Michael Lucey
University of California, Berkeley

[Author's Final Version of: "**Playing with Variables: Leduc *au village*." *Romanic Review* 107 (2016): 199-213.**]

Playing with Variables: Leduc *au village*

Violette Leduc is known for books, fictional and autobiographical to varying degrees (*Ravages, Thérèse et Isabelle, La Bâtarde*), that include scenes recounting in detail sexual relations between women. Her books also include accounts of her unrequited love for a series of gay men (including Maurice Sachs, Jean Genet, and Jacques Guérin), her physical and emotional feelings for Simone de Beauvoir (never reciprocated across the several decades of their friendship, a word that perhaps cannot quite do justice to the odd and unbalanced relation they had), as well as her marriage and her relationship later in life with a construction worker she calls René in her writings. Sexual outsiders of many kinds fascinated her, and, it should be added, it does not seem that the categories that other people used to talk about her sexuality or sexuality in general had much pertinence for her.

Consider the extraordinary letter she writes to Beauvoir in late summer 1950 about her feelings for Beauvoir and her feelings towards a couple of women who run the hotel in which she is staying in the village of Montjean:

> That you should not love me in the way that I love you is well and good, since that way I will never grow tired of adoring you gravely. My love for you is a kind of fabulous virginity. And yet I have passed through, and am still in the midst of, a period of sexual frenzy. . . . I

have been obsessed by, hounded by, that couple of women I wrote you about. I have been humiliated, revolted. They have found in this village, they have made real a union, whereas I have for 15 years been consumed by, and am still consumed by solitude. I have often felt as if I were in Charlus's skin as I spied on them, as I envied them, as I imagined them. They never even spend 15 minutes apart, and I often cry with rage and jealousy when I notice this fact. They are mistrustful, they are shut up inside their happiness. One night I told them, after all the people summering here had left, I told them in very nuanced terms that I loved you and about your beautiful friendship for me. It was a one-sided conversation. I gave, but got nothing in return. They are even more extraordinary than Genet's "Maids". The difference in their ages – I have also already told you about this, one is thirty, the other fifty-six – is something I find enchanting and consoling. . . . How simple they are, I keep coming back to this, how unrefined, how sure of themselves. The younger one has the face of a brute. Their fatness is the weight of sensuality. When seated they open their legs wide, like soldiers, whereas so-called normal women keep them crossed or closed tight. They are a torment to me without even knowing it but they also intensify my love for you because you are a part of the disaster that I am. I often think about lesbians in their cabarets, who exist on another planet, who are nothing but sad puppets.[1]

The letter is typical of Leduc in all her idiosyncrasy: verging here and there towards the preposterous without ever quite tipping over into it, excessive in its emotivity, self-consciously obsessive, and also profoundly curious about the way sexuality functions (which doesn't mean she can't make the odd homophobic remark), and about the lack of fit between her sexuality and everyone else's (in this case, Beauvoir's, the two women in question, and lesbians who frequent queer bars and cabarets). She is attentive to a number of characteristics -- axes of variations in sexualities we might say -- that aren't always factored in to typical discussions of sexuality: that sexualities have a class or regional component; that age difference is important in some sexualities; that girth can have a relation to gender and to sexuality; that sexualities such as her own and that of this couple apparently are sometimes best understood by way of representations from the world of literature (Genet's two maids), and that the representations chosen can sometimes rely on transgendered forms of identification (her link to Proust's Charlus).

Consider another more condensed example of Leduc's attentiveness to what I will call the multivariable experience of sexuality. *La Bâtarde* recounts several outings taken by the young Leduc and her mother to see different shows while they were living under the same roof in Paris. (They once went, for instance, to see the cross-dressing aerialist, Barbette.) As they set out on one such outing, Violette takes her mother's arm:

> "Don't put your arm through mine. You're such a farm boy!" she said.
>
> Farm boy. The use of the masculine got to me.
>
> --Ne me donne pas le bras. Mais que tu es paysan! me disait-elle.

Paysan. Le masculin m'affligeait.[2]

In one very compact utterance, Leduc's mother registers her impression of her daughter's sexuality, subtly linking together gender, object choice, and that odd mixture of regional identity, class, and race that is contained in the French concept of peasant, *paysan*. It's also a generically interesting utterance, because of the way it indexes a complicated cultural framework for understanding sexuality, a framework that could only belong to someone located socially close enough to peasants to have a detailed awareness of how their sexual culture operates, but not wanting to be associated with it.

