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MARGUERITE DURAS: TWENTIETH CENTURY  
NOVELIST.

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MARGUERITE DURAS: TWENTIETH CENTURY NOVELIST

A DISSERTATION

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degree of

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By

CATHERINE TAMSY CHEVREAU BRIGGS

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1977

MARGUERITE DURAS: TWENTIETH CENTURY NOVELIST

A DISSERTATION

APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF MODERN LANGUAGES

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## MARGUERITE DURAS: TWENTIETH CENTURY NOVELIST

### CHAPTER I

#### INTRODUCTION

Marguerite Duras is not new to the literary world. She consistently proves and improves her writing talents which have expanded since 1943 to include, not only the novel, but also the theatre, short story and cinema. Marguerite Duras is a success in all genres; however only the novel will be taken into consideration here.

Duras is an important literary figure. Her novels reflect the main literary currents of the periods in which they were written. Thus, her work progresses from the traditional novel to the nouveau roman. This evolution serves as a link between the existentialist novel and the nouveau roman.

The new literary movement reflected by a group of writers referred to as New Novelists came into existence, according to Henri Peyre, in 1953 in France simultaneously with the publication of Robbe-Grillet's Les Gommages:

...By a fortunate coincidence, Robbe-Grillet's Les Gommages, in 1953, was hailed as a striking herald of a fictional revolution by some critics (Roland Barthes, Maurice Blanchot); and L'Emploi du temps, by Michel Butor, was admired by philosophical minds when, three years later, it appeared. Novels

by slightly older writers (Samuel Beckett, Marguerite Duras, Nathalie Sarraute) which had received little attention up to then were lumped together with those of the newcomers, to whom Claude Simon, Claude Ollier, the Swiss Robert Pinget were soon added.<sup>1</sup>

The writing of a nebulous group of authors consisting of such names as Robbe-Grillet, Butor, Sarraute, Duras, Beckett, Simon, Ollier, Pinget, Blanchot, Bessette, Cayrol and Yacine seemed at first appearance so radical that the term anti-novel was used to describe this new type of fiction. Since each writer is distinctly different in his approach to the novel, perhaps the only common element to link these authors is actually their opposition to the novels and writing techniques perfected by their predecessors. Henri Peyre points out that the authors of the anti-novel are using the fictional form of a novel in order to question fiction itself.<sup>2</sup>

Laurent Le Sage also notes that there are obvious differences in the writing styles of the authors grouped together as New Novelists. He continues to focus upon the point that the unquestionable link is in what these writers oppose such as: psychological analysis, social studies, story emphasis, entertainment and escape. Le Sage, furthermore, suggests that there are certain basic techniques which exist among the new writers which he feels are constant enough to be considered characteristics. In general, Le Sage lists the preoccupations of the New Novelists using a new approach to create characters, having almost complete disregard for

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<sup>1</sup>Henri Peyre, French Novelists of Today (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 360.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 337-395.



chronology, giving prominence to objects and space, substituting pattern for plot, and treating the dialogue in an unorthodox manner.<sup>3</sup>

Henri Peyre uses the following passage to make a striking point on literary evolution:

...the truest revolutions in art have often been accomplished by those who believed they were pursuing the work of their predecessors and who were original without having to proclaim it, or without being aware of it.

In truth, the attempts of the new novelists to link themselves with either phenomenology or new ethics, even with the speculations on language to which philosophy likes to confine itself, have convinced only a small group among the critics and readers. The few solid features common to the recent novelists and to our age can be very briefly summed up.<sup>4</sup>

In following her predecessors, Marguerite Duras began to create a newness in her novels. This newness was an individual style which became more original with each novel. Duras matures as a writer and begins to develop her own distinctiveness in style, she removes her characters from the patterns and techniques previously adhered to by the traditional novelist. They progressively become characters without many of the vital statistics such as personality and individuality accompanied by a physical or psychological description. These characters become increasingly anonymous and fluid with a minimum of individualization, and such qualities as these are widely recognized features in the works of the New Novelists.

Although a number of themes appear in the novels of Marguerite Duras, the four main ones are: love, freedom, waiting, apathy and alienation.

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<sup>3</sup>Laurent Le Sage, The French New Novel (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State Press, 1962), p. 5.

<sup>4</sup>Peyre, French Novelists of Today, pp. 388-389.

Love as a major theme throughout the novels of Marguerite Duras takes on several different attributes. For many of Duras' characters love is a goal which supplies the ultimate in desire and happiness and, therefore, completes life and makes it whole. In a few novels love is confining and a nuisance to the person in love because of its restrictions on freedom. Love in this confining aspect hinders and binds the character and closes him off from a condition of total freedom without responsibilities and commitments. The theme of love also appears as a way to free a character from selfishness and isolation. Characters experience each other through love because it eliminates inhibitions and restraints. Death is mixed with the theme of love in several novels in which the ultimate fulfillment of love or passion can be found only in death.

In addition to the theme of love, freedom is also important in novels. She is obviously concerned about achieving an ultimate freedom, one in which a human being feels no restraints, no inhibitions of action, no self-centered personality, and no particular identity. A person is free to experience what he or she wants, even another identity. Duras presents freedom in two distinct fashions: a total freedom through insanity; a partial freedom through intoxication. A person is completely free from the dictates of self and society through insanity, according to Duras. No one questions the actions of a demented person. People who cannot escape from the world through insanity find a brief respite from the same restrictions of self and society through the use of alcohol. Inebriation is the closest a sane person gets to the freedom which the insane enjoy.

The final theme important in Duras' novels is that of alienation. She mainly treats this theme through portraying the lack of communication

between characters. However, she does weave other forms of alienation into her novels. Some of these are withdrawal of affections, mental derangement and physical isolation. Duras points out that there is a great deal of isolation within today's society and makes an appeal, somewhat Utopian, that we begin again with a tabula rasa.

Marguerite Duras' style has evolved from the traditional novelistic techniques to those of the New Novel. Her first few novels present the more conventional aspects of telling a story, describing a plot and a character along with developing a character psychologically. Thus, the reader obtains a very definite impression of each character and the plot. She sets scenes of a family quarrel or of filth, poverty and starvation and adequately describes each situation following the steps of the traditional novelist.

Throughout Duras' fifteen novels dating from 1943 to 1971, she consistently writes about women and the world in which they live, the problems they face and the manner in which they deal with these problems. Although a man might be narrating the novel, the events revolve around a woman. It is always a woman who is the center, the focal point, of the novel. Therefore, quite naturally, the male characters in the novels of Marguerite Duras are of secondary importance to the women involved.

Marguerite Duras' first works portray characters in a traditional manner with the author intervening between the character and the reader. The characters are set before the reader as a good or a bad person, each with a personality and individuality.

It is generally conceded that Duras' fifth book, Les Petits Chevaux de Tarquinia (1953), bridges the transition from her previous traditional

style of writing to the remainder of her novels which share characteristics linked to the movement of the nouveau roman. Gradually Marguerite Duras' fiction becomes an unfolding presentation of a moment free from the dictates of traditional fiction.

Marguerite Duras uses a style suitable to her objectivity and to her vision of reality. The major device in her novels is dialogue in which conversation consists of terse exchanges of clichés and mundane observations. Duras' novels are filled with incessant conversation or babbling in which the characters say nothing but through which the author subtly manages to reveal something about a character, or as Le Sage points out, "Duras' phrases are heavy with things unsaid."<sup>5</sup>

In Duras' adept handling of words, however brief a sentence may be, there is a strong poetic quality. This quality enhances and enriches all her prose but is particularly noticeable in her last novel, L'Amour (1971). With the appearance of L'Amour she seems to have reached a pinnacle in her writing career. At this stage all the experiments and influences which her writing has undergone in its transition have left their imprint. The major elements of what is now distinctly her own style culminate in L'Amour. At this point Duras can no longer be called a traditional novelist. Le Sage maintains that Duras wavers between new writing and conventional fiction because the influences exerted by established practices of fiction, traditional fiction, must be felt by all the New Novelists. However, with the publication of L'Amour Marguerite Duras eschews all conventional presentations of exposition, narration, plot dénouement and character development. L'Amour, which conceivably could

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<sup>5</sup>Le Sage, The French New Novel, p. 40.

be considered as a long prose poem represents Duras' definitive break with traditional fiction. This novel reflects a true spontaneity on the author's part and corroborates Duras' own statement about her novels: she advances only with uncertainty.<sup>6</sup>

Duras has now developed an individuality. She is unique just as all the other authors of the nouveau roman. However, she still does not consider herself to be part of any school of writers. The individuality of Duras and the New Novelists is an important addition to the writing of novels. However, in his discussion of the New Novelists Henri Peyre makes a plea for them not to eliminate too much from literature:

To make literature thus simple in an increasingly complex world may be worthwhile as a health cure or as a purge, provided new authors follow those austere geometricians and theorizers and undertake once again, starting from a new basis, to make life more significant and richer. The assumption of much that has preceded, in the present volume, was that the novel, of all literary genres, is liable to lose most grievously if it abdicates that function which makes it a mirror to the manners, the moods, the social and political history, and the individual and collective passions of the people. Technical innovations seldom survive or matter unless they reflect for the people concerned a deeper change in the vision and in the way of apprehending reality.<sup>7</sup>

This is not to say that a novelist should stop experimenting with techniques or trying to invent new ones. It must also be understood that there cannot be set rules for creating a novel. There must always be, for obvious reasons, an opening for input from each author to express his individuality. Again Henri Peyre states:

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>7</sup>Peyre, French Novelists of Today, p. 392.

