law; the second tableau describes her descent into neuroticism over the lonely years as a wife, and later on as a widow and a mother. The story opens with the parentless heroine (whose brother owns a sesame oil store) already married to the paralytic second son of a wealthy family. Her family background – being from a merchant family – is hugely important in influencing how she will be treated by her marital family, and from the opening page it soon becomes clear that being a merchant is not a well-regarded trade in the Chinese society in which this work is set.

The heroine is not accepted by other female members of her marital family as one of their own, and even the servants scorn her country manners. Her married life is described as time spent between looking after her paralytic husband and smoking opium to alleviate her seemingly uneventful life. This changes when Chiang Chi-tsê, her husband's youngest brother, appears. Chi-tsê's apparent virility, and certainly his physical health, is a direct contrast with her bed-bound husband and the heroine

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<sup>37</sup> Carole H. F. Hoyan, *The Life and Works of Zhang Ailing: A Critical Study* (unpublished thesis, University of British Columbia, 1996), pp. 141-42.

<sup>38</sup> Hoyan 'The Life and Works of Zhang Ailing: A Critical Study', pp. 95-101.

<sup>39</sup> C.T. Hsia, 'Eileen Chang', p. 396.

<sup>40</sup> Eileen Chang, '自己的文章', in *流言 Written on Water* (Taipei: Crown, 1987), p. 21. The translation is my own.

confesses to loving him. The first tableau ends with his rejection of her love.

The second tableau begins ten years after this rejection when both the heroine's husband and mother-in-law have passed away. Ch'i-ch'iao is now the head of her own household, answering to no one and demanding obedience from her servants, her son, called Chanbai, and her daughter, named Chan'an. This second half of the novella focuses on her relationship with her children and merges traditional Chinese practices with modern ways of life. In this section, we are given images of a mother's irrational behaviour towards her children. For instance, she encourages her son to smoke opium and gives him a concubine after she succeeds in destroying his marriage to a distant cousin – a marriage that the mother protagonist has arranged herself. For her daughter, Ch'i-ch'iao first sends her to a Western Catholic school and then decides to bind her feet – a practice which, by then, was already outdated and even forbidden in the society in which *Jingsuo Ji* is set. The mother protagonist then foils her daughter's imminent marriage to a respectable man. The story ends with the death of the mother and Chan'an seen shopping for jewellery in the street with an unknown man.

## **2 Part I: Identity development and the significance of motherhood**

### **2.1 Maternal nurturance**

At first reading of Leduc's *L'Asphyxie*, what stands out most is the mother character's total lack of warmth towards her only daughter. The opening sentence, 'ma mère ne m'a jamais donné la main' (p. 7), forewarns readers of the mother figure's intolerance of any physical contact between herself and her child, and as the

story unfolds, the extensive abuse to which the mother character subjects her daughter suggests that the former is indeed not a suitable candidate for motherhood. For instance, the episode in which the mother figure discovers her child has lost an expensive umbrella and brutally punishes her, physically as well as verbally, highlights the mother figure's inappropriate, and one could argue overblown, reaction. This will be discussed further on. In Chang's *Jingsuo Ji*, although Ch'i-ch'iao is not depicted as a cold mother, her domineering ways and her determination to destroy her children's marriages and health (by giving them opium to smoke) also present this mother character as not conforming to accepted standards of mothering.

Neither mother figure was given the opportunity to choose between accepting or rejecting motherhood. Both mother figures make provisions to ensure their child(ren) are fed and educated. Although they do not undertake the task of feeding and educating their child(ren) themselves, as the child narrator in *L'Asphyxie* clearly implies with her time spent at boarding schools, or as the narrator in *Jingsuo Ji* implies when describing Ch'i-ch'iao's determination to send Chan'an to a Western Catholic secondary school, both mother figures nevertheless appear to accept their responsibility for ensuring their child(ren) are, or at least appear to be, well cared for.

Let us consider first the task of feeding. In *L'Asphyxie*, for instance, the child narrator retells of an episode in which she is forced by the mother figure to eat 'une pile de tartines' (p. 50) to avoid being sick, and later on, when she is left at the boarding school during Whitsun, she receives a box of candied fruits from her mother. Of course, this gesture can be interpreted as a consolation prize offered by the mother to her child for not allowing the latter to come home during the holiday. It can be assumed that the mother figure is forcing her child to accept the mother's authority and expecting her to like it, just as she assumes her child would enjoy the sweetened candied fruits. However, considering the mother figure's show of regret of



having her daughter in the first place, as the starting sentence suggests ‘ma mère ne m’a jamais donné la main’ (p. 7), I would argue that feeding her child is considered by the mother figure as a chore which she is expected to fulfil.

In *Jingsuo Ji*, Ch’i-chi’ao also influences the lives of her children through food, but choosing opium smoking (in Mandarin, the word ‘ingest’ is applied to smoking opium) is ominous and implies the mother character’s decision is not made upon the overall well-being of her children, but is, instead, influenced by her desire to control her children, at least, financially, since both her son and daughter do not have an income of their own and depend entirely on their mother. How Chan’an became addicted to opium is disclosed during an episode when we are informed that both Chanbai (her brother) and Chan’an were encouraged by Ch’i-chi’ao to smoke opium.

Where, on the one hand, Chanbai was given opium to smoke to ‘give up his frequent visits (to red-light districts)’ (p. 173), Chan’an, on the other hand, became addicted to opium after being given the drug to alleviate the pain of dysentery which she contracted at the age of twenty-four. When outsiders advised Ch’i-chi’ao to help her daughter to give up this addiction, they received a resentful reply from the mother protagonist: ‘What am I afraid of? At least we can still afford it, and even if I have to sell twelve hectares of land for those two (brother and sister) to smoke, who dares make a comment?’ (p. 173).<sup>41</sup> Her gesture is an unfortunate misplaced show of maternal nurturance that does not take into consideration the physical well-being of her children.

This show of generosity with food, or in this case with opium, is, however, not uncommon in a mother. In her work on the development of motherhood since the eighteenth century, Badinter describes the act of feeding her child as ‘la preuve

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<sup>41</sup> This quotation, as well as future quotations from this work, is my own translation from the original text.

d'amour' of the mother.<sup>42</sup> Kleinian theory goes further by suggesting that maternal nurturing is linked with the child's sense of 'emotional security'. The act of giving food is, therefore, not only a demonstration of the mother's love for her child, but it is also a stabilizing mechanism which offers the child a sense of security. This is an important emotional state which Maslow claims is more 'vital' than the need for love.<sup>43</sup> This certainly raises the argument that the offering of food to one's child is more complex than simply as a form of bribery, as is the case in *L'Asphyxie* with the mother figure, or as a show of maternal generosity as seen in *Jingsuo Ji*.

For instance, let us reconsider the mother figure's offer of 'une pile de tartines' in *L'Asphyxie*. Although this mother figure is categorized by Isabelle de Courtivron as generally a 'bad' mother,<sup>44</sup> described by Mireille Brioude as a violent mother, and suggested by Hughes to be a 'cipher for sadism-in-the feminine',<sup>45</sup> I would argue that, from Badinter's perspective, the social demand for a mother to 'show' her love for her child implies that both mother-figures are neither bad nor good. Furthermore, the psychological association between the child's intake of food and his/her need for security suggests the actions of both mother-figures are logical and, again, neither bad nor good.

Burdened with the unavoidable result of her sin of having a child out of wedlock, and trying to survive in a society that associates food with maternal love, not to give her child food would be interpreted as not loving her child which, following Badinter's argument on the significance of motherhood to women, would become 'un crime inexplicable'.<sup>46</sup> Since the mother figure has already sinned in the

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<sup>42</sup> Badinter, *L'Amour en plus*, p. 196.

<sup>43</sup> Melanie Klein, *Love, Hate and Reparation*, p. 108; Maslow, *Toward a Psychology of Being*, pp. 153-54.

<sup>44</sup> Isabelle de Courtivron, 'Violette Leduc: L'enfermée pèlerine', in *Les Cahiers du GRIF*, 39 (1988), 49-53 (p. 50).

<sup>45</sup> Mireille Brioude, *Violette Leduc: La mise en scène du 'je'* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000), p. 70; Alex Hughes, *Heterographies: Sexual Difference in French Autobiography* (Oxford: Berg, 1999), p. 16.

<sup>46</sup> Badinter, *L'Amour en plus*, p.

eyes of society by giving birth to an illegitimate daughter, to appear not to feed her daughter would be social suicide.

The child heroine in *L'Asphyxie* evokes her mother's nurturing as something abundant, as in *la pile de tartines*, or as a substitute for the maternal absence, as in the candied fruits. However, the child heroine's perspective is lacking knowledge of the social context which the mother faces on a daily basis. Not having a mother-figure of her own to learn from, yet needing to avoid social suicide or social reproach, Berthe can only display her affection for her child in a manner which she believes will grant her the maximum social approval, in other words, through food.

Similarly, although side-effects derived from the ingestion or smoking of opium are nowadays widely acknowledged, *Jingsuo Ji* was written at a time when the Chinese society accepted opium as an alternative to Western medicine, as Chuan Chih Kao points out when he writes: 'opium does not cure, yet one of the reasons Ch'i-ch'iao gives Chan'an opium to smoke is the assumption that opium cures'.<sup>47</sup> The text does not explicitly state that Ch'i-ch'iao was motivated by a desire to cure her daughter. In fact, in describing Ch'i-ch'iao as 'not going to the lengths of taking her (Chan'an) to be treated medically' (p. 173) and simply advising her to 'smoke a couple of pipes' (p. 173), Chang presents Ch'i-ch'iao as a nonchalant mother figure.

We are, however, further informed that smoking opium 'did reduce the pain considerably' (p. 173) and that Chan'an was 'eventually cured' (p. 173). Although there is no explicit association between opium smoking and Chan'an's getting well, the inference that opium can cure, at least the characters in *Jingsuo ji*, is implied. This is demonstrated when Chang writes, in the same sentence, that Ch'i-ch'iao 'advises her [daughter] to smoke opium' and 'indeed it did reduce the pain considerably' (p. 173). This is immediately followed by a fresh sentence which

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<sup>47</sup> Chuan Chih Kao, *Eileen Chang Reconsidered*, p. 89.

begins with ‘after eventually making a full recovery’ (p. 173). From this perspective, Ch’i-ch’iao’s show of misplaced generosity, at least in this aspect, is challenged, and it can be argued that she was motivated by a genuine belief that opium could treat and cure her daughter’s illness, albeit a belief which Kao suggests highlights the mother protagonist’s ‘foolish’ knowledge more than her love for her child.<sup>48</sup>

Although the motivational force behind the mother figures’ display of care for their child(ren) differs, what they both have in common is a propensity to give too much, either in terms of value or quantity. For instance, the child narrator in *L’Asphyxie* either receives expensive items or large amounts of food from the mother figure and when the latter is not personally taking care of her child’s daily meals, instructions are given to ensure that at least her child is fed: ‘mange, il faut qu’elle mange’ (p. 188). In *Jingsuo Ji*, Ch’i-ch’iao’s refusal to stop funding her daughter’s opium addiction after the dysentery episode also demonstrates a lack of restraint. Although Mien Mien Huang goes further and claims that in giving her children opium to smoke, Ch’i-ch’iao is demonstrating that she is ‘no longer human, having lost all her emotional feeling and morality, even her humanity’, my argument seeks to show a more positive, and if possible, a humane side of this mother-figure.<sup>49</sup>

Both mother figures’ difficulty as mothers who can provide a balanced, or at least appropriate, diet reflects a degree of deficiency in understanding how they should approach their child(ren)’s upbringing. This then leads to the question of how they can learn to be a ‘better’ mother than de Courtivron’s ‘bad’, Brioude’s ‘violent’, Kao’s ‘foolish’, or even Huang’s ‘inhumane’ mother. As mentioned previously, culturally sanctioned motherhood needs to be learnt and the most likely teacher is the

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 95.

<sup>49</sup> Mien Mien Huang, ‘A Study on the Reading History of Eileen Chang’s *The Golden Cangue* in Taiwan, 1957-2011’ (unpublished masters thesis, Chinese Culture University, 2013), p. 19. Hereafter referred to as ‘A Study of Chang’. My translation. All future translations of quotations from this work will be my own.

woman's own mother. Chodorow further adds that as the woman 'tries to provide nurturant care for the child', she is bringing into her own mothering memories of her own upbringing.<sup>50</sup>

When this is applied to the mother figures in both works, however, a discrepancy immediately surfaces. From the replay of a speech the child heroine's mother in *L'Asphyxie* gives her, it is evident that this mother figure did not, or was unable to, learn from her own mother: 'Maman était molle. Veuve à vingt et un ans avec deux enfants. Ses parents m'élevaient. Ils m'ont fait entrer chez les Sœurs' (p. 51). Similarly, although there is no indication of when Chi'-chi'ao's parents died, from her marriage (which is arranged by her brother) to the occasional visits which her brother and his wife pay her, it can be deduced that the siblings have been orphans before Ch'i-chi'ao's wedding plans.

This lack of maternal guidance impairs the mother figures' maternal instinct – which Badinter argues is a myth in any case – so that they raise their child(ren) mostly according to a set of social standards that demonstrates foremost their ability to satisfy the physical well-being of their care.<sup>51</sup> By psychological standards, this is not an unusual approach. The Freudian concept of the infant's instinct for self-preservation (the need for the mother's breasts in order to survive) emphasizes the close attachment the infant will form with his/her mother whom the infant regards primarily as his/her source of nurture.<sup>52</sup> Maslow also highlights that the basis upon which a person can flourish is by satisfying first and foremost his/her need for physiological gratification.<sup>53</sup> Although the quantity offered is of little consequence (since it is the show of offering food which demonstrates to their

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<sup>50</sup> Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering*, p. 90.

<sup>51</sup> Badinter, 'L'indifférence maternelle', in *L'Amour en plus*, pp. 73-89.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.

<sup>53</sup> Maslow, *Toward a Psychology of Being*, pp. 153-54.

respective societies that they are responsible mothers), the mother figures' decision to give their child(ren) more than the necessary amount suggests the belief that the more copious or the better the food that is given, the more copious or better is the love shown.

This public demonstration of the mother figures' love for their children can therefore be interpreted in Maslowian terms as a desire to gratify their sense of belonging and acceptance. A more detailed examination of the mother figures' offering of food, however, reveals a more narcissistic approach towards their designated role. Let us consider the child heroine's first account of food in *L'Asphyxie*: 'la dispute monta, éclata. Ma mère lui [grandmother] reprochait l'anisette, le chausson aux pommes, l'heure avancée' (p. 12). The reader is immediately presented with two completely different characters. On the one hand, there is the angry and perhaps strict mother figure, and on the other hand, we envisage a generous and perhaps lax (grand)mother figure.

No indication is given yet as to whom the child heroine supports, but the following sentence soon makes her preference clear: 'je m'étais déshabillée en pleurant, en pensant qu'elle [grandmother] était malheureuse à cause de douces choses qu'elle aimait manger' (p. 12). The child heroine is standing with the grandmother, who is called Fideline, but is referred to affectionately as *grand-mère* throughout the work. The grandmother's fondness for sweet things, coupled with her willingness to share with the child heroine *l'anisette* and *le chausson aux pommes*, presents the image of a kind character who Hughes describes as the 'good' mother.<sup>54</sup> The named grandmother is associated with food and pleasure, in particular the sharing of *l'anisette* which the grandmother and grandchild enjoy 'agréablement' (p. 10) and is used as a pick-me-up following the episode when the child heroine is

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<sup>54</sup> Hughes, 'Violette Leduc's *L'Asphyxie*', p. 859.

pushed into the pond in the park. In contrast, there is the mother figure who is not named and is described as personally offering the child heroine food just twice throughout the work – the first time when forcing the child heroine to eat *la pile de tartines* at the beginning of the story, and the second time towards the end of the work when she sends a box of crystallized fruit.

In the child heroine's eyes, the mother figure does not approve of her child being given sweet things to consume unless she is the one who is offering them. This desire to be the one who offers sweet things, and consequently to be perceived as a giver of pleasurable food, suggests an unconscious desire within the mother figure to be accepted, or even liked by the child heroine, who clearly does not regard her in the same positive light as the named grandmother. Arcana proposes that 'mothers and daughters compete intensely, primarily for the affection of the husband-father', but in the case of *L'Asphyxie* where there is no apparent husband-father figure, the child heroine has become the focal attention for the grandmother and mother characters.<sup>55</sup> The mother figure may not have been taught how to mother, and she clearly does not enjoy being a mother, yet she resents the fact that her own mother is gaining the affection of the child heroine – her child. This conflicting behaviour suggests an individual who finds it difficult to tolerate all displays of affection, unless she is the distributor as well as the receiver of such emotions.

In order to retain her child's love, the mother figure must alienate her child from what the latter perceives as 'good' nurturing but what she, the mother, perceives as a threat to her own acceptance. Her angry outburst: 'de l'alcool! Ta grand-mère est folle. Elle te tuera. Tu iras en pension. Je t'y mettrai en rentrant' (p. 73), not only demonstrates her disapproval, but in telling her child: 'elle te tuera', the mother figure is warning her child of the danger the 'good' grandmother poses. The mother

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<sup>55</sup> Arcana, *Our Mothers' Daughters*, p. 97.

figure's reaction resonates with Maslow's theory on how 'destructiveness may occur as one of the concomitant reactions' to a threat.<sup>56</sup> In forcibly separating the child from the perceived 'good' grandmother, who is the source of sweet food, and in forcing the child heroine to eat and to accept sweet crystallized fruit from her, the mother figure is trying to destroy the bond between the grandmother and the granddaughter and preserve her importance, if not her existence, in this triangular relationship.

In *Jingsuo Ji*, the use of food as a narcissistic approach towards preserving her own existence is also found. Ch'i-ch'iao offers her son Chanbai opium to 'keep him in' (p. 173). Kao claims that this episode is influenced by Chang's own entrapment at the hands of her own opium-addicted father.<sup>57</sup> However, where Ch'i-ch'iao and Chang's father differ is that the former manipulates her show of generosity to control her son while the latter misuses his authoritarian power and, under the effects of opium, physically and brutally restricts Chang's movements. Although Chang does not directly and publicly reflect on her childhood and the traumatic experience of being abandoned by her own mother at the age of three and living with an addictive father, her pessimistic view on life can nevertheless be detected in her works, in particular in her characterization of Ch'i-ch'iao.

Stephen Cheng writes that, Chang 'being a confirmed pessimist, averred that all human conflict arises from the wickedness of the heart'.<sup>58</sup> Chang's Ch'i-ch'iao is indeed the embodiment of malice. For instance, three days after his wedding to Yuan Che-sh'o, Chanbai is encouraged by Ch'i-ch'iao to smoke opium with her. Under the influence of opium and after being 'repeatedly questioned' (p. 171) by his mother,

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<sup>56</sup> Maslow, *Motivation and Personality*, p. 126.

<sup>57</sup> Kao, *Eileen Chang Reconsidered*, pp. 89-90.

<sup>58</sup> Stephen Cheng, 'Themes and Techniques in Eileen Chang's Stories', in *Tankang Review*, 8 (1977): 169-200 (p. 172).



Chanbai ‘confides (to her mother) everything’ regarding intimate details between him and Che-sh’o (p. 171). What immediately follows this unwittingly disclosed information is Ch’i-ch’iao’s first show of malicious intent towards her son:

Early next morning, [...] Ch’i-ch’iao has not slept a wink all night, yet being full of energy, invites some female relatives over to play cards, including the mother of Che-sh’o. At the mahjong table (she) reveals all her daughter-in-law’s secrets which her son had revealed to her word for word, exaggerating some details slightly to make them more colourful. Others try to interrupt, but are unable to [divert the conversation] with other gossip, [and] Ch’i-ch’iao grins and returns the conversation back to her daughter-in-law. (pp. 171-172)

The unfortunate daughter-in-law’s humiliation is completed with the hasty departure of her own mother from the mahjong table who is, by then, ‘red in the face and unable to face her daughter’ (p. 172). Hsia attributes Ch’i-ch’iao’s behaviour as ‘the insane jealousy of a frustrated woman unable to abide normal sexual life around her’.<sup>59</sup> Indeed, although opium is not directly responsible for the destructions that eventually follow, including the end of Chanbai’s marriage and the death of Che-sh’o, Ch’i-ch’iao’s use of opium as a tool to destroy what could potentially be a normal sexually active marriage does manifest a vindictive refusal to allow others, including her own son, to enjoy what she herself had been denied.

A reading of Maslowian theory on ‘instinctoid needs’, in this case, the instinctoid need to destroy reveals, however, a neuroticism which goes beyond the desire to deny others joy.<sup>60</sup> Similar to Frommian and neo-Freudian thinking, Maslow highlights that at the first sign of danger, an individual will fight back.<sup>61</sup> Living as a woman in a society that is described by Julia Kristeva as ‘androcentrique’ in *Des*

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<sup>59</sup> C.T. Hsia, ‘Eileen Chang’, p. 401.

<sup>60</sup> Maslow uses the term ‘instinctoid need’ to refer to the innate needs in the Hierarchy of Need theory in *Motivation and Personality*, pp. 83-95.

<sup>61</sup> Maslow, *Motivation and Personality*, p. 126.

*Chinoises*, and described by Chiung-chu Chen as a mother who uses motherhood ‘to usurp’ the power of her son, Ch’i-ch’iao’s use of opium appears to be a manipulative means of maintaining her power and her existence.<sup>62</sup> However, considering that Chanbai is a gambling addict who spends his time in brothels and who, without an income of his own, depends entirely on his mother, the need to deliberately destroy the power in her son appears superfluous.

It is nevertheless clear that in writing ‘now, even she cannot keep this half-a-man (his son) – he is married’ (p. 170), Chang is implying that the chosen daughter-in-law is a threat. What the mother protagonist is arguably destroying then is the potential power her daughter-in-law may have upon her son to usurp her own status, and she achieves this by torturing her daughter-in-law using the apparently well-intended means of ‘nurturing’ her son. The tragedy of this trinity – mother, son and daughter-in-law – is that Ch’i-ch’iao’s initial intentions may be well-meant, but imbued with the constant fear of losing someone, she, as both a mother and a widow, must struggle with the inner conflicts within her. Huang quotes Hsiao-lin Chen that Ch’i-ch’iao’s inner conflicts are ‘primarily caused by her loneliness and being rejected by the family’, yet, paradoxically, she chooses to mercilessly destroy those closest to her – her family members – in an attempt to achieve a sense of security and belonging.<sup>63</sup>

Let us now consider the mother protagonist’s motivation behind her offer of opium to the daughter. As suggested earlier, opium was initially offered to Chan’an by the mother to relieve her child’s pain. This mother character’s subsequent angry refusal to take heed of advice regarding Chan’an’s addiction suggests a maternal reluctance to deprive her daughter of a needed item. However, the additional

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<sup>62</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Des Chinoises*, p. 105; Chiung-chu Chen, *The Development of Female Consciousness in the Fiction of Eileen Chang and Fay Weldon*, p. 3.

<sup>63</sup> Huang, ‘A Study of Chang’, p. 30.

information given following this episode clearly informs readers that opium hinders marriage proposals: ‘Chan’an’s marriage was, after all, affected by this (opium smoking). Matchmakers were already not very active around their house, but now, they have disappeared altogether’ (p. 173).

The use of opium as a means of keeping her daughter by her side is explicitly referred to when, towards the end of the story and some six years after first giving Chan’an opium, Ch’i-ch’iao calmly invites her daughter’s suitor She-Fǎn for dinner. Whilst She-Fǎn is being received by Chanbai (as is customary in Chinese families when the father is deceased and the eldest son must take on the role of the father), Ch’i-ch’iao joins them and calmly explains that Chan’an ‘will be down shortly, after she has smoked a couple (of opium pipes)’ (p. 183). Upon seeing She-Fǎn’s shocked reaction, the mother protagonist quickly makes a pretence of making excuses for her daughter: ‘for a young lady, how inconvenient it is. It’s not that she (Chan’an) hasn’t tried to stop, but her body is weak [...] on and off, it’s been more than ten years’ (p. 183). Detecting a change in She-Fǎn, Ch’i-ch’iao stops ‘in case people can see through her lies’ (p. 184). There is, however, no mistaking Ch’i-ch’iao’s intention to discredit her daughter.

Although no further information is given in the story regarding how many times Chan-an has tried to stop her addiction, we do know that after having met her suitor She-Fǎn, she ‘worked hard at quitting’ (p. 178) and that ‘there was nothing Ch’i-ch’iao could do about it’ (p. 178). It can also be argued that this is her moment of *harmatia* since, in refusing to smoke opium, she is deliberately breaking the tie which binds her to her mother who, sensing this threat to her existence as a mother, retaliates and exposes She-Fǎn to her lies. The marriage does not go ahead and Ch’i-ch’iao achieves her goal – having her daughter by her side.

Huang notes that ‘Ch’i-ch’iao’s broken marriage leaves her jealous of anyone

whose marriage is better than hers, especially of Chan'an who is the evidence of her broken marriage'.<sup>64</sup> But since Ch'i-ch'iao started to provide Chan'an with opium at least six years before the appearance of She-Fän, the mother protagonist is not only jealous of the possibility that her daughter may have a happy or more normal marriage, she also shows that she will not allow her daughter to separate from her at all.

This narcissistic behaviour suggests that in Ch'i-ch'iao's view, her identity as a mother is only validated by the continuous physical presence of her children. Following Maslow's theory, this is suggestive of a need for security. This then raises the question as to how motherhood could have a positive value upon the identity development of a woman when, as discussed earlier, there is no clear quantifiable nor qualifiable means of evaluating the woman's ability to execute her role as a mother.

## 2.2 Motherhood as a choice

Kristeva writes: 'mais alors, qu'allez-vous faire d'une femme si elle n'est même pas mère?'<sup>65</sup> Indeed, in stating that mothering is perceived by social scientists as 'a natural product rather than a social construct' for women, Chodorow stresses the inescapable association of identity development between a woman and her biological functions.<sup>66</sup> Furthermore, despite many feminist theories that are suspicious of the social tendency to present motherhood as the ultimate feminine role, or even as a moment of fulfilment whose rewards endure, Chodorow argues that bioevolutionary factors bind women to motherhood: 'the sexual division of labour was necessary for species survival in the earliest human communities. [...] The implication is that the

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<sup>64</sup> Huang, 'A Study of Chang', p. 33.

<sup>65</sup> Kristeva, *Des Chinoises*, p. 225.

<sup>66</sup> Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering*, p. 14.

mode of reproduction of mothering is unchanging, and retains the form of its earliest origins'.<sup>67</sup>

Since 'woman' is defined according to a set of preconceived interpretations which includes her ability to have children as well as her physical desirability, and juxtaposed with the marginalization of 'le troisième sexe' – a term coined by Beauvoir to represent women who have lost their biological ability to have children – this implies that being recognized as a fertile female, as opposed to a non-female, has become an influential factor in women's decision to conform to the accepted ideal of a woman.<sup>68</sup>

The fear of being labeled as a genderless or invalid individual propels women to choose to become mothers. In *Jingsuo Ji*, the urgency to become a mother is evident in Ch'i-ch'iao. Huang writes that due to the Second Master's severe disability, 'readers should be extremely curious as to how, within five years of marriage, Ch'i-ch'iao is able to give birth to two children'.<sup>69</sup> This provokes the interpretation that it is the heroine who takes the initiative to ensure she has children – an act which is badly regarded in traditional Chinese society, particularly when the man in question is severely disabled and should avoid overexertion. In *L'Asphyxie*, the mother figure clearly did not deliberately seek out her lover in order to become a mother, yet her many public performances confirm her desire to be acknowledged as one. For instance, in the episodes when the mother figure performs the role of the doting mother who is prepared to buy her daughter the best school uniform available, and when she states 'c'est ma fille' (p. 112) to the crowd surrounding the wet child in the *jardin public*.

The two mother figures' emphatic show of embracing motherhood opens up an

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>68</sup> Beauvoir, *Le Deuxième sexe I*, p. 68.

<sup>69</sup> Huang, 'A Study of Chang', p. 32.

interesting perspective on self-identification. Chodorow suggests that girls who are brought up from early childhood to believe in the joys of motherhood are, in reality, conditioned to believe in a myth established by institutions to ensure that ‘people’s participation further guarantees social reproduction’.<sup>70</sup> If Chodorow is right and that self-deception occurs whenever women refuse to acknowledge to themselves that the child they already have is not wanted as fully as it is supposed to be, that the maternal instinct which they are supposed to possess is not (yet) felt, then, the mother-figures’ public shows of interest in motherhood suggest that a degree of self-deception is at play here. That is to say, in *L’Asphyxie* and *Jingsuo Ji*, both mother-figures associate their identity with motherhood yet in private, they clearly demonstrate a distinct refusal to ‘mother’ their respective child(ren). Is this, then, confirmation that self-identification is associated with self-deception?

As the story unfolds in *L’Asphyxie*, the mother character’s lack of choice becomes apparent and she is forced to raise her illegitimate daughter after having been seduced and then abandoned by the son of her wealthy employer. The child heroine is a constant reminder to her mother of her father’s betrayal and, as Hughes notes, ‘denial and punitive rage continue to be associated with the heroine’s mother throughout the novel’.<sup>71</sup> Instead of calling her daughter by name, the mother uses instead words such as ‘espèce de sauvage’, ‘sale bête’, ‘maboule! Espèce de maboule’ throughout the novel whenever they are alone. Sivert remarks that since the illegitimate daughter ‘does not “belong”, legally, to any man’, she ‘cannot be defined, named, or placed even marginally as are the other women’.<sup>72</sup> The mother’s determination not to call her daughter by name resonates with this statement, and I would further add that in denying her child an identity the mother figure is also

<sup>70</sup> Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering*, p. 35.

<sup>71</sup> Hughes, ‘Violette Leduc’s *L’Asphyxie*’, p. 852.

<sup>72</sup> Sivert, ‘Permeable Boundaries and the Mother-Function’, p. 294.

denying this 'sale bête' a place in her life; a respectable life which she has built up with a legal husband and a legitimate son.

This hardly seems like a woman who is trying to convince to herself that the child she has is desired, and the abuse which the child heroine suffers under her mother is evidence that both the mother and the daughter are acutely aware of the situation. The child heroine recounts that she is moved from place to place yet nothing belongs to her, not even a name or a home. For instance, the 'rue de Foulons' (p. 39) is forbidden to her because it is where the child heroine's father lives.

Although the mother figure explains that *rue de Foulons* 'c'est ta rue' (p. 39), she remains, nevertheless, the unwanted and illegitimate child and can only peer from a window into this world which will never be hers. Another example is that the mother figure's house is only a short distance away from the child heroine's boarding house, yet the voice of the child heroine reflects on never having a home: 'tu n'en auras jamais, tu le sais déjà' (p. 186). Sivert points out that the child heroine has no identity as there is 'no more room for her in this novel than in society'.<sup>73</sup> Although as readers, we are aware that the child heroine must have a name, a place of birth and a date of birth, they are not provided as detail in the text.

If the mother figure's principal goal in denying her child a name is to erase her existence, then the only plausible explanation for her emphatic show of maternal love in public is a desire to be seen as a sexually valid female. By identifying herself as a mother in public, the mother figure has adapted her personal desires to society's expectations. This, in Maslowian terms, answers the mother figure's desire to be (re)accepted by the society that initially rejected her and is gratifying her sense of belonging. It is not, then, the more self-actualizing (and more esteem-enhancing) desire which would have been the case were the mother figure using self-deception

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 302.

as a form of identification. That is to say, when the mother-figure believes that ‘mothering’ is answering her need to maximize individual potential, regardless of whether ‘mothering’ is indeed acknowledged by the mother-figure as a reflection of her potential, any fulfilment will lead to an increase in her sense of self-esteem.