Leduc's representations of her mother's reactions to the sexually dissident forms of behavior she exhibits while growing up (and later) provide consistently interesting evidence of a point of view (her mother's) that is neither exactly approving nor exactly disapproving, but is certainly matter-of-fact about such expressions of dissidence, and that can be perfectly nonchalant about them. When Leduc is expelled from her girls' school because of her sexual relations with one of the teaching staff, she is sent by train to Paris, where her mother is now living. Her mother meets her at the station: "I saw my mother in the first row: a brush stroke of elegance. A young girl and a young woman. Her grace, our pact, my pardon. I kissed her and she replied: 'Do you like my dress?' We talked about her clothes in the taxi. My mother's metamorphosis into a Parisienne eclipsed the headmistress and sent the school spinning into limbo. Not the slightest innuendo. Giving me Paris, she gave me her tact" (*La Bâtarde,* 111). There is a complicity between mother and daughter, a shared choice not to take up the subject of Leduc's behavior or its consequences. We might see behind this complicity a shared set of reference points regarding sexual culture, and understanding that their point of view and that of the

headmistress are not the same, a further sense that Parisian sexual culture is a bit different from what they are used to. Clearly, the sexual culture of the countryside, villages, and towns they came from was, while not the same as what they see around them in Paris, already a rich, diverse, and conflicted one, which means that they are already in full possession of a practical understanding of sexual diversity and dissidence that allowed them to communicate with and understand each other on all sorts of implicit levels.

This practical understanding of sexual diversity that Leduc shares with her mother is, of course, present in her letter to Beauvoir as well. Her practical understanding tells her that her love for Beauvoir, the relationship between the two women she encounters that summer, and the sexuality of Parisian lesbians are all related and yet different. We could say, borrowing the term mobilized so influentially by Kimberlé W. Crenshaw, that Leduc and her mother have a practical understanding of sexuality that is fundamentally *intersectional*.[3] José Esteban Muñoz glosses Crenshaw's term in the following way: "Intersectionality insists on critical hermeneutics that register the copresence of sexuality, race, class, gender, and other identity differentials as particular components that exist simultaneously with one another."[4] We might then imagine that Leduc's experience of her own sexual idiosyncrasy, and her practical ways of understanding distinctions between different sexualities she perceives around her is somehow an experience of intersectionality, and that among the "identity differentials" that count for her are differentials between country life, small town life, and city life, and differentials between people involved in literary or intellectual pursuits (Beauvoir) and those who are not.

(In a number of interesting critical works on Leduc from the late 1990s and early years of this century it was common to talk about her as instantiating "a new and less

gender-bound identity," or "the potentially fluid character of gendered and sexual performance," or to speak of "the realm of sexual flexibility and illegitimacy adumbrated in Leduc's life-writings," or to characterize *La Bâtarde* as "a text that not only gives queerness a voice, but also takes a queer delight in challenging normative notions of what gender is and should be." I think that in order to grasp what Leduc is up to, it is probably necessary to qualify these assertions first of all by noting that for her sexuality is tangled up in more factors than gender and object choice. It can involve age, regional and ethnic identity, class, and cultural or literary affiliations. It is a kind of position taking in all of these ways. It is also, we might say, sedimentological: it is connected to multiple layers in our personality that have been laid down at different times. Some aspects of it are highly resistant to change, some mercurial. Leduc's sexual engagements, as we shall see in more detail below, involve position taking of many kinds. If they seem flexible and fluid viewed from one vantage point, from another, the *constraints* that govern those engagements, and that produce such suffering for Leduc, might be more salient.)[5]