...Not many novelists and even fewer lovers of novels would disagree with the following typical answer made by an expert craftsman of fiction, Louis Guilloux, to an interviewer in Les Nouvelles littéraires of December 21, 1935: 'There is no technique of the novel properly speaking. There is a technique appropriate to each novel and it is not transmissible. The novelist must incessantly invent his technique, and this means that the work he has just completed teaches him, as a rule, very little about the way in which he will write the next. The novelist is a man who is obsessed: What are the means of making the objects of his obsessions visible?...If there existed a technique of fiction, the writing of novels could be taught.<sup>8</sup>

This incessant invention of technique by an author is quite visible and traceable throughout the novels of Marguerite Duras.

Another important idea to be kept in mind is that Marguerite Duras can be considered as a distinctly feminine writer. Although she, herself, denies the categorization of a writer who describes only problems of women and asserts that she is writing about universal problems, not solely those of women, she still presents the major portion of all her ideas through the eyes of women.

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 392.

## CHAPTER II

### CHARACTERIZATION

The characters of Marguerite Duras' first novels, both men and women, are traditional characters which are depicted through a psychological description. The author fills in the description by telling the reader something of the protagonist's personality, virtues, and vices. By playing the part of an intermediary, Duras keeps the reader well-informed of explanations for the character's actions and, therefore, provides reasons for future actions. Gradually, these characters are re-shaped into a simple existence without all the trappings of a psychological interpretation of actions and feelings. They become characters without an absolute norm, without a psychological explanation, but with increasing anonymity and a fluid, ever-changing existence. These last few characteristics are common to the New Novelist.

A male character may be the narrator of the novel, as in Le Marin de Gibraltar; or the main character, as in L'Après-midi de Monsieur Andesmas, but he is, nonetheless, second in importance to the female character in the same novel. The men are similar to the women they accompany in the novel. As a matter of fact, the men and the women belong to two main

categories throughout all her novels: they are wanderers in search of a possible goal and alcoholics in search of a temporary freedom from the pressures or boredom of life.

Marguerite Duras' characterization of women is far superior to that of men. Her characterization remains traditional until the fifth novel, Les Petits Cheveux de Tarquinia (1953). With this novel she begins to hold less and less to the conventionalities of what is considered traditional characterization. In the first four novels her women are carefully delineated and their situation well described. Marguerite Duras is lauded for her excellent depictions of women and their problems. Frequently, Duras' characters remain anonymous throughout the entire novel, or until very late in the novel, as in Le Marin de Gibraltar (1952). Her ultimate goal seems to be the search for a total freedom and the escape from self-limits upon each identity.

Children in Duras' novels serve to suspend reality momentarily. Through their innocence of the events around them, they allow a brief moment's respite for the woman involved. The child's suspension of the drama of existence functions much like the comic relief in a play. For a few moments now and then, the woman's attention, along with the reader's, focuses upon the activities of the child, a moment which offers a pause in the events.

Marguerite Duras' heroines share in varying degrees several undesirable traits. One such trait is that of suffering. Each feels a certain amount of distress, of unhappiness with her status in life. She is shackled to an unhappy memory or perhaps a regrettable present. She accepts suffering and carries it with her daily. Perhaps it is this suffering



which weighs constantly upon her mind, an unhappiness which consumes whatever seed of pride she could ever have possessed, leaving humiliation or abasement in its place.

The women in Marguerite Duras' novels are not involved in hypothetical situations about life, but, in contrast, are involved in distinctly real situations. For instance, one of the most poignant examples of suffering is the mother in Un Barrage Contre le Pacifique (1950). Duras gives a very full background of this woman. The author exaggerates the virtues of hard work, poverty, the unfairness of the cadastral government in their treatment of the mother and the rest of the peasants in Indo-China, in order to reveal the psychological reasons for the actions of the mother. The realistic and graphic descriptions of the misery and filth that the mother and her children must face each day shocks the reader while, at the same time, it reinforces his sympathy for the people who must live in such squalid surroundings.

La mère in Un Barrage Contre le Pacifique is a very good and strong example of the traditional type of character development found in the earlier novels. She is a woman pitted in a struggle against life and against the odds of overcoming the type of life she must lead. Duras' description of the mother's health, ideas, children, actions, personality and reasons are clear and accompanied by a specific plot which leads the reader along an all too well-defined path. Such an explanation follows below:

Lorsque son mari mourut, Suzanne et Joseph étaient encore très jeunes. De la période qui avait suivi, elle ne parlait jamais volontiers. Elle disait que ç'avait été difficile, qu'elle se demandait encore comment elle avait pu en sortir. Pendant deux ans, elle avait continué à donner des leçons de

français. Puis, comme c'était insuffisant, des leçons de français et des leçons de piano. Puis, comme c'était encore insuffisant, à mesure que grandissaient ses enfants, elle s'était engagée à l'Eden-Cinéma comme pianiste. Elle y était restée dix ans. Au bout de dix ans, elle avait pu faire des économies suffisantes pour adresser une demande d'achat de concession à la Direction générale du cadastre de la colonie.<sup>1</sup>

With a plot so full of action and description of the characters that there is no room for doubt as to what kind of people they are, Duras leaves, also no room for imagination or surprise on the part of the reader. She prepares the reader so well that mid-way in the novel, he can predict the outcome. For Duras is there, between the words and passages, to take the reader by the hand and lead him through the novel. The reader then, without thinking too much, merely sympathizes.

Another view of the poverty and suffering which must be endured in Indo-China is apparent in Le Vice-Consul (1966), especially in the description of the character of the poor, starving mad-woman who was driven away from her own village. Peter Morgan is writing a book about her and the song she sings, the song of Savannakhet. He has observed the poverty and misery and feels he must write of this mad, beggar-woman because he is drunk with the sufferings of India: "Je m'exalte sur la douleur aux Indes."<sup>2</sup>

The characterization of the mad, beggar-woman is poignantly rendered by the author in an interior monologue mixed with description from an omniscient point of view. Early in the novel the reader finds the following interior monologue:

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<sup>1</sup>Duras, Un Barrage Contre le Pacifique (Paris: Gallimard, 1958), p. 19.

<sup>2</sup>Duras, Le Vice-Consul (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1966), p. 157. (further reference by page only).

Elle trouve: Je suis une jeune fille maigre, la peau de ce ventre se tend, elle commence à craquer, le ventre tombe sur mes cuisses maigres, je suis une jeune fille très maigre chassée qui va avoir un enfant. (p. 18)

An explanation of this girl's approaching madness is mentioned briefly in the next quotation giving some of the psychological reasons for her behavior now and in the future:

Ce n'est pas encore la folie. C'est la faim, cachée par la peur qui se montre à nouveau, l'asthénie qui regarde la lard, sent les soupes. C'est l'amour de sa mère qui s'exprime au hasard. Elle voit qu'on lui montre encens et pétards, elle parle toute seule, remercie le ciel, le marché tourne sous ses yeux à une vitesse enivrante.

...Dans la lumière bouillante et pâle, l'enfant encore dans le ventre, elle s'éloigne, sans crainte. Sa route, elle est sûre, est celle de l'abandon définitif de sa mère. Ses yeux pleurent, mais elle, elle chante à tue-tête un chant enfantin de Barrambang. (pp. 27-28)

In such descriptions as the two given above, Duras adeptly weaves the presentation of her characters. With her careful choice of words she is also able to manipulate, to some extent, the reader's feelings.

In the representation of women Marguerite Duras leaves no room for self-esteem, vanity, or pride. The heroines exist frequently in a state of utter resignation. Abjectness comes about from a realization that for her, life

...is made up of a host of things that can never be questioned, simple, irremediable facts: time passes, and is broken up by an alternation of man's work and his holidays; summers are hot, in certain places there is always a breeze at night; the outer world is made up of houses, roads, policemen, workmen, maids, concierges, etc.; one generally finds oneself in a certain number of simple states such as boredom or desire.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Jacques Guicharnaud, "Woman's Fate: Marguerite Duras, Yale French Studies, XXVII (1961), p. 106.

These simple states weigh heavily upon Duras' women characters who are neither morally nor psychologically strong. Boredom reigns in their lives, although the desire to love or to be loved partially subdues it. This desire is a road to the characters' ultimate aim in life, to be happy. However, due to the weakness of character in the heroines, this boredom reduces their mental processes to a rather neutral state. Consequently, the women spend most of their time waiting for happiness. The mental neutrality is expressed in their passive nature and empty, hollow gestures and words such as the reader finds in Détruire Dit-Elle (1969). The characters do a great deal of staring at one another and utter simple, meaningless phrases. There is less involvement in development of characters in this particular work than in any of Duras' other novels until L'Amour.