In *Jingsuo Ji*, the reader may infer that Ch’i-ch’iao believes her role as a mother to Chan’an will lead to recognition from society based on the fact that she attempts to do the right thing by ensuring her daughter has an appropriate suitor. In deliberately fabricating lies to her daughter’s suitor, however, Ch’i-ch’iao’s ‘doing the right thing’ for her child is arguably a pretence, designed to conceal her resentment that her child might find happiness without her. Her anger that Chan’an may separate from her is evident when Chan’an expresses a willingness to marry and Ch’i-ch’iao vents:

Not shy! You’ve got something in your stomach that can’t wait?  
Can’t wait to get married, and you don’t care about the dowry!  
You don’t care, but he might care! You are so sure he wants you?  
Look at yourself. What do you have that he likes? Don’t lie to  
yourself!’ (p. 180)

When we attend to these details, it seems that one important motive in Ch’i-ch’iao’s objections to suitors is her desire to keep her daughter at home, as a kind of permanent child. The mother protagonist achieves this through various methods.

Firstly, in denigrating her daughter, Ch’i-ch’iao hopes to instil a sense of self-worthlessness in Chan’an who, feeling less confident in herself, will, following Maslow’s theory on the Hierarchy of Needs, withdraw back to her mother – the zone which offers the comforts of familiarity. In creating fear in her daughter, Ch’i-ch’iao is encouraging Chan’an to remain with the person she is familiar with, that is to say, her mother. This, subsequently, confirms her appreciation of the mother and enhances that mother’s sense of self-confidence. From this perspective, Ch’i-ch’iao is



motivated by an egoistic need for love which she hopes to gratify through subordinating her daughter.

Secondly, Beauvoir comments on the resentment that a mother might feel towards her daughter's desire to establish independence from her: 'aux yeux de la mère, c'est là un trait d'odieuse ingratitude; elle s'entête à "mater" cette volonté qui se dérobe; elle n'accepte pas que son double devienne une autre'.<sup>74</sup> From this perspective, Ch'i-ch'iao's anger is the manifestation of a fear that separation occurs, and thus emphasizes further the previously suggested assumption that, in Ch'i-ch'iao's view, motherhood is intrinsically associated with her existence. On the other hand, however, if the mother protagonist's rage is directed at the prospect of losing the authoritarian hold she has over her daughter, then her attitude is more narcissistically motivated.

Thirdly, the possibility that the role of the mother is an empowering one, whether or not it is connected to a myth of maternal instinct, is examined by feminists such as Annie Leclerc. Leclerc suggests that men's fear of women derives precisely from the knowledge that only women can give life and describes childbirth as 'un éclatant bonheur et non un borbier de souffrances abjectes'.<sup>75</sup> This optimistic note opens up further possibilities. Since social expectations reinforce the assumption that maternal instincts are necessary qualities in defining a woman, knowing that the exclusivity of child birth is accessible only to her increases Ch'i-ch'iao's sense of power which subsequently heightens her sense of self-confidence. At last, her biological construction has allowed her to exceed man, even if it is only in the knowledge of child bearing and other processes associated with child caring that are biologically restricted, such as lactation.

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<sup>74</sup> Beauvoir, *Le Deuxième sexe II*, p. 191.

<sup>75</sup> Anne Leclerc, *Parole de femme* (Paris: Grasset, 1974), p. 107.

Fourthly, motherhood further provides Ch'i-ch'iao with an opportunity to control the emotional and physical responses of another human being during the first stage of life and her self-confidence is, as the result of this sense of superiority over others, further enhanced. Kristeva writes that a Chinese woman 'est soumise à toute une série d'autorités – celle de sa mère et de son père, celle de la belle-mère et du beau-père, celle du mari et enfin celle du fils'.<sup>76</sup> For Ch'i-ch'iao, to release Chan'an from her hold entails relinquishing her power as a mother; a power that she has yearned for after years of repression, subordination and restriction. Kao succinctly identifies Ch'i-ch'iao's attitude towards her daughter, including foot-binding Chan'an for a year, as 'facilitat[ing] control'.<sup>77</sup>

The two mother characters use motherhood to either enhance their sense of self as a sexually valid woman or as a powerful mother. In the following section, focus is placed on how they attain a greater sense of the self by imposing upon their respective daughters their teachings of what is required in being 'their' daughter.

### 2.3 Education in *L'Asphyxie*

Chodorow remarks that the welfare and happiness of the family traditionally falls to the responsibility of the female head of the family and that, for this reason, she feels responsible for everything connected to the happiness and success of her family and children.<sup>78</sup> When she fails to create a happy family and, as a consequence of her 'failure', her daughter becomes a burden to the society, blame is automatically directed at the mother regardless of other sources which may have contributed to the situation. The wish to avoid social reproach by producing a daughter who can be

<sup>76</sup> Kristeva, *Des Chinoises*, p. 79.

<sup>77</sup> Kao, *Eileen Chang Reconsidered*, p. 93.

<sup>78</sup> Chodorow, *Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory*, p. 58.

acknowledged as a useful, if not successful, member of society can easily find an echo in *L'Asphyxie* and *Jingsuo Ji*.

Let us consider, firstly, the psychological perspectives which Maslowian theory can cast on maternal teaching as portrayed in the writing of Leduc and Chang. What emerges from the reading of both works is the violent verbal and physical abuse the mother figures direct at their respective daughters which, following Maslow's theory, risks leading the daughters into a state of unhealthy development marred by emotional deficits.<sup>79</sup> This less-than-ideal approach cannot, however, be condemned outright since humanistic psychology asserts that discipline, deprivation, frustration, pain and tragedy 'have something to do with a sense of achievement and ego strength and therefore with the sense of healthy self-esteem and self-confidence'.<sup>80</sup>

If discipline and pain are necessary elements in the development of a healthy individual, then the mother figures are surely running a winning race. In her study of *L'Asphyxie*, Hughes comments on the mother figure's cruelty and her 'capacity for violence' towards her daughter which, in one episode, verges on 'annihilatory'.<sup>81</sup> This particular episode, in which the child heroine loses an expensive umbrella and describes her mother's subsequent violent reaction, can undoubtedly be viewed as brutal discipline:<sup>82</sup>

Elle secouait mes épaules, elle secouait mes bras. Elle me projetait en avant, elle me projetait en arrière. Elle me jetait sur le côté. C'étaient autant de gestes qui me mettaient à l'Assistance, mais elle ne lâchait pas mon bras. [...] Elle recommença la même besogne. Elle disait des mots, des mots, des mots et je mourais entre chaque mot. (pp. 127-28)

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<sup>79</sup> Maslow, *Motivation and Personality*, pp. 38-56.

<sup>80</sup> Maslow, *Toward a Psychology of Being*, p. 4.

<sup>81</sup> Hughes, 'Violette Leduc's *L'Asphyxie*', p. 852

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 854.

The mother's anger is eventually ended by the arrival of the grandmother character who is immediately cast by the child heroine as her saviour: 'quand elle entrait par une porte le mal s'en allait par l'autre' (p. 130). And after having understood the cause of this brutal attack from her daughter (the child heroine's mother), we are informed that the grandmother figure replies with 'tu lui achètes de trop belles choses pour son âge' (p. 131). Through the mouth of the grandmother figure and retold by the child narrator, this critical judgment of the mother figure's action intensifies the polarity of a good and bad mother. On the one hand, the grandmother is depicted as kind, wise and a protector, and on the other hand, the mother figure appears lacking in judgment and a destroyer.

What, however, the child heroine appears to have failed to comprehend from the mother character's angry outburst is the lesson which she is being implicitly taught. Throughout *L'Asphyxie*, the child heroine repeatedly refuses to acknowledge her paternal heritage, for instance, her paternal grandfather is described as the one who is 'n'est pas le vrai' (p. 11). In so doing she is implicitly deepening her claim to illegitimacy. Hughes argues that the 'parapluie tout neuf, le plus beau de la ville' (p. 127) is the mother's attempt 'to transcend the opprobrium the society in which she lives accords women with illegitimate offspring'.<sup>83</sup> Furthermore, Hughes adds that by buying the best umbrella available, the mother is offering her child a part of society which 'she associates with the world inhabited by her aristocratic seducer'.<sup>84</sup>

With this in mind, the mother-figure's refusal to call her child by name is an indication that, perhaps, she does not consider herself capable of giving her child a sense of status or recognition within society. Indeed, when she confronts her seducer at the boulevard Poterne and remarks that 'je ne demande rien. Je me marie. Mais

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p. 854.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., p. 854.

elle...’ (p. 45), she is indirectly asking him to acknowledge his illegitimate child. This gesture can also be interpreted as a mother’s affection for her child; that is to say, the mother is attempting to offer the child a permanent sense of security by persuading the father to give his child something which only he has the power to give – his name. The mother’s subsequent anger directed at her child can be interpreted as a reaction to being rejected twice by her seducer; once as the pregnant lover and the second time as the mother of his child. It can equally be suggested that the mother is angry as a result of seeing her child’s stubborn refusal to accept her (futile) attempts at giving the child heroine a fundamental sense of well-being in knowing that she belongs.

To belong somewhere psychologically is not enough, and the mother figure also attempts to mould her daughter into an individual who is recognized by ‘les bonnes manières, la toilette’ (p. 20). There are many episodes in *L’Asphyxie* in which the child heroine’s apparent lack of composure is the catalyst for the mother figure’s anger. For instance, when the child heroine is sitting on her wooden horse at the merry-go-round: ‘Devant mon affaissement, ma mère grincerait des dents. Elle me ferait sortir en me poussant avec le manche de son parapluie. Dehors, elle éclaterait “tu ne seras jamais comme une autre!”’ (p. 21-22). The mother also does not tolerate tears in her daughter, as the mother figure’s remark when she is shopping for school uniform with the child heroine and the latter begins to weep with grief suggests: ‘mais qu’est-ce que tu as? Réponds, sauvage? Tu m’énerves! Si tu savais comme tu m’énerves!’ (p. 101).

Hughes writes that ‘the rage displayed here by the “bad” mother may simply be understood as a sign of the irritation she feels at the sight of her daughter’s

embarrassingly public unhappiness'.<sup>85</sup> Turning to Beauvoir's suggestion that women are not considered apart from their physical appearance, it can be argued that the mother figure's attitude towards her daughter is a reflection of a need to transform her daughter into a presentable person. Juxtaposed with Maslowian theory that pain and discipline increase the individual's sense of self-respect and courage to progress forward, the mother figure's desire to inflict pain upon her child can be interpreted as a desire to transform her child's physical appearance.<sup>86</sup>

For instance, in the episode when after having dressed her child, the mother sits the child on a straw-bottomed chair with her dress and petticoat pulled behind the chair. Although the child heroine remarks 'les fibres s'incruster dans mes chairs' (pp. 7-8), she must remain seated and immobile, like a dressed-up doll. Furthermore, Arcana also states that that good daughters are 'characterized by passivity, beauty, innocence, and victimization'.<sup>87</sup> This then transforms the badness in the mother and casts the mother, at least the mother's harsh treatments, in a new light by giving her a more protective and educational image.

To a certain extent, it can be argued that the mother figure is successful in instilling her views on physical appearance in her daughter, particularly in terms of how a mother should be presented. There are other female characters in *L'Asphyxie*, such as Mme Barbaroux who is always cleaning and polishing in her immaculate house, Mlle Pinteau who lives with her brother and is rumoured to be in an incestuous relationship with him, or Mme Panier who plasters her face with makeup. The depiction of these three characters by the child narrator clearly suggests that what they all have in common is, in Hughes's words, 'an uncanny strangeness'.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Hughes, 'Violette Leduc's *L'Asphyxie*', p. 860.

<sup>86</sup> Maslow, *Toward a Psychology of Being*, p. 7.

<sup>87</sup> Arcana, *Our Mothers' Daughters*, p. 39.

<sup>88</sup> Hughes, *Heterographies*, p. 21.

Furthermore, given that these three female characters are all childless, it can be implied that, in the eyes of the child narrator, being childless is an abnormal situation for a woman.

The mother figure's teaching not only tries to transform her daughter into a presentable person, thereby increasing her perceived worth to society as a mother, but when we consider the child narrator's final remark: 'c'était une mère irréprochable' (p. 188), a number of interpretations are possible. It can be argued that, despite her flaws, the mother figure does give birth to a child and she is subsequently more 'normal' than other childless women. It can also be suggested that being a single mother, and despite her questionable methods of bringing up her child, the mother figure nevertheless fulfils her responsibility as a mother by providing financially for her child. She does not abandon her child, and from this perspective, she is *irréprochable*. It is, therefore, evident that the child identifies femaleness with motherhood. From this perspective, the mother figure is not only able to satisfy her desire for society's acceptance since she is the responsible and presentable mother, but she is also achieving a more gratifying sense of self-esteem in believing that she has 'taught' her child to maintain society as it is.

#### **2.4 Education in *Jingsuo Ji***

In *Jingsuo Ji*, Ch'i-ch'iao encourages learning in her daughter Chan'an whom she enrolls at high school after much effort. Ch'i-ch'iao has followed traditional expectations of women by becoming a wife and mother, but her support for her daughter's self-improvement – and, later, her objections to a potential son-in-law – seem to imply that she does not approve of this path for her own daughter. This seems to resonate with Beauvoir's remark:

[La mère] espère racheter son infériorité en faisant de celle qu'elle regarde comme son double une créature supérieure. [...] Parfois, au contraire, elle lui interdit farouchement de lui ressembler: elle veut que son expérience serve, c'est une manière de reprendre son coup.<sup>89</sup>

Does Ch'i-ch'iao, then, want her daughter to break free from the limitations of being born a woman? Certainly, she is infuriated when Chan'an expresses a desire to leave school without completing her studies:

'Why?' asked Ch'i-ch'iao.  
 'I can't keep up, it's too hard and I'm not used to it,' replied Chan-an.  
 Ch'i-ch'iao took off one of her shoes and hit her across the face. Bitterly she says 'your father wasn't man enough, you too? You weren't born deformed but you just won't make something of yourself for me!' (p. 168)

To slap her daughter already demonstrates Ch'i-ch'iao's fury, but to use her shoe not only emphasizes her anger (she is so angry that she seized the object nearest to her), but also implies her intention of causing shame by using the most accessible soiled item worn by the dirtiest part of the body.<sup>90</sup> The intensity of this reaction suggests that her daughter's education is of great significance to Ch'i-ch'iao; it is not just a preparation for marriage, as Arcana suggests.

During a conversation between two servants of the Chiang household, we are informed that Ch'i-ch'iao is not only outspoken but her use of words are so 'country-like' and 'coarse' (p. 142) that even the servants have not heard of them before. In his work on *Jingsuo Ji*, Huang points out that 'if she [Ch'i-ch'iao] were

<sup>89</sup> Beauvoir, *Le Deuxième Sexe II*, p. 190.

<sup>90</sup> In Chinese society, feet can be perceived as erotic objects, as is the case with women's bound lotus feet. However, not only are youngsters taught from an early age not to put their feet on tables and never to touch other people's heads with their feet, Confucian doctrine dictates one of the filial gestures of a son to his parents is to wash their feet. This suggests that feet are dirty and need to be cleansed. Furthermore, most modern Chinese families continue to refrain from wearing outdoor shoes within the house for fear of bringing dirt, both literal and metaphorical, into the house.



able to mind her manners, perhaps [she] could have won the respect of the Chiang family'.<sup>91</sup> But considering the fact that Ch'i-ch'iao was born into a merchant family selling sesame oil and is therefore unlikely to have received a formal education, she cannot be expected to be as refined as her two sisters-in-law who are from aristocratic families. Even if she attempts to refine her ways (which she does not do at all), I remain unconvinced that she could win the respect of the Chiang family. Shirley Paolini and Chen-shen Yen point out, in their study of madness and Chang's female heroines, that 'in the hierarchical pecking order of the household, she (Ch'i-ch'iao) ranks only above the servants'.<sup>92</sup> Her humble background, which comes with the implication that she has not received an adequate level of education, has cemented her status within the Chiang household.

Having suffered due to a lack of learning, Ch'i-ch'iao places importance on Chan'an's academic success. This suggests that, on the one hand, Ch'i-ch'iao is trying to protect her daughter from the same fate that she had suffered herself and is manifesting maternal love. On the other hand, with her outburst 'you just won't make something of yourself for me!', it is apparent that she projects her needs onto her daughter and identifies personally with the result. Any failures by the daughter are, subsequently, regarded by Ch'i-ch'iao as her own personal defeat.

One could ask, what of her son? Kristeva describes women in Chinese societies as individuals who 'ne se réalisent qu'en étant filles chéries de leurs pères ou vieilles mères trônant à travers leurs fils'.<sup>93</sup> Chanbai is, by Chinese society's standard, his mother's trophy and the (male) representative of his immediate family. It is therefore more logical and more to Ch'i-ch'iao's advantage to invest in her son's education.

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<sup>91</sup> Huang, 'A Study of Chang', p. 49.

<sup>92</sup> Shirley J. Paolini and Chen-shen Yen, 'Moon, Madness, and Mutilation in Eileen Chang's English Translation of *The Golden Cangue*, in *Tamkang Review*, 19 (1988), 547-57 (p. 552).

<sup>93</sup> Kristeva, *Des Chinoises*, pp. 105-6.

Indeed, we are informed that prior to her daughter entering secondary school, the mother has already tried but failed to encourage her son Chanbai to enrol in classes, the reason being that he prefers 'playing cards and visiting theatres, and trying to sing' (p. 167) than going to school. As a last resort, Ch'i-ch'iao turns her attention to Chan'an: 'Ch'i-ch'iao is helpless and can only send Chan'an to Hu-Fan Girls' High School' (p. 167). Maternal love, or at least a desire to prevent her daughter from suffering her fate, becomes, at this stage, ambiguous.

Her expression of anger after Chan'an decides to drop out of school can firstly be seen as an unconscious manifestation of her disappointment in a son who is socially advantaged to succeed but who has misused the freedom he was given by becoming a son who can be described as a promoter of decadent Chinese society. It can also be interpreted as a mother's disappointment with a daughter who seemingly will not attempt to develop academically. It can also suggest that Ch'i-ch'iao's frustration with Chan'an's academic failure derives from the fear of being perceived by others as a failing mother who cannot produce brilliant offspring. However, since she is only angry with Chan'an, this is an indication that she holds the traditional Chinese view of favouring boys over girls. In other words, even though she is a woman, she is subconsciously sharing the view of the patriarchal society.

As Ch'i-ch'iao has already experienced social and gender limitations, it is surprising that she should inflict the same restrictions upon her daughter, yet this further highlights her desire to be recognized by society for being a socially compliant, rather than a supportive mother. This is similar to the mother figure in *L'Asphyxie* where the child heroine is taught to identify femaleness with motherhood. The consequence of desiring to exhibit their ability to produce successful offspring under the illusion that they will be able to acquire a sense of identity is the development of a sense of guilt. This becomes particularly salient when the mothers

focus on demonstrating their ability as mothers rather than concentrating on the emotional and physical need of their child. This is discussed in the following section.

## 2.5 Motherhood and guilt in *L'Asphyxie*

Lacanian theory proposes that a newly born infant relies on the mother – his ‘sensation manager’ – to manage ‘his pain and pleasure’.<sup>94</sup> The effect of having his or her need satisfied is described by Klein as ‘pleasant phantasies’, whereas when the child’s need is ignored or satisfaction is delayed, ‘destructive phantasies’ occur.<sup>95</sup>

In *L'Asphyxie*, the mother figure rejects the power she is supposed to have over the child narrator by delegating the management of her daughter’s pain and pleasure to an institution. For instance, the mother figure refuses to allow the child heroine to leave the boarding school and return home to her (now married with a legitimate son) during Whitsun. Instead, the child heroine is left at the boarding school with a maid and a private-study assistant with no family. The child heroine reacts with disbelief and rage: ‘je laissai tomber ma valise. Elle (l’assistante) comprit combien c’était pénible pour moi. [...] Je retournai au vestiaire. Je me déshabillai, de rage, je mis mon tablier d’étude’ (pp. 174-75). And it is this group, consisting of a maid (an orphan), that forms a temporary family unit for our child heroine, now also an orphan who has been rejected by her own family. Where previously it is suggested that, as an illegitimate child, she does not belong to any man, her mother’s action forces her to realize that, in fact, she does not belong with her mother either.

Alienation is a dominant theme in the novel. Cries of frustration such as: ‘elle m’énervé. Elle m’énervé’ (p. 74), and ‘sors’ (p. 104) are the mother’s words to her

<sup>94</sup> Philip Hill, *Lacan for Beginners* (New York: Writers and Readers, 1999), p. 181.

<sup>95</sup> Melanie Klein, ‘The Relationship to Ourselves and to Others’, in *Love, Hate and Reparation*, p. 61.

child, retold by the child narrator. Not satisfied with verbally banishing her daughter from her world, the mother also sends the young heroine to a boarding school that is just five minutes away. This has a profound effect upon the child's sense of security, and is poignantly obvious when, towards the end of the novel, upon being asked 'pourquoi êtes-vous pensionnaire?', she reflects on the same question:

Je m'étais posé la même question avant elles. Quand j'avais mal à la gorge et que nous montions nous soigner à la sinistre infirmerie, quand mes lèvres se séparaient pour les gros bords d'un bol d'eau vinaigrée, quand je passais mes deux heures d'étude à somnoler contre le radiateur pour adoucir les élancements d'oreille, je me posais cette question. (p. 172)

This deliberate alienation by the mother, however, poses contradictory attitudes. On the one hand, it can be argued that the mother's primary intention in sending her daughter to boarding school is to gain freedom from motherhood. In the child heroine's account, she is her mother's 'boulet' (p. 46), and being sent away allows the mother a period of relief. It can equally be argued that being at boarding school, the mother need not be reminded constantly of her shame and can live in a fantasy world where she can lead a respectable life. Psychological explanation highlights, however, that the deliberate distancing of oneself from an other is an unconscious attempt at distancing oneself from guilt. For instance, Diane Tice and Roy Baumeister argue that 'people often try to reduce guilt precisely by distancing themselves psychologically from their victims'.<sup>96</sup> The mother figure does more than that; she also distances herself physically from her daughter, thereby implying that the degree of guilt must be overwhelming for the mother.

In her study of *Violette Leduc*, de Courtivron describes the child heroine as 'la

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<sup>96</sup> Diane Tice and Roy Baumeister, 'The Privacy of the Interpersonal Self', in *Individual Self, Relation Self, Collective Self*, ed. by Constantine Sedikides (Philadelphia: Psychology Press, 2001), p. 81.

plaie de sa mère'.<sup>97</sup> In sending this 'wound' away to boarding school, the mother is able to momentarily recover from the shame of having been betrayed, as well as from the guilt of having delegated her maternal responsibility to someone else. In my view, it can equally be argued that by physically distancing herself from the child heroine, the mother figure is unconsciously saving her daughter from her – the mother's – physical and violent manifestations of frustration. From this perspective, maternal love for her child cannot be categorically denied.

## 2.6 Motherhood and guilt in *Jingsuo Ji*

Ch'i-ch'iao is depicted as a woman who, in spite of being motherless, cannot reject motherhood, in particular child bearing. She does, however, entrust the care of her children to nannies, and later, once Chanbai has reached the marrying age, he is encouraged to take a wife of his mother's choice to care for him, thereupon relieving Ch'i-ch'iao of her responsibility as a carer. With her daughter, however, the situation is more complex.

Even though Ch'-ch'iao uses all of her connections in order to send Chan'an to school (though not to a boarding school), she is nevertheless very reluctant to separate from her daughter, as is clearly demonstrated when Ch'i-ch'iao decides to bind her feet: 'You are thirteen years of age, foot binding may be a little late but you can blame me for this delay. I'll do it now, perhaps there is still time' (p. 166). Foot binding in ancient China was considered a prerequisite for girls wishing to find a husband, but set at the end of the Qing dynasty and the beginning of the Communist era when iconoclastic rejection of traditional beliefs was considered essential in the modernization of a society, the mother character's desire to continue with this dying

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<sup>97</sup> De Courtivron, 'Violette Leduc: L'enfermé pèlerine', p. 49.

practice suggests an alternative motive: that of wanting to restrict her daughter's mobility so that she cannot leave the house and will remain with her mother.

The daughter is further prevented from leaving the mother when Ch'i-ch'iao explicitly and fiercely expresses her rejection of her daughter's suitor, when, on the contrary, the mother character should be eager to embrace her daughter's success in finding a husband which, subsequently, has the effect of confirming her valid teaching as a mother. Commenting on Ch'i-ch'iao's angry reaction towards her daughter's suitor, Guo points out that in explaining to her daughter that 'all men in this world are bastards, you need to take care, [since] who doesn't want your money?' (p. 179), the mother character is in reality trying to prevent her daughter from an unhappy marriage.<sup>98</sup> It cannot be denied that Ch'i-ch'iao understands fully the consequences of not marrying for love, yet to continually deny her daughter the possibility of finding a husband resonates with Beauvoir's theory that the mother 'n'accepte pas que son double devienne une autre'.<sup>99</sup>

Chodorow suggests that when a mother is able to establish relationships outside of her immediate family circle, she 'is not invested in keeping her daughter from individuating and becoming less dependent'.<sup>100</sup> In this context, it may be inferred that the mother protagonist in the Chang text lives a very restricted life with few positive interactions with other individuals, and she needs her daughter's presence to keep from being alone. From this perspective, her actions do not reflect a mother's love but suggests a dominant desire to satisfy her need for a sense of security.

### 3 Conclusion: The value of motherhood

<sup>98</sup> Yu-wen Guo, 'A comparative study of *Jingsuo Ji* and *Yuan Nu*', p. 153.

<sup>99</sup> Beauvoir, *Le Deuxième sexe II*, p. 191.

<sup>100</sup> Chodorow, *Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory*, p. 62.

Let us now place the texts examined above in direct relation to Maslowian and feminist theory, in order to see how text and theory might further challenge and/or enrich each other.

Chodorow suggests that the difficulty in establishing a female identity is not due to the ‘inaccessibility and negative definition of this identity, or its assumption by denial’, but to the ‘identification with a negatively valued gender category, and an ambivalently experienced maternal figure, whose mothering and femininity, often conflictual for the mother herself, are accessible, but devalued’.<sup>101</sup> When the daughter is unable to recognize the worth of her mother, she is unable to recognize the values of motherhood and its significance which, consequently, devalues the care and nurturing she has received. This eventually results in the daughter degrading her own worth, as seen with Chan’an in *Jingsuo Ji* who claims that she is not intelligent enough to keep up with her school work, or equally, with the child heroine in *L’Asphyxie* who comments on being clumsy, and by not divulging her name presents herself as a character without a recognizable identity.

In our readings of both Leduc and Chang, we have seen that, instead of being viewed as individuals, women are seen by others as objects who are unable to exercise their desires for self-enhancement as subjects and, at the same time, are subjugated into playing out the roles they have been assigned to. Maslow asserts that an understanding of the individual is essential to being appreciated and it is this appreciation of being regarded as a subject which elevates self-value.<sup>102</sup>

Categorizing the individual is, on the contrary, detrimental to the self-worth of an individual, yet socially and culturally, women are generally referred to as child bearers and carers. Although such categorization of women as an essential tool for

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., pp. 110-11.

<sup>102</sup> Maslow, ‘Resistance to be Rubricized’ in *Towards a Psychology of Being*, p. 126.

the continuation of the family is unavoidable, they are not automatically recognized, both socially and culturally, as individuals with unique characteristics and needs; and even though they may accept being perceived as useful objects, their role as mothers is not necessarily one they have freely chosen, as demonstrated by Ch'i-Ch'iao and the mother figure in *L'Asphyxie*. According to Arcana, this submission to categorization is not purely a circumstance of society, but considerable blame rests with the mothers who 'condition their daughters toward behaviour that is safe and therefore unchallenging to male domination'.<sup>103</sup> From this perspective, motherhood does not increase a woman's sense of self-worth.

Furthermore, the mother's teaching is, at times, contradicted by her actions. For example, the mother figure in *L'Asphyxie* warns her daughter of the wickedness of men and promotes this disdain in her child, yet marries to become a wife and a mother (with a legitimate child). Equally, Ch'i-ch'iao warns her daughter of the evil in men and their greed for her wealth yet she confesses to loving her brother-in-law, despite his flaws, and prefers to ignore the reality that he is, and has always been, only after her money.

Inconsistency, however, does not go unnoticed by their respective daughters who perceive the double standards adopted by the mother figures as manipulative and devaluing. This is demonstrated in the depiction by the child narrator in *L'Asphyxie* of the sickening transformation the mother figure goes through at the fair when a strange man approaches them, or when at the uniform store, the child narrator describes her mother's behaviour towards the shop assistant as a metamorphosis which 'me dégoûtait' (p. 101). Similarly, in *Jingsuo Ji*, Chan'an chooses to leave her high school so that she will not be embarrassed by her mother and will not 'lose face in front of her class mates' (p. 167). Chan'an also ends her relationship with her

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<sup>103</sup> Arcana, *Our Mothers' Daughters*, p. 45.



suitor for fear of what her mother's irrational behaviour might do to their love. The daughters may critically judge their respective mother's actions, yet it seems clear that the mother figures' inconsistencies are a form of self-protection.

One explanation for the refusal of women to acknowledge their self-deception is the compensation which motherhood grants them as assumed at least by the mother character in Leduc's work and by Ch'i-ch'iao. Among other rewards assumed to form part of the marital package, such as being given an identity and a social status, motherhood allows women to finally proclaim to society their validity as a gendered individual. Beauvoir proposes that 'la raison de leur (femmes) existence est là, dans leur ventre, et leur donne une parfaite impression de plénitude'.<sup>104</sup> Alison Fell quotes John S. Ransom, who asserts that people establish a 'field of activity within which individuals recognize themselves as subjects of a certain kind – as wife, patient, student, husband, psychiatrist, professor'.<sup>105</sup> Together with Ransom's suggestion that women are conditioned by society to recognize themselves as mothers, as well as Tice's and Baumeister's comment on the need for the 'public self to provide stability to the private self', it appears that, despite the unfavourable values of motherhood, women can nevertheless achieve a positive self-image and enhance their sense of self-esteem through obtaining society's approval of having executed satisfactorily the role of a mother.<sup>106</sup> Such assumption resonates with our reading of Leduc and Chang in so far as there are no depictions of negative social judgments surrounding the mother figures' physical treatments of their respective daughter in *L'Asphyxie* and *Jingsuo Ji*.

Miller argues that self-esteem can be achieved when the mother role is

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<sup>104</sup> Beauvoir, *Le Deuxième sexe II*, p. 164.

<sup>105</sup> Alison Fell, *Liberty, Equality, Maternity in Beauvoir, Leduc and Ernaux*, p. 41.

<sup>106</sup> Tice and Baumeister, 'The Privacy of the Interpersonal Self', in *Individual Self, Relation Self, Collective Self*, p. 80.

implemented voluntarily and with a positive approach<sup>107</sup> In other words, she suggests that having a positive perspective on the role depends largely on the establishment of self-value. This is successful only when the woman is able to distinguish between ‘feeling exactly what she should want’ and ‘being led to believe (that her situation) is what she should want’.<sup>108</sup> Contentment can therefore only be maximized when gratification of self-esteem is achieved through the choices made freely by the individual and without pressure from society. In the case of the mother figure in *L’Asphyxie*, it is shown that she does not wish to be a mother (at least, not to her illegitimate daughter) and her displays of resentment, which are directed only at her daughter in a manner that is both violent and denigrating, implies that she does not perceive motherhood as a means of heightening her sense of self-esteem.

On the other hand, although social pressure pushes Ch’i-ch’iao towards motherhood, she nevertheless takes action to become pregnant. However, she is seen to oscillate between the ‘good’ and ‘bad’ mother role throughout the story which is an indication that although she identifies her sense of self-worth with being a ‘good’ mother, her authentic desire suggests otherwise. That is to say, she does not desire motherhood at all. This is touched upon by Kristeva, who states that even though motherhood is intertwined with a woman’s identity, this is particularly salient in Chinese societies.<sup>109</sup> Taking into account the fact that *Jingsuo Ji* ends with Ch’-ch’iao dying in the knowledge that she is hated by her children, by her maternal family and by the Chiang household, it can be suggested that Chang wishes to highlight the unacceptable, if not damaging, strategy of focusing on achieving a sense of self-value through motherhood when the woman is not receptive to the idea of becoming a mother in the first place.