In the summer of 2013, the journal *Signs* published a special issue devoted to the history of the concept of intersectionality over the past few decades. Crenshaw was one of the guest editors for that special issue, and in the introduction to it, she and her co-editors wrote: "As intersectionality has traveled, questions have been raised regarding a number of issues: the utility and limitations of its various metaphors, including the road intersection, the matrix, and the interlocked vision of oppression; the additive and autonomous versus interactive and mutually constituting nature of the race/gender/class/sexuality/nation nexus; . . . the number of categories and kinds of subjects (e.g., privileged or subordinate?) stipulated or implied by an intersectional

approach; and the static and fixed versus the dynamic and contextual orientation of intersectional research."[6] In my understanding of the work Leduc's writing does to show how many variables are in play in her experience of sexuality, it seems most useful to focus on the "interactive and mutually constituting" aspect of the different variables involved and also to be attentive to how much of her experience of sexuality is related to discrepancies between her (embodied) point of view on the social field and the way sexuality operates within it and the point of view others around her present to her. Traveling to mid-twentieth-century France with an "intersectional approach" also necessarily involves a focus on what is "dynamic and contextual" in that approach, in the effort to ascertain which and how many categories seem pertinent to any given intersection. My own understanding of the interactivity and the dynamism in the relations between various socially pertinent variables in the construction of an experience or a perception of sexuality has been influenced by the work of Pierre Bourdieu.

Any given social variable, Bourdieu explains in *Distinction*, needs to be understood as influencing and as being under the influence of an array of other pertinent social variables. Here is how he expresses this insight, one that led to a particular way of collecting and processing data, to a practice of modeling it geometrically:

> The particular relations between a dependent variable (such as political opinion) and so-called independent variables such as sex, age and religion, or even educational level, income and occupation tend to mask the complete system of relationships which constitutes the true principle of the specific strength and form of the effects registered in any particular correlation. The most independent of

> "independent" variables conceals a whole network of statistical relations which are present, implicitly, in its relationship with any given opinion or practice.[8]

Bourdieu draws attention to how difficult it can be to perceive how different variables are interacting with each other in producing either a sense of social location, of social intelligibility, or of social identity. Leduc's writing in particular, when brought into relation to Bourdieu's thought, has helped me to understand how useful it can be to think of sexuality both as a variable in its own right and as the effect of the interaction of a wide-ranging (and never finalized) set of other sociological variables, and how much the particularities of both the (phenomenological) experience of and the (epistemological) apprehension of sexuality are tied to, indexed to, particular locations within a given social field. Indeed, phenomenological and epistemological considerations may be inseparable, and literary writing, which binds the two together, becomes a particularly useful tool for investigating this conundrum.

Consider Bourdieu's compelling description in *Distinction* of what social class might be, a description that might also hold for sexuality. Imagine, then, in the following passage, replacing the words "social class" with the word "sexuality":

> Social class is not defined by a property (not even the most determinant one, such as the volume and composition of capital) nor by a collection of properties (of sex, age, social origin, ethnic origin . . . income, educational level etc.), nor even by a chain of properties strung out from a fundamental property . . . in a relation of cause and effect, conditioner and conditioned; but by the structure of relations

> between all the pertinent properties which gives its specific value to each of them and to the effects they exert on practices. (106)

It strikes me that in a very practical way, this is how Leduc understands her own sexuality, and also a range of sexualities in the world around her. Some of those sexualities take on names (lesbian) that seem to make them a property in their own right, and certainly that is how many people experience those sexualities. For Leduc, the experience of sexuality as a *property* is an alien one: sexuality is, for her, the *effect* exerted on certain *practices* by a shifting structure of relations between a shifting set of "pertinent" properties. It is a summing of multiple vectors, a summing that happens for her almost intuitively. Her frustration and suffering around sexuality frequently arise from the fact that her way of doing these sums is indecipherable to those around her, or somehow makes no sense to them.

Village Life

Leduc's experience in Montjean in the summer of 1950 did not only result in a letter to Simone de Beauvoir, it also resulted in a quite remarkable short text, little known today, "Au village" (Village life), that was published in *Les Temps Modernes* in March 1951. Leduc spends fifteen pages describing a number of eccentric figures that she met during her vacation, including the couple of women referred to in the letter to Beauvoir and a cross dressing man she refers to as La Chauplanat. It might be read superficially as belonging to the genre of a sophisticated Parisian recounting droll stories of small town life – were it not for the fact that Leduc is herself a product of small town life, and that the intellectually serious *Les Temps Modernes* would seem an unlikely location for that

particular literary genre. "Au village" can better be understood as a kind of experimental writing about, among other things, the conjoined perception and experience of sexual culture. If we take Leduc's writing as being, at many points, *sociologically* experimental, we can notice her attunement to problems of categorical division in the experience of sexuality and sexual culture that are simultaneously phenomenological, epistemological and sociological. She seems attuned as well (although perhaps not consciously – it's more something that is part of her writing practice) to the sense that sexuality is perceived by most of us simultaneously as a pertinent sociological characteristic in its own right and as the effect of the structural relations between a considerable number of other pertinent sociological variables (age, class, education, regional affiliation, race, religion, etc.). Sexuality is a variable, and a multivariable effect simultaneously. Leduc seems intent on illustrating how the kinds of excess meaning that can accrue to certain lived experiences of sexuality, excesses that are understood differently by people observing them from different points of view, reveal that there are multiple possible futures in which those meanings might unfold.