The characters in Détruire Dit-Elle are some of those that Marguerite Duras takes out of the mold of the traditional figure and stretches just a bit out of shape. In Détruire Dit-Elle Duras' characters do not develop. There is very little change in their actions, dialogue or the author's description of them from the beginning of the novel to the end. Since practically the entire novel is written in dialogue, there is hardly any opportunity for the author to intervene and add her own opinions to the circumstances. When Duras does have the chance to interject her own thought, she remains quite objective, merely reporting a fact. The extract given below is an example of the lack of psychological description, listing of virtues and vices, and revealing opinions on behalf of the author:

--Je trouve que nous nous ressemblons, murmure Alissa...  
 Vous ne trouvez pas? Nous sommes de la même taille.

Elles sourient.

--C'est vrai, oui.

Alissa fait glisser la manche d'Elisabeth Alione. Son  
 épaule est nue.

--...la même peau, continue Alissa, la même couleur de  
 peau...

--Peut-être...

--Regardez...la forme de la bouche...les cheveux.<sup>4</sup>

In this passage Alissa points out to Elisabeth how much they are alike. The conversation is not heavy in meaning, nor is it significant for any other reason except to let the reader know that the two women in the novel are very much like each other. Duras has removed character development and individualization to show this freedom to express any identity or personality.

Marguerite Duras' traditional heroines share a universal situation, that of looking for a man. In this situation Duras presents a characteristic sequence of events and reactions, each preparing the next in a coherent order. The man, the object of desire for these traditional heroines, will bring the long awaited happiness to them. They can see no reason to live alone or for themselves, rather they must seek, or be found by, a man. It is as though he would be their link to life and would give them a reason for existing, as Jean Bessière explains: "Exprimer la joie et les misères quotidiennes, dire l'attente du bonheur est la

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<sup>4</sup>Duras, Détruire Dit-Elle (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1969), pp. 100-101.

vocation de ses personnages féminins, qui tous recherchent l'homme."<sup>5</sup>

However, the heroine never succeeds in attaining happiness nor the right man. She remains unfulfilled in her search for happiness throughout the novel.

The first female character of Marguerite Duras' to present the idea of the search for happiness linked to the desire for a man is Françoise from Duras' second novel, La Vie Tranquille. Françoise says of Tiène:

Peut-être faudrait-il forcer Tiène à m'épouser, ne pas le laisser repartir cet hiver, faire de Tiène un être de chance et de malchance, le faire choisir entre tous les mariages notre mariage, entre tous les empires celui perdu d'avance, chaque fois perdu d'avance, celui nommé le bonheur?<sup>6</sup>

In this rather lengthy sentence the reader catches a glimpse of Françoise's reasoning process neatly laid before him by the author. Duras has put these words in to reveal more about the psychology of the character according to the more traditional dictates of writing, which she will later reject in part.

Most of the succeeding novels echo the idea of searching for a man in order to find happiness. This is particularly noticeable in Le Square, where the maid lives in boredom waiting to be chosen by a man so that her life will take on some importance. However, the maid is not searching. She goes to dances, not to find a man, but to be found by a man:

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<sup>5</sup>Duras, Moderato Cantabile, notes par Jean Bessière (Les Editions de Minuit 1958; rpt. Paris: Bordas, 1972), p. 15.

<sup>6</sup>Duras, La Vie Tranquille (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1944), p. 167.

--J'ai beaucoup réfléchi. Je suis jeune, bien portante, je ne suis pas menteuse, je suis une de ces femmes comme on en voit partout et dont la plupart des hommes s'accommodent. Et cela m'étonnerait quand même qu'il ne s'en trouve pas un, un jour, qui le reconnaîtra et qui ne s'accommodera pas de moi. J'ai de l'espoir.<sup>7</sup>

Once again, through the maid's words, the author intervenes to give the reader an insight into the reasoning process and personality of the character. Duras carefully edits the present experience of a character and molds the personality, virtues and vices by showing him consciously reasoning about a problem.

Many of the women in Duras' novels are insane or heavy drinkers. In speaking of insanity Marguerite Duras says:

La force de fous résulte de leur refus d'accepter les limites du moi. Elle ne voit pas, dans cette extension extrême du moi, l'extravagance de l'égotisme, mais simplement l'abolition de la frontière qui le sépare des autres.<sup>8</sup>

It is in the abolition of self-limitations that freedom enters. The character becomes free from social and moral restrictions which the sane find imposed upon them or which they impose upon themselves. Insanity, then, is total freedom. It opens the door to the mind and permits it to wander wherever it pleases, thereby allowing it to assume other identities. The author believes the strength of the madman to lie in his refusal to place any limitations on self.

Continuing with the idea of freedom from limitations, Marguerite Duras introduces the heavy drinker. A state of drunkenness is a type of temporary insanity. It is as close as a sane person can come to emulating

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<sup>7</sup>Duras, Le Square (Paris: Gallimard, 1955), pp. 20-21.

<sup>8</sup>Duras, Moderato Cantabile, notes par Jean Bessière (Les Editions de Minuit 1958; rpt. Paris: Bordas: 1972), p. 4.

insanity. In seeking complete freedom the heroine begins to drink. The more she drinks, the more readily she sheds value judgments, worries, rules and her identity. Therefore, she passes from one person, the person upon whom society has placed expectations, who must act within certain self-limitations, to another person, or identity, who is freed from obligations and restrictions. Under the influence of alcohol, she experiences other thoughts without the barriers she must face in her sober state: "L'être est pudique mais, pour posséder le sens de lui-même, il doit se parler et vouloir être autrui. Il faut être dérangé, garder sa maison ouverte."<sup>9</sup>

There are two outstanding characterizations of madness in the novels Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein (1964) with the character of Lol, and in L'Amante Anglaise (1967) with the character of Claire. These two women live in a type of isolation because of their states of madness. Each state of madness could be the result of a revolt, not a conscious revolt of actions but a revolt in the sense that perhaps their states of insanity are due to the fact that they cannot cope with reality and responsibility. They are expressing a freedom which has no better outlet than that of madness.

For Lol the slight derangement gives her permission to do as she feels and at the same time offers an explanation for her actions. The author reveals Lol's personality, or, her madness, through her unusual reasoning process. Such a psychological insight is given in the following passage:

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 4.



Elle devait toujours se rassurer davantage après ses promenades: si elle le voulait on la voyait très peu, à peine. Elle se croit coulée dans une identité de nature indécise qui pourrait se nommer de noms indéfiniment différents, et dont la visibilité dépend d'elle.<sup>10</sup>

Lol's husband does not think of her actions as a result of insanity or a slight madness, but of her reserved personality. Instead, he sees her through different eyes and rationalizes his wife's unusual behavior in the following manner:

Elle disait chaque jour, comme si c'était la première fois, qu'elle s'était promenée là ou là, dans quel quartier, mais elle ne signalait jamais le moindre incident auquel elle aurait assisté. Jean Bedford trouvait naturelle la réserve de sa femme sur ses promenades. (pp. 48-49)

The other outstanding characterization of madness is the character Claire. Reflecting an almost total freedom in her madness, she experiments with several identities. She chops wood for two days in order to be like her friend, Alfonso. Then she stops up her ears so as to be like her deaf-mute cousin, Marie-Thérèse. Even her husband, Pierre, has difficulty in describing what Claire is like. He turns over all household duties to Marie-Thérèse, thereby freeing Claire from any responsibility and letting her do as she pleases without questions or demands. In her freedom she escapes her old identity, or searches for a new one, or perhaps just extends herself to be not one, but several other identities. In this state she moves beyond reality, beyond time and beyond Claire:

---...Pour me connaître, pour me comprendre, on aurait dit qu'elle pouvait se passer de moi.

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<sup>10</sup> Duras, Le Ravisement de Lol V. Stein (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1964), p. 46.

--Elle était pleine de quoi? dites le premier mot  
qui vous vient à l'esprit?

--Je ne sais pas, je ne peux pas. D'elle?

--Mais elle, qui?

--Je ne sais pas.<sup>11</sup>

Through the interviewer's questioning of Pierre Duras lays the groundwork for explaining to the reader Claire's freedom to adopt any identity. The author very carefully paints the character of Claire, her problems, her personality, her actions through the observations of the other characters in the novel before Claire, herself, enters and responds to the questions of the interviewer. In this manner the author leads the reader to think and feel what she wishes him to think and feel about Claire. Duras has set the stage for Claire's entrance.