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<sup>107</sup> Miller, *Toward a New Psychology of Women*, p. 35.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 95.

<sup>109</sup> Kristeva, *Des Chinoises*, p. 225.

Let us close by exploring the perspectives which Maslowian theory can cast on maternal ambivalence as portrayed in the writing of Leduc and Chang. Maslow asserts that love is a prerequisite for healthy development, so that if love is not granted to individuals at an early stage of life, they will grow up in a state of emotional deficit.<sup>110</sup> According to such a view, if society's (mythical) standards of motherhood are ideologically rather than emotionally based, the mother figures cannot be expected to perform their role with so-called maternal love as they have neither been taught nor experienced it.

Furthermore, compromising one's own desire in order to meet the expectations of society reflects a need for belonging and love which, according to Maslow, can only be gratified by others, leading to a continual fear of external forces and the perpetuation of existing situations. The mother figures are shown to accept motherhood, in one way or another, as a requirement of their gender, rooted in the nature of reality; yet the inadequate show of joy manifests a hostility to their designated role as child bearers. Motherhood is sought as a means of achieving social acknowledgement, but the fact that child-bearing can only be experienced by the mother makes it difficult for society to comprehend the sacrifices, hardship and pains the mother had to endure. Until the daughter becomes the mother and experiences motherhood, she is unable to fully appreciate what has been for her an abstract concept. This, at least, seems to be the case with the child heroine in *L'Asphyxie*, who only sees violence and coldness in her mother, and with Chan'an in *Jingsuo Ji* who regards her mother as unreliable.

When motherhood can be chosen freely by women, this will, from a Maslowian perspective, have a positive impact on women's identity development in that they will be better equipped (emotionally) to progress towards a more self-enhancing need.

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<sup>110</sup> Maslow, *Motivation and Personality*, p. 53.

This resonates with the character of Ch'i-ch'iao, as portrayed by Chang, since as a consequence of a highly deficient-motivated need for love from her society, the heroine is unable to obtain a sense of self and must constantly search to fulfil her basic need for love. The more she feels the need to gratify this need for love, the less likely she will be to reject motherhood.

In contrast, through the mother figure in *L'Asphyxie*, Leduc is manifesting the belief that, in order to achieve a sense of individualism, women need to break away from social values by adopting the growth-motivated need for self-development. An important factor in the development of growth-motivated need is focusing on the needs of the self and placing the interests of the self before others. This is explored in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER III

### **Individualism: Motivational forces behind the development of identity in the female characters of *La Bâtarde* and *Love in a Fallen City*<sup>1</sup>**

This chapter, which deals with the question of individual and collective identity in Leduc and Chang, will be divided into three parts. In the first part, we will confront feminist, psychologists' and Maslowian perspectives concerning individual and collective identities. This will create a framework for the readings that follow. In the second part, we will see how Leduc and Chang explore the problem of individualism, especially as it is encountered and negotiated by female characters. To do so, we will have recourse to the following oppositions, which both authors bring into play: the self versus the other; the individual versus the collective; self-interest versus sacrifice. The text by Leduc to be analysed will be *La Bâtarde*. For Chang, *Love in a Fallen City* will be examined. In our third part, we will draw out significant contrasts

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<sup>1</sup> Eileen Chang, '傾城之戀', *傾城之戀 Love in a Fallen City* (Taipei: Crown, 1968), pp. 187-231. All future references are my own translation in English taken from the original text.

between Chang's and Leduc's treatment of the question of individual identity.

## 1 Feminist and Maslowian Perspectives

### 1.1 Feminist theories: identity versus patriarchy

According to many theorists, women continue to be perceived as objects, regardless of their social background, age, appearance and profession. For instance, Jane M. Ussher, in her study of female sexuality, suggests that woman is acknowledged as an object, not as an agent, and that the objectification of woman in the material world is maintained 'through the perpetuation of negative images that are read as "natural", rather than as contrived'.<sup>2</sup> Nancy Chodorow asserts that since woman is given such a clearly defined yet devaluing framework, she is resolved that her designated role in society is a devalued one.<sup>3</sup>

This situation, according to Chodorow, is further aggravated by the woman's own acceptance of this perceived worth.<sup>4</sup> That is to say, in Chodorow's view, the majority of women from various socio-cultural backgrounds still view domesticity as their principal function in life. Although domestic tasks are not signs of weakness, they are functions that are, as mentioned in the previous chapter, perceived as being outside the world of public power. They therefore entail a lower status for the person who undertakes such functions. Since it is usually the woman who is expected, in most cases by her society, to engage in these tasks, she is inevitably reinforcing and

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<sup>2</sup> Jane M. Ussher, 'Theorizing Female Sexuality: Social Constructionist and Post-structuralist Accounts', in *Female Sexuality: Psychology, Biology, and Social*, ed. by Precilla Y.L. Choi and Paula Nicolson (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester, 1994), p. 151.

<sup>3</sup> Chodorow, *Feminism*, p. 44.

<sup>4</sup> Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering*, p. 31.

perpetuating her relative weakness. This suggests that, to a significant extent, it is the woman's own acceptance of this subordinate social role, over and above society's perception of what she is supposed to be or who she is expected to be, which exacerbates the female search for an individualized *I* identity.

But this critique should not lead us into adopting a false dichotomy. An un-nuanced reading of feminist theory might consist in opposing traditional gender roles with a utopian ideal, in which each individual woman could somehow choose her identity without reference to social norms or collective identity of any kind. But to develop an individual identity without regards to the expectations and norms of society carries the potential risk of creating a marginalized individual. Mary Jacobus highlights the danger a woman faces of even attempting to develop an identity which is not already given by patriarchy by stating that refusal of phallogentricity 'risks reinscribing the feminine as a yet more marginal madness or nonsense'.<sup>5</sup> Luce Irigaray examines this problem from another angle: what happens when women simply aim to do what men do? According to her, for a woman to grasp at a traditionally masculine role would still leave her seeking identity within patriarchy: 'il ne s'agit pas pour autant d'élaborer un autre "concept" – à moins pour une femme de renoncer à son sexe et de vouloir parler comme les hommes'.<sup>6</sup> The suggestion that woman should renounce her sex in order to achieve a more masculine voice is a setback to her attempt at achieving a positive identity development. Not only as it widens further the gap between man's superiority and woman's inferiority but also because it implies that woman should be ashamed of her sex.

We need to be wary, then, of a number of assumptions. One is that individual identities can be formed which can exist independently of group identities. Another is

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<sup>5</sup> Mary Jacobus, *Reading Woman: Essays in Feminist Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1986), p. 26.

<sup>6</sup> Irigaray, *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un*, p. 122.

that the only group identities available are patriarchal. Many theorists (including psychoanalytic thinkers) insist that an individual identity can only be achieved in relation to a collective identity or identities, but this surely does not leave the passive assumption of traditional gender roles as the only option. For instance, technological advancements continue to break biological boundaries and it has become more possible for a woman to develop an identity beyond roles that are traditionally designated to women. Furthermore, by understanding her need and by seeking a role which allows her to optimize her potential, a woman can be said to be actively seeking a place in society which benefits her. Whether the role she chooses is perceived as a traditional gender role then becomes less significant.

## 1.2 Maslowian and other theories

Maslow himself, as we saw in the introduction to this thesis, was aware that he had not taken sufficient account of gender in his thinking about the Hierarchy of Needs. However, the main aspects of Maslowian thought that are relevant here are his views on how individual capacities can be maximized.<sup>7</sup> It is worth restating that, according to Maslow, once the individual achieves an overall sense of well-being, this can then help to accentuate, as well as encourage, the need for self-discovery.<sup>8</sup> Such self-growth, he claims, can be shown to be closely associated with happiness; he insists that the pursuit of personal desires is directly beneficial to self-growth. In this context, passivity is not, and cannot be, compatible with high levels of satisfaction.<sup>9</sup> But, by presenting personal desires that conflict with gender roles as somehow

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<sup>7</sup> Abraham Maslow, 'Self-Actualizing people: A Study of Psychological Health', in *Motivation and Personality*, pp. 149-180.

<sup>8</sup> Maslow, *Toward a Psychology of Being*, pp. 31-45

<sup>9</sup> Maslow, *Toward a Psychology of Being*, p. 45.



unnatural or as wrong (for instance, in the previous chapter we looked at individuals refusing to procreate), he does not address the question of whether patriarchy blocks the individual's desire to seek self-development.

It is worth mentioning a number of other theories of identity-formation which can be used to complement Maslow's view. According to the psychologist Mario Jacoby, self-growth and happiness depend on having the capacity to identify and fulfil a desire as well as reflecting upon the process via which the desire is achieved.<sup>10</sup> Erik Erikson points to the need for a degree of independent thinking which combines 'having a conscious sense of individual uniqueness, an unconscious striving for a continuity of experience, and a solidarity with a group's ideals'.<sup>11</sup> Constantine Sedikides and Marilynn B. Brewer also associate independent thinking with collectivity and how relationships with others influence the development of an independent identity.<sup>12</sup>

Arthur Aron and Tracy McLaughlin-Volpe examine in detail how the self develops in relation to others, focusing in particular on the motivational forces behind the individual's choice of action within a collective group.<sup>13</sup> They suggest that desire can either appear as an 'independent desire' which affects only the individual, or it can take form as a 'collective desire' which involves the way in which the desire affects the individual both as a singular subject and as a member of a group.<sup>14</sup> Although Aron and McLaughlin-Volpe agree that both desires can be present simultaneously, they nevertheless hint at a greater likelihood of achieving a

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<sup>10</sup> Mario Jacoby, *Individuation and Narcissism: The Psychology of the Self in Jung and Kohut*, trans. by Myron Gubitz (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 98. Hereafter referred to as *Individuation and Narcissism*.

<sup>11</sup> Erik H. Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis* (London: Faber, 1968), p. 208.

<sup>12</sup> Constantine Sedikides and Marilynn B. Brewer, *Individual Self, Relational Self, Collective Self*, p. 77.

<sup>13</sup> Arthur Aron and Tracy McLaughlin-Volpe, 'Including Others in the Self', in *Individual Self, Relational Self, Collective Self*, pp. 93-104.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 93.

better or improved self when the individual focuses more intently on achieving fulfilment as a collective individual.<sup>15</sup>

Both ‘independent’ and ‘collective’ desire, so conceived, concentrate on the fundamental concept of the self, as well as on an inherent desire to survive, or to exist, in one role or another.<sup>16</sup> But ‘collective’ desire is the personalized or individuated form of a group desire, and therefore inclines the individual to promote group welfare. In brief, within ‘collective’ desire, although the subject does not depend (entirely) on the approval of others for a sense of satisfaction, self-criticism is aligned with the group perspective, and adherence to certain rules form the parameters within which the subject develops. In ‘collective’ desire, there is no absolute dichotomy between ‘individual’ and group, for the individual in a collective group understands ‘collective’ desire as meaning individual desire that is pursued within collectively agreed parameters.

The question of survival in the twentieth century is raised by psychologists Harry C. Triandis and David Tragimow.<sup>17</sup> According to Triandis and Tragimow, collective life offers the advantage of enhanced group survival, whereas independent life takes advantage of different ‘modern lifestyles’.<sup>18</sup> Collective life mirrors the more primitive communal life in which the survival of the family as an entity is based upon the division of labour and the enhancement of group strength. This carries the advantage, it is argued, of minimizing the time and effort an individual needs to use to ensure his/her survival, together with that of the group to which he/she belongs. Meanwhile, the individual may maximize his/her unique expertise.

This, however, implies an imbalance of knowledge and the presence of

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 93.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 102.

<sup>17</sup> Harry C. Triandis and David Tragimow, ‘Cross-national Prevalence of Collectivism’, in *Individual Self, Relational Self, Collective Self*, pp. 260-69.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 268. What is meant by ‘modern lifestyle’ will be discussed further below.

weaknesses and deficiencies since the individual is encouraged to specialize in one particular know-how whilst relying on other members of the collective group to compensate for his/her lack of skill in other areas. This leaves the individual dependent on the group. The individual may even fear being eventually abandoned by the group. To overcome this fear and in order to secure his/her own survival, it becomes necessary for the individual to prioritize the interest of the group by sacrificing personal desires.

Independent life, on the other hand, is more associated with modern-day living, which entails survival through individual strengths; strengths that are not limited to physical capabilities and which are not dictated by a division of labour from above/outside. Thus an individual does not specialize in one particular skill but must master all skills in order to survive in an independent fashion. This person is therefore not as dependent on others and is more in control of how he/she wishes to live, but this carries the disadvantage of having to spend extra time and effort on gaining new knowledge when it could have been devoted to perfecting previously acquired skills. The individual is consequently adequately competent in all fields but insufficiently proficient to compete with his/her counterpart in collective living.

As suggested earlier, identity development is closely associated with the achievement of a sense of fulfilment, yet the possibility of (healthy) self-interest is, at times, smothered by the individual's sense of morality, to the detriment of personal development. Remarking on the effects of social pressure on an individual and how group life promotes morality, Tice and Baumeister argue that conforming to a life of moral standards is, for the majority of people, the easiest form of cohabiting with others.<sup>19</sup> But then moral standards function primarily as a form of

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<sup>19</sup> Dianne M. Tice and Roy F. Baumeister, 'The Primacy of the Interpersonal Self', in *Individual Self, Relational Self, Collective Self*, p. 82.

control/self-control benefiting, as a priority, the group. When self-interest comes into conflict with the community's moral standards, a degree of sacrifice, in most cases self-sacrifice, becomes necessary for the individual.

Such views challenge any simplistic dichotomy opposing individual and collective development; but they do not take sufficient account of the power of traditional gender roles in giving a particular kind of collective identity, based on gender roles, excessive weight. To find the interface between such theories and feminist critiques of gender requires careful steps. Let us first approach gender identity with the psychoanalyst and feminist Karen Horney, a critic of Freud, who suggests that if a woman is perceived to be under the influence of patriarchal society, she must also be conditioned into accepting the needs of society as her own.<sup>20</sup> Following Maslowian and Jacobian theories of fulfilment, any sense of happiness that she experiences then can only represent a form of pseudo-satisfaction. Her experience of happiness is inauthentic and, ironically, serves only to accentuate her identity as 'man-made'.

This 'man-made' identity is further validated by the assumption that a woman is more suited for a specific role. The importance of gender role is explained by Erikson:

In what respects a female anywhere can be said to be 'weaker' is a matter to be decided not on the basis of comparative tests of isolated muscles, capacities, or traits but on that of the functional fitness of each item for an organism which, in turn, fits into an ecology of divided function.<sup>21</sup>

He argues that society needs to accept and thus surpass the physical differences

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<sup>20</sup> Karen Horney, 'The Flight from Womanhood: The Masculinity-complex in Women, as Viewed by Men and by Women', in *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 7 (1926): 324-339 (p. 326).

<sup>21</sup> Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis*, p. 280.

between the two sexes and allow each sex to develop according to their natural biological constructions.

This account, however, seems too slanted towards biological essentialism to allow it to be reconciled with the accounts of many feminists. Toril Moi, however, shows the way forward with the remark ‘intellectual life is always crucially shaped by its political and social context’.<sup>22</sup> This implies that as politics and society are predominantly influenced by patriarchal demands, women’s identity development must also be intrinsically intertwined with patriarchy. The works of Leduc and Chang can throw light on where the interface between feminism and theories of development may be found. Bearing these various theorists in mind, then, let us now turn to examine Leduc’s and Chang’s portrayal of female characters pursuing an individual identity.

## **2. Individualism in Leduc and Chang**

### **2.1 *La Bâtarde***

In the previous chapter, we have seen that, in *La Bâtarde*, Violette herself (and, to an extent, others as she portrays them) is represented as being acutely aware of the socially sanctioned roles which are indicated to her, first as a girl and then as a woman. We have also seen, however, that she repeatedly moves beyond or between them; indeed moves into the wrong ones (from the point of view of social norms). This, perhaps, is not a surprising element since, as Elissa Gelfand suggests in her study of Leduc’s sense of identity in *La Bâtarde*, the protagonist Violette is

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<sup>22</sup> Moi, *French Feminist Thought: A Reader*, p. 1.

marginalized from birth and can more easily embody or reject a multitude of social roles: ‘Leduc responds to a multiplicity of otherness – she is illegitimate, lesbian, mad, often poor and a woman[.] [S]he ultimately makes negativity and rejection the very basis of her self-affirmation’.<sup>23</sup> However, Gelfand’s statement does not take into account Violette’s relationship with Gabriel or other male characters in *La Batârde*, and nor does she provide details of the way in which she perceives Violette to be mad. It is clear, though, that being marginalized does allow Violette to manifest more easily her sense of individualism. She thereby resists and survives the pressure of social norms.

Having left school, Violette deviates from the socially approved pathway that leads from childhood into adulthood, and (via marriage) into motherhood. This is especially clear in the case of her abortion which is, by definition, a refusal to become a mother. However, in Violette’s case, it seems also to be a refusal to cease to be a child. Berthe tends to Violette when she becomes ill after her abortion, and Violette willingly accepts that they should resume the mutual roles of mother and child. But when Berthe becomes ill in turn, to the point where ‘elle s’était surmenée lorsqu’elle m’avait soignée’ (p. 469), Violette does not wish to become her mother’s carer. She does not visit her sick mother, let alone look after her. Even though Violette acknowledges that she has caused her mother’s illness, stating blankly: ‘j’étais responsable’ (p. 469), she nevertheless leaves her mother alone in her flat under the care of strangers. This strongly suggests that she refuses reciprocity because she does not wish to move from the position of helpless child to that of capable adult. The original relationship to Berthe remains a relationship of child to mother. Meanwhile, she remains child-like and irresponsible in relation to her lover,

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<sup>23</sup> Elissa Gelfand, ‘Resetting the Margins: The Outsider in French Literature and Culture’, in *Critical Issues in Foreign Language Instruction*, ed. by Ellen Silber (New York: Garland, 1991), pp. 200-232 (204).

Hermine.

In the earlier chapter we have seen that Violette becomes financially dependent on and pampered by Hermine. Throughout this phase – from the moment Violette is diagnosed with *trachéite* (p. 245) until she receives the telegram from Hermine telling her that their relationship is over (p. 313) – Hermine behaves as the parent/mother to the child Violette. And by enacting the role of the child, Violette manifests first and foremost her acceptance of her worth as perceived by Hermine. Violette is child-like, too, when she blames Hermine for all her failures:

Hermine surveillante d'internat, Hermine qui étudiait le *Concerto italien* dans le Jardin d'enfants pouvait éviter, éloigner, repousser la pensionnaire Violette Leduc. J'aurais eu, c'est sûr, mon certificat d'études secondaires, je serais devenue institutrice. Hermine pouvait me chasser de son box la nuit où j'allai la retrouver. Elle serait devenue professeur de musique, j'aurais enseigné. Renvoyée du collège, elle m'écrivit la première par l'intermédiaire d'une élève; c'est ainsi qu'à mon tour je fus renvoyée, et que j'échouai dans un lycée de Paris au niveau plus élevé; je fus recalée à l'oral de mon diplôme de fin d'études secondaires. (pp. 321-22)

In Violette's account, Hermine is not only responsible for her expulsion from school but, amongst other 'could have beens', she is also blamed for Violette's academic failure.

This sudden attention to her academic achievements is puzzling since we are informed quite early on in the story that she doesn't care about her studies: 'je suis la plus mauvaise élève du grand dortoir. Cela ne me fait ni froid ni chaud. Je déteste la directrice, je déteste la couture, la gymnastique, la chimie, je déteste tout' (pp. 97-8). When we juxtapose this ascription of blame with her initial indifference to academic

achievement, Violette's behaviour is revealed to be childish, verging on farcical. It cannot be denied that blaming Hermine is Violette's angry response to being abandoned; but in refusing to acknowledge the sacrifices Hermine makes for her, such as using her savings to buy the expensive eel-coloured suit for her, or giving up a career in music so that they can be lovers, Violette is displaying the behaviour of an individual whose interests lie primarily in achieving what pleases or benefits her personally.

Leduc evokes Violette's great distress and helplessness when Hermine leaves her: 'j'avais mal partout et nulle part. Dans le centre de Paris. Je ne la (Hermine) retrouverai pas. J'ai mal, j'ai mal, j'ai mal. Si je pouvais pleurer. Je ne pouvais pas pleurer' (p. 314). If Hermine ever accepted to mother Violette, it is ironic that, after having become totally dependent on Hermine (for food, shelter, clothing and general affirmation of her worth and capacity to inspire love), Violette is abandoned; this would seem to suggest that Violette had played her role as a dependent only too well. Leduc also evokes Violette's great anger when Hermine abandons her: 'Neuf ans. Hermine. Neuf ans, neuf ans, neuf ans, neuf ans, neuf ans, neuf ans' (p. 314).

Let us suppose that Hermine's decision to leave Violette is on the grounds that she is no longer willing to accept Violette as her lover, and refuses to maintain Violette's childish dependence on her, Violette's subsequent reactions (distress, helplessness and anger) would be justified. It would also provide a possible explanation for Violette's refusal to blame herself or accept responsibility for any frustrations in her life.<sup>24</sup> After all, Hermine is her creator and is therefore responsible for her behaviour.

Violette continues to claim value as a child when she turns to Berthe for guidance and support after Hermine's abandonment. Maslowian theory highlights the

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<sup>24</sup> This is discussed later in the chapter.



importance of regression to a zone familiar to the individual as a safety measure for the psychological wellbeing of the person.<sup>25</sup> Violette's action can therefore be interpreted as conforming to this theory on the need to regress into a safety zone so as to regain the necessary courage to venture out again. This pattern confirms the importance of the child's role for Violette in two ways. There is, on the one hand, the suggestion that Violette has become so accustomed to playing the child that the way in which she achieves self-value is no longer sufficiently flexible for her to escape or switch to another role. Violette's account suggests that Hermine and Berthe, one after the other, value her as a child which, in turn, encourages her to adopt a more dependent behaviour when in their presence. Yet if Violette insists on being the eternal child, these particular women cannot or will not meet her wishes, as demonstrated by Hermine's eventual rejection.

These tendencies in Violette are thrown into relief by contrast with the sacrifices which she notes, though without praising them, in others. For instance, Hermine's tendency to sacrifice herself for Violette. She deals with Hermine's sacrifices in a striking manner: rather than recognize any value in them, or read them as signs of love, she emphasizes that Hermine resents having made them. For example, we are told that Hermine gives up her dream as a pianist to be with Violette, but in so doing Violette is made to feel guilty for having deprived her lover of her piano (a situation expressed in a kind of *style indirect libre*): 'elle ne joue plus, son piano je le lui ai pris' (p. 145). Later, when Hermine asks Violette if she liked the 'chemise de nuit avec l'empècement de dentelle ocre' (p. 196), Violette replies: 'oui, elle me plaisait. Elle devait me plaire. Sa vie était foutue...' (p. 196). This time, it seems, Violette resents having to affirm liking this nightshirt given to her by Hermine. Her resentment is an indication that she feels guilty for having ruined her lover's life

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<sup>25</sup> Maslow, *Toward a Psychology of Being*, p. 55.

Violette's obsessive fixation with herself is clearly demonstrated when, upon the termination of their relationship, she bitterly reflects on her sacrifices:

Qui, finalement, a le plus donné à l'autre? Moi. J'ai répondu sans hésiter. [...] C'est mon métier et tout mon avenir que j'ai donnés à Hermine. Je lui donnai ma santé, mon poste dans une maison d'édition. Hermine a surgi, elle m'a privée de sécurité. (pp. 321-22)

For every event leading to her becoming Hermine's lover, for every failure encountered since then and for her many claims that 'j'aurais eu, je serais devenue', Violette simply blames Hermine.

In her examination of self-consciousness in Leduc's *La Bâtarde*, Judy Cochran remarks that the heroine Violette 'has always preferred to exaggerate her defeats'.<sup>26</sup> To an extent, Violette does indeed tend to give an amplified interpretation of events. For instance, when she repeatedly cries out 'neuf ans' seven times after Hermine's abandonment, and her remark on the many 'could have beens'. However, although moments of success are depicted to occur less frequently for Violette, they are nevertheless integrated into the text, but in an unexpected manner. For instance, Violette's step-father is rarely mentioned and when he is, it is to emphasize the awkward tension between the duo, that is to say, the step-father/step-daughter. Only one positive comment is made by the step-father to Violette and this scene is sandwiched between Violette and Berthe at *Le Prado*, and Violette going to *L'Empire*: 'Ce soir-là mon beau-père parla de politique à table. [...]. Il chercha un nom de politician, je m'écriai "Rappoport!" "C'est cela, mon petit. Tu as trouvé", me dit-il' (p. 175). Instead of using the reiteration of words, moments of success are

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<sup>26</sup> Judy Cochran, 'The Textual, Sexual Self: Self-consciousness in Violette Leduc's *La Bâtarde*', in *Atlantis: A Woman's Studies Journal*, 13 (1987): 47-52 (p. 50).

unexpectedly included and this, to a certain degree, is a technique used to emphasize Violette's victorious moments.

Violette does show herself maturing subsequently. This maturation is, however, developed in relation to men, in particular Gabriel and Maurice. At the same time, it departs from the socially sanctioned, highly gendered model. Gabriel's behaviour suggests that he values Violette not only as an adult woman, as opposed to a child, but also as a companion. His desire for her as a woman can be perceived as a reflex response towards a sexually available female, but his acceptance of her as a wife suggests Violette possesses the necessary qualities to be appreciated as a companion. Certainly, he never fathers or mothers her by providing financial security; and his pet name for her, *bonhomme*, suggests, as we have seen, that he senses her behaviour is not reducible to traditional gender roles.

The possibility that Violette might be valued 'beyond gender' emerges more clearly still with Maurice. Commenting on the benefits Violette achieves from her relationship with the homosexual Maurice (and this relationship is certainly beneficial to Violette since she began to write under his insistence), Hélène Jaccopard suggests that Maurice gives a sense of psychological optimism to Violette's sense of worth: 'Les grands noms (Simone de Beauvoir, Nathalie Sarraute, Jacques Guérin, Maurice Sachs, Jean Cocteau, Jean Genet, etc.) contribuent à définir l'identité de Violette.'<sup>27</sup> Not only is Sachs one of the *grands noms* who inspires Violette to write, he also plays an influential role in encouraging Violette to develop an identity that goes beyond the traditional gender role. As Cochran explains, 'by withholding his male organ, Sachs refused Violette the means of defining herself through him'.<sup>28</sup> Regardless of his sexual orientation, Sachs is a member of

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<sup>27</sup> Hélène Jaccopard, 'La Faute au paratexte: L'autobiographie de Violette Leduc', in *French Forum*, 3 (1994): 329-345 (p. 331).

<sup>28</sup> Cochran, 'The Textual, Sexual Self: Self-consciousness in Violette Leduc's *La Bâtarde*', p. 52.

patriarchal society, and an interpretation of Cochran's explanation that Sachs does not allow Violette to define her through him can be that he refuses to let Violette develop an identity that conforms to the standards set by the patriarchy.

Her relationship to him suggests further maturation in her, but not in terms of adaptation to a fixed culture which offers predetermined gender roles and associated subject positions. Maurice is presented as a rather glamorous and extremely charismatic character inhabiting also an individualistic space beyond all norms; and Violette manifestly aspires to similar individualism: 'je m'étais promis d'imiter Maurice jusque dans les intonations de sa voix' (p. 534). The fact that Maurice is homosexual, and does not manifestly desire Violette as an object, forms a contrast with Gabriel, who treats her on the one hand as an object of desire, and on the other as an equal and a companion. This creates a greater possibility, with Maurice, for Violette to develop an individualism (relatively) unbound by gender and sexuality.

An example of what Violette perceives to be her value (to Maurice) is given when Maurice remarks: 'Ma chère Violette, [...] vos yeux sont cernés, vous semblez fatiguée. Je vous conseille de vous allonger avec un livre. Sans pleurer, sans jouer les séquestrées de Poitiers' (p. 518). It is interesting that Maurice makes reference to 'les séquestrées de Poitiers'. This brings to mind *La Séquestrée de Poitiers* (published in 1930), a judicial account by André Gide of the Blanche Monnier case – a young woman who was kept in captivity by her mother for twenty-five years. Maurice's reference to 'les séquestrées' appears to imply more than one female. This leads the readers to wonder if this is either just a typographical error, or Maurice speaking idiomatically, or whether it carries a more sombre significance. That is to say, the deliberate reference (by Leduc through her protagonist) to the incarceration of more than one female implies that Violette is depicted as identifying herself also as 'une séquestrée' who is never free to express herself, either due to the social

stigmatization of being 'la bâtarde' or due to her sexual orientation. If we consider 'jouer les séquestrées' to be Maurice's use of an idiomatic form, this also places Violette in the category of confined women which, again, highlights the psychological unease with which Violette perceives her place within society.

When they retreat to the country, Maurice at first treats Violette as a child in need of attention and incapable of making decisions on her own. For instance, he decides where they should go and when Violette should go to bed. Violette reinforces this image of a child desperately in need of attention, even at the cost of becoming a burden, by pouring out her childhood sorrows: 'hier soir, j'ai crié et sangloté après lui avoir parlé pendant trois heures de mes malheurs d'enfance' (p. 523). Although Violette the child is the price or value set initially by Maurice, this price is not a constant. Maurice eventually insists that she cease to complain to him, and that she should instead write her memoir (thus, we are told, she begins her work *L'Asphyxie*). As a writer, he invites her to become a writer; by the same token, she will cease to be a child.

Even with Maurice, however, it is not easy, and perhaps, ultimately, not possible, for Violette to break from romantic or amorous models of relationships with men and find a more individual way of life. This emerges when Maurice sends Violette a letter from the work camp. In this letter, he proposes they pretend to have a child together, whilst concealing his true intention: that it is for the sake of escaping the work camp. When she realizes his motives, Violette's response is a pragmatic evaluation of the situation: 'je gardai le papier (the doctor's letter stating that she is pregnant) trois jours et trois nuits sans me décider à l'envoyer. Je n'étais plus flattée. Je pesais le pour et le contre' (pp. 567-68). It is at this point, in my view, that Violette demonstrates her desire for individual growth, away from a gendered role. Having gone to the trouble of obtaining a false medical letter, her refusal to help Maurice

escape by burning this ‘ vraie lettre d’amour – le certificat du médecin’ (p. 569) not only demonstrates her resentment at being important only when her help is needed, but shows an awareness that she is called upon to help Maurice simply because of her sex. In his quest to leave the camp, Maurice has reidentified Violette as a sexual object. And, if at first she is flattered to be receiving a letter from Maurice, when she realizes it is purely for the purpose of survival, her reaction, though mixed, is above all that of anger.

Of course, it must be noted that, considering what’s at stake for Maurice, Maurice’s request – of making a false claim with the help of his female friend – is understandable. It also highlights Violette’s selfish stubbornness. However, I argue that it is the manner in which Maurice asks Violette to make a pretence of her condition which offends Violette. Maslowian theory in relation to the way in which an individual dislikes being perceived as a useful object or being rubricized – being categorized as belonging to a collective group – can shed some light on her seemingly ‘selfish stubbornness’.<sup>29</sup> In an example provided by Maslow, he argues that resentment occurs when a woman discovers that she is valuable to man because she belongs to the class ‘woman’, and that it is this class ‘woman’, not the woman herself, which is valuable to him.<sup>30</sup> It cannot be denied that what she can provide, above all, is a credible deception to bring Maurice home, yet Violette’s refusal to help him implies that she is simply expressing a desire to be appreciated as a genderless individual.

## 2.2 *Love in a Fallen City*

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<sup>29</sup> Maslow, *Toward a Psychology of Being*, p. 40.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 128.