In describing La Chauplanat, one of the things that interests Leduc is the difference between the way the villagers react to him and the way summer visitors do:

> Once the summer visitors have left, no one takes any particular notice of La Chauplanat in the village. La Chauplanat is a man. Married to an egg (his bald wife wears a turban day and night), Le Chauplanat is a father and a grandfather: three sons, three grandsons. The person whose hair is fixed like Ingrid Bergmans, who balances on top of that hair one of the tall striped caps worn by a New York showgirl on

> parade, the person who is the bandleader, tailor, organist, and cashier in his son's delicatessen thinks of himself as a woman, and a chaste one. It has been this way for twenty years. No one has heard any stories about him suggestive of particular kinds of tastes. He doesn't cheat on his wife, that's how kind folks put it. The proud village listens to, admires, and absolves its head musician in make-up when he waves his conductor's baton. . . . The farmers whose chests swell when this musician signals the drummers somehow fail to notice that their man is conducting a military march wearing silk stockings. . . . The summer visitors are a little less ingenuous. They are obsessed by La Chauplanat, who is for them a nightmare, a source of fascination. The factory blacksmiths, the hosiery sales reps, the itinerant road workers who insult her and tear her to pieces also dream of her. Hotel dining rooms are the coliseums into which they throw her, trample her, lift her up, throw her down, tear her apart, break her into pieces. The women among the visitors, overshadowed by a man who conducts himself as a woman beyond reproach, egg on these jeering toreadors.[9]

Leduc is, herself, neither an ingenuous villager capable of accepting at face value and without comment the transgendered way of life of La Chauplanat, nor is she, it would appear, the obsessed outsider who seemingly can do nothing but produce an endless stream of derogatory talk about her. Leduc's fascination is different in kind, she implicitly suggests, from that of the mostly working class people who spend their summer vacations

in this town. Her description carefully points out how understanding La Chauplanat involves taking into account his or her (Leduc gives us no indication as to a preferred pronoun of address, so I shall alternate) marriage, her family life, the ambiguous sexuality and gender of his wife, her profession, his religiosity, her desire for female celibacy, his musicality, her fashion sense and so on. All this is implicitly known and in some practical way understood by the entire village, it seems, which is what allows La Chauplanat simply to be a part of the ordinary life of the village. It is the possibility of (and the fragility of) this ordinariness that seems to fascinate Leduc. Her presentation is structured by a movement from the extraordinary to the ordinary, and then back to the extraordinary, before finally concluding in a more ordinary register. She begins the passage referring to La Chauplanat with feminine pronouns:

> La Chauplanat aims to be the woman with the most artistic makeup, the whitest lingerie, the tightest corset, the most painful shoes. She wishes to be the most noticeable, the most frequently pointed out, and the best behaved. She is the great eccentric, she is discretion itself.[10]

In short, La Chauplanat stands out, and makes a point of doing so. A few sentences later we learn that this eccentric woman, who makes a point of simultaneously being noticed and incarnating distance and discretion, is not exactly what she seems. ("Once the summer visitors have left, no one takes any particular notice of La Chauplanat in the village. La Chauplanat is a man.") If this comes across, in part, as a sensationalist revelation of gender non-conformity, Leduc's goal nonetheless appears to be simultaneously to sensationalize and to desensationalize the situation. This woman who dresses so as to stand out is, in fact,

somehow unremarkable (as regards her gender non-conformity) to the village for most of the year. Notice that at this point in Leduc's account, once it has been announced that "La Chauplanat is a man," linguistic gender switches back to the masculine for awhile; La Chauplanat even becomes Le Chauplanat briefly, as information about his background is provided. Only when the passage turns to consider the obsessive, hostile discourse of the summer visitors, is La Chauplanat once again consistently (almost) referred to in the feminine as she is subjected to the discursive violence of the summer visitors, male and female. Then, with the summer visitors gone, the passage gently oscillates back and forth between genders:

> As he sits near the window sewing, assuming the attitude of a young noblewoman from a ruined family embroidering her trousseau with her hair weeping about her, Chauplanat looks younger than his years. Ambition keeps you young. He is a serene sage who would be a woman and thinks no further than that. La Chauplanat has been forgiven because she has never sinned. She is a moving figure, a stoic. She is the legend accompanying an image from a summer vacation.[11]

If La Chauplanat is so exemplary, it would seem to be because of the way she can exist in the village with a gender that adjusts according to circumstance, where the use of pronouns in any utterance is indicative both of her or his gender and of the context of the utterance, of the social positioning and the intentions of the interlocutors, of their awareness (or lack of awareness) of all the pertinent sociological variables in play in the situation.

The portrait of La Chauplanat offers a lesson about the complexity of sexuality in situation, and about the practical and somewhat subliminal calculations we are always performing in refining our perceptions of the composition of other people's sexuality in situation. (This is why certain people in the village regularly rehearse the fact that even though it might seem that someone with La Chauplanat's profile would be the kind of person who would be off secretly seeking out sexual encounters with men, that does not, in fact, seem to be the case; and indeed, upon further consideration of all the variables in play, it comes to make some kind of sense to most people that such sexual encounters are not part of what La Chauplanat is seeking.) The portrait that follows it, and that resembles it in some ways, takes these insights a step further. This is the portrait of the Panther and Juno, the couple of women Leduc referred to in her letter to Beauvoir, the Panther being 26 years older than Juno, and Juno being, it turns out, married to a farmer named Julien, who visits the couple on Sundays. We can take Leduc's portrait of the couple (like her letter to Beauvoir about them) to be part of an effort to imagine how their sexuality might be understood, what other social variables it is connected with, how its manner of being reported (to her and by her) becomes part of the problem regarding what it is. The complex utterance that is Leduc's letter to Beauvoir indexes multiple frameworks for understanding sexuality, as does her portrait of these two women in her article. The letter also recounts an interaction between her, the Panther and Juno that is not included in "Au village" -- Leduc's "monologue" to them about her love for Beauvoir, about their friendship -- in which Leduc attempts (and apparently fails) to negotiate a shared framework for understanding different kinds of relations between women that might include both hers and theirs.

As with the portrait of la Chauplanat, the portrait of the Panther and Juno makes a point of distinguishing between the attitudes of the summer visitors to the village and the attitudes of the locals. In both cases Leduc's own position is neither that of the visitors nor that of the locals. She gets information about the Panther both from the locals and from visitors like a prurient blacksmith from Paris who caught the two women kissing in the kitchen early one morning. (He is in fact renting a room from the Panther and her partner.) Providing a social location not only for your own point of view, but also for the source of each piece of information you accumulate about someone seems a key part of Leduc's procedures for this portrait, which seems therefore also to be about how the implicit social calculus of sexuality works, how it interfaces with other processes of social positioning. One of the pieces of information Leduc picks up from a local early on is that Juno, the Panther's partner, "is married" (1602), and much of the rest of the portrait of the two women will be an effort to present enough pieces of pertinent information to allow an informed reader to arrive at a practical understanding of this village same-sex sexuality that Leduc finds so fascinating and appealing.

Julien is the name of Juno's husband, and Leduc is there, in the women's kitchen, one day when Julien comes to visit, bringing fruits and flowers from the farm where he lives with his mother. After his departure, the Panther asks Leduc a question, as if wondering what their situation must look like from a socially distant point of view, that of a sympathetic female summer visitor from Paris:

> “What kind of a marriage is this anyway? Can you tell me? It was a whim, she married him on nothing more than a whim. And he wasn’t the first fiancé... Bouboule, Lulu, L’Aigrefin... What kind of fiancés

> were they all?" [...]
>
> "You aren't telling the whole story," Juno chimed in. "I took him to save the house. You know that's true! His property is ours. In fact, our business is as much his as it is ours..." [...]
>
> "We could have found another way to solve the problem," cried the Panther. "He's not the only person around who has property... When he shows up here, I have to leave. I'll never be able to bear it. It's too much for me."[12]

The marriage was, it seems at first glance, a practical financial move. Julien was apparently not Juno's first male suitor, and is willing (at least for the time being) to content himself with brief visits, and to allow the women to use his money to keep their café afloat. Juno seems happy with the arrangement. It drives the Panther a little crazy.