Drunkenness plays a similar role to that of insanity. It allows the woman more freedom from imposed restrictions and inhibitions in which she only turns to alcohol as a means to free her mind and, to some extent, to liberate her actions. Consider as an example, Anna in Le Marin de Gibraltar. The reader gains more of an insight into her character by delving into her drinking problem. She and her male companion, who narrates the book, become inebriated frequently. Most of the time while sailing, they are drunk or close to it. This drunken freedom from society could be parallel to insanity in view of the fact that intoxication frees the mind somewhat, or at least allows it to wander as their bodies are wandering from port to port. In some instances while under the influence

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<sup>11</sup>Duras, L'Amante Anglaise (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1967), p. 92.

of alcohol, Anna and the narrator have quite lucid moments:

--Ce n'est plus lui, dit-elle, que maintenant j'attends.  
 --On attend toujours, dis-je, quelque chose. Quand  
 l'attente est trop longue, alors on change, on attend  
 autre chose que vient plus vite. Des koudous sont  
 faits pour ça, pour les petites attentes.<sup>12</sup>

This much lucidity while under the influence of alcohol appears to be significant. Duras has removed the characters from the daily pressures and strain. She believes that they are now experiencing the greatest freedom that a sane person can. While in this stage of freedom, however temporary it may be, Anna and her male companion reason better and understand things more clearly. Duras explains Anna's dominant traits and desires and now is in the process of relating Anna's awareness and responsiveness to life. Again Duras presents the psychological reasons for the actions of the protagonist.

Similarly, Anne Desbaresdes in Moderato Cantabile (1958) uses alcohol as a freeing agent. She extends her self-identity from the person she is to the person she desires to be. It is as though she could become the woman who was killed by her lover in a fit of passion. The more she talks to Chauvin about the murder, the more she drinks and the more involved she becomes. This escape into the other self permits her a temporary harmony which, otherwise, she does not experience: "Si on ne buvait pas tant, ce ne serait pas possible." "Je crois que ce ne serait pas possible, murmura Anne Desbaresdes."<sup>13</sup> Consequently, she passes from one identity to another in a moment of freedom given to her through the use of wine:

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<sup>12</sup>Duras, Le Marin de Gibraltar (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1952), p. 232.

<sup>13</sup>Duras, Moderato Cantabile (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1958), p. 117.

La sagesse appartient à Anne Desbaresdes qui sait les limites de sa victoire et la nécessité ou l'inévitable de sa défaite; par son mime de l'amour et de la mort, elle accepte sa situation en même temps qu'elle lui échappe. La défaite est du domaine de la réalité; la victoire est d'ordre sentimental.<sup>14</sup>

Her ability to mime the love and death of the murdered victim is brought about by the wine which helps her to go beyond her self-limitations.

Duras presents the facts about Anne Desbaresdes through one of the simplest techniques used in the development of a character, she has Chauvin tell Anne what he knows of her:

--Vous êtes Madame Desbaresdes. La femme du directeur d'Import Export et des Fondories de la Côte. Vous habitez boulevard de la Mer.<sup>15</sup>

The author completes Anne's characterization. Although she is wealthy and has a stable marriage, she seeks happiness in a relationship outside her marriage. She tries to escape from her boredom by looking for passion which will bring her a completeness of feeling and, therefore, happiness. The passion she witnesses in the scene of the murdered woman and the man who loved her is Anne's idea of happiness. The release she feels through the use of wine helps her to become, at least for a while, the murdered woman and helps her to imagine Chauvin as her lover.

Beginning in 1953 Marguerite Duras gradually turns from the traditional methods of characterization as observed in the preceding novels to a freer technique employed by the New Novelists. In this trend toward a more fluid or, perhaps, a more free presentation of characters,

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<sup>14</sup>Duras, Moderato Cantabile, notes par Jean Bessière (Les Editions de Minuit 1958; rpt. Paris: Bordas: 1972), p. 16.

<sup>15</sup>Duras, Moderato Cantabile (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1958), p. 41.

they become almost anonymous. This is best seen in Duras' latest novel, L'Amour. There are no names for the characters, merely the words: un homme, une femme, un autre homme, elle and il. There is no background information, personality description, or any identity of character. The following passage illustrates Duras' introduction of characters in this novel:

A gauche, une femme aux yeux fermés. Assise.  
 L'homme qui marche ne regarde pas, rien, rien d'autre que  
 le sable devant lui. Sa marche est incessante, régulière,  
 lointaine.  
 Le triangle se ferme avec la femme aux yeux fermés. Elle  
 est assise contre un mur qui délimite la plage vers sa fin,  
 la ville.  
 L'homme qui regarde se trouve entre cette femme et l'homme  
 qui marche au bord de la mer.<sup>16</sup>

In this type of presentation, it is difficult to identify the characters separately because the reader tries to follow patterns previously established by traditional novelists. It gives the reader the chance to make of the characters what he wishes rather than having his impressions transmitted by the author.

Happiness is a state of mind which Marguerite Duras' traditional female characters patiently await. They pursue happiness through desire and love, for either must surely lead to the man who will eventually bring happiness into their lives. However, the men they encounter are wanderers searching also for a missing quality in their lives. These men are quite similar to the women who find them. They exist for no particular reason other than existence's sake; their lives are as incomplete as the

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<sup>16</sup>Duras, L'Amour (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), p. 8.

lives of the women. The Vice-Consul in Duras' Le Vice-Consul expresses this idea rather succinctly in the following statement about himself: "Je me suis efforcé d'aimer à plusieurs reprises des personnes différentes, mais je ne suis jamais parvenu au bout de mon effort. Je n'ai jamais été hors de l'effort d'aimer.....Faute d'aimer j'ai cherché à m'aimer mais je n'y suis pas parvenu."<sup>17</sup>

The conversation between Anna and her male companion in Le Marin de Gibraltar exemplifies the state of apathy and neutral mentality which some of the traditional men characters express:

--Et toi, demanda-t-elle, tu as été heureux?  
 --J'ai dû l'être quelquefois, mais je n'en ai pas de souvenir précis... J'ai fait de la politique, dis-je, dans les deux premières années de l'Etat civil. Je crois bien que c'est à ce moment-là.<sup>18</sup>

As above, the male character is always secondary to the female character in a Duras novel.

The narrator of Le Marin de Gibraltar describes the main character, Anna, whom he watches with intense curiosity and whom he desires. It is she who causes all the action, that of searching for a sailor and roaming the world. The narrator only plays a supporting role. The following passage is an example of Duras' characterization of Anna given by the narrator:

Il me fit de l'effet. Je le sentis se répandre dans mes bras, dans ma tête, je me laissais faire. Elle s'était fardée, elle portait une robe noire, qu'elle avait mise exprès pour aller au bal. Elle était

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<sup>17</sup>Duras, Le Vice-Consul (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1966), p. 77.

<sup>18</sup>Duras, Le Marin de Gibraltar, p. 162. (further reference by page only).

extrêmement belle et désirable. Les nouveaux venus qui ne la connaissaient pas encore la regardaient beaucoup et ils parlaient d'elle, à voix basse. (p. 93)

The narrator describes Anna and the surroundings, and the reader sees the narrator's impression of Anna. The narrator becomes Anna's male companion and sails with her in search of the marin de Gibraltar, yet she is the protagonist of the novel.

Another striking character portrayal of a man of secondary importance to the woman in the novel is the example of Monsieur Andesmas in Duras' novel, L'Après-midi de Monsieur Andesmas. Monsieur Andesmas is an old man whom the author describes as he waits for his daughter, Valérie, to bring an architect from the village to see about remodeling the house he bought for her. The description reveals that his life is consumed by and lived for his beautiful daughter. At the beginning of the novel the reader finds this statement: "Et Monsieur Andesmas craint pour son enfant Valérie, dont l'amour règne impitoyablement sur sa destinée finissante..."<sup>19</sup>

In the novel Monsieur Andesmas is the main character, but his importance is diminished as the novel progresses and the character Valérie, although she does not appear until the very end, takes over and dominates the old man's thoughts and conversation. Therefore, Monsieur Andesmas is also a supporting character who helps to define the existence of this exquisite being, Valérie, to whom he dedicates his life. He constantly thinks of her, whether in the past or the future:

Un jour ou l'autre, en robe riche de couleur claire, Valérie, sur cette terrasse, guetterait ce chemin, à cette heure-ci

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<sup>19</sup>Duras, L'Après-midi de Monsieur Andesmas (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1952), p. 24. (further reference by page only).

du soir. Sous ce hêtre qui perpétuerait les bienfaits de son ombre à quiconque serait là à cette heure-ci, dans l'avenir, en cette saison exacte, Valérie attendrait la venue de quelqu'un. (p. 65)

Marguerite Duras turns from the traditional presentation of characters in Détruire Dit-Elle. The two men in the novel are so similar that were it not for the mentioning of their names from time to time, they could easily be one man. Duras begins the novel without clearly defining either one of them very well:

Il s'assied, prend une cigarette, lui en offre une.  
 --Je ne vous dérange pas?  
 --Mon non.  
 --Je suis seul moi aussi dans cet hôtel.  
 --...Nous sommes les derniers tous les soirs, regardez,  
 il n'y a plus personne. Sa voix est vive, presque  
 brutale.  
 --Vous êtes un écrivain?  
 --Non. Pourquoi me parlez-vous aujourd'hui?<sup>20</sup>

These two men, Max Thor and Stein, act alike, talk alike and even love the same woman Alissa:

Stein se rapproche, il pose sa tête sur les jambes  
 nues d'Alissa. Il les caresse, il les embrasse.  
 --Comme je te désire, dit Max Thor.  
 --Comme il vous désire, dit Stein, comme il vous aime. (p. 42)

Max and Stein continue to be very much alike throughout the novel. They say the same things and occasionally, even speak for each other. It is quite obvious that only the names make them different people; however, this is exactly what Duras is trying to accomplish: an anonymity of character where one is free to be another.