### 2.2.1 Background and Synopsis of *Love in a Fallen City*

The original Chinese version of *Love in a Fallen City* was published in Shanghai in 1943, the same year the Chinese version of *The Golden Cangue* was published. Although critics such as C.T. Hsia or C.C. Kao do not rank *Love in a Fallen City* to be the equal of *The Golden Cangue*, this novella has, nevertheless, generated much public interest and has been adapted into various films and plays throughout China and Hong Kong since its publication.<sup>31</sup> In her study on Chang's depiction of love affairs, Liangya Liu argues that this particular work is able to achieve positive public reactions as the result of the author's 'ingenious method of using a type of romantic comedy to describe human nature that is caused by a distortion of Chinese patriarchal society'.<sup>32</sup>

The story begins in Shanghai with the female protagonist Liusu Bai at her maternal family home, discussing the death of her ex-husband with her family members. Through their dialogues, we learn that Liusu divorced her husband many years ago and returned to her maternal family with her divorce settlement, a substantial amount which she handed over to her brothers as a gesture for allowing her to return to her maternal home. The brothers, now under financial pressure to support their growing families (as well as Liusu, her maiden sister and their mother), are weary of supporting Liusu. They pressure Liusu into either remarrying a widower with children or returning to her ex-husband's household, now as his widow.

When a matchmaker introduces Liuyuan Fan, a wealthy business man, to her maiden sister Baoluo, Liusu sees him as her only escape from her maternal family

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<sup>31</sup> For example, the 1984 Hong Kong film *Love in a Fallen City* directed by Ann Hui and produced by Shaw Brothers Studio; the 2009 Chinese television series *Love in a Fallen City* directed by Mengji and produced by Zou Jingzhi.

<sup>32</sup> Liangya Liu, '張愛玲的世紀末愛情', in *中國女性書寫: 國際學術研討會論文集*, ed. by 淡江大學中國文學系 (Taipei: Student Books, 1999), pp. 331-332.

and decides to steal him for herself. Being the illegitimate son of a wealthy Chinese man, Liuyuan is not, by traditional standards, the perfect husband for any lady of a respectable and traditional family. Yet, it is his unconventional childhood which gives plausibility to his choice of potential bride – the widowed, and sexually experienced Liusu. During the blind date which the matchmaker organised for Liuyuan and Baoluo and to which practically all the female members of the Bai household, including Liusu, acted as chaperones, Liusu dances with Liuyuan three times. The family is furious with Liusu's audacity. However, before further action can be taken, she leaves for Hong Kong with the matchmaker to spend a month with Liuyuan.

Whilst in Hong Kong, she tries and fails to trap him into marriage and upon her return from Hong Kong, she is ridiculed by her family members. After a period of absence, Liuyuan then sends Liusu a ticket to join him in Hong Kong. This time, Liusu agrees to become his mistress and she is set up in a respectable area of Hong Kong. Her new comfortable life is, however, short-lived. Japan wages war on Hong Kong and in their attempt to survive, they find love for each other. With the Japanese invasion, they return to Liusu's maternal home in Shanghai as Mr and Mrs Liuyuan Fan, and Liusu is greeted with great respect by all her family members.

### **2.3 Identity development and collective living**

Derek Wright writes that the Chinese community is 'founded upon ideologies which stress the value of devoted and heroic self-sacrifice in the service of the collective'.<sup>33</sup> Individuals, in particular women, within this community are not differentiated through their actions or thoughts but through their contributions to the group.

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<sup>33</sup> Derek Wright, *The Psychology of Moral Behaviour* (London: Penguin, 1971), p. 217.



Certainly, Chang's characters in *Love in a Fallen City* tend to promote self-sacrifice for the benefit of the group. For example, the mother of the Bai household asks her daughters-in-law to give up their treasured possessions so that her adopted daughter Baoluo may wear them on her first blind date:

The old mistress Bai searched throughout the household for any gold, pearls and valuables. Whatever could be put on Baoluo was put on her. The silk fabrics given by god mothers to the girls of the Third household [...] were forced to be relinquished by the old mistress Bai to make Baoluo a quipao. (p. 197)

Another example may be seen in the case of Liusu putting the marital interests of her sister and young nieces before her own: 'I still have two unmarried younger sisters; Third brother's and Fourth brother's girls are growing up, slowly but surely. They don't have time to show them (the girls) off! How can they think of me?' (p. 194).

This novella depicts individual unwillingness to act in the interest of the self for fear of being categorized as an egoist and being subsequently ostracized from the community. For instance, Liusu obediently accepts being neglected, while her sister receives all the family's attention in preparation for her blind date. Liusu does not challenge the lack of support for her when she is also expected to meet a potential husband. She simply agrees to blend into the background and become invisible.

Wolfgang Stroebe and Bruno S. Frey remark that twentieth-century psychological thought and psychoanalytic theory hold the belief that behaviour is directed at drive reduction. That is to say, if possible, the individual will strive to attain his/her personal goal without cheating or exploiting his/her partners.<sup>34</sup> The apparently oxymoronic phrase 'collective independence' has been used to evoke the idea that

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<sup>34</sup> Wolfgang Stroebe and Bruno S. Frey, 'Self-Interest and Collective Action: The Economics and Psychology of Public Goods', in *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 21(1982): 121-137 (p. 121-122).

individuals within a relatively disempowered group, such as women in traditional Chinese society, may attempt to distinguish themselves (in both meanings: to shine and to emerge as an individual) within the parameters set by a traditional or conventional role. Bernd Simon and Claudia Kampmeier state that as the collective self is found more in members of minorities (that is to say, an individual in a collective group can be more easily distinguished from other members of that group by becoming a minority within the group), the need for self-respect is also ‘particularly salient and thus particularly likely to dominate a person’s self-interpretation’.<sup>35</sup>

This throws light on the aspirations of women characters in *Love in a Fallen City*, since they strive to enhance their unique competence in traditional roles so as to achieve a more significant recognition of their particular skills. This can subsequently heighten their individual sense of self-confidence whilst concomitantly strengthening the survival of the group to which they belong. For example, the principal concern for the women in *Love in a Fallen City* is finding a suitable, preferably wealthy, husband either for themselves or for their daughters. Although they may be perpetuating the image of a woman who is only acknowledged through her superficial quality, it cannot be denied that their education and skills, developed with the intent of attracting a suitable husband, help to further enhance their recognition within society.

However, when Liusu dances, she seems to distance herself from collective social and moral norms, and in doing so, appears to find true happiness:

Liusu’s head tilted to one side as her eyes and hands started

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<sup>35</sup> Bernd Simon and Claudia Kampmeier, ‘Revisiting The Individual Self’, in *Individual Self, Relational Self, Collective Self*, ed. by Constantine Sedikides (Philadelphia: Psychology Press, 2001), pp. 201-48 (201).

moving through dance poses. [...] Suddenly, she smiled – a private, malevolent smile; [...] telling tales of fealty and filial piety, chastity and righteousness: distant tales that had nothing to do with her. (pp. 195-95)

Her joy is clearly manifested in the phrasing, ‘suddenly, she smiled’. However, the use of ‘a private, malevolent smile’ not only implies that she will no longer sacrifice herself for the benefit of others, but suggests also that she will contemplate deliberately sacrificing others so as to benefit personally from their sufferings. The phrase: ‘telling tales of fealty [...] that had nothing to do with her’, further highlights her boldness and perseverance in fulfilling her desires against all odds. As Haiyan Lee writes in her review of *Love in a Fallen City*: ‘no character or object appears as *is*, without a double life, without being subverted by a mischievously fabulous mind’.<sup>36</sup> Liusu also appears as a character with numerous faces. Her behaviour is in direct contradiction with her society’s expectations of how a woman should behave, yet it is precisely in confronting such repressions with a smile that she not only emphasizes her sense of self-confidence, but also implies the anticipation of the feeling of joy when she succeeds in spite of such social restrictions.

But this tendency does not lead her to alienate herself from society, for the desire to marry Liuyuan is an incorporation of both Liusu’s private desire and her public needs. In her discussion of feminine melodrama in Chang’s fiction, focusing in particular on the non-existence (in a traditional Chinese context) of the Western figure of the *happy divorcee*, Li Guo writes that ‘remarriage is not so much an individual choice as a social necessity’.<sup>37</sup> She further adds that ‘a woman like Liusu,

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<sup>36</sup> Haiyan Lee, ‘Eileen Chang’s Poetics of the Social: Review of love in a Fallen City’, in *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* (2007), (Para. 4 of 18) <<http://u.osu.edu/mclc/book-reviews/review-of-love-in-a-fallen-city/>> [accessed August 2016].

<sup>37</sup> Li Guo, ‘Making History Anew: Feminine Melodrama in Eileen Chang’s *Love in a Fallen City*’, in *Consciousness, Literature and the Arts* 12 (2011), (para. 6 of 42). <<http://www.dmd27.org/guo.html>> [accessed August 2016].

someone other than a “good wife and mother”, must endure both a “nonidentity” as well as relentless ridicule by her relatives and others for her failure in the marriage market’.<sup>38</sup>

This makes the development of an authentic identity an improbable outcome for her due to the influential social factors which are intrinsically merged into her motivation and choices, so much so that there is no clear barrier between her private desires and the wishes of her society. Liusu can only seek to negotiate fulfilment as an individual within the containing structure provided by collective independence; a situation where, following Wright’s theory, her beliefs must be ‘identical with those of other respectable citizens’.<sup>39</sup> She aims for self-esteem through aligning her criteria with other members of her community so as to derive pleasure from thinking of herself as an acknowledged and respected woman. For example, she reasons that if she gets to marry Liuyuan Fan, ‘the prize the whole crowd was eyeing like so many greedy tigers’, then ‘all her stifled rancour would be swept clean away’ (p. 202). Here, ‘rancour’ finds a remedy in marrying a bachelor who is seen, collectively, as eligible.

Ironically enough, Liuyuan seems to offer Liusu other possibilities of self-fulfilment beyond the norms of her society of origin:

When I first met you in Shanghai, I thought that if you could get away from your family, maybe you could be more natural. So I waited and waited till you came to Hong Kong... and now, I want to take you to Malaya, to the forest with its primitive people. (p. 212)

Similar in this respect to Maurice who promises Violette a kind of freedom when he

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., (para. 6 of 42).

<sup>39</sup> Wright, *The Psychology of Moral Behaviour*, p. 185.

takes her into the country, Liuyuan attempts to remove Liusu from familiar surroundings and create a social and cultural vacuum in which she can explore and discover a new identity. However, cultural and social ideologies have become so firmly established within her that even during the bombings of Hong Kong, which serve to alter previously established perceptions of correct conduct for both men and women, Liusu remains convinced of the importance of marriage to a woman: ‘She was a selfish woman. In this age of chaos and disorder, there is no place for those who stand on their own, but for an ordinary married couple, room can always be found’ (p. 228). It can be argued that Liusu’s pursuit of marriage, even during economic and political changes, reflects the conviction that, according to her belief, her existence can only be positively acknowledged when she is accepted by the opposite sex.

Moreover, Chang’s novel suggests that acting independently within a collective group leaves individuals particularly exposed to condemnation in terms of the group interest. For example, Liusu is assessed by her sister-in-law purely in terms of monetary value, on a profit/loss basis:

Don’t use Sixth Sister’s (Liusu’s) money. It will bring you bad luck! As soon as she got married, her husband spent all his family’s money. Then she came back here, and now her family, as everyone can see, is going bankrupt. A real bad-luck comet, that one!’ (p. 190)

The sister-in-law’s tone suggests that the value of a woman is not only determined by men, but that it is also harshly criticized by women who have internalized the values of the dominant male community. Similarly, the possibility that Liusu might marry is ridiculed by the family, whilst preparations for Baoluo’s first meeting with Liuyuan

are executed with 'great fanfare' (p. 197). The contrast depends on the superior value traditionally placed on a virgin bride. Although Baoluo and Liusu are sisters sharing the same room, to be a divorcee is clearly to be inferior. This creates the illusion of a dead-end for Liusu who finds no way out apart from relying on the generosity of her unsympathetic family or pursuing a loveless marriage.

The matchmaker in *Love in a Fallen City* may prove to be a rare exception to the rule that all women should seek respectability and fulfilment, above all in marriage; perhaps she is allowed to be the exception because she enables the marriages of others. But, by contrast, Liusu remarks that 'no matter how amazing a woman is, she won't be respected by her own sex unless she's loved by a member of the opposite one' (p. 200). When the matchmaker suggests Liusu look for somebody to marry instead of a job, she replies: 'no, I don't think so. My life is over already' (p. 193). This suggests, once again, that she has internalized the socially prescribed need for a man's recognition and approval.

Similarly, she says to Liuyuan, 'if you were killed, my story would be over. But if I were killed, you'd still have a lot of story left!' (p. 225). Liusu is not denying she has any claim to worth but, on the contrary, is validating it through associating her existence with the values of her collective group. In other words, the socio-cultural group with which she identifies herself regards her husband as a highly valuable asset. Being part of a community where a woman's status depends predominantly on the perceived value of the man with whom she is associated, the direct promotion of the worth of her husband has the indirect effect of promoting Liusu's own status.

Indeed, in her study on Chang's use of expressions and vocabularies, Meilin Shi suggests that Chang's use of the words 'victor of war' to describe her protagonist is

appropriate in that without war, Liusu would not have discovered love.<sup>40</sup> In response to this suggestion, I would further add that Liusu's victory is both literal and metaphorical: she survives the Hong Kong bombings and she survives social insignificance by becoming a role model for women to look up to: 'Liusu divorces then remarries, and with such surprising results. No wonder those around her want to copy her' (p. 230). Of course, Karen Horney's argument that women have conditioned themselves to the desires of men certainly highlights the ambiguity surrounding the authenticity of self-worth, and although Liusu's sense of her own worth is in relation to Liuyuan, it cannot be denied that she has, to an extent, increased her sense of self-worth by deliberately overvaluing her husband's.<sup>41</sup>

### **3 Individualism in Leduc and Chang: significant contrasts**

Our first section confronted Maslowian and feminist perspectives, and our second section proposed readings of Leduc and Chang's texts which can point the way to an interface between the two. In this third section, we will pursue this line of inquiry, but emphasize significant contrasts between the two authors' respective approaches to the problem of women's individualism and their pursuit of happiness in French and Chinese society respectively.

#### **3.1 Maximization of potential**

In this section, we will tease out how Leduc and Chang deal with the issue of seeking

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<sup>40</sup> Meilin Shi, '張愛玲小說與紅樓夢之詞語，詞匯，時空比較研究' (unpublished master's thesis, National Sun Yat-sen University, 2004), p. 55.

<sup>41</sup> Karen Horney, 'The Flight from Womanhood', p. 326.

a balance between individual and collective desires. Aron and McLaughlin-Volpe highlight the view that indifference to social and political criticisms is associated with individual independence. But we have seen that various thinkers see individual independence as a variation of personalizing group desires, and according to this view, it is in the interest of the individual to promote group welfare.

Leduc and Chang adopt different approaches to the question of self-interest versus collective interest. For instance, at a time when abortion was not acknowledged favourably by society, Violette's determination to terminate her pregnancy is suggestive of an act of self-interest. The depiction of sexual orientation in *La Bâtarde* is also an example of conflicting interests at work. For instance, Maurice does not flaunt his homosexuality in public and it is arguable in this sense that his choice of secrecy is either due to a need for privacy or a conscious need to hide from social judgement, thereby reflecting his desire to conform to the norms of the society. In contrast to *La Bâtarde*, we have seen that there is a salient presence of self-sacrifice for the benefit of the group throughout *Love in A Fallen City*, especially in the sacrifices required of, for example, the third mistress (who has to undertake the running of the entire household, even though she is physically unwell), and the strong-willed and capable fourth mistress (who has to stand down from power because of her useless husband).

The contrast between Leduc and Chang on this point is further highlighted when we juxtapose the two heroines: Violette and Liusu. On the one hand, Violette progresses from low self-esteem as a child and adolescent to a higher level of self-value, verging on narcissism, as the lover of Hermine. When Violette remarks after Hermine leaves her that, 'C'est mon métier et tout mon avenir que j'ai donnés à Hermine' (*La Bâtarde*, p. 322), she does not reflect upon her own flaws. This implies a strong sense of self-worth. By contrast, we have seen earlier that Liusu perceives



her life 'is over already' (*Love in a Fallen City*, p. 193), being a divorcee and in her thirties which, in the eyes of the Chinese society of the 1940s, is already over the desirable marital age. Her acceptance that life is already over for her suggests a low self-esteem which can only be raised by a man's recognition and approval.

### 3.2 Types of identity development

Why ask whether an individual achieves an identity through collective independence as opposed to an 'individual' independence? Does it not suffice to say that individuality has been achieved? In our opening part, we referred to Triandis and Tragimow who assert that it is the process by which an individual develops an identity that can reveal how he/she defines himself/herself within a society. That is to say, collective life, explain Triandis and Tragimow, offers the advantage of increased group survival whereas individual life takes advantage of different modern lifestyles.

According to Simon and Kampmeier, independent living carries the advantage of allowing the individual to acquire a wider range of knowledge, allowing for 'one's uniqueness as an individual to move into the foreground' (as opposed to societies in which a division of labour is strictly observed).<sup>42</sup> However, it can nevertheless threaten individual distinction by erasing any specific flaw or merit. Education – here I refer to group education – functions as a representation of collective living with the aim of elevating the overall intellectual level of the collective group, but it may not systematically distinguish individual talents.

Individual characteristics are also more likely to be lost through such education, particularly when education functions as a representation of the continuation of

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<sup>42</sup> Simon and Kampmeier, 'Revisiting the Individual Self', pp. 202-03.

collective living. For instance, in *La Bâtarde*, Leduc (through Berthe and Violette) links education to the possibility of identity formation. But this does not eliminate the risk that, although a woman may be better recognized for having acquired knowledge in a range of areas, she also risks becoming too well merged into her socio-cultural group to maintain a unique identity.<sup>43</sup>

Maslow highlights the tension between conformity and transgression, and the problems this tension raises for identity development. In order for the self to develop, it is often suggested that the individual must remain indifferent to external criticisms and resist the dictates of a structured society. However, Maslow, Sedikides, Lowell Gaertner, and Toril Moi argue that this type of living is not habitual to human beings as, by nature, we need to interact with each other in order to satisfy our deficiency needs.<sup>44</sup> The presence of others is also necessary to the growth of self-esteem and self-confidence as the individual primarily needs to grow emotionally. This growth is, Maslow argues, based on the fundamental gratification of lower needs which are concomitantly needs which rely on the response of others.<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, it is through interactions that knowledge, which promotes self-esteem, is best gained. Solitude is, consequently, not a satisfactory method for the overall development of the self.

As it is unlikely for an individual to develop an identity that focuses solely on the interests of the self without being influenced by external factors, it becomes more feasible for the majority of people to develop their own identity whilst following social norms. Needless to say, their personal development is highly influenced by the social framework, and the more they adhere to social ideologies, the more they will

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<sup>43</sup> This mode of living is not exclusive to women as men can also risk becoming merged into their socio-cultural group.

<sup>44</sup> Constantine Sedikides and Lowell Gaertner, 'A Homecoming to the Individual Self', in *Individual Self, Relational Self, Collective Self*, p. 8; Toril Moi, *French Feminist Thought: A Reader*, p. 1.

<sup>45</sup> Maslow, 'Psychological Data and Human Values', in *Toward a Psychology of Being*, pp. 152-66.

be encouraged to develop according to societal rules that will result in greater acceptance by society. Their sense of self-confidence and emotional elation are enhanced and in turn they feel more secure to take on new challenges. For instance, Violette marries Gabriel to gain society's recognition of her worth as a woman, and in the process develops her writing career and financial independence. Another example can be found in Liusu who accepts her role as the hidden mistress, and yet it is from this situation that she experiences love and eventually becomes the legitimate wife. Keeping within the social framework, however, only allows the heroines to achieve a form of status acceptable to and acknowledged by society.

Creation derived from societal rules cannot be regarded as completely free and when freedom is only partially available, it becomes logical to presume all subsequent developments of the self to be incomplete or inauthentic. When we consider Violette's initial search for acceptance as a woman, her pregnancy and subsequent abortion are indications that her authentic desires are not associated with her ability to reproduce. Similarly, Liusu evolves from being a divorcee, then mistress to a wife, but the realization that material comforts are all unreliable is a manifestation that her needs are not, in reality, associated with society's definition of wealth and status. Why would the majority of people overlook this lack of authenticity and maintain that they are satisfied with their personal development?

Let us see how such issues are explored by Leduc and Chang respectively. We have seen that Chang puts into play, and questions, the possibility that Liusu might achieve individualism through collective independence – achieving independence from the collective. The individual independence found in Violette, on the other hand, reflects an implied belief that every woman has different levels of capabilities which can be and should be balanced out through the acquisition of knowledge. For instance, Hermine is depicted as a musically talented *surveillante* (which connotes a

degree of academic achievement) who gives up her talent to become Violette's lover. From this perspective, it can be argued that Hermine has only moderate capabilities in a range of fields, but she is able to survive independently in her socio-cultural group.<sup>46</sup> Another example is found in Berthe who, by encouraging Violette to become qualified for a non-exceptional but safe job such as teaching, is asking her daughter to maximize her overall competences.

In Chang, collective independence offers some hope of counterbalancing woman's perceived physical weakness. For example, Liusu returning to her maternal family to escape a physically abusive husband is indicative of her inferior strength and the need for protection by a collective group. Indeed, even though Chang's heroine is never depicted to be alone, there is nevertheless a sense that collective living might be used to the advantage of women to promote their overall sense of security and their mental strength. I would go further and suggest that it is by being part of the blind-date entourage that gives Liusu the initial courage to dance with Liuyuan. However, it soon becomes clear that being the only female of the blind-date entourage who can dance gives her a clear advantage – she succeeds in capturing Liuyuan's attention. This resonates with Simon and Kampmeier's suggestion that an individual belonging to a minority group within a community is usually distinguished as such because he/she is an elite member of that community, that collective selves are 'typically more pronounced members of minorities than among members of majorities'.<sup>47</sup>

Neither Leduc nor Chang suggests that a clear distinction can always be made between collective and individual independence. For instance, education forms an important, albeit unsuccessful, part of Violette's childhood and adolescent years,

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<sup>46</sup> Her adaptability to living independently in her socio-cultural group is discussed in Chapter I.

<sup>47</sup> Simon and Kampmeier, 'Revising the Individual Self', p. 206.

even though in some respects education may be detrimental to the development of individualism. The female characters in Chang's work are all depicted either as having inferior or no formal education at all. Such freedom from indoctrination might subsequently provide greater freedom in thought. However, the depiction of their inability to escape from their social repression clearly indicates a degree of inadequacies which might have been overcome through knowledge acquisition.

### 3.3 Self-interest

Maslow gives love a central, if uncontroversial place in his thought when he represents it as essential for happiness. For instance, he remarks that 'the absence of love certainly stifles potentialities and even kills them'.<sup>48</sup> But will self-love suffice as a form of love that can lead to the fulfilment of potentialities? Jacoby quotes Kohut to the effect that 'the more secure a person is regarding his own acceptability [to others], the more certain his sense of who he is'.<sup>49</sup> But to what extent can a love of the self promote an individual identity?

In *Leduc*, self-love is depicted as leading to an obsessive self-fixation or an excessive demand for love which is often regarded as narcissistic. For example, we have seen that Violette is constantly depicted as the receiver of attention who shows little appreciation for Hermine's generosity. Fromm theorizes that narcissism prevents the individual from expressing or experiencing love for others, and an example of this narcissistic love can be found in Violette who emphatically declares her love for Hermine: 'je l'aurais tant aimée' (p. 314).<sup>50</sup> Yet in what capacity does Violette love Hermine? Let us consider Violette's abandonment of the cat that is

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<sup>48</sup> Maslow, *Toward a Psychology of Being*, p. 99.

<sup>49</sup> Jacoby, *Individuation and Narcissism*, p. 146.

<sup>50</sup> Fromm, *Man for Himself*, p. 131.

loved by Hermine and is described by Violette as ‘la petite bête désolée à fendre l’âme, c’était toi’ (p. 318). It can be argued that in spite of Violette’s declaration of love for her lover, she does not in reality care for Hermine. After all, it is difficult to accept the abandonment of an object which represents Hermine, and which is also loved by Hermine, to be Violette’s logical approach to manifesting her love for a loved one.

In her examination of how desiring the other equates to wishing to be recognized by him/her (what she terms as the ‘desire-as-recognition’ phenomenon), Alex Hughes highlights that in *La Bâtarde*, ‘such relations revolve around two fundamental needs which exist within each of us: the need to assert our selfhood as absolute and the need, in so doing, to negate the other’.<sup>51</sup> Fromm also argues that selfish persons are incapable of loving or appreciating others.<sup>52</sup> Consider first Violette’s question: ‘qu’est-ce qu’une petite bête abandonnée? Qu’est-ce que c’était?’ (p. 318)’. Her subsequent reply ‘ma jalousie, mon pouvoir, ma douleur, ma tyrannie’ (p. 318) appears somewhat unrelated to the question. This, however, highlights that love or emotional tenderness is not the element of concern for Violette.<sup>53</sup> Instead, it is the feeling of ‘jealousy, power, pain and tyranny’ which implies that the act of abandoning the cat is a matter of authoritarian control and not love. When this particular type of love becomes overbearing and is unappreciated by others, in this case by Hermine, the individual – Violette – as a whole is negatively perceived, as demonstrated by Hermine who eventually rejects Violette.

To return to the significance of the cat in question, Violette describes the scene as follows:

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<sup>51</sup> Alex Hughes, *French Erotic Fiction: Women’s Desiring Writing, 1880-1990*, pp. 70-71.

<sup>52</sup> Fromm, *Man for Himself*, p. 131.

<sup>53</sup> Fromm, *Man for Himself*, p. 130.

Le petit chat, ton trésor, ta consolation amené à Avallon quand nous allions dans le Morvan... Il miaula jusqu'à l'aube dans la chambre d'hôtel. La petite bête désolée à fendre l'âme, c'était toi: tu rendais chacune des mes exigences à chaque miaulement. Tu le consolais, tu le consolais... Je ne le supportai pas. (p. 318)

It is implied that Hermine is unhappy with Violette's overwhelming demands. It is also shown that Violette understands the consequence of her unwillingness to change: 'j'ai compris que tu ne me le pardonnerais jamais' (p. 318). Yet, Violette remains unresponsive to the needs of her lover. Violette's uncompromising attitude may be detrimental to her relationship but it does nevertheless highlight, to an extent, her determination to prioritize personal interests and needs before others.

For Liusu, on the contrary, love of self is manifested through her love for life. In fact, *Love in a Fallen City* is predominantly a story about survival, not only for Liusu but for all the characters.<sup>54</sup> We have seen how Liusu raises her self-esteem through aligning her desires with other members of her community so as to derive pleasure from thinking of herself as an acknowledged and respected woman. Ironically, it is through compromising her own pleasure to please Liuyuan, and through the sacrifices she makes to her own reputation, that she finally satisfies her desire for self-enhancement. From this perspective, it appears that identity development can be achieved from the suppression of personal interests.

It is difficult to conceive how self-love and self-esteem, despite the prefix 'self', could exist independently of society. Tice and Baumeister argue that the effects social pressure has on an individual, as well as the importance of morality in group life, cannot be overlooked.<sup>55</sup> Similarly, Wright states that any individual wishing to

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<sup>54</sup> Liusu and other female characters need to survive in a large family consisting mainly of women. She also has to survive widowhood, a war and the disgrace of her escapade with Liuyuan.

<sup>55</sup> Tice and Baumeister, 'The Primacy of the Interpersonal Self', in *Individual Self, Relational Self, Collective Self*, p. 82.

achieve a sense of self-esteem must feel obligated to display all possible positive qualities which are ‘declarations of moral belief identify(ing) to others the kind of person we are and thereby determin(ing) how they will act towards us’.<sup>56</sup> What seems like self-derived motivation might depend, fundamentally, on such pressures. The apparent presence of (healthy) self-interest might, then, be undermined by the individual’s sense of recognition by the group to the detriment of personal development.<sup>57</sup>

We have seen that self-sacrifice is presented as central to Chinese culture, as depicted in *Love in a Fallen City*. In *La Bâtarde*, one can argue that, persuaded by André to leave Valenciennes to avoid causing a scandal, the pregnant Berthe’s agreement to do so is a gesture of self-sacrifice. Berthe does not remain to humiliate André’s family with the reality he has done Berthe wrong. She does not remain to reveal to the villagers the flaws of this respected family. Furthermore, from the description given of the respected family that is faced with problems of its own, André’s love affair with a maid would likely be considered as the passing of a storm, soon to be forgiven and forgotten.

However, to qualify as an act of self-sacrifice, her actions must be acknowledged by others as a gesture carried out for the benefit of a group. But can her departure be considered as such? After all, she is more affected by Violette’s illegitimacy than any inhabitants of Valenciennes. The question of whether she acts for entirely selfless motives is therefore moot. David Gautier claims that turning attention onto the self and acting in the interest of the self may help to develop the overall well-being of the individual.<sup>58</sup> Fromm challenges, however, the feasibility of such a claim since he

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<sup>56</sup> Wright, *The Psychology of Moral Behaviour*, p. 185.

<sup>57</sup> Tice and Baumeister remark on the effects social pressure has on an individual and how group life promotes morality in ‘The Primacy of the Interpersonal Self’ in *Individual Self, Relational Self, Collective Self*, p. 82.

<sup>58</sup> David Gautier, *Morality and Rational Self-Interest*, (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1970), pp. 125-26.



argues that the individual is already pre-conditioned by society and ‘acts under the illusion that his actions benefit his self-interest, though he actually serves everything else but the interest of his real self’.<sup>59</sup> Whether an individual can truly prioritize personal interest remains ambiguous.

### 3.4 Beauty and identity development

Beauvoir remarks that women know they are recognized as valuable according to their appearance: ‘a femme [...] sait que quand on la regarde, on ne la distingue pas de son apparence: elle est jugée, respectée, désirée à travers sa toilette’.<sup>60</sup> Annie Woodhouse argues that ‘sex, gender and appearance form a sort of trinity which runs deep in our social and psychological expectations of how our lives should be’.<sup>61</sup> Writing on Violette Leduc’s work, Sabine Schrader also highlights the difference between natural and culturally-enhanced beauty: ‘Ni la masculinité, ni la féminité ne sont un fait naturel, mais une “cultural performance”’.<sup>62</sup>

Both Leduc and Chang explore the theme of beauty as a problem for the development of identity. In their different ways, they suggest that women are so adapted to living within the standards of society that, however strong their striving to attain individuality, they accept the need to compete against each other in terms of beauty. They have seemingly internalized the idea that a woman who focuses on her physical beauty is self-improving and therefore more valuable to herself as well as to society. For instance, in *Love in a Fallen City*, after having heard from the match-maker that a blind date has been arranged for her sister Baoluo and Liuyuan,

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<sup>59</sup> Fromm, *Man for Himself*, p. 19.

<sup>60</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *Le Deuxième Sexe II*, p.602.

<sup>61</sup> Annie Woodhouse, *Fantastic Women: Sex, Gender and Transvestism* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989), p. ix.

<sup>62</sup> Sabine Schrader, ‘Le Bonheur était une façade’, in *Violette Leduc*, ed. by Paul Renard (Lille: Université Lille 3, 1998), p. 39.

Liusu suddenly realizes that she has been a divorcee for at least seven years. The fear that she may have aged since her divorce is apparent when Liusu then rushes to a mirror to check on her appearance and is reassured to find that she does not appear old: ‘her small face seemed smaller yet, and even more attractive’ (p. 195). Physical appearance is demonstrated to be important, not only to the women characters of *Love in a Fallen City*, but also to Liuyuan who deliberately takes his blind date and the entire entourage to a warm, dark cinema in an attempt to reveal his blind date’s true features. We are informed that the cinema is warm and humid and will ‘wash away the cosmetics’ (p. 198).