And yet, she has other reasons for consenting to a marriage that on some level seems intolerable to her:

> "I'm twenty-six years older than she is," she whispered without glumness. "You have to look ahead. Julien may not be much, but she won't be alone.... She'll have my house and his money. I could easily die before her. But what kind of a man is he really?"[13]

Julien, whatever his inadequacies (none too handsome? none too bright?), seems at least like a good insurance policy. And, as Juno makes a point of adding at this juncture, he doesn't really take up that much room: "He only comes by on Sunday nights and often,

admit it, he doesn't spend the night." Which means, of course, that on some Sundays he does stay overnight and the Panther, enraged, goes and stays somewhere else.

Leduc is intrigued, wanting to know where and how far away he lives. The Panther supplies her response: "He lives with his mother, of course. . . . On his farm with his animals. That's only natural. He has to increase his wealth. Can you see him living around here? He's a bit dim, really."[14] We see the category of the unsophisticated peasant functioning again here, intersecting with, deflecting in various ways, pathways that might otherwise on their own seem fully to constitute a given sexuality.

Leduc will add a few more variables for us to take into account, having to do with the way this marriage functions and the way gender operates in this complex familial system. The two women think fondly back to the way they spent the night before Juno's marriage to Julien:

> "The day before the wedding," the Panther informed me, "we ended the day, her and me, watching a boxing match. It was a crazy thing to do. Eight hundred francs a seat... She's crazy about wrestling," she admitted.[15]

Female masculinity at its finest, we might say, this couple of women making a point of reminding Julien where he stands by their extravagant expenditure on a particular form of spectatorship the night before his marriage to Juno. In the paragraphs following this piece of information, Leduc carefully provides a few more for us to factor into our sense of these women, and the context in which they live out their sexuality. We learn, for instance, from the Panther's mother, that "the Panther had recently turned down three marriage

proposals" (1606). We also learn that not everything is smooth sailing in this situation when Juno expresses her unhappiness with the way the Panther reacts when Julien does in fact spend a night with his wife:

> "But really, there's something you need to stop doing," she added, "and that is to go back to your mother's and smash up everything in the bedroom you grew up in on the nights he's staying here."[16]

Whatever unresolved tensions there may be in their situation, these women live their situation openly. "Que dit le pays?" Leduc queries. "What do people round here say about you?" "'They can all just mind their own business,' the Panther replied. Juno nodded her approval." The mailman says hello to the two women as they walk down the street arm in arm, and Leduc concludes the portrait with the following moral, "Ceux qui s'imposent n'indisposent pas les autres." "People who are sure of themselves don't bother others." This might recall for us a comment made quite recently by Colin R. Johnson about sexuality in small-town America:

> Rural and small-town Americans have a long history of accounting for various forms of difference in terms of eccentricity, idiosyncrasy, or simply the predictable weirdness of neighbors, friends, and family members whom they may not always love, or even particularly like, but whom they also realize they are going to live with whether they want to or not. In some cases, rural and small-town residents have even been known to demonstrate a certain kind of protectiveness toward social outliers, especially when criticisms of these individuals

are seen as coming from outside the community.[17]

All in all the example of Juno and the Panther, as given to us in Leduc's prose, provides further evidence that Leduc's way of understanding sexuality, and of offering that practical understanding to us, conforms to the model Bourdieu offers. Sexuality, for Leduc, seems to be intelligible as a structure built up of multiple properties; it is "the structure of relations between all the pertinent properties which gives its specific value to each of them and to the effects they exert on practices" (*Distinction* 106). Leduc's writing constantly suggests that in every situation in which she enacts her own sexuality, or offers a portrait of someone else's, there will always be a complex operative set of features in play that are determinative of that sexuality. The particular set of features may involve a sense of social position (class) and a sense of a peculiar and somewhat fragile point of view on the social field, a sense of ethnic positioning (taking *paysan* to be a kind of ethnic category), in Leduc's case a sense of literariness and a sense of necessary sexual illegitimacy all braided together in unpredictable ways that perhaps produce not a recognizable sexual identity as such and yet some kind of a intersectional or multivariable pattern that feels meaningful to her and whose meaning and value it is her goal to transmit to us.