In comparing Duras' female to her male characterizations, one finds a remarkable similarity. They possess several of the same qualities:

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<sup>20</sup>Duras, Détruire Dit-Elle, p. 15. (further reference by page only).



many of them are wanderers who are in pursuit of a possible goal, usually happiness, which they never attain; they also seek a freedom, or temporary release, from daily pressures through alcohol. As Alfred Cismaru states: "Marguerite Duras' male characters are not always so clearly delineated, and possess, on occasion, an ability for eluding, temporarily, the vicissitudes of their condition."<sup>21</sup>

In essence, Duras seeks to present characters who go beyond the identities of being just male or female. Her ultimate goal would be to have no distinctions between men and women. This is total freedom of identity.

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<sup>21</sup>Alfred Cismaru, Marguerite Duras (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1971), p. 155.

### CHAPTER III

#### THEMES

Although love is a multi-faceted theme in Marguerite Duras' novels, it appears more as a negative force throughout the majority of her works. She paints this theme in dismal, less appealing colors. As Jean Bessière states:

L'amour est le mythe de la plénitude humaine. Dans sa perfection, il est utopique; dans ses formes sociales, il représente toutes les possibilités d'aliénation; dans ses incertitudes il est le signe d'un malaise moral ou psychologique.<sup>1</sup>

In Les Petits Chevaux de Tarquinia love is a confining annoying force.

In her first novel, Les Impudents, the love motif appears in love-hate relationships. Maud, a twenty one year old girl, detests and at the same time loves her older brother Jacques. After the death of Jacques' wife, Maud goes to comfort him with the purpose of offering a few consoling words. However, before she can say anything, he begins to speak and, as is appropriate to his callous nature, he ends by asking for

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<sup>1</sup>Duras, Moderato Cantabile, notes par Jean Bessière (Les Editions de Minuit 1958; rpt. Paris: Bordas, 1972), p. 15.

money. Maud gives him some money without hesitation. Jacques has borrowed from everyone in the family in order to try to cover some of his debts. His egotistical desire to rule the family and his selfish greed persist throughout the novel. Maud appears to be irritated, yet patient with him until the end when her hatred of Jacques overwhelms her and she finds herself turning him in to the police. Her love for Jacques has been completely extinguished by her resentment, and hate now is dominant.

Ah! oui, elle se souvenait. Son malheur était grand sans doute. Elle le constatait sans tristesse et même avec une espèce de satisfaction.

...  
 Cette idée, tout de même, de dénoncer son frère!  
 Saugrenue! Au fait, Jacques avait été roulé par  
 Tavarès! ...Elle essayait vainement de retenir sa haine,  
 mais les raisons qu'elle s'était données lui glissaient  
 de l'esprit comme du sable qui ait filé entre ses doigts.<sup>2</sup>

Love is a goal for Anna, in Le Marin de Gibraltar, as she sails from port to port around the globe. This love is embodied in the figure of a nameless sailor from Gibraltar who is a fugitive and a deserter, and, more importantly, the man who once gave Anna an insatiable desire for love. Ironically, as the narrator of the story and Anna pursue the sailor, the love which begins to grow between them depends upon the search for the sailor.

Je devins un homme sérieux. Cela commença après Tanger et cela dura. Elle Aussi, elle devint sérieuse à son tour et cela commença pour elle aussi, après Tanger, et cela dura. Je ne veux pas dire que nous l'étions tout à fait lorsque nous arrivâmes à Cotonou, non, mais seulement que nous l'étions beaucoup plus qu'au départ. C'est long et difficile

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<sup>2</sup>Marguerite Duras, Les Impudents (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1943), pp. 239-240.

de devenir en un jour ni même en dix jours, mais seulement commencer à le devenir.<sup>3</sup>

An idea of love as encumbering reveals itself in Les Petits Chevaux de Tarquinia. Sara's picture of love is perfect. This is shown in the fact that while other people, including her own husband, are having affairs, Sara never has. The following quotation illustrates her idealism:

Cette envie de vivre à l'hôtel n'avait rien à voir avec les sentiments que Sara avait pour Jacques, mais seulement avec ceux que personnellement elle s'inspirait, elle et la vie, depuis quelques années. Outre qu'elle croyait que c'était pour elle le moment de vieillir et qu'elle Jacques--car Sara en était quand même encore là, à croire que l'amour, lui, ne pouvait vieillir--elle désirait ardemment ne plus importuner personne avec son caractère difficile. A l'hôtel, elle n'en aurait fait souffrir personne. Et les caractères difficiles s'y épanouissent Jacques était entièrement absorbé par la lancée des filets.<sup>4</sup>

Sara feels only true love. Again, Sara expresses her views of love:

J'aime pas quand il dort trop, dit Jacques, ça l'abrutit. Quand il est abruti, je l'aime moins. Moi je l'aime encore plus, dit Sara. (p. 71)

...

--Je t'aime plus grand que la mer, dit-elle.

--Et l'Océan?

--Plus que l'Océan, plus que tout ce qui existe.

--Et tout ce qui existe pas?

--Plus aussi que tout ce qui existe pas. (pp. 137-38)

Society's interpretation of love can be seen through the eyes of the other characters: it is confining, a source of alienation from other people. As Jacques remarks:

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<sup>3</sup> Marguerite Duras, Un Barrage Contre Le Pacifique (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1958), p. 236.

<sup>4</sup> Marguerite Duras, Les Petits Chevaux de Tarquinia (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1953), pp. 64-65. (Further references made to this text will show page reference only).

Sauf lorsqu'elle se retrouve petite bourgeoise comme avec les parents du démineur. Mais--il sourit--au fond, qui n'est pas enfermé avec qui? (p. 73)

The reactions of the group of friends surrounding Sara demonstrate their annoyance with her because of her love for her son. To them this is limiting her from experiencing other passion and forbids freedom:

--Ce que j'ai remarqué, dit l'homme, c'est votre amour pour votre enfant, j'en ai même été agacé.  
--Tout le monde, dit Sara. (p. 130)

A very bitter resentment of loves' confinement reveals itself through the shopkeeper's remarks about his deceased wife:

--Non, dit l'épicier, avec elle j'ai perdu ma joie de vivre. Maintenant, je ne suis plus qu'amertume.  
(p. 165)

Love does not allow enough freedom for one to express himself or to live and enjoy life to its fullest. Ludi makes two remarks about affection which give a good analysis of Marguerite Duras' statement on romantic ardor in this novel:

--Tu sais, reprit Ludi, c'est peut-être bien l'amour à la longue qui rend méchant comme ça. Les prisons en or des grandes amours. Il n'y a rien qui enferme plus que l'amour. Et d'être enfermé à la longue, ça rend méchant, même les meilleurs. (pp. 247-48)

After referring to love as a golden prison, Ludi later admits that there is no escape, no vacation from this passion. Using the adjective "golden" shows that affection is a thing of value, however, it is not entirely desirable or good because of its confining aspect:

--Il n'y a pas de vacances à l'amour, dit-il, ça n'existe pas. L'amour, il faut le vivre complètement avec son ennui et tout, il n'y a pas de vacances possibles à ça.  
Il parlait sans la regarder, face au fleuve.  
--Et c'est ça l'amour. S'y soustraire, on ne

peut pas. Comme à la vie, avec sa beauté, sa merde et son ennui. (p. 258)

However, Marguerite Duras does seem to distinguish between the affection among friends and the romantic fondness between lovers. Friendship appears in a much more favorable light. Friendship allows freedom and does away with barriers between people. One does not experience the unknown through friendship:

- Peut-être, dit Diana. Elle ajouta: Mais qu'est-ce qui manque à tous ces amis? On est tous là à s'aimer, à s'aimer les uns les autres, qu'est-ce qui nous manque?
- Peut-être l'inconnu, dit Sara. Dans cet endroit-ci on est drôlement coupé de l'inconnu.
- Peut-être, dit Diana, qu'il n'y a rien qui coupe de l'inconnu comme l'amitié. (p. 103)

Toward the end of the novel Ludi states that it was through loving his friends that he learned the meaning of friendship, or of an unencumbered ardor, a freedom in love:

- Je vous aimerai toujours, toi et Jacques. Toute ma vie. Je vous aime tellement qu'il me semble quelquefois que c'est à partir de vous que j'ai découvert l'amitié. Il ajouta, toujours pensif; Et toujours, à partir de vous, je trouve que les gens qui n'ont pas d'amis, comme nous sommes, ce sont des espèces d'infirmes. (p. 248)

By using the image of the cripple Marguerite Duras is able to point out that passion not between friends is made up of hindering or binding qualities.