On the topic of beauty, Schrader remarks that in *La Bâtarde*, femininity is associated with beauty and that being physically attractive is also ‘la terre promise que Violette Leduc vise à atteindre’.<sup>63</sup> Throughout the text, Violette is seen to place great importance on her physical appearance, but there are voices in the text that question the need to compete over physical qualities. For instance, Violette is perpetually concerned with her appearance but is advised by Bernadette to concentrate instead on her ‘vitalité’ (p. 365). In her study of Leduc’s characters, Gelfand writes that the evocation of Violette’s ugliness becomes ‘the symbol of her detachment from herself and from others’.<sup>64</sup> In response to this, I would argue that evoking her ugliness in order to progress beyond physical appearance is not detaching herself from others. In the context that Leduc is voicing her thoughts on physical beauty through her character, she is attempting to guide the readers into new territory: a new vision of judging feminine appearance beyond culturally-influenced criteria.

It is interesting to note that Violette’s evolution from being primarily concerned

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>64</sup> Gelfand, ‘Resetting the Margins: The Outsider in French Literature’, p. 209.

with her appearance, which she considers to be unattractive, to concentrating on personal characteristics, coincides with the various stages of her life. Not only does this imply that she is progressing physically as well as psychologically, but the fact that she is more focused on personal qualities than physical traits helps her not to see 'nature' (as the supposed dispenser or withholder of beauty) as dictating her fate.

The approach to physical appearance in identity development for women in *Love in a Fallen City* is quite different. For instance, physical beauty is treated by Liusu as a valuable and essential tool in gaining the attention of others who can then grant her a new status. This not only implies that her physical appearance depends predominantly on fate or genetics, but suggests also that her acceptance relies on how others react to her physical traits. She is consequently unable to control how she becomes a woman. Similarly, it is implied by the female characters in *Love in a Fallen City* that Liuyuan will accept Baoluo as long as she is 'made' attractive enough for him on that blind date. In doing so, they perpetuate society's perception of how a woman should appear and leave the woman vulnerable to the demands of patriarchy.

### 3.5 The positive effects of transgressions

There are female characters in both Leduc and Chang who seem to conform passively to social expectations, and who are presented as achieving a kind of contentment. For example, in *La Bâtarde*, Julienne is depicted as a woman who 'espérait, souhaitait, attendait le mariage avec une lumière de légende dans ses yeux' (p. 353). She does indeed appear to have achieved the happiness that she had been searching for in Roland. In *Love in a Fallen City*, we have seen that the sisters-in-law seem similarly contented. Julienne and the sisters-in-law are depicted as examples of

women whose pleasure derives from having fulfilled their ambitions in roles designated to them by their respective societies.

However, in the works in which they appear, the respective narrators show very limited interest in these unusual cases, unsurprisingly since their happiness is achieved by embracing ready-made roles, a strategy in life which suggests, from a Maslowian perspective certainly, a failure to maximize the kind of potential that motivates more important characters in these works. To be central protagonists to Leduc or Chang, any individual character's path towards fulfilment involves attempting to achieve or maximize their potential, even if it entails going against socio-cultural or socio-political demands.

Through their characters, both Chang and Leduc suggest that pleasure can be found, either intentionally or unconsciously, in transgressing social expectations. For example, Violette's illicit activities as a black market trader, described by Anaïs Frantz as a 'taboo issue', indicate transgression.<sup>65</sup> The feeling of pleasure brought about by momentary fame, and an overall 'santé de fer' (*La Bâtarde*, p. 559) suggest, however, that her illegal activities are beneficial to her. In *Love in a Fallen City*, not only is Liusu praised for being able to remarry with surprising results, she is also implied to be a role model for those females around her.

Moreover, the heroines' transgressions are winning ones, in that those who witness them decide to praise them. For instance, Violette is accepted by the villagers when she returns from her trip of selling on the black market in Paris: 'ils m'accueillaient à bras ouverts, ils voulaient que je leur raconte ma vie et mon labeur' (*La Bâtarde*, p. 591). Violette further remarks that 'je devins célèbre aussitôt mon retour' (p. 602). It is evident that not only does society forgive her for her illegal trading, but that is also accepted and welcomed. However, whether Violette would

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<sup>65</sup> Anaïs Frantz, 'The Repentance of a Bastard: A Study of Violette Leduc', p. 6.

have been equally welcomed by the villagers had she been unsuccessful as a black market trader remains uncertain.

On the contrary, in *Love in a Fallen City* transgression is implied to be acceptable only when it proves to be successful. Let us consider Liusu's audacity in dancing with Liuyuan which initially incites hate:

[your] heart [is] covered in lard, if you think you can destroy your sister's future, if you are hoping to do that, I'm telling you to forget it! So many ladies and he doesn't even notice them, [you think] he wants you, this broken flower? (p. 199)

But she confidently expects that she will eventually be respected and admired by her female family members. This becomes clear when she remarks: 'Baoluo must be cursing her silently. [...] But she knew that as much as Baoluo hated her, the younger woman's heart was also full of respect and admiration' (p. 200).

But how do Leduc and Chang relate the transgression of sexual norms to the pursuit of identity and happiness? Violette's numerous sexual experiences in *La Bâtarde* suggest sentimental attachment to one particular lover is less significant. Following Fromm's theory, seeking to gratify her sexual desires is the manifestation of an individual placing the interest of the self above the benefits of the community, thereby creating an individual identity free from moral restrictions.<sup>66</sup> Conversely, Liusu is depicted as being very aware of social protocols and does not willingly break from social standards. For instance, after becoming the lover of Liuyuan and standing in the house that he had set up for her, she reflects: 'If she were Mrs Fan officially, she would have all sorts of responsibilities. [...] But now she was just Fan Liuyuan's mistress, kept in the background. She should avoid people and people

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<sup>66</sup> Fromm, *Man For Himself*, p. 134.

should avoid her' (p. 222). This reflection is written in a version of *style indirect libre*, so that the 'should' sounds like the quotation of a view that generally prevails in society and a view privately held by Liusu. This shows the extent to which she has internalized social norms concerning sexual morality.

Liusu's position in relation to conventional morality is complex and ambivalent. In Chinese society, physical love without marriage is perceived as unacceptable social behaviour. However, Liusu sees no moral advantage in marriage, which, though socially approved of, she views as a form of sacrifice. In the story, Liusu remarks on marriage, or at least a woman's first marriage, as being 'to please one's parents' (p. 216). Liuyuan puts it more bluntly by describing marriage as 'long-term prostitution' (p. 216).

Indeed, if we consider Liusu's initial reaction to the prospect of catching Liuyuan, it can be suggested that even Liusu is under no illusions about Liuyuan's affection. For instance, she asks herself 'does Liuyuan Fan really like her? Not likely. [...] She must be careful – she has no one to turn to, she only has herself' (p. 200). Then when she decides to go to Hong Kong with the matchmaker under the pretence of being a companion (even though she suspects that Liuyuan arranged it all with the matchmaker), she remarks to herself: 'she likes to gamble. She decides to stake her future on this trip' (p. 202). Liusu evidently chooses Liuyuan for his 'ability to provide for her'. Yet, the depiction of marriage in Chang's work bears a striking resemblance to the game 'Russian roulette', and this similarity is also commented on by Lien-chiang Chang who states that 'under Eileen Chang's hands, this story describes fate as uncontrollable'.<sup>67</sup>

Needing to find a husband yet faced with a seemingly reluctant Liuyuan, Liusu

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<sup>67</sup> Lien-chiang Chang, 'The Across Text Type and Analysis Between the Drama Script and Its Original Novel of Eileen Chang's *Love in a Fallen City*' (unpublished thesis, National Taiwan University of Arts, 2016), p. 9.

compromises her reputation and uses her sexual appeal on Liuyuan with the intention of eventually tempting him into marriage. One can argue that in having Liuyuan as her only lover, she has remained relatively 'virtuous' (though also relatively 'vicious' by deliberately stealing her sister's suitor) with regard to social norms. Certainly, her decision to become his mistress is presented as being motivated not by any need to fulfil sexual desires as such, but by the prospect of an eventual marriage. Her decision to break free from social norms highlights a greater personal desire to prioritize her own interest. Leo Ou-fan Lee remarks that Liusu must become a nontraditional woman as 'women characters in traditional Chinese fictions are not divorced'.<sup>68</sup> Guo argues that Liusu represents a 'consciousness of Chinese women that deviates from and modifies traditional concepts of femininity'.<sup>69</sup>

Since Liusu's actions and thoughts are stimulated by an awareness that her own survival depends largely on her ability to stand out from her female counterparts, it can be argued that her identity is developed under the influence of socio-cultural demands and is therefore not a reflection of her private desires. Contrary to Violette who uses sexuality to achieve greater personal satisfaction and is consequently suggestive of an individual developing an identity, Liusu approaches her own sexuality as a means of gaining greater recognition. From this perspective and following Maslowian theory on the need to gratify personal needs in order to achieve a sense of self-actualization, it can be suggested that Violette is more at an advantage in achieving a degree of individualism through her sexuality than the socio-culturally focused Liusu.

If, however, we approach Maslow's view on the maximization of potential from the angle that such potential must be directly related to one's physical construction,

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<sup>68</sup> Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern: The Flowering of a New Urban Culture in China 1930-1945* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 295.

<sup>69</sup> Guo, 'Making History Anew', para. 6.

Violette, who we see uses sexual experimentation in identity development, becomes less likely to succeed than Liusu who focuses on maximizing her qualities as a sexually appealing and available woman. The nuance in Maslow's view highlights a degree of optimism in Liusu's identity development since she strives to develop a sense of identity as a gendered individual and as a categorized female person. This is different from the behaviour of Violette who places less emphasis on her gender and, following an interpretation of Maslowian theory, reveals herself to be less likely to succeed in fulfilling her potential as a female individual.

One important issue raised by Erikson in his study of identity is the meaning of freedom for each individual. He comments that 'each group identity cultivates its own sense of freedom, which is the reason why one people rarely understand what makes another people feel free'.<sup>70</sup> With this in mind, it would be unfair to infer that Violette's sense of freedom is greater than that of Liusu's. Adjustments must be made according to cultural context. Thus, going away on holiday with a bachelor, and in the process creating a scandal for Liusu (and for her family as well), can be considered to be a rupture from socially acceptable behaviour. This rupture can also be suggested to be daring enough to equal, if not surpass, Violette's sexual experimentations in a comparatively more liberated society.

For this reason, it is more appropriate to determine the degree of freedom both characters believe to be available to them in their respective socio-cultural communities. One possible method is to examine the reasons behind their deliberate digressions from socially acceptable sexual behaviour. Only then can we assess how far their actions and attitudes have a positive effect upon their overall well-being.

### **3.6 Freedom and sex**

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<sup>70</sup> Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis*, p. 89.



Seeking freedom from society is made more difficult as the individual can be deterred from exercising or contemplating an action or thought through the fear of mental punishment coming from within the self. This effective form of deterrent is, according to Wright, an example of rules that are ‘internalized into each individual which, unlike restrictions set by others or the society, form the basis upon which self-judgment is established, [and] when these internalized rules are violated, guilt appears and self-condemnation occurs’.<sup>71</sup>

This resonates with both the texts examined here. For example, we saw above that when Hermine gives up her dream as a pianist to be with Violette, Violette is made to feel guilty; that guilt motivates her expression of pleasure when Hermine presents her with an ochre nightshirt, and she renounces happiness ‘en ne voulant pas l’attrister’ (p. 197). Here it seems that Violette’s guilt is associated with a need to make sacrifices. With reference to the argument proposed by both Fromm and Maslow on the need to prioritize the desire of the self before others to achieve positive personal growth, it can be suggested that the need within Violette to make sacrifices is a form of internalized restriction.

Similarly, in *Love in a Fallen City*, Liusu’s sense of self-reproach is intensified after her first failed attempt at entrapping Liuyuan into marriage:

Basically, a woman who was tricked by a man deserved to die, while a woman who tricked a man was a whore. If a woman tried to trick a man but failed and then was tricked by him, that was whoredom twice over. Kill her and you’d only dirty the knife. (p. 218)

This debasing description of how a woman is perceived in a society influenced by

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<sup>71</sup> Wright, *The Psychology of Moral Behaviour*, p. 164.

centuries of male cultural hegemony is internalized by Liusu. Here, guilt does not equate to a need to make sacrifices. Quite the contrary: ‘kill her and you’d only dirty the knife’ implies that even making a sacrifice is not enough to atone for one’s sin. In Liusu’s case, internalized (patriarchal) norms are presented to be detrimental to personal development.

Although fear is common to both depictions of guilt (Violette’s and Liusu’s), they are driven by distinctly different attitudes. On the one hand, Violette’s fear of not having done enough to satisfy both her and Hermine’s needs is a reflection of her desire to achieve fulfilment. When society – the relatively liberal society in which she lives – is indifferent to her behaviour and emotions, then it is logical to assume that only Violette judges herself, and only Violette can relieve herself of guilt (if she finds a way). Here again is the suggestion that Violette can potentially choose, as an individual, how she approaches her emotional responses.

Liusu’s fear of non-conformity reflects, on the other hand, her need to comply with social demands. Robert Kastennbaum and Ruth Aisenberg write, ‘do something that good Catholics, good Jews [etc...] don’t do and one risks total ostracism. One becomes dead to the group’.<sup>72</sup> Since Liusu is clearly afraid of doing something that good Chinese women ‘don’t do’, her guilt is motivated by her fear of social death. Contrary to Violette who can make amends by trying to please Hermine, for instance, Liusu can only justify her actions and atone for her wrongdoings through gaining society’s approval. In this case, self-interest is relinquished in order to escape social alienation.

Maslow emphasizes that to be severed from community life threatens the individual’s sense of security and comfort.<sup>73</sup> Prioritizing the interest of the self

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<sup>72</sup> Robert Kastennbaum and Ruth Aisenberg, *The Psychology of Death* (London: Duckworth, 1974), p. 122.

<sup>73</sup> Maslow, *Toward a Psychology of Being*, pp. 21-35.

above the benefits of the community increases the probability of ostracization, and when the individual is categorized as being an egoist, the survival instinct of the community generally works in favour of the collective and withdraws from the individual to avoid any potential conflicts or threats. This resonates with the fear of exclusion that is common to characters in Leduc and Chang. For example, Violette's declaration of happiness at being 'retr e dans le troupeau' (p. 376) is an action instigated by the fear of exclusion. *Love in a Fallen City*, on the contrary, depicts above all individual unwillingness to prioritize the interest of the self before the needs of the community. Quoting a previously mentioned example, Liusu's apparent acceptance of not receiving any attention from her family when she, like her sister, is also expected to meet a potential husband, is the manifestation of an individual afraid of being perceived as egoistic.

### 3.7 Perceived value and identity development

In our analysis of individualism in Leduc and Chang, we touched several times on the question of self-esteem, and its relation to the judgments of others, which, whilst they always seem to be internalized, may or may not leave the individual character free to develop an identity in relation to those judgments. Let us now probe this issue further.

Sedikides and Brewer remark that 'self-esteem goes up in response to social acceptance and goes down in response to social rejection'.<sup>74</sup> Wright similarly remarks: 'my self-esteem depends on how those *I* value value me', and 'in serving the interests of those to whom I am attached, I am therefore strengthening my sense

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<sup>74</sup> Sedikides and Brewer, 'The Primacy of the Interpersonal Self', p. 74.

of identity'.<sup>75</sup> However, if we read such comments from a feminist perspective, they seem deeply problematic, particularly if 'the interests of those to whom I am attached' are subsumed within a system that pressures individuals towards culturally determined gender roles. If women believe their recognition is predominantly influenced by their perceived worth, one can only assume that they must also be more inclined to conform to society's definition of what a woman should be.

It is, thus, difficult to see how women can develop a positive sense of the self when, in order to maintain or maximize their worth, they must conform to the patriarchal image of a woman. They risk not only confining themselves within social norms, but also perpetuating the image that a woman is defined by her maternal role and her femininity. Culture will then appear like nature to women, and is all the more easily passed down the generations.

This is a typical feminist position, and so it will suffice here to cite two sources. Moi writes that 'in patriarchal society women are considered men's property'.<sup>76</sup> This statement implies that since women are more likely than men to fall under the rule of ownership, they are also more likely to be concerned with how valuable they are perceived to be. Irigaray remarks that, as the result of being perceived as an object, women's worth is commercially judged by society: 'la femme est traditionnellement valeur d'usage pour l'homme, valeur d'échange entre les hommes. Marchandise, donc'.<sup>77</sup> Irigaray, like Horney, believes that the system of representation is biased and does not reflect a true perception of the values of women, yet traditional beliefs and practices are so powerful that women continue to be perceived as the more apt home-makers, proliferating subsequently the image of women as more suitable for activities within the home. This phenomenon places the woman in a vulnerable

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<sup>75</sup> Wright, *The Psychology of Moral Behaviour*, p. 130.

<sup>76</sup> Toril Moi, 'Jealousy and Sexual Difference', *Feminist Review*, Summer (1982): 53-68 (62).

<sup>77</sup> Irigaray, *Ce Sexe qui n'en est pas un*, p. 30.

position where the majority of her time is spent within the home and she must rely on others, in most cases on a man, to bring in resources from beyond the boundaries of the house. It is this dependence which encourages man into believing that he has the power to decide what qualities the woman he chooses to receive his resources must possess.

We do not need to assume that this process must be unidirectional: men adopt their gendered roles as well as women. Taking as an example a report by Geng Xujing on a 2013 survey titled ‘Chinese people’s love and marriage values’.<sup>78</sup> Xujing writes that, as a necessary condition for marriage, over fifty percent of women expect their potential husbands at least to own a house. But the point is that even as society modernizes, men remain the recognized dominant authoritarian group. For instance, cultural practices such as the wedding ceremony where the father or a father substitute, also a man, gives the bride away maintain the superiority of men over women.

Let us now see how far such problems are exposed and explored in Leduc and Chang’s writing. In *Love in a Fallen City*, Liusu only becomes a highly regarded and welcomed member of her maternal family after her marriage to Liuyuan, who is depicted as the principal decider of her worth. The fear of jeopardizing his opinion of her becomes the primary determining factor of her actions:

Of course she considered looking for a job, anything to earn a bowl of rice. [...] But if she took some menial job, she would lose her social status. [...] She couldn’t sell herself cheaply now, or else he’d have a perfect excuse for refusing to marry her. So she just had to hang on a little while longer. (p. 219)

Living in a society where women of reputable families are neither required nor

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<sup>78</sup> Geng Xujing, ‘Chinese People’s Views on Love and Marriage in 2012’, *Women of China*, February 26, 2013. < <http://www.womenofchina.cn/html/womenofchina/report/150962-1.htm> > [accessed 7 May 2014].

encouraged to seek paid employment for fear of bringing shame upon the family, Liusu's decision not to take 'some menial job' can arguably be a justifiable attempt at preserving her family's social status and, consequently, her own standing. Although Guo presents a more materialistic picture by comparing Liusu's behaviour to a masquerade in which she is only seeking to find 'dwellings in a world of triviality and petty desires'.<sup>79</sup> It is, however, ironic that Liusu should regard gaining independence through paid employment as selling herself cheaply when, without this resource, she must remain parasitically dependent on her materialistic maternal family.

The desire for a highly regarded public recognition is a powerful incentive for individual women to strive to please those who can determine their worth, even at the risk of sacrificing personal values. For example, in *La Bâtarde*, Berthe asks Violette:

J'étais gaie? A demandé ma mère.  
 Tu ne t'en souviens pas?  
 [...]  
 Tu étais toujours gaie. Tu chantais.  
 Je chantais? dit-elle avec une voix d'enfant. Je chantais et je  
 n'avais pas un sou, dit-elle avec extase. (pp. 170-71)

We are given an account of how Berthe became a wealthy and respectable lady following her marriage to the man with the pince-nez. Her last remark, 'je chantais et je n'avais pas un sou', suggests that prior to her marriage and whilst working her way towards respectability, she enjoyed more freedom and satisfaction from having fulfilled her desires. The implication that Berthe's conscious need to gain public recognition at the loss of her freedom, or her unvoiced desire for freedom, is an unsatisfactory compensation cannot be neglected.

However, since she does not manifest a desire to return to a period of financial

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<sup>79</sup> Guo, 'Making History Anew', para. 19.

insecurity, it can be argued that in choosing to lose her happiness and freedom in order to gain a degree of public recognition, Berthe resonates with Maslow's theory on the behaviour of an individual prioritizing the perceived value of her public self over personal needs. However, if her actions are interpreted as an attempt at giving her daughter an acknowledged place in society by virtue of her legal marriage, then I would argue that such a sacrificial act deserves recognition. After all, marriage may allow Berthe to fulfil her need for a sense of security and love, but in being a recognized married mother, Berthe is, first and foremost, offering her daughter the possibility of being acknowledged as a legitimate individual which, following Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, is fulfilling a higher level of need (the need for self-esteem) than that suggested to be fulfilled by Berthe. Hughes describes Hermine's seemingly self-sacrificial stance with Violette as 'loving martyrdom'.<sup>80</sup> I would add that Berthe too can be perceived as a martyr.

Not only is a woman expected to make sacrifices for the pleasure of others, but she is also expected to adopt a pleasing attitude towards others in the hope of raising her own perceived worth. For example, when Liuyuan pulls Liusu away from a dancing party under the pretext that she is suffering from a headache, this unexpected gesture leaves Liusu with 'no time to think, though she knew that she didn't want to cross him. [...]. So she let him help put on her coat, apologized to others, and walked out with him' (p. 206). Her attempt to maintain a positive relationship with Liuyuan, juxtaposed with Berthe's decision to fulfil her desire for public recognition, imply that both accept the value of the self as perceived by others and must, subsequently, submit to the rules of the deciding party.

Tice and Baumeister comment that there are exceptions when the individual need not react to others in order to enhance self-esteem, but they argue that, for this to

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<sup>80</sup> Hughes, *French Erotic Fiction*, p. 75.

occur, the individual must possess a strong enough sense of self-confidence in the beginning to withstand the pressures of social networks.<sup>81</sup> Such ideas might seem, at first, to find resonance in Chang and Leduc. For example, it can be argued that Berthe epitomizes the confident single mother raising an illegitimate child under the illusion of being loved by the socially superior André. If, however, we return to the earlier suggestion that Berthe's behaviour as a single mother is a form of martyrdom, then we must also consider the possibility that, in reality, Berthe is forced to confront social pressure. Her insistence that Violette must be appropriately dressed demonstrates her hope that both the mother and daughter will eventually escape marginalization: she hopes that Violette can 'rivaliser en soins, en médaille et chaînette d'or, en robes de broderie, en longues anglaises, en teint clair, en cheveux soyeux avec les enfants riches de la ville' (pp. 31-32).

Similarly, in *Love in a Fallen City*, a firm belief in the self is demonstrated by Liusu when she boldly dances with Liuyuan not once but three times. She does not allow society to dictate how she should act and uses to her advantage her ability to dance, as well as her self-perceived attractive features, to become visible to Liuyuan. Her behaviour, however, is severely criticized by her sisters-in-law, evident when they comment, 'we who are properly brought up, people like us (third mistress) aren't taught to dance. [...] Utterly shameless!' (p. 199). Yet she is determined to show them that such acts can have a positive result, thereby demonstrating a strong belief in the self.

But the texts also show the limits of such tendencies within their respective heroines. For instance, in *La Bâtarde*, Maurice's apparent interest in Violette affirms her worth as a valued friend: 'Sachs m'observait et réfléchissait. J'étais fière de l'intéresser' (p. 439). We have seen how he allows her possibilities of greater

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<sup>81</sup> Tice and Baumeister, 'The Primacy of the interpersonal Self', p. 75.



fulfilment. However, when Violette insistently clamours for Gabriel to recognize Maurice's worth, Gabriel replies with 'si tu savais comme je m'en fous' (p. 441). His explicit refusal to value the man 'Maurice', who values his wife 'Violette', demonstrates his indifference to the opinions of Maurice. It also indirectly questions his wife's choice of friends. This subsequently suggests his lack of appreciation or confidence in Violette's judgement. I would also add that her repeated attempts at getting her husband to change his opinion and agree with her on her choices imply that, to a certain extent, she is supremely confident with her decisions and is therefore, manifesting a sense of self-esteem.

In *Love in a Fallen City*, we saw how women internalize patriarchal values, and cited the passage where Liusu, once divorced, was seen as the inferior of Baoluo who is acknowledged as a virgin bride. The juxtaposition of the apathetic husband with the interested friend in *La Bâtarde*, and the comparison between the cherished daughter with the scorned Liusu highlights the existence of contrasting values and how the recognition and respect of others can become influential factors in elevating or denigrating the value of the (female) self.

### **3.8 External influences: new environments, old habits**

Both Leduc and Chang show their heroines moving into (for them) radically new environments. This creates in each case a kind of testing-ground which allows the characters to slough off old tendencies, to break with external, cultural norms that provide an obstacle to personal desires. I will show that even if a human being has all her wants supplied when entering a new environment, and perhaps one that resembles a state of nature in some respect, and even though personal desires can emerge more clearly, having been disentangled from the influence of the old culture,

the heroines of Leduc and Chang remain focused on their need to seek alignment with new external cultural norms.

Let us consider the introduction of wars in both works which changes or makes redundant the antebellum status. Socio-cultural rules are changed or made redundant by war. This sweeping-away of existing norms allows Violette and Liusu to experience new events in a different or less restraining environment. But where Violette experiences financial independence, physical health, respect and, subsequently, an increased self-esteem as a black-market trader, there is a sense of uncertainty in Liusu, who discovers that external forces which have hitherto been influential elements in her decisions are no longer as significant as she had once believed. Whereas Violette flourishes from her illegal activities, Liusu misses the old certainties which constrained but also contained her identity: 'here in this uncertain world, money, property, the permanent things – they're all unreliable' (p. 228).

The development of Violette's creative skills as a writer away from the city demonstrates the possibility of developing an individual identity through the removal of established external influences and/or the fact of living in more natural surroundings. We saw Chang similarly experimenting with the possibility of creating an identity free of external influences. This is apparent when Liuyuan looks forward to taking Liusu to Malaya, though in Liusu's case internalized values proved too strong. But the contrast seems less stark on closer examination, for it turns out that neither Leduc nor Chang sees her heroine as only requiring to be released from the status quo in order to flourish.

Sedikides and Gaertner propose that developing an individual self is not about being asocial or being in a social or cultural vacuum, but rather about how the individual self 'is subjectively valued and about the ways in which a threat to this

type of self [...] is handled psychologically'.<sup>82</sup> Alison Fell quotes Kristeva's argument that women are 'labouring under the misapprehension that it is possible to exist outside of the symbolic order'.<sup>83</sup> As both Violette and Liusu demonstrate, external elements appear in a variety of forms and cannot be completely eradicated. Rina Onorato and John Turner quote Cooley as stating that 'the "I", the "me" and "mine" [...] always imply social life and relation to other persons'.<sup>84</sup> As the 'I' and 'je' is used throughout *La Bâtarde* and *Love in a Fallen City*, Violette and Liusu are evidently characters who are psychologically attached to specific socio-cultural communities.

Furthermore, Leduc does not depict an absolute return to nature. Violette thrives in the country but her development remains dependent on 'culture', that is to say, she thrives because of her interactions within the country and not the consequence of being in a social or cultural vacuum. More than physical survival is at stake. Violette clearly enjoys the prestige her illegal business gives her: 'J'eus un noyau de clients dans l'immeuble somptueux du vieux docteur. Ils m'accueillaient à bras ouverts' (p. 591). Her sense of self-confidence and creativity in war-time France can be regarded as a reflection of having finally satisfied her desire for financial stability – a concept or aspiration that makes no sense outside culture.

However, Violette's preoccupation with entrepreneurship, even during the economic turmoil of war, not only suggests she remains under the societal influence of pre-war France where personal achievements are represented by the accumulation of wealth, but also highlights the reality that, irrespective of spatial changes, financial stability remains a dominant factor for Violette. Similarly, Liusu is unwilling to reject

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<sup>82</sup> Sedikides and Gaertner, 'A Homecoming to the Individual Self', p. 8.

<sup>83</sup> Alison Fell, *Liberty, Equality, Maternity in Beauvoir, Leduc and Ernaux*, p. 33.

<sup>84</sup> Rina Onorato and John Turner, 'The "I", the "me" and the "us"', in *Individual Self, Relational Self, Collective Self*, p. 149.

her initial belief about the importance of marriage. This conviction does not change with changing circumstances.

The question then arises of what would count as a healthy adaptation for any given individual. The challenge the characters face is to proceed to define the self in a manner conducive to happiness whilst, at the same time, relying on the judgement of others (which may result in subordination and self-denigration), and discarding environmental factors to create a vision of the self that is compatible with the values of the self as perceived by others.

#### **4 Concluding comments: Love of the self and identity development**

Sedikides and Gaertner emphasize that what is seen as an unimportant belief in one culture may have important significance in another. In *Love in a Fallen City*, the importance of social networks for the creation of an individual identity highlights what we might call the society-orientated self in Liusu. In contrast, Violette manifests a more self-orientated identity whose desire for self-enhancement is not overshadowed by her fears of social criticism. For instance, when Berthe is taken ill, Violette does not visit her. Instead, she remarks: ‘je ne dissimule pas mon ingratitude et ma cruauté’ (*La Bâtarde*, p. 469). Her experimentations and adventures, as well as a general indifference to the consequences of these, suggest a strong sense of self-confidence which, according to Maslow, all help towards the development of a sense of self.<sup>85</sup> But one must ask if this is a form of disavowal; a reminder that she did not choose to be the illegitimate Violette, nor did she choose to be in this world: ‘je suis navrée d’être au monde’ (p. 21).

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<sup>85</sup> Maslow, *Toward a Psychology of Being*, p. 4.

When we take into consideration the rationale behind Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs – that deficiency love need must be sufficiently gratified before any self-orientated or self-actualizing need can take place – Violette's apparent indifference to social criticism can offer the following interpretation: that she has sufficiently satisfied her need for love and no longer needs to focus on gaining more acceptance from others. She is then able to progress towards a more self-orientated development.

This may appear at first glance to contradict the suggestion raised in Chapter II that Violette feels a need for maternal love and is desirous of such affection. However, Maslowian theory supposes that 'self-actualization does not mean a transcendence of all human problems. Conflict, anxiety [...] frustrations, sadness, hurt and guilt can all be found in a healthy human being'.<sup>86</sup> This suggests that her apparent lack of compassion towards Berthe may be a show of resignation that she will never be adequately fulfilled in her need for maternal love and that in order to achieve what Maslow terms 'pseudo-growth', Violette chooses not to acknowledge this need.<sup>87</sup> It can then be argued that since she has chosen not to recognize her need as authentic, implying that this need for love does not exist or is not true for her, it is subsequently unnecessary for her to show affection for her mother as a daughter should, even when Berthe is 'malade [...] seule dans l'appartement' (p. 469).

It is in being indifferent to criticisms that Violette can proceed towards a more self-orientated growth. However, the fact that Violette emphatically and repeatedly states that she does not care about what people think of her "parce que je me fiche de tout le monde" (p. 224) suggests the opposite. In trying to convince the reader that Violette is indifferent to a need for approval, it can be argued that Leduc is in reality

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 210.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p. 58.

portraying a character who is not only sensitive to external judgments, but is deeply affected by how she is perceived.

In *Love in a Fallen City* there is also a degree of self-interest present in Liusu. Her plans to trap Liuyuan into marriage are a clear example of this. However, contrary to Violette's achieving a sense of self-growth from personal experiences, Liusu is depicted as a woman living in a world where changes rarely occur and where the possibility of challenging changes is repressed:

The Bai household was a fairy land where a single day, creeping slowly by, was a thousand years in the outside world. But if you spent a thousand years here, all the days would be the same, each one as flat and dull as the last one. (p. 195)

Liusu's disapproval of a life empty of changes and events is indicative of insufficient intellectual and physical stimulation, highlighting concomitantly her sense of curiosity and a desire to face challenges.