[1] "Il est bien que vous n'aimiez pas comme je vous aime puisque ainsi je ne me lasserai jamais de vous adorer avec gravité. Mon amour pour vous, c'est de la virginité fabuleuse. Pourtant j'ai traversé et je traverse encore une période de délire sexuel. . . . J'ai été obsédée, traquée par ce couple de femmes dont je vous ai parlé. J'ai été humiliée, révoltée. Elles ont trouvé, réalisé dans un village une union pendant que je me suis consumée quinze ans et que je me consume encore dans la solitude. Je me suis souvent sentie dans la peau du baron de Charlus en les épiant, en les enviant, en les imaginant. Elles ne se quittent pas un quart d'heure et j'ai souvent des larmes de rage, de jalousie en le constatant. Elles sont méfiantes, elles sont enfermées dans leur bonheur. Je leur ai dit un soir, après le départ de tous les estivants, je leur ai dit avec des nuances que je vous aimais et votre belle amitié pour moi. Ce fut un monologue. J'ai donné mais je ne recevrai rien. Comme elles sont beaucoup plus extraordinaires que les « bonnes » de Jean Genet. Cette différence d'âge -- je vous l'ai dit aussi: l'une à trente ans, l'autre a cinquante-six ans -- m'enchante et me console. . . . Comme elles sont simples, j'y reviens encore, rudes, sûres. La cadette a une tête de brute. Leur grosseur, c'est le poids de sensualité. Elles ouvrent fort leurs jambes quand elles sont assises, à la soudard, tandis que les femmes dites « normales » les croisent, les serrent. Elles me tourmentent sans le savoir mais elles intensifient aussi mon amour pour vous car vous êtes dans ma débâcle. Je songe souvent aux lesbiennes de cabaret qui sont sur une autre planète, qui sont des malheureux pantins." Violette Leduc, *Correspondance 1945-1972*, edited by Carlos Jansiti (Paris: Gallimard, 2007), 174-175 (my English translation).

[2] Leduc, *La Bâtarde,* translated by Derek Coltman ([Normal, IL]: Dalkey Archive Press, 2003), 127. In French: *La bâtarde* [1964] (Paris: Gallimard-L'Imaginaire, 1996), 133.

[3] See Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (1991): 1241-1299.

[4] José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 99.

[5] The first citation is from Alison S. Fell, "Literary Trafficking: Performing Identity in Violette Leduc's *La Bâtarde,*" *Modern Language Review* 98, no. 4 (2003): 870. The next three are from Alex Hughes, *Heterographies* (Oxford: Berg, 2000), 139, 142, 146. Nina Bouraoui takes this position to an extreme, commenting about Leduc in the *Magazine Littéraire* in December 2003: "Ici, il n'y a pas d'homosexualité. Il s'agit de liens, d'histoires, de sexualité, c'est tout. Parce que la littérature efface l'identité sexuelle.... Un grand auteur a tous les sexes, un grand auteur n'a aucun sexe..." [Here there is no homosexuality. We find relations, stories, sexuality, nothing else, because literature erases sexual identity. . . A great author is all sexes; a great author is no sex in particular.] ("Violette Leduc, l'écriture comme pratique amoureuse," 47). René de Ceccatty's *Violette Leduc: Éloge de la Bâtarde* (Paris: Stock, 1994) provides another intriguing account of love and sexuality in Leduc, relating her to many other twentieth-century French writers. See esp. chapters 3, 4, and 9. See also Alex Hughes, "Commodifying Queer: Violette Leduc's Autobiographical Homotextualities," in Owen Heathcote, Alex Hughes, and James S. Williams, eds., *Gay Signatures: Gay and Lesbian Theory, Fiction and Film in France, 1945-1995* (Oxford: Berg, 1998), 113-29.

[6] Sumi Cho, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, and Leslie McCall, "Toward a Field of Intersectionality Studies: Theory, Applications, and Praxis," *Signs* 38, no. 4 (2013): 787.

[8] Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste,* trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 103.