The main theme present in Moderato Cantabile is that of love. The presentation in the novels up to this point, has been somewhat subtle. Marguerite Duras introduces this theme, now in a blatant manner. Close to the beginning of the novel a crime is committed, a murder of passion occurs at a small cafe. The rest of the novel revolves around this

murder as the main character, Anne Desbaredes, becomes increasingly more interested in the event and seeks to discover more and more about the facts of the murder. Anne meets a man at the cafe, Chauvin, who also witnessed the murder. She meets him several times at the cafe, under the pretense of being out for a walk, in order to discuss what might have happened between the lovers. The more they talk about the love between the man and woman which finally drove him to kill her, the more Marguerite Duras intermingles life and death. In this novel the theme of love cannot be separated from that of death.

Le thème de l'amour et le thème de la mort reviennent constamment, et comme autant de variations, sur l'image initiale. A ce statisme se combine une progression qui, d'ailleurs, nous ramène au point de départ.<sup>5</sup>

Anne drinks wine while she and Chauvin talk. Marguerite Duras' contention that alcohol frees one from self-limitations and inhibitions plays an important factor in this novel. Anne, because of her unfulfilled passion in her marriage, feels a desire from deep within to be the woman who was slain out of passion, and who finds the ultimate fulfillment of love, of passion, in death.

...Elle refait avec Chauvin l'histoire de ce meurtre, de cette femme et de cet homme unis dans une mort "choisie". Il appartient à l'homme de teur, à la femme de mourir.<sup>6</sup>

As Anne continues to drink she tries to become that woman through the release which the wine provides for her by imagining what the reason and

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<sup>5</sup>Duras, *Moderato Cantabile*, notes par Jean Bessière (Les Editions de Minuit 1958; rpt. Paris: Bordas, 1972), p. 30.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 105.

the situation leading to the death might have been. Jean Bessière speaks of her freedom in the following statement:

Une femme en possession de l'amour entre dans une aventure qui la libère de toutes les contingences faussant le sentiment et voilant l'absolu de l'expérience. L'expérience originaire, le substrat émotionnel du roman, la représentation même d'Anne Debaresdes sont à placer sous le signe de l'intensité.<sup>7</sup>

One evening Anne and her husband give a party. Anne is detached from everyone and everything that is said to her. The only thing of importance becomes her desire, her desire to be the slain woman and to experience fulfillment in passion. All Anne can think about is Chauvin, who, although not invited, is lurking outside the garden fence.

L'homme s'est relevé de la grève, s'est approché des grilles, les baies sont toujours illuminées, prend les grilles dans ses mains, et serre. Comment n'est-ce pas encore arrivé?<sup>8</sup>

...  
L'Homme reviendra malgré lui sur ses pas. Il retrouve les magnolias, les grilles, et les baies au loin, encore et encore éclairées. Aux lèvres, il a de nouveau ce chant entendu dans l'après-midi, et ce nom dans la bouche qu'il prononcera un peu plus fort. Il passera. (pp. 138-39)

He has been helping her to become the other woman by filling in details of the murder. After she becomes intoxicated, an intoxication which frees her from her former self, she goes into the garden and vomits. This is significant in the fact that it represents the rejection of her former identity and that she has now stepped, or progressed, into a new identity.

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>8</sup>Marguerite Duras, *Moderato Cantabile* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1958), p. 137. (Further reference by page only).



She wants to be with Chauvin and confirm her new self. Bessière remarks about the liaison between Anne and Chauvin:

Secrète affinité née du hasard: deux êtres sont témoins d'un crime après lequel le meurtrier se jette sur le corps de la femme qu'il a tuée, pour le couvrir de baisers. Anne Desbaresdes devine, à ce moment, que son fêve de passion absolue est possible, que l'amour trouve sa perfection dans la mort. Elle sait comment échapper à l'indifférence conjugale dont elle se sent prisonnière...<sup>9</sup>

Anne successfully assumes the identity of the dead woman. Her hands are always cold and so are her kisses. Mentally she is the woman who died and her mental state expresses cold, death-like physical attributes. For all practical purposes she died, as the woman had:

--Je voudrais que vous soyez morte, dit Chauvin.  
--C'est fait, dit Anne Desbaresdes. (p. 155)

Bessière talks of this symbolical death:

...Anne et Chauvin ne vivent cette répétition que symboliquement ou "magiquement". Ils ne retiennent qu'une seule qualité de la mort: le froid. Mains froides, baisers froids: voilà les signes de l'accompli.<sup>10</sup>

Marguerite Duras presents another side to the theme of love in her novel, Détruire Dit-Elle. Here love acts as a freeing-agent for the characters. Through love they escape selfishness and expand to experience each other:

Entre ces trois personnages, il n'y a aucune rivalité; ils partagent une passion unique, vivent dans une manière de confusion sentimentale et presque physique où ils trouvent le bonheur.

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<sup>9</sup>Duras, Moderato Cantabile, notes par Jean Bessière (Les Editions de Minuit 1958; rpt. Paris: Bordas, 1972), p. 105.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 105.

L'amour ne réduit plus le sujet à lui-même, mais le conduit à la reconnaissance et à la libération d'autrui.<sup>11</sup>

Love is such an omnipotent force that it also becomes a destructive force. It does not make the characters seek death as in Moderato Cantabile, but it will destroy any obstacle which is anything that is not love, not free:

Aussi l'amour n'est-il plus auto-destruction, mais simplement la destruction de ce qui n'est pas amour.<sup>12</sup>

Each of the three characters, Alissa, Max Thor and Stein possesses an ultimate freedom throughout this novel. Theirs is the ability to pass into an anonymity of being, to love each other, and be like each other, without regulations:

La passion supprime les divisions et les différences sociales. Il n'y a plus adultère ni infidélité, la femme n'est pas le piège construit par la société "bourgeoise" pour résumer les interdits et les contradictions; loin de toute fraude, elle fait du sentiment une manière de Protée capable de confondre toutes les conduites humaines et de créer une véritable fraternité.<sup>13</sup>

Love expressed in Détruire Dit-Elle is, therefore, a mixture of humanism, humanitarianism and a fraternity of mankind. The inhibitions, restraints and whatever barriers one falls victim to are erased by this universal love which, in this novel, renders unparalleled freedom to the characters. Jean Bessière gives such a description of the love theme as it appears in this novel:

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 22.

Le personnage se "dit" lui-même, mais il peut dire tout aussi exactement l'intériorité de l'autre, comme il peut lui prêter son regard ou sa réflexion. Stein déclare à Alissa l'amour de Max Thor en même temps qu'il la caresse. C'est la fin, de la solitude et la possibilité d'une communication. Il n'y a pas de caractère privé de l'individu, de sa vie; même les gestes les plus intimes sont occasion de spectacle. C'est la forme d'un "humanisme" qui ne repose que sur le sentiment. Une telle "solidarité" n'est possible, que parée que chacun a décidé d'ignorer les limites de son moi et d'aimer. ...Anne Desbaresdes essayait de réduire la dissociation de son moi par l'amour; dans Détruire Dit-Elle l'amour n'est possible que par la découverte de cette dissociation.<sup>14</sup>

The type of love presented by Marguerite Duras in Détruire Dit-Elle is not one which society has adopted or even recognized: the universal menage à trois. As Claude Mauriac describes in his article:

L'amour, par exemple, qui n'est pas ce que l'on croit, ni ce que l'on dit; qui peut se présenter comme ici, sous une forme que nous n'avons pas appris à connaître, à reconnaître, amour indifférencié qui est, au même moment, le bien (et le mal) la joie (et la souffrance) de deux hommes et de deux femmes, amour que l'on ne fait pas, amour défait, mais que rend ces étrangers complices.<sup>15</sup>

The last of Marguerite Duras' novels, L'Amour, has a very negative presentation of the theme of love. The author returns to the combination of death and love, such as one finds in Moderato Cantabile, and to the idea of confining love which appeared in Les Petits Chevaux. Marguerite Duras uses these ideas as a springboard from which she launches a much stronger statement on love.

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

<sup>15</sup>Claude Mauriac, "Le Cinéma, fluide amour, art volatil," Le Figaro Littéraire, no. 1228 (1er - 7 dec. 1969), 37-38.

The word love appears only a few times in the novel. The major part of the book deals with a prison, death and fires at the prison. Why, then, would the author title her novel L'Amour? It appears that she, in order to strengthen her statement has kept to a minimum the use of the very word she proceeds to describe, thereby rendering a presentation of love which is almost allegorical.

The three main characters, two women and one man, remain unnamed throughout the entire novel. The woman who appears in prison at the beginning states that she is S. Thala. The other woman, who is presented toward the end of the novel, says that she is the death of S. Thala. These two instances are found in the following:

--Il m'a dit plusieurs noms ce matin quand je vous  
cherchais--elle s'arrête--j'ai choisi celui de  
S. Thala.<sup>16</sup>

...

--Je suis la morte de S. Thala. (p. 83)

It seems that Marguerite Duras is issuing a proclamation on love which states that love is as restricting and confining as a prison would be. It isolates and applies strict regulations upon lovers. The following passages express Duras' ideas of this type of love:

--La prison--il ajoute--c'était éteint quand je  
suis parti--il s'arrête, il l'informe--ça brûle  
souvent.  
Les sirènes hurlent. Le voyageur dit:  
--Ça brûle encore.  
--Oui mais plus loin--il s'arrête--ça brûle toujours  
quelque part. (p. 86)

Fires are continually breaking out in the prison. This coupled with the fact that the young woman came there to die appears as a symbolical

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<sup>16</sup> Marguerite Duras, L'Amour (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1971), p. 62. (Further reference by page only).

presentation of fire as passion. This passion slowly consumes the prisoner with the final result of death. Therefore, the ultimate fulfillment of passion is in death, an idea which was first mentioned in Moderato Cantabile and which now appears to be confirmed in Marguerite Duras' latest novel, L'Amour.