This desire to break free from authoritative power is, however, thwarted by her self-perceived incompetence, apparent when she remarks: 'if there was a way, I'd be long gone! I haven't studied much, and I can't do manual labor, so what kind of job can I do?' (p. 193). Liusu has identified the cause of her problem yet does not proceed to resolve the situation through learning. Instead, she feels obliged to depend on the generosity of her family who are becoming less eager to shelter her and who, ironically, are also the people she is trying to escape from:

Go and be his widow, after we've divorced? People will laugh till their teeth fall out! She (Liusu) went on sewing [...].  
'Sixth Sister, that's no way to talk,' said Third Master. 'He didn't do right by you back then, we all know that. But now he's dead – you're not going to hold a grudge, are you? Those two concubines that he left behind, they won't go into widowhood. If you go back now, all serious and proper, to lead the mourning for him, who's going to dare to laugh? It's true you didn't have any

children, but he has lots of nephews, and you can pick one of them to continue the line. There isn't a lot of property left, but they're a big clan; even if they only make you the keeper of his shrine, they're not going to let a mother and child starve.' (p. 189)

In a few sentences, Chang has not only highlighted the unreasonable practice of traditional Chinese society, she has also highlighted Liusu as a parasite – a term Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar use to define a woman who is tended by the labour of others.<sup>88</sup>

It appears Liusu's expected sole purpose in life is to be the keeper of her husband's shrine. Liusu is restricted from acting in the interest of the self and also restricted from experiencing life beyond the routines of domesticity. As a result, she is unable to accumulate sufficient knowledge to explore her potential. Depicting a woman with a sufficient level of curiosity, yet not having enough knowledge to venture out alone, is a technique Chang uses to highlight the presence of an innate or instinctive desire for knowledge within the safety of existing environmental restraints. It also implies Chang's belief that traditional Chinese social structure is limiting women's development of knowledge.

By referring to her life as dull and flat, Liusu suggests she is unable to gain access to knowledge and is therefore subordinated by authoritarian rules. This is, however, not used by Liusu as an incentive to challenge established rules, but as a justification for her passive or conforming behaviour. Unlike Violette, Liusu expects others, in particular the dominant power, to change her life and adjusts her needs and behaviour so that her actions are objectively targeted towards pleasing others. From this perspective, any development henceforth cannot be considered as answering her authentic need.

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<sup>88</sup> Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century, Volume 2: Sex Changes* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), p. 143.

By contrast, women characters in *La Bâtarde* are certainly not dependent on men for their material survival, and since Violette is depicted as being unable to achieve positive growth from her relationships with Hermine and Gabriel, it can be argued that the exertion of influence by others upon the individual is represented as unhelpful, if not detrimental, to the development of self-identity. In other words, self-growth – particularly positive self-growth – can only be sourced from the individual.

Freudian and Kleinian theory, as well as that of Erikson, emphasize the importance of primary attachment for the future development of a child.<sup>89</sup> It is also argued that the child would be more inclined to please the primary carer – usually a maternal person – rather than a secondary carer. When applied to Leduc's and Chang's work, it can be suggested that those directly in charge of Violette's and Liusu's upbringing will play an influential role in their identity development. It is possible to suppose, consequently, that the depiction of Violette growing up in a boarding school is a reflection of Leduc's belief that self-development is promoted only when external influences are kept to a minimum. In contrast, Liusu is depicted to be always in the company of others and any personal progress made is directly the result of her response to the interplay of events. This further accentuates the differences in identity development between the self-orientated Violette and the society-orientated Liusu.

The development of narcissism or self-interest in Violette and Liusu also differs. At first glance, Violette's manifestation of self-interest is suggestive of a narcissistic child who demands attention and love but is unwilling to reciprocate in the same manner. In contrast, Liusu's self-interest is influenced by her need to conform to

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<sup>89</sup> Sigmund Freud, *On Sexuality*, p. 375; Melanie Klein, 'Parenthood: On Being a Mother', in *Love, Hate and Reparation*, pp. 76-80; Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis*, p. 105.



social demands. Chung-tien Yi remarks how in traditional society, the only route considered appropriate for a woman is to be a wife and a mother, with chastity or widowhood as the only recourse if she should lose her husband.<sup>90</sup> William Theodore De Bary also refers to the repressed state of women in traditional Chinese society, stating in particular the influence of Confucian ideology on the lack of recognition of women in society.<sup>91</sup> Liusu's compliance is therefore a reflection of the internalization of the Confucian principle which regards personal sacrifice as a desired virtue for women.

The lack of support from Liusu's family is not only an indication that she is no longer considered significant, but implies also that she has become unworthy of recognition and is therefore expendable. It is this potential danger of being replaced which threatens her sense of survival and Liusu moves to safeguard her existence by concentrating on her own needs and by acting in the interest of the self, as is demonstrated when she takes an interest in her sister's intended suitor. Although this narcissistic approach poses the risk of abandonment by her family, it nevertheless permits Liusu to be distinctively different from other female members and, consequently, reduces the risk of substitution. Focusing on fulfilling her own needs is therefore demonstrated to be a counter attack against the possibility of extinction and does not reflect a need for self-growth as we have seen with Violette.

Another difference between Violette and Liusu is their approach towards their sexual identity. On the one hand, Violette deliberately departs from socially acceptable sexual behaviour in order to achieve a sense of sexual fulfilment. The seemingly confident exhibition of her sexual identity may, however, be challenged. Maslow comments that a growth independent of outside forces is characteristic of a

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<sup>90</sup> Chung-tien Yi, *Chinese Men and Women*, p. 9.

<sup>91</sup> William Theodore De Bary, *Sources of Chinese Tradition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), p. 393.

self-actualizing individual, but for self-actualization to take place, all deficiency or basic needs must be sufficiently satisfied. If Violette's sexual experimentations can be interpreted as signs of insecurity, then the need to be promiscuous would imply that her basic needs have not been sufficiently fulfilled. This would then suggest an individual less able to proceed towards self-actualization.

Liusu, on the other hand, does not experiment with sex. In fact, she abstains from intimacy in the hope of gaining a long-term commitment from Liuyuan: 'She approved entirely, because spiritual love always leads to marriage, while physical love tends to reach a certain level and then stop, leaving little hope of marriage' (*Love in a Fallen City*, p. 210). Liusu is not concerned with attaining sexual fulfilment but perceives her sexual function both as a reward which she can offer to Liuyuan for his commitment to her, and as a tool which she uses to achieve her goal. Objectifying sexual acts and exploring her sexuality indicate that not only is she conscious of her feminine traits but that she also understands how to manipulate them to her advantage. Liusu does not approach sexual intimacy as a means of achieving an identity, nor is it directly influential to self-growth. It is, instead, objectively used to help fulfil her need for recognition. This is contrary to Violette's subjective approach to sexual intimacy which helps to strengthen her sexual identity whilst concomitantly underlining her need for love.

Fromm remarks that 'the most effective method for weakening a child's will is to arouse his sense of guilt'.<sup>92</sup> It can be argued that in order for Violette to achieve a sense of relief as well as positive growth from the feeling of guilt, she must detach herself from blame. An example of such detachment is found at the end of the relationship between Hermine and Violette when Violette blames Hermine for all her failures and does not acknowledge her own defects. A reading of Maslow's theory on

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<sup>92</sup> Fromm, *Man for Himself*, pp. 155-56.

confronting and resolving personal defects to promote personal growth reveals Violette's strategy of condemning others and, in the process, deflecting her attention away from personal flaws, to be unbeneficial to individual growth.<sup>93</sup> I would however argue that, contrary to Maslowian theory, it is also by condemning others, and thereby concealing or overlooking her weakness, that she is able to maintain or achieve more easily an overall belief in the self.

On the other hand, Liusu condemns herself when her initial plot to entrap Liuyuan fails, but instead of detaching herself from blame, she accepts her failure as proof that her actions are incorrect. She pragmatically questions her strategies and proceeds to restore her sense of security by reassessing her actions. Although both Liusu and Violette appear not to have achieved positive growth (one has failed in her own eyes and must therefore retreat to reassess her strategies, and the other feels compelled to disconnect herself from blame in order to maintain her sense of self-confidence), I suggest that in stating that she has fewer flaws (or that she denies having them), Violette is already manifesting an awareness of her faults. She is, following Maslowian theory, more likely to achieve positive individual growth than Liusu who does not acknowledge her set-backs (or failures as perceived by society) as personal defects.

Above, we saw that Hermine and Berthe value Violette when she is a child. This, subsequently, encourages the latter to adopt a more dependent behaviour when in their presence. The two principal men in Violette's life, in contrast, encourage her to break free from child-like behaviour. Gabriel values Violette not only as a woman but also as a companion. Violette's relationship with Gabriel discloses the search for an identity that is mature both physically as well as psychologically. Her decision to marry Gabriel is therefore motivated by, on the one hand, a primary need to assert

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<sup>93</sup> Maslow, *Toward a Psychology of Being*, p. 61.

her identity as a sexually active adult female and, on the other hand, a secondary need for public recognition of her worth as a desirable woman.

Her motivational need, however, can be argued to be in contrast with her personal needs as she reflects on the error of her decision on the day of her marriage: ‘On va se marier, tout se débîne, on a vécu avant de vivre’ (p. 383). The cake after her wedding meal, which she describes as ‘le gâteau le plus sombre et le plus minable’ (p. 384), can also be interpreted as an awareness of having overlooked her personal desire. This consequently discloses a greater motivational need within her to be identified as an independent adult woman sexually active in a heterosexual relationship than a need to be recognized as an independent lesbian.

Maurice, in contrast, is valuable to Violette in that by accepting her as his friend, she becomes just Violette – an individual whose sexual identity is of no interest to him. However, in his quest to leave the camp, Maurice has pushed Violette back from being a genderless friend to being a sexual object. Maslowian theory suggests that individuals dislike being used, and it is this apparent lack of appreciation for her qualities as an individual which turns Violette away from Maurice.<sup>94</sup>

In *Love in a Fallen City*, Liuyuan is considered by Liusu as the ultimate reward which will provide her with a recognized existence. Her perception of life closely relates to the rule of the natural world where only the fittest survives, and to avoid being eliminated she needs to become indispensable. Liusu achieves distinction by differentiating herself from other female characters, first as a divorcee and then as a capable dancer – both being qualities that are not well received in a respectable Chinese family. This is followed by having the courage to be indifferent to criticism and, lastly, to create her own ideal existence. We have seen how in Liusu’s account, the level of respect a woman can expect from society, especially from her

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<sup>94</sup> Maslow, *Toward a Psychology of Being*, p. 40.

counterparts, is determined primarily by the value a man places on her. Unlike Violette, who experiments with different sexual partners, Liusu's actions reflect the calculating steps of a woman intent on achieving a sense of recognition through her sexuality.

On the basis of the relevant differences we have found between Violette and Liusu, it can be suggested that Violette represents the development of an individual identity whose deficiency love needs are eventually sufficiently satisfied to allow for the attainment of self-enhancing growth through knowledge acquisition and experimentation. Liusu, on the other hand, may be victorious in her quest for the ultimate reward but her desire to conquer is motivated primarily by a need for belonging and acceptance. When development is associated with dependence on her socio-cultural group or on another individual, then one must challenge the authenticity of her identity development.

Finally, our reading shows how, in Leduc and Chang, the development of individualism reflects the way in which the individual responds to rules established by the dominant social group. It has also been demonstrated that behaviours which fall within social boundaries are generally more beneficial to individual development. However, since it has also been suggested that behaviours which conform to social norms are not always true reflections of the individual's desires, behaviours that do not conform to social norms must then imply a greater likelihood of satisfying personal desires. With this in mind, I will now explore the impact of two taboos – thanatos and eros – on the development of an individual identity.

## CHAPTER IV

### **Thanatos, Eros and the search for individual identity in the female characters of *Thérèse et Isabelle*, *La Bâtarde* and *The Rouge of the North*<sup>1</sup>**

This chapter will examine the development of individual identity in relation to death and sex, two topics which are often treated as taboo. Taboos, of course, are subject to wide cultural variation. For example, homosexuality is not openly discussed in current day China and is in many countries considered a sensitive topic. Derek Wright suggests that for a topic to be effectively recognized as a taboo, it must be able to elicit a degree of emotional turmoil, such as the feeling of guilt, shame or fear, within the individual.<sup>2</sup> Although guilt and shame are socially constructed, there is, however, no rigid rule as to what can arouse emotional turmoil since feelings, such as fear, are particular to the individual. This implies it is possible for a topic to be both a taboo and a sensitive issue.

Attempts to overcome the dictates of acceptable or expected behaviour in order

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<sup>1</sup> Violette Leduc, *Thérèse et Isabelle*; Violette Leduc, *La Bâtarde*; Eileen Chang, *The Rouge of the North*.

<sup>2</sup> Derek Wright, *The Psychology of Moral Behaviour* (London: Penguin, 1971), pp. 164-85.

to achieve individualism are the manifestation of a powerful instinct for individual survival. Wright theorises that the rejection of collective beliefs in favour of the solitary experience is critical to the development of individualism, particularly as physical and emotional inflictions such as pain, punishment, fear and guilt are specific to the individual.<sup>3</sup>

Maslowian theory does not focus on differentiating between collective and individual beliefs. Instead, it concentrates on how, when an individual is faced with social or political alienation, his or her attempt at survival is not only demonstrating a degree of courage or perseverance, but also a greater desire to fulfil personal needs and growth.<sup>4</sup> It is with this in mind that I will focus first on the topic of death and the extent to which an individual's cognition of the concept of death affects personal development. The second half of the chapter will explore the topic of sex. Of course, this theme has been discussed in earlier chapters, but here it is the connection between sex and death that will be explored.

Possible motivational forces behind the individual's need to embrace death and sex are also analysed to bring to light any commonality or discrepancy between the works of Leduc and Chang. This chapter is divided into two sections, with the first focusing on death in *La Bâtarde* and *The Rouge of the North*, and the second examining the treatment of sex by the female characters of Leduc's *Thérèse et Isabelle* and Chang's *The Rouge of the North*.

## **1 Thanatos and taboo in Leduc's *La Bâtarde* and Chang's *The Rouge of the North***

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<sup>3</sup> Wright, *The Psychology of Moral Behaviour*, p. 185.

<sup>4</sup> Abraham Maslow, 'Defense and Growth', in *Toward a Psychology of Being*, pp. 45-58.

Death destroys a man; the idea of Death saves him.

(E.M. Forster)<sup>5</sup>

What is death? According to Freud, it is ‘natural, undeniable and inevitable’.<sup>6</sup>

Rosemary Gordon provides a more detailed description of what death means: ‘it is the experience of that psychological state, the state of non-being, which might be felt either as a “dissolution” or as an absorption in a transpersonal union’.<sup>7</sup> Wright’s definition of death is somewhat ambiguous in that he describes death as a state in which being ‘the absent one’, or ‘the one who abandoned me’ qualifies as being dead.<sup>8</sup> In these cases, this ‘disappearance from a perception frame of reference’ is expected to have an effect upon the living’s sense of security.<sup>9</sup> Although it is reasonable to assert that the fear of death is common to all cultures, responses to death vary widely between and within cultures. It is with this in mind that I explore the perception of death as a danger.

### 1.1 Death as a danger

Death is the inevitable outcome of life. Freud argues that since everything dies, attempts to achieve progress in any form appear futile. Not only does death represent a state of nothingness, Freudian theory also highlights the paradoxical situation of the living organism struggling ‘against events (dangers in fact) which might help it to

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<sup>5</sup> Cited in Robert Jay Lifton, *Living and Dying* (London: Wildwood House, 1974), p. 37.

<sup>6</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Reflections on War and Death*, trans. by A. A. Brill and Alfred Kuttner (New York: Moffat, York, 1918), p. 41.

<sup>7</sup> Rosemary Gordon, *Dying and Creating: A Search for Meaning* (London: Library of Analytical Psychology, 1978), p. 16.

<sup>8</sup> Wright, *The Psychology of Moral Behaviour*, p. 7.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.



attain its life's aim rapidly'.<sup>10</sup> According to Georges Bataille, the disorder of death is beyond man and that, in line with Freud's theory, makes man's efforts 'un non-sens'.<sup>11</sup>

In her work on the psychology of death, Gordon approaches death from a different perspective. She claims that death is 'experienced only when an ego-structure has emerged'. In other words, an individual's experiences – achievements as well as failures – appear to be 'an expression of the way he handles his knowledge of the existence of death'.<sup>12</sup> Gordon claims that death is necessary in order to arouse within the individual a sense of consciousness or knowledge of being either physically or psychologically alive. Writing on death around the same period as Gordon, Lifton's also suggests that opening oneself to love and growth is 'to be become vulnerable' to loss and disillusionment.<sup>13</sup>

So far, we are presented with two different psychological approaches to death: either that death reduces the individual to nothingness or that death encourages the 'existence' of the individual. At this stage, I would like to bring in Robert Kastenbaum's and Ruth Aisenberg's argument that the way in which death is perceived at a particular moment 'is likely to be influenced by many situational factors'.<sup>14</sup> This is of relevance to the examination of death in *La Bâtarde* and *The Rouge of the North* since the characters' perception of death is influenced by various factors, such as cultural belief on the notion of death. Let us first examine Leduc's work.

In *La Bâtarde*, for example, the death of Fidéline from illness puts an end to Violette's dependence on a protective maternal figure and brings her into a new kind

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<sup>10</sup> Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* [translator/editor?] (New York: Bantam, 1959), pp. 70-71.

<sup>11</sup> Georges Bataille, *L'Érotisme* (Paris: Minuit, 2011), p. 48.

<sup>12</sup> Rosemary Gordon, *Dying and Creating*, p. 35.

<sup>13</sup> Lifton, *Living and Dying*, p. 59.

<sup>14</sup> Robert Kastenbaum and Ruth Aisenberg, *The Psychology of Death* (London: Duckworth, 1974), p. 5.

of existence: ‘elle me choyait, sa mort me délivra. [...] Fidéline mourut, je pris de l’aplomb’ (p. 44). Judy Cochran states that ‘Fidéline’s love offers Violette security but inhibits her growth as an individual’.<sup>15</sup> A Maslowian take on this would argue that it is precisely the love of the grandmother which allows Violette to gratify her need for love and belonging and allows her to progress toward a more self-actualizing need.

Kastenbaum and Aisenberg propose that ‘in infancy and in early childhood, the disappearance or destruction of objects probably is experienced as a partial loss of the individual self. In a sense, he disappears when his mother leaves the room’.<sup>16</sup> In the previous chapter, it is suggested that Violette identifies more with her grandmother than with her own mother. The death of Fidéline can therefore be interpreted by the young Violette as her own death. With this in mind, let us consider Julia Kristeva’s argument that self-identity is discovered through death, particularly the death of ‘I’.<sup>17</sup> If Violette interprets her grandmother’s death as her own, then the birth of her sense of self-identity is also the moment of her ‘perceived death’. This throws light on Violette’s remark of being delivered and of having ‘pris de l’aplomb’.

Another example of self-discovery through the death of ‘I’ in *La Bâtarde* is found when Violette aborts her foetus. As discussed in previous chapter, it can be argued that her decision to kill a representation of the self (with her abortion) is indicative of a lack of self-love or a lack of self-respect. With reference to Kristeva’s statement that ‘l’abjection est une résurrection qui passe par la mort (du moi)’, by killing a part of her – the part which she perceives as unworthy – Violette hopes to rediscover her sense of self-worth.

In *The Rouge of the North*, there is a similar discovery of the self for Yindi after

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<sup>15</sup> Cochran, ‘The Textual, Sexual Self: Self-Consciousness in Violette Leduc’s *La Bâtarde*’, p. 48.

<sup>16</sup> Robert Kastenbaum and Ruth Aisenberg, *The Psychology of Death*, p. 29.

<sup>17</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Pouvoirs de l’horreur: Essai sur l’abjection* (Paris: Seuil, 1980), p. 22.

the death of her husband, for from this point on, she is finally able to control her own future, as well as that of her son. Although Yindi is given status and is acknowledged as the wife of the second master throughout the fiction, it is only in widowhood that she can finally take control of both her own and her son's life, as well as gaining recognition from other members of the family as the visible head of the Second household and the 'only woman there at the family council' (pp. 92-3). The significance of the death of others upon an individual will be examined in detail later, but at this stage, it is evident that both Violette and Yindi are able to achieve a sense of identity from the death of a close family member.

In spite of this common theme, it is nevertheless evident that the frequent representation of death by Chang (such as the deaths of the Old Master, the Second Master, the Old Mistress, Yindi's own parents in *The Rouge of the North*), as opposed to its limited evocation by Leduc (such as the death of Fideline and minimal descriptions of André's death in *La Bâtarde*), marks a significant difference. Let us examine this discrepancy with reference to one of the psychological approaches to death that is described earlier – that death is the inevitable termination of life and once death occurs, the individual ceases to exist both physically as well as spiritually.

To be inevitable implies that one can no more prepare for death than for birth. This then reduces the significance of needing to repeatedly evoke a natural phenomenon. This minimal use of death finds an echo in *La Bâtarde*. Furthermore, it is mentioned earlier that in societies which believe in the significance of death as the final end of both physical and spiritual life, death is feared and must, therefore, be disavowed as a form of self-protection. It can therefore be argued that the minimal use of death scenes in *La Bâtarde* suggests a society whose sense of fear is aroused by the belief of nothingness after death, and is therefore attempting to minimize its power upon the living. This fear of death will be discussed in detail later in the

chapter.

Chang's repeated evocation of death, either of the self or of others, reflects, on the contrary, a significantly less fearful attitude towards the cognition of death. Kastenbaum and Aisenberg state that 'the individual's cognition of death is related to the world he lives in'.<sup>18</sup> This is, indeed, reflected in today's world where suicide is condemned in Western societies yet the practice of seppuku (the act of suicide to preserve honour and to avoid the possibility of shame) in Japanese culture remains a socially acceptable practice. Douglas J. Davies describes the view of death in Hinduism, Buddhism and Sikhism as 'part of the immense cycle of ongoing existence'.<sup>19</sup>

In Chinese society, where religious as well as cultural belief perceives death as a transitional phase between this life and the next – I refer here to an afterlife – the depictions of physical death in Chang's work imply that not only should it be confronted as often as possible so that every individual can be prepared for it, but also suggest that the biological termination of life is not the final phase of an individual and should therefore be accepted and embraced. For example, the Old Mistress holds a party to celebrate the birthday of the long-deceased Old Master in a Buddhist temple: 'the sixtieth birthday of the long-dead master of the house was celebrated posthumously in the Temple of the Bathing Buddha' (p. 72). Chang implies that the Old Master's physical death is not his 'final' end – since he is presumed to be attending his own party. She is also suggesting that the dead should not be feared by the living.

Bataille argues that the fear of dying is aroused by the perception that physical death poses as 'un danger magique, susceptible d'agir à partir du cadavre par

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<sup>18</sup> Kastenbaum and Aisenberg, *The Psychology of Death*, p. 450.

<sup>19</sup> Douglas J. Davies, *A Brief History of Death* (Malden: Blackwell, 2005), p. 8.

“contagion”<sup>20</sup>. The danger that death is believed to pose to the living can be found in *La Bâtarde*, with Berthe deliberately trying to prevent her daughter from ‘catching’ death. For example, Violette is purposely kept away from her dying grandmother and is not even allowed to say good morning: ‘Je ne pouvais plus entrer dans la chambre, je ne devais plus lui dire bonjour par la porte entrouverte’ (p. 43). Berthe also tries to keep death away from Violette, first by not telling Violette of the grandmother’s death. The young Violette overhears her mother remarking to Clarisse that ‘c’est fini’ (p. 43), but is unable to comprehend the meaning of ‘fini’: “qu’est-ce qui est donc fini?’ ai-je demandé à l’obscurité’ (p. 44). The young Violette is also shielded from death when the deceased Fideline is carried out concealed underneath ‘une houle de parapluies’ (p. 44).

In *The Rouge of the North*, Chang also explores the belief that death might have a contagious effect. For instance, after Yindi’s attempted suicide she is confined within her quarters and publicly dismissed by her mother-in-law which, subsequently, sends a message to the entire household that they can and should distance themselves from Yindi too: ‘the matter (her attempted suicide) was never mentioned when she waited on Old Mistress again after a few days’ rest, but ever since then Old Mistress never wanted her around much. It seemed that Second Master needed more nursing now’ (p. 90). Although Yindi is not successful in her suicide attempt, she nevertheless forces the mother-in-law to acknowledge its existence, and faced with the possibility that death – represented by Yindi – has entered her family, the mother-in-law must, as head of the house, attempt to control and restrain it.

## 1.2 Death of the self

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<sup>20</sup> Georges Bataille, *L’Érotisme* (Paris: Minuit, 1957), p. 49.

Robert Kastenbaum, Herbert Rosenfeld, Robert Jay Lifton and Eric Olson propose that suicide is an acceptable behaviour when the individual perceives his/her own death as an expression of freedom or believes in a life after death.<sup>21</sup> With this as reference, let us examine Yindi's suicide attempt which takes place shortly after she confesses her love for her brother-in-law who, we are informed, is flattered yet rejects her affections.

The cultural attitude towards death in the society to which Yindi belongs is perpetuated by religious belief in an after-life. And where death represents the continuation of an existence, Kastenbaum and Aisenberg argue that there is a tendency for the person to perceive death as the solution to intense discomfort, an end to disillusionment or the attainment of something better which cannot be found in life; in short, death represents 'the gateway to eternal bliss'.<sup>22</sup> (They do, nevertheless, appear to contradict themselves further on by also insisting that the individual contemplating suicide is psychotically acting on impulse without a thought for the future).<sup>23</sup> The termination of the physical body is then welcomed or, as Ronald Britton writes, quoting Rosenfeld, 'death is perceived as an idealized solution to all problems'.<sup>24</sup>

In *The Rouge of the North*, as suggested previously, the birthday party given for the deceased Old Master is an indication that the Old Mistress believes that her dead husband is still able to attend his own party. Yindi is also depicted to believe in an afterlife. For instance, when she finds out during a family meeting that she will receive a smaller share of the family's wealth, she calls to her husband's spirit: "my husband, dear person, how cruel you are!" she (Yindi) wailed. "Leave us all alone in

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<sup>21</sup> Kastenbaum and Aisenberg, *The Psychology of Death*, pp. 251-70; Herbert Rosenfeld, *Impasse and Interpretation* (London: Routledge, 1987), pp. 106-07; Lifton and Eric Olson, *Living and Dying*, p. 89.

<sup>22</sup> Kastenbaum and Aisenberg, *The Psychology of Death*, p. 6.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 251.

<sup>24</sup> Ronald Britton, *Sex, Death and the Superego* (London: Karnac, 2003), p. 156.

the world. Poor you, never had a single happy day when you were alive” (p. 97).

Given her belief in an afterlife, there is hope as well as despair in Yindi’s attempted suicide. By selecting death over life, Yindi expects to eliminate her pain; the pain of being physically confined within her quarter, the emotional dissatisfaction of being married to a physically handicapped husband and the potential humiliation she will suffer once her brother-in-law’s rejection of her love is known. She hopes to transcend her mortal life by destroying it.

Despite being married to a severely disabled man, having to live within a confined space, and being scorned by the family for her lowly background, the most likely catalyst to Yindi’s desire to seek death is her brother-in-law’s rejection of her love. Chiung-chu Chen claims that the Chang’s characters live in a culture built on guilt.<sup>25</sup> From this perspective, to have her first love rejected and then to live with the fear of being ridiculed due to this rejection is traumatic enough to propel Yindi to act by taking her own life.

A reading of Julia Kristeva’s argument on Chinese women and suicide suggests that the person who commits suicide ‘n’est pas motivé par le désir de chercher la mort. [...] Au contraire, le suicide est la voie la plus emphatique pour chercher la vie’.<sup>26</sup> When applied to Yindi, and it will become more apparent below why her attempted suicide is a gesture of wishing to live, it can be argued that by taking such a drastic step, she hopes to preserve her reputation as a faithful wife – an element of utmost importance in traditional Chinese societies – and to erase the memory of having her love rejected, in her view, so shamefully. Death is her gateway to a life she knew before the rejection.

Another example of the manifestation of a strong desire for the attainment of

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<sup>25</sup> Chiung-chu Chen, *The Development of Female Consciousness in the Fiction of Eileen Chang and Fay Weldon*, p. 137.

<sup>26</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Des Chinoises*, p. 120.

something better can be found in *La Bâtarde* when Violette decides to abort her child. As mentioned previously, the act of killing the foetus can, to a certain degree, be interpreted as a desire to kill a representation of the self. In analysing Violette and her self-perceived unattractiveness, Sabine Schrader writes that ‘l’image de monstre que Violette Leduc a d’elle-même, est élaborée par une tradition sociale et littéraire’.<sup>27</sup> If we approach the heroine Violette’s abortion with Schrader’s ‘image de monstre’, the act of killing her foetus can be interpreted as both a manifestation of a lack of self-love and a filicidal impulse, an impulse which Kastenbaum and Aisenberg highlights to be innate in all mothers who are not merely rejective, but suicidal.<sup>28</sup>

This unhealthy attitude towards the death of one’s child can, nevertheless, be an expression of ‘love’ for the community. In his argument on morality, David Gautier highlights that ‘it is in our interest to act on moral grounds’.<sup>29</sup> And the impulse to kill one’s child is on moral grounds – to protect society – then Violette’s abortion can be interpreted as her desire to attain something better for the good of the community. That is to say, if the physical removal of a representation of the self is intended to preserve the community from having to accept what Violette considers as a less worthy individual, then death of a representation of the self becomes the ideal solution to the improvement of a collective group.

Of course, one cannot overlook the possibility that Violette desires to be free from the burdens of motherhood which, according to Cochran, would ‘endanger her freedom to write’.<sup>30</sup> But to describe the death of her foetus as ‘le tuyau de caoutchouc rose, l’eau cramoisie’ (p. 466) highlights the macabre scene. It also emphasizes Schrader’s *image de monstre* – an image which the heroine is trying to

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<sup>27</sup> Sabine Schrader, ‘Le Bonheur était une façade’, in *Violette Leduc*, ed. by Paul Renard and Michèle Hecquet (Lille: Université Lille 3, 1998), p. 49. [full details given previously?]

<sup>28</sup> Kastenbaum and Aisenberg, *The Psychology of Death*, p. 346.

<sup>29</sup> David P. Gautier, *Morality and Rational Self-interest* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1970), p. 4.

<sup>30</sup> Cochran, ‘The Textual, Sexual Self’, p. 51.



kill to protect society. Contrary to Yindi, whose desire for suicide is focused on a personal need, Violette's destructive approach suggests a selfless act by a diffident individual.

Similarly to Violette, Yindi also manifests a desire to destroy an element belonging to or representing her – her son. Yet desiring to destroy her mature son, an act which indirectly suggests a desire to kill the development of a representation of herself which Yindi sees in her son, takes on a more sinister note when we consider that she is not killing the potential representation of the self, but an actual mature or developed image of herself. Contrary to the suggestion that the death of Violette's foetus implies the desire to kill a possible representation of a second-generation-of-Violette, Yindi's desire to induce the death of her own grown son manifests a more potent dissatisfaction with her life.

We are informed that her son is so small and thin due to Yindi's 'salty food' and that Yindi had to save 'in order to squeeze the money for opium out of their allowances' (p. 137). We are also informed that she encourages him to smoke opium as demonstrated when she offers him her opium-filled pipe to smoke: "'you have this one,' she said. 'It's fun as long as it doesn't get to be a habit' (p. 149). Although there is no clear indication that it has already become a habit for the son, Yindi's explanation for giving him opium implies that he is, or is becoming, addicted to opium: 'when you were a sick baby you used to have smoke blown in your face' (p. 149). Chen writes that opium smoking is a form of suicide.<sup>31</sup> Giving her son opium can then be suggested to be the manifestation of her filicidal impulse.

When we consider Yindi's remarks that her son 'was a part of her' (p. 150), then it can be argued that she also seeks to kill her own image which she sees being reflected in her son. Rather than physically aborting her son, she raises her son to

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<sup>31</sup> Chiung-chu Chen, *The Development of Female Consciousness*, p. 136.

become an opium smoking, poorly educated and financially dependent man. Yindi's methods of raising her son all lead to his eventual physical, social and financial death. When we consider Yindi's lack of emotion in seeing her son dying slowly from opium smoking (an addiction which she has endorsed), and juxtaposed with the earlier supposition that he is the representation of the mother, her filicidal impulse takes on a more sombre significance.<sup>32</sup> Through her son, she is witnessing her own death, and through her indifference to her son's slow death, she is manifesting a scorn or hate of the self which she is deliberately and slowly murdering.