[9] "La Chauplanat passe inaperçue dans son village quand les estivants sont partis. La Chauplanat est un

homme. Marié à un oeuf (son épouse chauve porte turban nuit et jour), le Chauplanat est père et grand-père : trois fils, trois petit-fils. Celui qui se coiffe comme Ingrid Bergman, qui équilibre sur cette coiffure la haute casquette galonnée des girls de défilé new-yorkais, celui qui est chef de fanfare, tailleur, organiste, caissier chez son fils charcutier se veut femme et femme chaste. Il l'a voulu pendant vingt ans. On ne lui connaît aucune aventure, aucune intrigue dites particulières. Il ne trompe pas sa moitié, chuchotent les bonnes âmes. Le village vaniteux écoute, admire, absout son chef de musique fardé quand il remue le bâton de chef d'orchestre. . . . Les agriculteurs qui bombent le torse lorsque ce musicien donne des orders aux tambours ne voient pas que leur homme dirige une marche militaire en bas de soie. . . . Les estivants sont moins candides. La Chauplanat en été est leur obsession, leur cauchemar, leur attraction. Les forgerons des grandes usines, les représentants en bonneterie, les cantonniers ambulants qui la déchirent rêvent d'elle. Les salles à manger des hôtels sont des arènes dans laquelle ils la précipitent, la piétinent, la relèvent, la rejettent, l'écartèlent, la disloquent. Les estivantes qui sont éclipsées par celui qui se veut femme irréprochable, excitent ces toréadors du quolibet." Violette Leduc, "Au village," *Les Temps Modernes* 65 (March 1951): 1599-1600 (English translations are my own).

[10] "La Chauplanat se veut la plus artistement maquillée, la plus neigeusement lingée, la plus strictement corsetée, la plus douloureusement chaussée. Elle se veut la plus remarquée, la plus désignée, la plus sage. C'est la grande excentrique et la grande reserve" (1598-1599).

[11] "Chauplanat ne paraît pas son âge lorsqu'il coud près de la fenêtre, lorsqu'il a l'attitude épanchée d'une jeune noble ruinée brodant son trousseau, la chevelure éplorée. L'ambition conserve. C'est un sage, un serein qui se veut féminin et qui n'imagine pas plus loin. La Chauplanat a été pardonnée parce qu'elle n'a fauté. C'est une émouvante, c'est une stoïque. C'est la légende d'un souvenir de vacance" (1600).

[12] "--Ça ressemble à quoi ce mariage ? Vous pouvez me le dire, vous ? C'est par caprice, uniquement par caprice, qu'elle l'a épousé. Oh ! ce n'est pas le premier fiancé... Bouboule, Lulu, L'Aigrefin... Ça ressemble à quoi ces fiancés? [...]

--Vous ne dites pas tout, a commencé Junon, je l'ai pris pour sauver la maison. Vous le savez ! Nous avons son bien. Le commerce est d'ailleurs autant à lui qu'à nous... [...]

--Nous nous serions arrangés autrement, a crié la Panthère. Il n'y a pas que lui qui possède du bien sur la terre... Quand il vient ici, il faut que je m'en aille. Je ne le supporterai jamais. C'est plus fort que moi" (1604).

[13] "--J'ai vingt-six ans de plus qu'elle, a-t-elle murmuré sans s'attrister. Il faut être prévoyante, ce n'est rien un Julien, mais elle ne serait pas seule.... Elle aura ma maison et son argent. Je pourrai m'en aller avant elle. Mais à quoi ça ressemble un homme comme ça?" (1605).

[14] "Il ne vient que le dimanche soir et souvent, avouez-le, il ne passe pas la nuit ici..."; "Mais chez sa mère. . . . Dans sa ferme, avec les bêtes. C'est naturel. Il faut que son bien grossisse. Vous voyez ça chez nous ! Ça n'est pas dégourdi" (1605).

[15] "-- La veille de son mariage, m'a détaillé la Panthère, nous avons fini la journée, elle et moi, dans une salle de boxe. C'était une folie. Huit cents francs la place... Le catch la passionne, a-t-elle avoué."(1605).

[16] "--Mais ce que vous ne devriez pas, a-t-elle ajouté, c'est vous retirer chez votre mère, tout casser dans votre belle chambre de jeune fille, quand il reste ici la nuit" (1606).

[17] Colin R. Johnson, *Just Queer Folks: Gender and Sexuality in Rural America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013), 110.