At the foundation of all the themes which Marguerite Duras employs lies an earnest desire for freedom which becomes intrinsically attached to each theme and vital in the comprehension of each. The quest about which Marguerite Duras seems to be most concerned is that of the achievement of an ultimate freedom. The reflection of freedom, at least partial, is presented, for the most part, under two particular conditions, insanity and intoxication. Although insanity obviously grants total freedom, freedom from self and from arbitrary restrictions of society the state most closely resembling insanity is that of intoxication. Many of Duras' characters find a certain fascination or, perhaps, fixation with alcohol. As Alfred Cismaru notes:

...drinking occupies a special place in the precarious existence of her novel's characters. To a greater or lesser degree, champagne, cognac, and above all whisky constitute the vital ingredients of most Durasian personages.<sup>17</sup>

The state of intoxication offers each character a sense of freedom, the type of freedom which oblivion produces. Through oblivion each character finds a release from the boring life he leads and therefore, uses alcohol more and more to erase problems or boredom.

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<sup>17</sup>Alfred Cismaru, "Salvation Through Drinking in Marguerite Duras' Short Stories," Modern Fiction Studies, (1973-74), 487-495.

In Le Marin de Gibraltar Anne and the narrator feel the need to drink while discussing any subject:

...Elle mangeait un tout petit peu plus que moi. La fatigue, sans doute, qui me nourrissait, et le vin, et, qui sait? Je commandai une nouvelle carafe de vin.--Quelquefois, dis-je, je ne peux pas m'arrêter de boire du vin, certains jours.--Je sais dit-elle. Mais on va être saouls.--C'est ce qu'il faut, dis-je.<sup>18</sup>

...

--je voudrais savoir la fin de cette histoire, dis-je, de la femme du marin de Gibraltar. Elle ne se fit pas prier. On ne mangeait plus, on buvait, on buvait tous les jours plus. (p. 165)

Cismaru, also, finds that the major reason for the use of alcohol in Duras' novels is the creation of a state of oblivion:

Drinking appeals for a variety of reasons, of course, but they can all be summarized by one word: oblivion. Oblivion of the stages of life, of its routine pleasures and dissatisfactions of those one loves or befriends as well, and of oneself above all, that cumbersome being, that being de trop as Sartre used to put it.<sup>19</sup>

Anna appears to be dissatisfied with herself during the entire novel. She has an abundance of material wealth and one might consider that with all these possessions she must obtain freedom; however, the boredom of her quixotic search has engulfed her life like a drunken stupor. Consequently, Anne must feel something of de trop as she continues searching and continues drinking. Drinking, therefore, provides the only liberation from this feeling.

The narrator, who for eight years worked for the Ministre copying marriage licenses, death certificates and birth records, a very

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<sup>18</sup>Marguerite Duras, Le Marin de Gibraltar (Paris: Gallimard, 1952), p. 165.

<sup>19</sup>Cismaru, "Salvation Through Drinking in Marguerite Duras' Short Stories," p. 489.

tedious and monotonous job, does not change his style of living when he joins Anna on her yacht. The only difference is that now he is unemployed, but his existence remains tedious and monotonous. Like Anna, who has an unlimited supply of whiskey, he uses liquor to lull his senses into a temporary freedom from this monotony:

J'étais un homme libre, sans femme, et qui n'avait plus aucune autre obligation que de se rendre heureux. Mais on aurait demandé à cet homme pourquoi il avait décidé de quitter l'Etat civil, qu'il aurait été incapable de le dire. Je venais de rompre avec le monde du bonheur dans la dignité et le travail, parce que je n'avais réussi à les convaincre de mon malheur. En somme, je ne tenais plus mon destin d'aucun autre que de moi-même, et désormais ma cause ne concernait que moi seul.<sup>20</sup>

...

Je marchais mal, très lentement, et cet homme libre était aussi lourd qu'un mort. Dans tout mon corps, le vin circulait, mêlé à mon sang, et il fallait que je le transporte encore avec moi, encore et encore, jusqu'à ce qu'il sorte et qu'il pisse au-dehors. Il faisait que j'attende. Attendre de pisser le vin, attendre que du vin de la liberté dont j'étais saoul. (p. 87)

Sara, Jacques, Ludi and Diana share the fascination for liquor in Les Petits Chevaux de Tarquinia. The most frequent action which occurs throughout this novel is that of raising a glass of liquor to the lips. In the small village they have chosen as their summer retreat, these four characters use alcohol in order to escape the boredom of their surroundings and of each other. Sara and Diana are known for their drinking of bitter camparis:

En général elles étaient ensemble, ce qui ne satisfaisait pas la plupart des autres. Sara et Diana

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<sup>20</sup>Duras, Le Marin de Gibraltar, p. 86-87. (Further reference by page only).

étaient de plus des femmes qui buvaient dix campari par jour, qui étaient étrangères.<sup>21</sup>

Jacques and Sara admit to being bored but do nothing about it:

--Tu t'ennuies? C'est ça?

Elle ne répondit pas.

--C'est ça ou autre chose?

--C'est ça. Je m'ennuie, dit Sara.

--Moi aussi, je m'ennuie beaucoup, dit-il.

Il ajouta: Et de quoi t'ennuies-tu? (p. 68)

Anne in Moderato Cantabile tries to relive the passion of the woman who has died. In a state of intoxication she becomes detached from herself, from her own identity, and is free to be the other woman and experience what the other woman has experienced. Alfred Cismaru remarks about this liberation through intoxication that:

...Anne Desbaresdes..., is Marguerite Duras' heroine of ultimate freedom, of involvement, of love and violence, of metempsychosis - all attainable, perhaps and partly, with the aid of liquor.<sup>22</sup>

...  
With the aid of liquor, Anne becomes intoxicated with the personality of the victim; she cannot help mimicking the gestures and movements the other woman must have made or repeating the words she must have said, in the intonation she must have used. Her identification with the other is her reincarnation, her participation in life, in the mystery of life, in the happiness and violence of life.<sup>23</sup>

Anne needs the assistance of wine in order to talk to Chauvin and question him about the murder. The wine seems to support her and give her strength where otherwise she might be afraid to continue a relationship under such

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<sup>21</sup>Marguerite Duras, Les Petits Chevaux de Tarquinia (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1953), p. 29. (Further reference by page only).

<sup>22</sup>Cismaru, "Salvation Through Drinking in Marguerite Duras' Short Stories," p. 492.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 493.



questionable circumstances. The following excerpt demonstrates some of her reliance upon wine:

--Que je bois du vin en votre compagnie, termina-t-elle-- elle rit subitement dans un éclat--mais pourquoi ai-je tant envie de rire aujourd'hui?<sup>24</sup>

...

--Je voudrais boire un peu de vin--elle réclama plaintivement, comme déjà lésée. Je ne savais pas que l'habitude vous en venait si vite. Voilà que je l'ai presque, déjà. Il commanda le vin. Ils le burent ensemble avec avidité, mais cette fois rien ne pressa Anne Desbaresdes de boire, que son penchant naissant pour l'ivresse de ce vin. Elle attendit un moment après l'avoir bu et, avec la voix douce et fautive de l'excuse, elle recommença à questionner cet homme.<sup>25</sup>

Chauvin, also, tries to relive the part of the man who murdered the woman. He assumes the personality of the man enough to satisfy Anne's questions and play a supporting role to her. This assumption of a new identity on the part of Anne and Chauvin is facilitated by the wine which they consume during their conversations. The more they drink the more they are released, to a significant degree, to take on a new identity.

In Dix heures et demie du soir en été the protagonist, Maria is on vacation with her husband, Pierre, and a friend, Claire, who is soon to become Pierre's lover. Marie knows what will happen as she senses the amorous friction between Pierre and Claire. Maria, though, will soothe her feelings in liquor. It is obvious that Maria is an alcoholic. Everytime they stop, she goes to a bar and drinks to attain freedom. She is freed from her disagreeable present situation, that of watching her husband take a lover. In her state of intoxication she is released from the problem

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<sup>24</sup>Duras, Moderato Cantabile, p. 71.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 72.

of Pierre and Claire and finds a new Maria when she discovers the fugitive, Paestra, crouching on the roof opposite her as she watches a summer storm from one of the hotel balconies. Then Maria decides to help Paestra escape the police who are looking for him. She finds a new identity in the Maria who pledges herself to the escape of another. Perhaps she sees a similarity in their situations: she is a fugitive from reality. This involvement accompanied by intoxication frees Maria from herself and her problems. As Germaine Brée comments:

...The story of Maria's night of anguish and revelation is told in an atmosphere of intoxication and nightmare, visually reconstructed as in a film, each moment sharply etched in darkness or light, without any recourse to explanation, extraneous comment, or moral judgement. More markedly than in Moderato Cantabile, the intensely subjective yet quasi-impersonal vision of intoxication shapes the strange sequence of events that fills Maria's night.<sup>26</sup>

It is, therefore, apparent that alcohol plays an important role in Duras' novels. It serves as a road to freedom, even though this release will obviously be only temporary. This freedom will be total and complete in Duras' presentation of insanity.