In Chang, expectation of an afterlife, which permeates the culture in which the characters move, blunts the urgency of self-development. Since death in the works of Chang is perceived as the gateway to another life in which individuals can gratify their needs, having this second chance inevitably reduces the need or urgency for the self to develop an individual identity during one physical existence. The characters of Chang are motivated into maintaining their condition and are thereby reflecting a desire for safety.

In contrast, Violette's profoundly secular perspective, (though she is raised a Catholic, her actions cannot be considered to be religiously correct) suggests that for her death is final, just as life is given only once. There is consequently a sense of urgency in acquiring as much experience as possible in one's lifetime, as evidenced in the various sexual experimentations and professional roles which Violette undertakes, as well as her decision to remain free of maternal responsibilities. The death of her foetus favours the pursuit of her intramundane desires.

Evidently the fear of not being able to fulfil one's desire or maximize one's significance in life is at play here, but the fear of change can equally influence the development of individualism. Freud writes, 'life itself, the highest stake in the game

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 136.

of living, must not be risked'.<sup>33</sup> He proposes that the fear of meeting death restrains a person's desire to accept challenging, at times dangerous, feats lest life itself should be threatened by such explorations.<sup>34</sup> This theory is supported by Maslow who suggests growth is prevented when the individual 'is afraid to take chances, afraid to jeopardize what he already has, [...] afraid of separateness'.<sup>35</sup> Violette belongs to a community whose belief has a tendency to ignore or distance itself from death. This then raises the question of how Violette is able to achieve a positive individual development with the belief that life can somehow be prolonged by not taking risks.

One possible explanation is that the fear of death is no longer the paramount concern for Violette, as evidenced by her remark 'vivre sa mort. Je l'ai vécue en attendant la balle dans mon dos' (p. 602). Violette fears not having maximized her life more than death itself. For instance, when at the height of her success as a black-market trader and not having a hotel room to stay in, Violette adamantly refuses one of her customers' offer of a room: 'je ne voulais pas me retrouver dans les vapeurs de la paresse' (p. 601). When a life of nothingness becomes more frightening than the belief that nothing follows death, this provides a powerful motivational force for the individual to strive towards enhancing the personal self. This, according to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, is a clear indication of a desire for self-actualization or self-growth.

### 1.3 The illusion of death of the self

The possibility of pursuing identity development by disrupting the status quo, and thereby obscurely or directly risking death, is highlighted by both Leduc and Chang.

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<sup>33</sup> Freud, *Reflections on War and Death*, p. 44.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>35</sup> Maslow, *Toward a Psychology of Being*, p. 46.

Mortal death is, however, not suggested to be the only essential element that can influence the attainment of a sense of individualism. Both authors also experiment with the possibility of changing the status quo by creating an illusion of death (of the self) where the occurrence of death is suggested but does not, in actual fact, take place. Although Kristeva rejects suicide, she does nevertheless highlight its goal:

ce n'est pas d'être tué par les autres, mais de tendre vers  
l'affirmation d'une véritable individualité. Si on n'y parvient pas,  
malgré tous ses efforts, si on lutte jusqu'à la mort et si on se  
sacrifie, alors on sera le plus courageux sur la terre, et cette  
tragédie produira sur l'esprit des hommes une grande  
impression.<sup>36</sup>

Kristeva's remark that suicide is an emphatic desire to live, the manipulation of the notion of (one's) death can imply, also, a will to survive. One such example is found in Violette's pretend suicide:

Exploisons ce tremblement, d'une menace soutirons une réalité.  
Je fabrique un autre tremblement, j'appuie en tremblant la houppette  
sur la poudre dans la boîte. [...] Dans quel état devait-elle être, se  
dira-t-il. Gabriel est pris, je le teindrai avec son inquiétude. (*La  
Bâtarde*, pp.425-6)

Death becomes a game for Violette who, by creating an illusion of emotional instability followed by a long absence, attempts to increase a sense of importance of the self which Gabriel is threatening to diminish with his attitude of indifference.

Death as a cry for help is also used by Yindi in *The Rouge of the North* who attempts to hang herself. However, choosing to stand on the old bed where 'the crash

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<sup>36</sup> Kristeva, *Des Chinoises*, pp. 120-21.

would be louder than on the floor when she kicked the stool over' (p. 87) highlights the ambiguity of her true intention. Did Yindi intend to carry out her suicide but fail due to poor planning, or did she deliberately choose an insecure means of suicide to create the illusion of death? The latter hypothesis certainly reveals a more dominant need within her to survive.

Let us suppose that Yindi, just like Violette, intends to *jouer à mourir*. This notion of creating the illusion of death connotes the ability to deceive others, and the act of 'playing dead' brings to mind play acting where they are both protagonists as well as directors. This gives an interesting insight into how they perceive their own life which, following the theme of their 'play-acting', has now become a plot. Being the directors of their own scripts, they are in control of how the players interact with each other as well as how well the protagonists fare in the plot. They are also in control of how and when death occurs.

Let us resume the assumption that Yindi chooses to commit suicide on the Second Master's old bed boards precisely for the reason that when the stool is kicked over the bed, the crash would be loud. Furthermore, Yindi's choice of time implies that the crash would be more noticeable: 'it sounded as if everybody was having difficulty getting through the night' (p. 87). Yindi only intended to create the illusion of death.

Playing dead arouses in others a fear of loss and this allows both protagonists to regain the centre of attention and re-establish their existence. This emphasizes their explicit desire not only to survive, but to be able to live as persons worthy of recognition. There is, however, a distinct motivational difference behind the two characters' need to create this fear of loss in others. As suggested earlier, Violette's pseudo-suicide attempt, a case of play-acting, is her attempt at arousing pity or an emotional response from Gabriel. After all, if he is troubled by her death, it becomes

plausible to presume he must not want her dead. If he does not desire Violette's death, she must matter to him. To resort to 'jouer à mourir' implies that her sense of emotional security is threatened by the possibility that she no longer matters to Gabriel and she must therefore attempt to satisfy her need for love.

Similarly, supposing that Yindi deliberately chooses an insecure means of suicide to protest emphatically against any possible slandering of her reputation, it can be argued that choosing the method which would raise the loudest alarm indicates a hope that she will be discovered and saved in time. She clearly does not seek death but only wishes to evoke the possibility of death so as to create the appearance of having suffered at the hands of others. In her examination of Chang's female characters, Xiuping Cheng urges readers not to condemn Yindi for her actions who has been made into a monster 'as the result of unreliable men around her'.<sup>37</sup> Yindi is depicted as a character caught between two generations – those adhering to predynastic traditions and the generation opening up to a more modern way of life. Cheng clearly suggests that Yindi should be recognized as a pitiful victim in need of protection from her community.<sup>38</sup>

As suggested earlier, both Yindi and Violette are seeking a sense of reassurance from their respective communities. Violette is, however, more likely to succeed in her quest than Yindi, and indeed, to an extent, Violette does succeed in gaining her sought-after reaction from Gabriel after her pretend suicide attempt: 'je t'ai retrouvée, je t'ai retrouvée répétait-il à bout de souffle' (p. 428). Maslowian theory suggests that the gratification of certain needs, such as the desire for love and for belonging, depends largely on the generosity of others.<sup>39</sup> In Violette's case, it is easier to seek

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<sup>37</sup> Xiuping Cheng, '批判男性世界的女性书写', in *江蘇社會科學 江苏社会科学*, 5 (2001), pp. 177-180 (180).

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 178.

<sup>39</sup> Maslow, *Toward a Psychology of Being*, pp. 57-8.

an emotional response from one individual – Gabriel – to obtain a sense of well-being. Yindi, on the other hand, is seeking to be accepted by all, or at least by the majority of members of her collective group. From this perspective, Yindi's negative individual growth becomes more potently implied. The focus shall now be placed on exploring the significance of the death of others to the individual, with particular emphasis on how the physical deaths of others affect the identity growth of the individual.

#### 1.4 Death of others

As suggested previously, Violette's personal growth and Yindi's new status through the death of a close family member highlight the direct benefits an individual can obtain from the physical termination of others. However, in the case of Yindi and her son, Chang also explores how the death of others can have a direct adverse effect upon the living.

Earlier, I discussed the significance of the death of an image of the self, and argued that the killing of a mature image of the self is the manifestation of a potent discontent with life. Here, I will examine again Yindi's willingness to fund her son's opium addiction in *The Rouge of the North*, but will focus on the effects the desire for his death as an 'other' has upon her.

Yindi believes she is unable to escape from her duty as a wife and must produce a son in order to maintain her existence. Chung-tien Yi explains that to be favourably considered in traditional Chinese culture, a woman must be able to fulfil her role as a wife and mother.<sup>40</sup> Yindi does express maternal love for her son: 'even I won't have you [the son] unhappy. You're all I have' (p. 149). This is clearly a façade to confine

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<sup>40</sup> Chung-tien Yi, *Chinese Men and Women*, p. 53.

her son within the house, as is evident when she decides to find him a wife so ‘he could stay at home’ (p. 146). She slowly poisons her son by using up her resources to finance his opium addiction. Yet, taking into consideration the fact that the society in which she lives acknowledges her existence primarily through her husband and son, damaging her son’s future must also have a negative impact upon her own status.

It can be argued that the death of the husband relieves Yindi of the stigma of being married to a disabled man, particularly as he has a relatively healthy son to continue the family name and to maintain Yindi’s social status. However, her ‘positive’ social image cannot endure, and it does not, when she openly finances her son’s opium addiction. This is demonstrated by Yindi’s remark to herself, ‘my evil name is out’ (p. 173). I shall now explore how the physical death of others has an impact upon the behaviour and beliefs of an individual.

In *La Bâtarde*, Fidéline is clearly respected after her death, and even André (the absent father in *La Bâtarde*), the Second Master, The Old Master and The Old Mistress in *The Rouge of the North*, are all accorded a degree of consideration and respect after their deaths despite their perceived mistakes and wrong doings. And although this special consideration is extended to the dead, Freudian theory argues that ‘overlooking whatever wrongs he may have done’ is more important to the living than to the dead.<sup>41</sup> To be forgiven by the living highlights the relative insignificance of truth and implies that all criticism of the dead should be suspended. There can be no more changes, and when the beliefs and knowledge we have concerning an individual are believed to remain forever unchanged after the moment of his or her death, it becomes desirable, or even crucial, for the living to attempt to preserve, or improve, the opinions and image of the self as perceived by the one who will soon be dead.

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 43.



This positive perception of the self by others (the deceased) not only benefits the surviving individual's psychological frame of mind, but knowing this positive perception will remain the same forever helps to provide a sense of stability and security for the living. For example, the posthumous evocation of Fidéline by Violette is a technique which, according to Alex Hughes, allows Leduc the writer to re-experience, through her character Violette, the grandmother's unconditional love for her granddaughter.<sup>42</sup> It is also a technique which not only immortalizes the memories of the grandmother who, in Violette's account, is 'l'ange' (p. 34) when she was alive, but suggest that by regarding Violette as her treasured granddaughter up until the moment of her death, Fidéline helps Violette to preserve perpetually this feeling of being loved.

This unchanging continuity is demonstrated when whilst on holiday with Hermine at Ploumanac'h and sensing a change in her lover, she first evokes the moment of her grandmother's departure: 'Je quittais la salle à manger (of the hotel at Ploumanac'h), je revenais au rideau empesé. La fenêtre regardait l'enterrement de ma grand-mère un jour de pluie' (pp. 304-5). Violette senses that she is no longer becoming important to Hermine and evokes her grandmother's death to provide her with a degree of relief. The grandmother's 'power' permits Violette to escape momentarily her imminent abandonment, as demonstrated when, immediately after evoking her grandmother's death, Violette remarks: 'Fidéline, c'est de la craie pour les écoliers, me disais-je en avalant mes larmes' (p 305). This unexpected remark brings to mind the image of a young school girl. This can be interpreted as Violette's desire to turn back the clock with the help of her angelic grandmother.

The supposition that death is the final event is, however, based on how individuals respond to the physical termination of life without focusing in particular

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<sup>42</sup> Alex Hughes, *Heterographies*, p. 14.

on the psychological effects death has upon the living. When we consider Violette preserving the memory of Fidéline as the caring, angelic grandmother, it seems that not only is death not the final event, but that it is possible to transcend death through death. For instance, after Violette comments on how it touches her when Berthe refers to Fidéline as ‘a’man’ (181), she adds ‘A’man. Le plus léger des oiseaux se pose sur la lyre du souvenir. Fidéline te voici transfigurée. Métamorphosée. A’man’ (p. 181).

Evoking Fidéline posthumously as ‘l’ange’ and having the ability to change form suggests she is immortal, and can no longer be touched by death. Furthermore, Fidéline is now more powerful than when she was physically alive, and is therefore more capable of protecting her granddaughter. Fidéline may have physically ceased to exist after her mortal death, and this sudden disappearance may instigate a sense of abandonment in Violette, but preserving and evoking posthumously memories of the caring Fidéline decreases Violette’s feeling of abandonment and helps her to regain the sense of being loved and being significant to someone.

The characters of Chang also evoke the memories of the dead for a sense of protection. For example, ‘the sixtieth birthday of the long-dead master of the house was celebrated posthumously in the Temple of the Bathing Buddha’ (p. 72). The surviving characters in *The Rouge of the North* feel obligated to celebrate the deceased master’s birthday. This is an indication that they believe he can punish them should they forget to do so. And when, following the death of the Second Master and the Old Mistress, the elders are called to help divide the Yao family estates and fortunes, and upon realizing that she has received a smaller share of the family fortune, Yindi cries out: ‘Poor Second Master has only this bit of blood and bones left in the world. [...] If I don’t do right by him how am I to face Second Master when I die?’ (p. 96). When the elders refuse to negotiate, Yindi calls out to the spirit

of her mother-in-law: 'I want to go and explain to Old Mistress, her spirit can't be so far away yet. [...] I'll tell Old Mistress I'm sorry I failed the Yao ancestors' (p. 97).

The use of ritual celebrations and calling to the dead by Chang suggest these are primarily practices used by the living to gain a sense of security. However, the implication that one is presumed to gain power after death not only motivates individuals to suicidal acts in order to acquire supernatural abilities, but leaves the living vulnerable to the belief that they are inferior to the dead. In other words, surviving members in *The Rouge of the North* live in fear of the possible harm the spirits of the dead can do to them, just as much as they live in anticipation of what these spirits can offer them.

The influence of the death of others upon an individual's overall sense of security is clearly implied in *La Bâtarde* and *The Rouge of the North*; the manner in which death (of others) evokes the individual's sense of security is manifested quite differently. On the one hand, Violette evokes the love of a dead grandmother to counteract her sense of loss, implying that the dead can continue to exert a positive influence upon the living.

The death of others in *The Rouge of the North*, on the other hand, serves to highlight the unpredictable, unreasonable and certainly fearsome power of the dead. The characters are living under the shadow of the 'uncontrollable' spirits of the dead and can only strive to fulfil their sense of security through gestures of respect. However, the reality of not knowing whether they have appeased the dead spirits further adds to their sense of insecurity and can, consequently, have a more profound and negative effect upon the individual's perception of the self.

## 1.5 Social death

To speak of ‘social death’ is not necessarily merely to deploy a metaphor comparing social marginalisation to death. Kastenbaum and Aisenberg, for instance, define social death as the situation where a person is no longer perceived as alive by others.<sup>43</sup> This makes social death into a lived reality, when the isolated individual is treated by others as dead to them and when some of the consequences are felt to be the same as those that follow on physical death. An example of social death is found in *La Bâtarde*, since Violette belongs to the group of illegitimate children cursed at birth: ‘les bâtards maudits’ (p. 65). This phrase creates an echo effect with the title of the work, which lends it special emphasis. Furthermore, Violette is not just *un bâtard*, she is *la bâtarde*, which emphasizes that her gender and her illegitimacy are intertwined.

Her illegitimacy also results in her having to live ‘entre jupons’ (p. 65). Freudian theory on the psychosexual stages of a child, in particular the Oedipus Complex theory, asserts that two parents (two individuals of different genders) are required for the child to establish a psychosexual development.<sup>44</sup> Melanie Klein, as well as Nancy Chodorow, also advocates the benefits to the psychological health of the child of being parented by a constant mother and father figure.<sup>45</sup> Leduc’s narrator voices a conventional perspective on a household without a father (absent first because of the scandal of illegitimacy and subsequently because of death); it is not an ideal situation. The narrator does, nevertheless, challenge this conventionally perceived ideal (or normal) means of nurturing a child by showing the young Violette benefiting from being raised by a caring grandmother and a financially competent mother.

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<sup>43</sup> Kastenbaum and Aisenberg, *The Psychology of Death*, p. 476.

<sup>44</sup> Freud, ‘The dissolution of the Oedipus complex’, in *On Sexuality*, pp. 315-21.

<sup>45</sup> Melanie Klein, ‘The relationship to ourselves and to others’, in *Love, Hate and Reparation*, pp. 115-19; Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering*, p. 212.

One can argue that growing up amongst a small group of women is not detrimental to the physical wellbeing of the child, but what is emphasized by the narrator is that Violette, along with her carers, is excluded from society. As an example of social marginalization, ‘la famille qui voulait tenir le haut du pavé’ (p. 56) does not reply to the child Violette’s greetings in the morning. The episode with the children licking *coco* demonstrates further the child narrator’s sense of being excluded: ‘c’était l’époque du coco. Les enfants léchaient la poudre sur le dessus ou le dessous de leur main ou bien ils buvaient le liquide dans un godet. Je les enviais. Tous aimaient le coco. Je n’aimais pas le coco’ (p. 38). By stating that she does not like what other children all adore, she is excluding the self. They live ‘entre jupons’ and Violette is made to feel excluded, despite the efforts of the caring grandmother and the competent Berthe who is described as being ‘en possession de tous ses moyens’ (p. 317).

This implies two possible outcomes: the difficulty of understanding the masculine sex, as demonstrated by her choice of male lovers, and a heightened sense of security but only in the company of women. From this perspective, it can be argued that it is partly the result of her childhood isolation from society that Violette discovers her sexual orientation. For Leduc’s heroine, although her up-bringing may be unconventional, it cannot be argued to be detrimental to the development of her sexual identity.

André’s absence is a case of dying twice. First he is dead to Violette for having rejected fatherhood, then dead through ‘l’acte de décès’ (p. 34). But if the father is alive-but-dead, then, one can argue, so is any child of his alive-but-dead. Whether he is both illegitimate and dead, or only one or the other, becomes a grey area. Meanwhile, Violette reproduces the family gesture of minimizing the father’s already ghostly existence by naming him infrequently, and any description Violette receives

about her absent father is always from the perspective of the mother, as if he only lives through Berthe. For instance, Berthe asks Violette to be a Protestant to be like her father: ‘il était protestant, tu seras protestante’ (p. 87). It is as if André has little or no importance in the life of Violette (except to explain her entry into the world). For instance, Violette refers to her father as ‘19233’, the number written on a photograph of him as a child which Berthe gives her: ‘le cœur de l’inconnu qui bat dans mon cœur a un numéro. C’est le no. 19233’ (p.33).

To eliminate this biological father as far as possible from the story of her life implies, to an extent, Violette’s intent to keep her illegitimacy, symbolized by André, away from her. In her study of the lasting effects of illegitimacy upon Leduc the writer, Anaïs Frantz proposes that nothing can ‘heal the existential wounds of the author, or repair the bastardisation’.<sup>46</sup> Indeed, as the title *La Bâtarde* suggests, eliminating the father as a self-protective measure is ineffective as she is always reminded of her heritage.

Furthermore, it can be argued that rejecting the father’s involvement in her life can be interpreted as a refusal to acknowledge his influence in her life, yet Violette cannot deny the impact her childhood isolation has upon her overall development, particularly upon her sexual identity. André must be acknowledged and, hence, is a possible reason why Berthe continues to evoke André to Violette. Her father’s absence is, then, a form of ghostly presence.

If by denying the presence of the absent father Violette hopes to achieve a sense of wholeness or legitimacy, one must challenge the degree of wholeness Violette feels when she renounces the presence of the father who is not only directly accountable for her unconventional upbringing, but who is also indirectly responsible for her subsequent development. Maslowian theory highlights the danger to the

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<sup>46</sup> Anaïs Frantz, *The Repentance of a Bastard: A Study of Violette Leduc*, p. 6.

overall positive development of an individual of ignoring or bypassing an ungratified need.<sup>47</sup> By denying that she is Violette-the-bastard in *La Bâtarde*, it is possible to suggest that the narrator is dismissing the experiences she has encountered and renouncing any development achieved as a result of her heritage. This then raises questions about the authenticity or validity of her developments.

Social death and its effects upon individual female characters are also explored by Chang in *The Rouge of the North*. Indeed, Chang gives her character Yindi the disadvantage of being born to a small commercial family at a time when trading and commerce, both important elements in the economy of a country, are considered lowly and dishonest activities. She also puts Yindi to work at the counter of the family's store before her marriage in order to distinguish her, albeit unfavourably, from her sisters-in-law who are not permitted to interact with strangers as a sign of their respective families' wealth and position. This marginalization becomes total ostracization when, mentioned previously, her mother-in-law refuses to accept Yindi's filial service following her suicide attempt. It is only after the death of the Old Mistress of the household that she becomes acknowledged as the widow of the Second Master and eligible to receive a share of the family's wealth.

However, even after having finally achieved her desire for recognition and wealth, Yindi is still unable to enjoy her new position, as manifested by her miserly attitude, with her 'pennypinching' ways (p. 180), her self-alienation from society by never asking callers to 'stay for dinner' (p. 167), and 'offering only tea once a year on her birthday' (p. 167). She even refers to herself as a woman with a disreputable name: 'is it because my evil name is out and people won't give us their daughter?' (p. 173). Chen suggests that 'as married women born into poverty, they [Chang's female characters] discover that gender inequities and that lowly social status leave them

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<sup>47</sup> Maslow, *Toward a Psychology of Being*, p. 58.

marginalized; naturally; they want to possess power in order to survive'.<sup>48</sup> But Yindi's dissatisfaction endures once she has escaped, if not gender inequities then, at least, lowly social status. Chen's reading of Chang, therefore, requires to be nuanced in the case of *The Rouge of the North*.

In Maslowian terms, we might say that Yindi's negative approach to life highlights the inconsistencies between needs which Yindi consciously believes she should satisfy and needs which are authentic to her, and therefore must be satisfied, but of which she remains unaware. Chen suggests that Yindi agreeing to a marriage with a disabled man is 'her attempt to gain access to a wealthy family', thereby reflecting 'her own uncertainty, fear, vanity and ambition'.<sup>49</sup> Carole Hoyan suggests the characters of Chang tend to be 'fighting against the social system which adversely affects their lives'.<sup>50</sup> I would, however, argue that Yindi is neither a money-seeker nor a fighter. Instead, from a Maslowian perspective, she is trying to survive by gratifying her sense of belonging. She attempts to achieve this by bypassing other preceding basic needs, in particular the need for love. Yet it is precisely due to the neglect of this fundamental need (which I suggest is authentic to her desire) that she does not and cannot attain a positive approach to life.

If a positive identity development cannot be achieved through Thanatos, then perhaps the characters of Leduc and Chang can obtain a degree of optimism through another 'taboo'. The following section will examine how Eros can influence the development of an individual identity in *Thérèse et Isabelle* and *The Rouge of the North*.

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<sup>48</sup> Chen, *The Development of Female Consciousness*, p. 292.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 115.

<sup>50</sup> Carole Hoyan, 'The Life and Works of Zhang Ailing: A Critical Study', p. 72.



## 2 Eros and taboo in Leduc's *Thérèse et Isabelle* and Chang's *The Rouge of the North*

Contrary to death, sex is not instinctively denied. Indeed, Michel Foucault suggests that sex fascinates us to the degree of making it worth dying for.<sup>51</sup> This association between death and sex is further explained by Foucault who argues that sex can destroy the social order since it disrupts work and incites violence. In order to preserve society from self-destruction, it becomes necessary for the 'droit canonique, pastorale chrétienne et loi civile' to systematically repress this fascination with sex.<sup>52</sup> Sex is perceived by society as a powerful and, more importantly, destructive tool, yet it is one which, Foucault contends, contains sufficient power to disclose 'ce que nous sommes et de nous libérer ce qui nous définit'.<sup>53</sup> To deliberately suppress sexual knowledge may lead to the survival of society but it also implies the cost of physical self-preservation is the death of the psychological self.

### 2.1 The significance of 'le sexe'

In his examination of the female sex, the well-known psychologist Sigmund Freud remarks that 'it is not only the first coitus with a woman which is taboo but sexual intercourse in general; one might almost say that women are altogether taboo'.<sup>54</sup> It must also be noted that his theory on women has been challenged by many psychoanalysts such as Karen Horney who argues that Freud is simply extending his views on male sexuality to women.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité I: La Volonté de savoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), p. 206.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 51.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 205.

<sup>54</sup> Freud, *On Sexuality*, p. 270.

<sup>55</sup> Karen Horney, 'The Flight from Womanhood: The Masculinity-Complex in Women, as Viewed by

The French philosophical theorist Georges Bataille, with his core interest in eroticism and transgression, explains that ‘l’activité sexuelle est une violence, qu’en tant qu’impulsion immédiate, elle pourrait déranger le travail’.<sup>56</sup> He also suggests that (and in a way his theory resonates with Freud’s) sex is taboo due to ‘l’interdit du sang menstruel et celui du sang de l’accouchement’.<sup>57</sup> Both Freud and Bataille propose that a sexually active woman symbolizes danger and that the negative emotions which consequently surround the female sex are the cause of sexual taboo. In 1976 (some twenty years after the publication of Bataille’s *L’Érotisme*), Michel Foucault published a book which revolved around the concept of power and, in part, on the rationale behind sex. On the subject of sex, he writes:

Autour du sexe, on se tait. [...] Ce qui n’est pas ordonné à la génération ou transfiguré par elle n’a plus ni feu ni loi. Ni verbe non plus. A la fois chassé, dénié et réduit au silence. Non seulement ça n’existe pas, mais ça ne doit pas exister et on le fera disparaître dès la moindre manifestation.<sup>58</sup>

It must be added that since the period described by Foucault, there has been much change and discussions surrounding sexuality. Lifton argues that although people continue to have difficulties with sexual expression, ‘it is also clear that the times have changed. Rather than ignore sex, we are more likely to flaunt it, experiment with it, or seek new kinds of experience through it’.<sup>59</sup>

Although sex is no longer a topic of which it can be said that ‘on se tait’ (at least this applies to most Western societies), the attitude that sex is a dangerous form of social interaction, one which can harm not only the individual but society as a whole,

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Men and by Women’, pp. 324-339.

<sup>56</sup> Bataille, *L’Érotisme*, p. 53.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.

<sup>58</sup> Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité*, p. 10.

<sup>59</sup> Lifton, *Living and Dying*, p. 1.

endures in Chinese as well as Western societies. For example, the current-day controversial topic of sex lessons for school-age children in British establishments resonate with Lifton's theory that sex is no longer a taboo. In contrast, the lack of such lessons for students in China suggests a general intolerance towards sexual discussions.

As mentioned previously, Freud and Bataille associate sex pejoratively with the female sex, woman is consequently perceived as dangerous. This can be found in the representation of the young and single Yindi in *The Rouge of the North* who is described at the beginning of the fiction as a burden who incites trouble and who should not be kept at home (as an unmarried maiden) for fear of bringing trouble to the maternal family: 'A grown daughter is not worth keeping. Keep her, keep her and she turns into an enemy' (p. 4). We have dealt with Leduc and Chang's treatment of sexuality in previous chapters. But here, we will be concerned with the way in which each author links sex to danger, and ultimately the danger of death. As before, each author will be seen to be responding to specific cultural norms in the process.

In French, 'le sexe' can refer to one's biological sex (male or female), or to the genitals (male or female), or, though this is largely obsolete, simply to the female sex (i.e. women as opposed to men). A reading of Kristeva's argument on *l'égalité sexuelle* highlights the danger a woman's theoretical ability to control her reproductive capabilities has upon the health of a society: 'la permissivité des rapports sexuels, l'avortement et la contraception, reste frappée de tabous par l'éthique marxisante ainsi que par la raison d'État'.<sup>60</sup>

On her examination of sexual stereotypes, Oonagh Hartnett also highlights the dangerous effects the woman's sex can have upon society. Hartnett remarks that the repression of a woman's desire to attain higher intellectual training derives from the

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<sup>60</sup> Julia Kristeva, 'Le Temps des femmes', p. 28.

fear that ‘she will injure society by reducing her own reproductive activity [...], and thus lessen the chances of the best element to perpetuate itself’.<sup>61</sup> Both Kristeva and Hartnett suggest that it is the woman’s ability, and her suggested freedom, to control her reproductive activity which is a threat to society.

However, the assumption that all women have control over their reproductive functions is incorrect when we take into account many current social and even religious practices where women are not permitted to consider contraceptives or abortion as options. For instance, Fidéline and Berthe in *La Bâtarde* are examples of women who enter into motherhood unwillingly. We have commented several times on the fact that Violette aborts her foetus against the desires of her lover Gabriel and despite the risks to her own health. We are also informed that after having aborted her child, Violette is made to realize the errors of her way, first through Berthe who, whilst nursing Violette, loved to hear the story of a poor country girl named Anita who was in the process of adopting a child: ‘chaque soir la dame recommençait cette histoire (of Anita) et je me disais que j’étais maudite. Je voulais l’enfant que j’avais supprimé’ (p. 466). Violette’s action resonates with Kristeva’s and Hartnett’s suggestion that although a woman is in control of her body, she is pressured into relinquishing this right. In Violette’s case, she is made to feel guilty for having exercised her freedom.

The topic of how a woman is perceived by society, as well as how she is expected to behave, is highlighted by Alison Fell who argues that ‘it is not the female body itself that is to be blamed for women’s oppression, but rather its interpretation and signification as a “passive sexual object” at a particular historical moment, which is then accepted as destiny by the majority of both men and women’.<sup>62</sup> Klein also

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<sup>61</sup> Oonagh Hartnett, *Sex-role Stereotyping* (London: Tavistock, 1979), pp. 21-22.

<sup>62</sup> Alison Fell, *Liberty, Equality, Maternity in Beauvoir, Leduc and Ernaux*, p. 86.

explores the supposition that sex no longer signifies erotic desires by proposing that a woman subjectively regains a sense of reassurance from the knowledge that she is capable of providing sexual pleasure and therefore able to prove to both her sexual partner and to herself that her sex is good.<sup>63</sup> It is further suggested by Maslow that although a woman is usually perceived as a sexual object, her sexual activities are not fundamentally motivated by her erotic desires and the desire to fulfil sexual needs, but are intrinsically linked to a desire for self-esteem rather than sexual gratification.<sup>64</sup>

If the woman is perceived by her sexual partner as a sexual object and if, whilst she is participating in sexual activities, she is not seeking sexual fulfilment, then to perform acts where she does not seemingly achieve physiological gratification implies the fulfilment of a different need. When we take into account that the reason for all the female characters in *The Rouge of the North* to agree to arranged marriages is to acquire a sense of recognition and acceptance, ensuring subsequently their own survival, it becomes evident that the motivational force behind their decision to marry and thereby becoming a sexual object is a desire to fulfil their need for safety.

It can be argued that daughters are expected to obey the wishes of their parents in a traditional Chinese society (since any form of retaliation may be met with punishment) and their agreement to arranged marriages does not therefore signify an ulterior motive other than to manifest their obedience. For instance, in *The Rouge of the North*, Yindi's daughter-in-law is disliked by both Yindi and her son, yet she still carries out the duties of a daughter-in-law: 'The bride was not entirely unaware of what went on behind her back. She came in every morning with the single word of greeting, 'mother', gruff and unsmiling' (p. 164). Yet it is this demonstration of

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<sup>63</sup> Klein, 'Identification and Making Reparation', in *Love, Hate and Reparation*, p. 71.

<sup>64</sup> Maslow, *Motivation and Personality*, p. 26.

apparent filial submissiveness which emphasizes their need to be protected by the community. In Leduc's *Thérèse et Isabelle*, this association of sexual gratification with a desire for recognition is less apparent. At this point, I will briefly describe Leduc's work which, after much controversy, was eventually published in 1966.

## 2.2 Background to *Thérèse et Isabelle*

*Thérèse et Isabelle* – a story depicting the sexual relationship between two female teenagers in a boarding school – was originally written as the first section of *Ravages*, a novel which Leduc presented to the publisher Gallimard in 1954. René de Ceccatty records that Leduc was soon asked to remove it from *Ravages* due to its 'obscénité énorme et précise'.<sup>65</sup> What caused such controversy then was not the description of sexual love between two teenagers, but the language Leduc uses to describe the sexual relationship between her two *collégiennes*. On Beauvoir's advice, a more toned down version of *Thérèse et Isabelle* was then included into *La Bâtarde* which later became a success. Carlo Jansiti suggests that the success of *La Bâtarde* renewed Leduc's confidence and in July 1966, the full version of *Thérèse et Isabelle* was finally published by Gallimard.<sup>66</sup>

## 2.3 The representation of sexual love

What differentiates the sexual activity in *Thérèse et Isabelle* from Chang's female characters is that the expressions of love between the two teenagers appear to be significantly less materially motivated. In her examination of Leduc's representation

<sup>65</sup> René de Ceccatty, *Violette Leduc: Éloge de la Bâtarde* (Paris: Stock, 1994), p. 17.

<sup>66</sup> Carlo Jansiti, 'A Story of Censorship' in *Thérèse and Isabelle*, trans. by Sophie Lewis (New York: Feminist Press, 2015), pp. 212-213.

of sexual love in *Thérèse et Isabelle*, Catherine Viollet describes it as ‘la rencontre amoureuse et sexuelle de deux collégiennes’.<sup>67</sup> She argues that sexual love is presented by Leduc in a pure form that is ‘à la fois poétique et réaliste, à la fois lyrique et précis’.<sup>68</sup> For instance, a sexual encounter is described by Thérèse as follows: ‘une fleur s’ouvrit dans chaque pore de ma peau’ (p. 29). It is this pure expression of love which transforms the eroticism, judged to be too obscene to be published in the 1950s, into a work which highlights ‘l’innocence qui se dégage de ce récit et que ne vient troubler ni contrarier le moindre sentiment de culpabilité’.<sup>69</sup>

The danger arising from their sexual encounters may not be explicitly, or even implicitly, suggested by Leduc. Yet the initial censorship of this work is an indication that despite the seemingly innocent love depicted by Leduc, bisexual love is judged to be a threat to society. I would argue that the danger which the sexual relationship between Thérèse and Isabelle pose to society is more threatening than the monogamous relationships which the female characters of *Chang* are depicted to have. This reasoning is based, on the one hand, on Kristeva’s and Hartnett’s arguments that society fears women’s ability to control their reproductive activities. That is to say, the two *collégiennes* are refraining from practising sexual acts that may carry the possibility of reproduction. They are, to a certain extent, perceived as a threat to society.

My suggestion that lesbian activity is more dangerous than heterosexual activity, on the other hand, resonates with Foucauldian theory that sex fascinates to the degree of disrupting work activities. Leduc’s protagonists are at an age when society expects them to contemplate entering the workforce, but the two teenagers are clearly

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<sup>67</sup> Catherine Viollet, ‘Violette Leduc: Ecriture et sexualité’, *Tangence* (Montréal: Érudit, 1995), pp. 69-83 (77).

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

diverted from such thoughts, as demonstrated by the negligible reference to studying and academic learning throughout the work. Reading even proves difficult for Thérèse, who remarks during her study period, ‘je ne peux pas lire’ (p. 54). The censorship of this work implies that any form of sexual love is not socially perceived as acceptable unless it is for the core purpose of protecting, or maintaining, society. With reference to the Foucauldian argument that sex is dangerous due to its ability to disrupt work, the relationship between the two school girls poses a greater risk since they are not participating in an activity that can offer the possibility of replenishing the population, or ensuring the survival of society by maintaining the work force.

A need-related sexual activity may be acceptable to society, yet it can also be counter-productive, particularly when, in using one’s body to achieve a goal, one might receive less than what is expected or promised. In Chang, this risk surfaces when Yindi discovers her husband’s family wealth has been overestimated: ‘all she got was her tiny monthly allowance, no more than a servant’s pay’ (p 58). It can be argued that once the principal reason for remaining attached to her husband becomes invalid, Yindi’s subsequent emotional detachment and sexual disgust are justified.

The implication that when an individual emphasizes the materialistic approach of sexual acts, as we have seen with Chang’s female characters, sexual activity no longer represents love for the other. This, following Maslowian theory, would make it difficult for the individual to progress towards a more self-enhancing growth. I now examine the extent to which sexual activity reflects or even encourages the development of individualism.

## **2.4 Sexual activity and identity development**

Maslowian theory argues that ‘consummatory love making may actually be seeking



self-esteem rather than sexual gratification'.<sup>70</sup> And on first reading, Yindi in *The Rouge of the North* stands out as the character influenced by a need to attain a sense of recognition. She achieves this by becoming the 'big one' (p. 19), or the principal wife of the Second Master: 'She (Yindi) doesn't want to be a concubine no matter how rich and great the family is' (p. 19). Even after learning that the Second Master's 'eyes are inconvenient' (p. 20) and that he is still single (which implies that he has a particular flaw which prevents him from finding a wife with a family background similar to his), Yindi is, nevertheless, willing to become his wife. This suggests a form of self-prostitution.

This self-prostitution is less apparent in *Thérèse et Isabelle*, where Leduc focuses more on the depiction of erotic activities that manifest innocent love. That is to say, the emotional attachment the protagonists have for each other is not purely demonstrated through carnal activities. For example, the innocence of Thérèse's and Isabelle's love is demonstrated by the giving of flowers:

J'avais un project.  
 'Oui, deux roses... Deux roses rouges. Tu iras chez le meilleur fleuriste...'  
 'De quelle grosseur?' demanda l'externe.  
 'Ce qu'il y a de plus beau. Oui, si tu veux: pour un professeur.  
 Respire-les avant de les acheter. Des roses roses de préférence.'  
 (p. 91)

Prior to this episode, we are informed that, without specifying the time of the year, Isabelle gives Thérèse 'du muguet' (p. 50), a bouquet described as 'un crucifix vert et blanc, en feuilles et en fleurs, allongé sur ma trousse' (p. 50). This *muguet* may suggest Thérèse's virginity prior to her defloration. That is to say, Thérèse is

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<sup>70</sup> Maslow, *Motivation and Personality*, p. 26.

described in her 'chemise de nuit spéciale [...] en mousseline de soie' (p. 21), and the white May lily can be interpreted as the representation of the innocent Thérèse.

Let us resume the previous example of the two roses which Thérèse asks a day student to purchase for her as a gift for her lover, after having lost her virginity to Isabelle. It is plausible to conclude, therefore, that Thérèse is attempting to reciprocate Isabelle's affection by giving a much more expensive gift than the May lily in return. Thérèse does not, however, give Isabelle the roses, and instead gives them to the new monitor who is overwhelmed by the gesture: 'C'est trop. Je devrais vous gronder. Vraiment, c'est trop' (p. 100). Isabelle's reaction when told of the event by Thérèse, is, however, less enthusiastic: 'Ce ne sont que des fleurs' (p. 102). This indicates her lack of attachment to relatively expensive love tokens. The two lovers' indifference to material objects is clearly in contrast with the materialistic Yindi who seeks financial rewards, and this further highlights the innocence or simplicity of the two school girls' love for each other.

On Leduc's writing of love for a female other, Charles-Merrien describes her ability to manifest her love for another woman as 'oser aimer, admirer une autre femme et le dire'.<sup>71</sup> Although the female other in question is, according to Charles-Merrien's examination of Leduc's *L'Affamée*, Simone de Beauvoir, I would argue that Leduc's depiction of love between Thérèse and Isabelle suggests her courage to speak out about love for a female other is not restricted to Beauvoir only.

The detail in which Leduc describes erotic love, such as the figurative language which is used to describe the female body parts, is examined by Lucille Cairns. Cairns highlights that although Leduc cites a woman's anatomy directly, 'her references to the genitalia and breasts of her heroines are, on the whole, less

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<sup>71</sup> Ghyslaine Charles-Merrien, 'Une Conception virile', p. 26.

explicit'.<sup>72</sup> For example, the clitoris is described as 'la perle' (p. 69), the hymen as 'l'oeil de l'innocence' (p. 70) and the vagina as 'les pétales' (p. 134). Leduc uses these descriptions to enhance the beauty that is found in love or, at least, in the act of love.

In contrast to Leduc's work, there are no examples of explicit sexual acts in the work of Chang. Any reference to what Maslow calls 'consummatory love making' is briefly implied in *The Rouge of the North* with the birth of Yindi's son, and later, with the births of her grandchildren. Indeed, the birth of Yindi's son is described in one simple phrase: 'Gu Nana's (Yindi) belly has shown them' (p. 54). This occurs immediately after the episode where Yindi sings incognito in the hope of catching her brother-in-law's attention. Instead of focusing on how she came to be pregnant, the juxtaposition of these two seemingly unrelated incidents, and the lack of information leading up to the birth of her son, highlights the implication that Yindi must bear fruit. Sexual pleasure is not, nor has it ever been, the ultimate goal.

The different techniques of depicting eroticism resonate with Maslow's Hierarchy of Need. On the one hand, the sexual enjoyments which the two heroines of Leduc are depicted to have achieved allow the lovers to satisfy their need for 'peak experience' – a term used by Maslow to refer to a momentary sense of complete joy. For instance, when Thérèse remarks: 'je me perdais dans le doigt d'Isabelle comme elle se perdait dans le mien. Qu'il a rêvé notre doigt consciencieux...Quels mariages de mouvements' (pp. 80-1). This, according to Maslow, is paramount to 'gaining a sense of authentic elevation as a human being'.<sup>73</sup> The two heroines, in seeking to express their affection for each other and in experiencing sexual peaks, have attained a level of physiological gratification to

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<sup>72</sup> Lucille Cairns, *Gay and Lesbian Cultures in France* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2003), p. 135.

<sup>73</sup> Maslow, *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature*, p. xvi.

proceed upwards on the Hierarchy of Need and, I would argue, have momentarily achieved a sense of self-actualization that is important in the identity development of individuals.

The need for sexual activity in Chang's *The Rouge of the North*, on the other hand, is motivated by the protagonist's sense of insecurity, and with the distinctly absent depiction of sexual peaks, Yindi cannot progress beyond her need for love and a sense of belonging. In fact, sexual activities are not explicitly mentioned by Chang but from Yindi's declaration, it is evident that she rarely experiences what Maslow terms as 'the peak experience': 'with us (Yindi and her husband) it's (sexual activity) really almost never' (p. 76). As mentioned previously, Maslowian theory suggests that an individual who has achieved his/her peak experience is more likely to progress towards a more self-actualizing need, a need that is less dependent on the responses of others.<sup>74</sup> Yindi is clearly excluded from this form of growth. Contrary to Thérèse and Isabelle who are depicted to have achieved sexual peaks and are therefore more likely to be indifferent to the responses of others, Yindi is vulnerable to the criticisms and judgments of others within her community and is, therefore, less likely to achieve an independence from which she can develop an identity.

The different approach to sexual love has a direct influence on the public's initial reaction, as commented on earlier. Leduc's publisher's censorship of the work implies that sexual activity, in particular the attainment of sexual peaks, can concomitantly promote the individual's sense of self-confidence and decrease his/her vulnerability to the judgment of others. Society is subsequently at risk from losing its power over this particular individual and the only way to contain this risk is through censorship.

The appreciation which Chang received from the publication of her story in its

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., pp. 156-80.

original form, on the other hand, is an indication that the public does not perceive *The Rouge of the North* as a threat. This is, nevertheless, limited to specific cultural backgrounds, as David Der-wei Wang highlights when he writes, ‘it was received coldly by both reviewers and general readers (of the English and American literary market). Ironically, [...] the novel was warmly welcomed in Hong Kong and Taiwan, and in overseas Chinese communities’.<sup>75</sup> One can argue that Chinese societies welcome this novel in part due to its lack of eroticism. If we approach this lack of sexual detail from a Maslowian perspective, which suggests that sexual peaks permit the individual to progress towards a more self-enhancing need, the lack of sexual gratification found in *The Rouge of the North* reveals the Chinese societies to be less tolerant of individual developments. That is to say, Yindi does not achieve gratification in love, and not having the opportunity to explore her sexuality implies that she is unable to progress towards a more individualized identity. She can only continue to seek gratification in her need for love – a need which is dependent on others.

The public’s positive response to the publication of *The Rouge of the North* can, therefore, be interpreted as a confirmation that it cannot, and will not, accept the depiction of a female character who is able to progress beyond her need for love and be unsusceptible to the judgment of others. Similar to the censorship of *Thérèse et Isabelle*, the public’s reaction to *The Rouge of the North* is primarily a selfish desire to maintain its power over the individual.

## 2.5 Virginité

From the point of view of social norms, the value placed on a bride’s virginity

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<sup>75</sup> David Der-wei Wang, ‘Foreword’, in *The Rouge of the North*, p. ix.

confirms that her body is part of a bargain that is fulfilled in marriage. In her suggestion on the cultural value placed on virginity in women, Luce Irigaray remarks that 'la femme-vierge, par contre, est pure valeur d'échange'.<sup>76</sup> Together with the reality that the more generic an item is on the market, the less desirable it becomes, it can be assumed that if virgins are widely available to society, they would become less popular than their sexually experienced counterparts. Virginity would no longer be a condition desired by women and women would not voluntarily seek to impose sexual repression upon themselves. The idea that the more generic or available an item is on the market, the less desirable it becomes is further explored by Kristeva who remarks that the desirability of the biblical figure of Jesus's mother Mary and the noble ladies of the feudal court is due to their inaccessibility to men as virgins.<sup>77</sup>

Yi also comments on the desirability of being virgins in traditional Chinese societies, not only for the girls themselves, but also for their parents whose hope of a higher return on an otherwise unprofitable investment relies greatly on their daughters being virgins.<sup>78</sup> From the same point of view, such value continues through marriage only if the woman remains faithful to her husband. Chastity begins with virginity before marriage, and continues through monogamy after marriage. But, as depicted by Chang, failing to maintain virginity (or monogamy) brings greater danger than the same failure in Leduc. This is arguably a reflection of social norms in Chinese and French society respectively.

On the one hand, the monogamous unions in *The Rouge of the North* all end with death, either of the husband or the wife. Leduc's work, on the other hand, depicts a singular relationship which ends with the departure of Thérèse. This not

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<sup>76</sup> Luce Irigaray, *Ce Sexe qui n'en est pas un*, p. 181.

<sup>77</sup> Julia Kristeva, 'Stabat Mater', in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. by Toril Moi (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), p. 170.

<sup>78</sup> Chung-tien Yi, *Chinese Men and Women*, p. 45.

only discloses a less repressive social environment for the characters of Leduc, but highlights a dominant difference in the treatment of virginity. For example, when Yindi refers to her future daughter-in-law as ‘old fashioned, not like the girls of today – heaven help us if we get one of those in the house’ (p. 149), there is the implication that sexual experience outside of marriage is perceived as shameful and devaluing.

Of course, it cannot be denied that the society in which Thérèse and Isabelle belong to does not approve of premarital sex (indicated by the problem of illegitimacy), or homosexual relationships (as both protagonists suggest with their secret encounters in the dormitory at night). However, the description of erotic scenes imbued with analogy suggests the two school girls are not ashamed of their sexual experience. For instance, after her first penetration, Thérèse remarks to Isabelle that she is ashamed of the blood, to which Isabelle simply replies with: ‘tu es folle’ (p. 72).

Female virginity may connote innocence and suggest evidence of a good (i.e. moral) upbringing. Freud theorizes that virginity is, from both psychological and social perspectives, the ‘symbol of innocence and evidence of education’.<sup>79</sup>

Virginity as a social requirement is further commented on by Kristeva who explores the history of women’s sexual freedom in traditionally restrictive China and highlights the Chinese phallic society’s draconian demand for sexually innocent women.<sup>80</sup> Bataille argues that even, or especially, when the value placed on such virginity is rationalized in purely moral and religious terms, it helps to perpetuate patriarchy.<sup>81</sup>

This notion of treating virgins as commodities is reflected in *The Rouge of the North* when Yindi’s single status is described as follows: ‘she was the goods you lose

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<sup>79</sup> Freud, *On Sexuality*, p. 265.

<sup>80</sup> Kristeva, *Des Chinoises*, p. 18.

<sup>81</sup> Bataille, *L’Érotisme*, p. 35.

money on, what they call daughters' (p. 7). Here, the value of daughters as commodities is presented as negative and relative; it costs families to have daughters whatever happens, but at least it will cost less if they can be married respectably. This seemingly affectionless perspective on daughters is further explained by Kristeva as the result of any given daughter being destined to 'quitter sa propre famille qui la considère par conséquent toujours déjà comme pas tout-à-fait sienne'.<sup>82</sup>

Under such circumstances, it is understandable that parents find it to their advantage to objectify their daughters. Being a virgin, therefore, gives Yindi and her family the possibility of choosing a husband, yet the choice she eventually makes is clearly what Rachel Leng describes as 'prostitution capitalizing on the female body as a transactional commodity'.<sup>83</sup> By the same token, it creates the risk of emotional indifference which is manifested in Yindi's apathetic attitude towards her husband.

By contrast, although there are various instances where Isabelle demonstrates an awareness of having transgressed beyond socially acceptable sexual love by demanding Thérèse to be more discreet or quieter, the reaction of Mme Algazine suggests a more tolerant behaviour:

'Vous êtes mineures...? Évidemment' [Mme Algazine].  
 Oui, avons-nous répondu ensemble.  
 'Vous êtes pensionnaires au college...? Vous portez l'uniforme'.  
 'Nous vous paierons, nous avons de l'argent', dit Isabelle.  
 'Vous paierez après', dit Madame Algazine.  
 [...]  
 'Pour vous, ce sera la première porte', dit-elle. (p. 109)

Madame Algazine is aware that they are underage and intent on lesbian sexual

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<sup>82</sup> Kristeva, *Des Chinoises*, p. 79.

<sup>83</sup> Rachel Leng, 'Eileen Chang's Feminine Chinese Modernity: Dysfunctional Marriages, Hysterical women, and the primordial Eugenic Threat', in *Quarterly Journal of Chinese Studies*, March (2014): 13-34 (p. 22). < <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:13399063> > [accessed august 2016].



activity, yet she is willing to offer them a room without advance payment. This can be interpreted as Madame Algazine's (as well as the community to which she belongs) tolerance of socially 'unacceptable' sexual behaviour.

Let us consider also the conclusion of the work in which the love affair ends abruptly: 'Nous ne nous quitterons pas? Nous ne nous quitterons pas. Ma mère me reprit. Je ne revis jamais Isabelle' (p. 143). Sentimental or emotional reflections are not expressed and this abrupt end is in direct contrast with the ending found in *The Rouge of the North* where Yindi laments on her life. Viollet writes that the relationship between Thérèse and Isabelle 'ne s'achève pas de manière tragique: la séparation des jeunes amantes est le fait du hasard'.<sup>84</sup> I would argue that *hazard* does not play an influential role in how the relationship ends. I suggest that since virginity as a transactional commodity is less significant in this work, the two lovers are focusing on prioritizing personal desires for sexual fulfilment in a society that is, as Mme Algazine demonstrates, more tolerant than the one found in Chang's *The Rouge of the North*. A reading of Maslowian theory on the need to progress towards a different need implies that Thérèse, at least, has gratified sufficiently her need for sexual love and is able to move on with apparent ease.

## 2.6 The shame of sex

Chang does not describe sexual scenes in any detail. However, her depictions of an apparent lack of respect and affection in Yindi for her husband serve to imply her sense of disgust for having to endure intimate acts with a man she despises. And given the value placed on women's virginity in Chinese societies, the moment of defloration, which social norms dictate should take place only in marriage and serve

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<sup>84</sup> Viollet, 'Violette Leduc: Écriture et sexualité', p. 79.

as the gateway to a life of monogamy, becomes an integral part of Yindi's life and defines who she is.

To lose her virginity to a man she meets for the first time, a man who is physically unattractive can be interpreted as an abuse of her value; to be abused by a character who cannot be identified as a real man (due to his disability) further increases her shame. Ironically, Yindi (and all other female characters of Chang) defends her virginity to maintain or even increase her worth only to lose it all – her virginity, her sense of identity and worth – to a disabled man.

In contrast to Yindi, the perception that the first sexual experience does not correlate to a particularly significant moment for the moral and physical self can be found in *Thérèse et Isabelle*:

Elle donnait des coups, des coups, des coups... On entendait les claquements de la chair. Elle crevait l'oeil de l'innocence. J'avais mal: je me délivrais mais je ne voyais pas ce qui arrivait.  
[...] Mon souvenir des deux doigts s'adoucissait, mes chairs tuméfiées guérissaient, des bulles d'amour montaient. (p. 70)

The first sexual violation is not experienced as a modification of any inner self. Virginity is instead treated purely as a violation of a biological part of the body after which, once the initial discomfort is overcome, the possessor can proceed to achieve sexual satisfaction and a new freedom. On lesbian relationships, Cairns writes that Leduc's approach to writing the body 'emphasizes healing and wholeness, rather than dismemberment'.<sup>85</sup> Thérèse's remark to Isabelle after losing her virginity, 'je vois le monde, il sort de toi' (p. 141), clearly demonstrates she has achieved a degree of physical satisfaction to compensate for her defloration.

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<sup>85</sup> Cairns, *Gay and Lesbian Cultures in France*, p. 135.

Although female virginity is perceived and treated differently in the writing of Leduc and Chang, the characters of both authors seek to achieve a state of well-being through the manner of its loss. For the female characters of Leduc, the loss of virginity manifests the desire to promote a general well-being through the satisfaction of their basic physiological need. The female characters of Chang, on the other hand, achieve a general well-being which derives from having fulfilled their psychological need for recognition. This need for social recognition, nevertheless, leaves these women vulnerable to social demands and restrains the level of sexual freedom they consider to be available to them. In contrast, the primary goal of Leducian teenagers is to fulfil a physiological need – a need which is suggested by Maslow to be easier to satisfy but also much more dispensable – as the abrupt ending to their relationship (without the death of either characters) demonstrates.<sup>86</sup>

### **3 Conclusion: Leduc and Chang compared**

The characters of Leduc and Chang are revealed to fear death. Their approach to death is, however, quite different. On the one hand, Leduc's characters are more likely to perceive death as the final termination of life and believe that there is nothing beyond death. They are, consequently, more likely to venture out and achieve experiences to gratify their needs. This approach to life is beneficial to their identity development. Chang's characters, on the other hand, perceive death as the continuation of life, and are less receptive to the idea of change. They are also more likely to embrace death as a means of transcending their life. Both beliefs reduce the characters' urge to venture out and experiment with life and are consequently

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<sup>86</sup> Maslow, *Toward a Psychology of Being*, pp. 172-73.

detrimental to the development of an individual identity.

In a relatively tolerant society, sexual activities are revealed to be beneficial to identity development. For instance, in Leduc's *Thérèse et Isabelle*, sexual relationships primarily answer the characters' desires for basic physiological gratification. This, in turn, allows the characters to progress upwards on the Hierarchy of Needs. The characters of Chang perceive sexual activities predominantly as a means of gaining financial safety or social recognition, and without achieving a sufficient level of gratification in their physiological need – a desire which precedes safety and belonging need – any growth they achieve can only be considered inauthentic.

On virginity, where Leduc's characters perceive the first sexual penetration as an abuse of the body, Chang's characters' concept of virginity is influenced by the perceived worth of their sexual innocence. From this perspective, characters of Chang, whose identity development is interwoven with social judgment, is less likely to achieve an identity development than the protagonists of Leduc.

## CONCLUSION

Why is it not the case that all women identify themselves as feminists or at least claim equal rights with men, even in cultures where to do so is without danger, and there are no religious factors in play? Although external factors such as social, political, economic and religious elements have played an influential role in prolonging the traditional female image, it has not been clearly explained why some women appear content in their role as carers, mothers and wives whereas others strongly manifest their disapproval of traditional female gendered roles.

On the one hand, it may be argued that women should reject the traditional female image as it is fundamentally related to biological functions and not to individual competences. On the other hand, it can be said that it is precisely in accepting as well as maximizing personal potential as a female that women can achieve an authentic well-being and develop an individual identity complementing, as well as complemented by, their gender. This emphasizes the ambiguous position which women of today face and explains to an extent why women's identity remains a subject of much debate.

It has, however, become increasingly evident that a positive perception of the

self is beneficial to women's overall well-being. And in order for this to materialize, women must understand above all the mechanisms which motivate them into accepting a specific role. By examining the motivational forces behind the depictions of women characters by Leduc and Chang, we have sought to understand what motivates these characters to specific actions and thoughts and, in the process, determine whether their path of progression is towards achieving a sense of individuality. Texts written by these authors provide a thoughtful response to the norms concerning gender which they perceive in their respective cultures. Read in relation to feminist critical theory and (post-)Maslowian insights, they help us towards a cross-cultural perspective on the problems mentioned above.

What, then, do our readings reveal? In our first chapter, we focussed on identity development through intimate attachments. More precisely, we explored the extent to which the pursuit of sexual intimacy is a manifestation of attempts at self-identification. In Leduc, intimacy is portrayed as the fastest route to satisfying a sense of love. In the case of Violette, we saw evidence of progression in her need for love, from the desire for physiological and physical gratification with her first lover Isabelle to attempting to satisfy her need for self-actualization with Hermine. In her third relationship, with Gabriel, Violette oscillates between her needs for self-enhancing growth and a desire for social conformity.

In *The Rouge of the North*, there is only one lover for Yindi, which increases the risk of disappointment and frustration, particularly when the lover fails to gratify her basic need for love. To neutralize this potential threat, Yindi disassociates intimacy from its primary function of fulfilling one's basic 'love need' and approaches sex as a means of gaining social acceptance. Unlike Violette,

misplacing or disassociating intimacy from its primary purpose of fulfilling one's basic love need is detrimental to Yindi's overall development.

In our second chapter, we analysed the polarity of the maternal role in relation to personal growth in *L'Asphyxie* and *Jingsuo Ji*. Concerning the mother's nurturing role, our corpus foregrounds the following possibilities: some women nurture to survive; some wish to nurture; and some reject nurturing to survive. To reject motherhood is women's emphatic refusal to be recognized as a reproductive machine, and although in a (post-)Maslowian perspective this carries the risk of not being able to optimize their sense of self-esteem, it also highlights the need within these women to be recognized not as a gendered person but as an individual.

This desire to move away from a gendered identity is reflected in *L'Asphyxie*, where there is an apparent separation between women and the maternal role. In Chang's work, on the other hand, women characters are unable to escape from the trilogy of sex, pregnancy and motherhood. Further examination of the mother-daughter relationships between Berthe and Violette in *L'Asphyxie*, and Ch'i-ch'iao and Chan'an in *Jingsuo Ji* reveals a degree of resentment which both mothers feel towards their roles and their respective daughters. However, Berthe is portrayed as rejecting motherhood with a degree of violence (at least to Violette). This is an indication that she does not perceive motherhood as a means of increasing her sense of self-esteem. Ch'i-ch'iao, on the contrary, deliberately sets out to become a mother and oscillates between the 'good' and 'bad' mother role, consequently highlighting her belief that the achievement of a positive identity development is closely associated with society's recognition of her ability as a 'good' mother.

In the third chapter, we concentrated on attitudes and treatments of perceived personal potential in the female characters of *La Bâtarde* and *Love in a Fallen City*. There is a salient presence of self-sacrifice for the benefit of the group throughout *Love in a Fallen City*. By contrast, in *La Bâtarde* the women characters are revealed to be less influenced by the demands of their social group, suggesting the development of a more self-orientated identity. The level of freedom (particularly sexual freedom) that women perceive to be available to them, as well as the degree of disobedience they believe to be permissible, plays a significant role in identity development.

In *La Bâtarde*, women characters are portrayed as being more easily excused for their divergence from moral and cultural gender norms, which implies that the influence social demands have upon the individual is relatively minimal. This, in turn, strengthens the development of a self-orientated identity. In contrast, the society of *Love in a Fallen City* is less forgiving of individual trespasses and the women characters are consequently compelled to develop a more society-orientated self.

The final chapter studies the effects of two taboo topics on the development of individualism in the female characters of *Thérèse et Isabelle*, *La Bâtarde* and *The Rouge of the North*. In *La Bâtarde*, the fear of death galvanizes individual characters into maximizing personal achievements and satisfaction. From this perspective, it can be argued that life, or the meaning of life, derives from the concept that death is the final termination of life and is therefore an important motivational force behind the development of a more significant self-actualizing individual. However, when physical death is counterbalanced by a belief in spiritual immortality and the omnipotence of the dead, there is, in contrast, a



tendency for individuals to stagnate in life in anticipation of potential personal improvements in the next life. This, at least, is suggested by Chang's portrayal of various characters, especially Yindi.

Where death is either feared or desired in these texts, sex is both feared and desired in *Thérèse et Isabelle* and *The Rouge of the North*. However, although female sexuality, as a disruptive or emasculating force, may incite desire and fear in a given society, a woman may manage the power of her own sexuality to determine how she is perceived (both how she perceives herself and how she is perceived by society), and not just in sexual terms (e.g. 'angel' versus 'whore'). Thérèse, who seeks to experience sexual enjoyment without being primarily motivated by the expectation of material rewards or other forms of compensation other than physical gratification, is more able to enjoy carnal pleasure than the female characters of Chang. Characters such as Yindi who is predominantly motivated by her desire for a sense of security and belonging have a tendency to prioritize the needs of others before her own, leaving Yindi vulnerable to the perceived value of her sexual functions by others. She is consequently less likely to achieve sufficient fulfilment in her basic physiological needs in order to proceed towards more growth enhancing desires.

In Maslowian terms, then, the corpus we have examined suggests that both Leduc and Chang, through their depiction of women, explore the desire to fulfil the three levels of the deficiency needs – needs that are essential for survival. However, whereas the characters of Leduc oscillate between the three levels of the deficiency needs, Chang's characters focus primarily on fulfilling their need for love and belonging. The flexibility found in Leduc's characters implies that they

are more able to adjust their needs to strengthen their overall sense of well-being – a prerequisite state for the achievement of an individualized identity, according to Maslow. The fixed desire for love and belonging which the characters of Chang display not only leaves them vulnerable to the demands of others, but prevents them from progressing beyond the deficiency need.

Thus, when read alongside and, to an extent, ‘against’ each other, Leduc and Chang suggest the following ‘cross-national’ findings. The correlation between flexibility and individual growth suggests that characters oscillating between needs are more likely to choose roles which enhance their overall sense of well-being and maximize their potential in life. In contrast, characters whose primary focus is to achieve a sense of satisfaction in their need for belonging have a tendency to prioritize the needs of others before their own. They are seeking to survive and not to maximize individual potential, and any choices made will subsequently be perceived, either consciously or unconsciously, as forced.

The attitude which a woman adopts vis-à-vis the traditional female gendered role can, therefore, be explained as being motivated by individual needs, even though the female gendered role is, by definition, general and common to roughly half the human species in any given culture (and significantly less than half in modern China). The motivational force behind a woman’s action or thought offers a plausible explanation as to why this much debated role is embraced by some whilst reluctantly fulfilled or rejected by others. It also shows that although social, cultural and political elements play a critical role in influencing the traditional image of a woman, it is women themselves who are ultimately responsible for their own identity.

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