Marguerite Duras, always preoccupied by the essentially human problems of communication, of solitude, of boredom, of desire and love tempered and frustrated by social deliberations presents us frequently with heroes and heroines who, with the aid of liquor, manage to rebel somewhat, to become partially and temporarily reincarnated, and to consent later to the mediocrity of life later, when the glossiness of revolt has been erased by the passage of time.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Germaine Brée, The Introduction to Four Novels by Marguerite Duras (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1965), p. xv.

<sup>27</sup> Cismaru, "Salvation Through Drinking in Marguerite Duras' Short Stories," p. 495.

The next two novels which followed, Le Vice-Consul (1966) and L'Amante Anglaise (1967), also deal with the theme of insanity. In 1964 Marguerite Duras produced a novel, Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein, in which the protagonist, Lol, is mentally demented. Lol never recovered completely from the nervous breakdown she had as a young girl after her fiancé broke their engagement for another woman. She remained in her room for several weeks while recuperating from her breakdown, stopped speaking except to say how bored she was:

Puis elle se plaignit, plus explicitement, d'éprouver une fatigue insupportable à attendre de la sorte. Elle s'ennuyait, à crier. Et elle criait en effet qu'elle attendait, réclamait avec l'impatience d'un enfant un remède immédiat à ce manque. Cependant aucune des distractions qu'on lui avait offertes n'avait eu raison de cet état. Puis Lol cessa de se plaindre de quoi que ce soit. Elle cessa même petit à petit de parler. Sa colère vieillit, se découragea. Elle ne parla que pour dire qu'il lui était impossible d'exprimer combien c'était ennuyeux et long, long d'être Lol V. Stein.<sup>28</sup>

This was the first expression of her desire to be someone other than herself; and thus she begins to achieve a total freedom because of her mental incapacity. Lol is not completely insane; but she has been affected just enough to say that she is not responsible for all of her actions. This demented state gives her a key to unlock the door of reality and wander out beyond responsibility while providing a reasonable excuse for her actions.

The plot, dealing as it does with a demented person, contains many passages pointing, to the slow decay of a human's spiritual life and to vain efforts often made to postpone the inevitable paralysis of intelligence.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Marguerite Duras, Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1964), p. 23-24.

<sup>29</sup> Alfred Cismaru, Marguerite Duras (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1971), p. 110.

Lol leads a very quiet life until she meets Jack Hold, for whom she has an unexplainable attraction, and discovers that he is having an affair with Tatiana, Lol's best friend when she was young. Lol then begins going for walks in the rye fields behind the hotel so she can see the room where Jack and Tatiana meet. Thus she vicariously enjoys their love affair.

Lorsque je suis allé à la fenêtre de la chambre de l'Hôtel des Bois où j'attendais Tatiana Kar, le mardi, à l'heure dite, c'était la fin du jour, et que j'ai cru voir à mi-distance entre le pied de la colline et l'hôtel une forme grise, une femme, dont la blondeur cendrée à travers les tiges du seigle ne pouvait pas me tromper, j'ai éprouvé, cependant que je m'attendais à tout, une émotion très violente dont je n'ai pas su tout de suite la vraie nature, entre le doute et l'épouvante, l'horreur et la joie, la tentation de crier gare, de secourir, de repousser pour toujours ou de me prendre pour toujours, pour toute Lol V. Stein, D'amour.<sup>30</sup>

Marguerite Duras progresses from the mentally demented Lol V. Stein to a totally insane young Cambodian girl in her next novel, Le Vice-Consul. The young girl becomes pregnant and is driven from her village. She wanders from village to village until her pitiful state of physical health adds to her deteriorating mental health. She must always be in constant search of food and shelter; she is always unwanted; she cannot communicate with others because she is so far from home that no one understands her language. This causes her to forget where she is going and why and eventually to forget who she is. Thus, the Cambodian girl becomes a lunatic for all to laugh at and push aside.

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<sup>30</sup>Duras, Le Ravisement de Lol V. Stein, p. 139.

This young girl has achieved total freedom through her insanity. Even the most ridiculous, the most bizarre action coming from her would be immediately dismissed from the minds of the others for she is insane and, therefore, not to be held responsible for her own actions.

One of the most striking scenes of her insanity which shows her animalistic behavior is found in the following:

Elle cherche dans sa robe, entre ses seins, elle sort quelque chose qu'elle lui tend; un poisson vivant. Il ne bouge pas. Elle reprend le poisson et, lui montrant, elle croque la tête en riant davantage encore. Le poisson guillotiné remue dans sa main. Elle doit s'amuser de faire peur, de donner la nausée. Elle avance vers lui. Charles Rossett recule, elle avance encore, il recule encore, mais elle avance plus vite que lui et Charles Rossett jette la monnaie par terre, se retourne et fuit vers le chemin en courant.<sup>31</sup>

No one would ever consider having her arrested because she is completely mad. Instead, the people who come in contact with her choose to ignore her or look at her with amusement since they cannot relate to her condition.

The freedom of the Cambodian girl is in direct contrast to the actions of the Vice-Consul in this novel. Jean-Marc de H., the Vice-Consul, is considered by the other characters to be a peculiar person. His actions could quite probably be viewed as irregular or a little on the mad side, but he must answer for them as he has not attained the freedom of the young Cambodian girl. Cismaru summarizes his actions:

Jean-Marc de H., Vice-Consul at Lahore, has been removed from his post because, without any apparent reason, he has shot a gun into the Shalimar Gardens, a depository

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<sup>31</sup> Marguerite Duras, Le Vice-Consul (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1966), p. 205.

of lepers and dogs. His shots were not aimed at anyone in particular, but some (lepers, or dogs, or both) died as a result of the accident. While the French officials study the case, he is sent to Calcutta, site of the Embassy. Here he becomes involved with the drinking crowd of the diplomatic corps and befriends the Ambassador's wife, Anne-Marie Stretter... All we learn at the end of the novel is that Jean-Marc de H. will, probably, be sent to Bombay and, probably, the whole unintelligible affair will be forgotten by everyone concerned.<sup>32</sup>

The Vice-Consul finds freedom only through liquor. He will be reprimanded for the unintelligible affair for he lacks the key which unlocks the door to the responsibility of his acts, that of Madness.

The last novel to deal directly with insanity is L'Amante Anglaise. Claire, the protagonist, who is mentally disturbed, has been free from responsibility for many years. Her husband, Pierre, hires Claire's deaf and dumb cousin, Thérèse, to take care of all household chores. After the authorities discover that Claire is the one who killed Thérèse, they try to find a motive. Of course, there is no motive. Claire knew that it was something which needed to be done, and that is all she would say. In her total freedom anything is possible and acceptable. Claire was merely acting without any restraint and afterwards she felt no remorse or sorrow.

--Vous ne savez pas pourquoi vous l'avez tuée?

--Je ne dirai pas ça.

--Qu'est-ce que vous diriez?

--Ça dépend de la question qu'on me pose.

--On ne vous a jamais posé la bonne question sur ce crime?

--Non. Je dis la vérité. Si on m'avait posé la bonne question j'aurais trouvé quoi répondre. Cette question, moi non plus, je ne peux pas la trouver.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>Cismaru, Marguerite Duras, pp. 112-113.

<sup>33</sup>Marguerite Duras, L'Amante Anglaise (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1967), p. 165.

Even if Claire is placed in an institution, she will remain free; in her mind Claire lives in a world without limitations and restrictions. It is this type of total freedom, which Duras paints as being pure and untouched by any other human, which appears to be so desirable.

Marguerite Duras holds to some of the tenets of the school of the nouveau roman in the expressions of waiting, apathy, inaction, boredom and lethargy which pervade her novels. These moods and feeling or lack of feeling are best produced by Duras' interplay of banal, monotonous situations accompanied by mundane, trite cliches and dialogue. She is so successful at creating a tone of lassitude that the reader's awareness often becomes lulled into a quiet complacency. However dull this may seem on the surface, this ability to capture the mood of a situation so completely that it draws the reader into the expressed mood is one of Duras' finest and certainly one of her strongest points.

One of the more obvious examples of apathy appears in the novel, Le Marin de Gibraltar. What could be more boring than committing oneself to a seemingly endless search for a sailor of a vague description and no name who could be in any port, major city or village in the world? The commitment itself is the only justification. The action of the commitment of searching the globe for the sailor is somewhat blurred by all the talk of action. The true action of the novel appears to be little more than coasting from one port to another, the drifting being well camouflaged by words, empty and meaningless words. Whiskey again enters and dulls the sensations of the characters. Since drinking is the major activity which occurs, the characters are in such a state of langor that they

could not do much of anything even if they tried. Cismaru makes this comment:

Intoxication, for example, allows only restless sleep and uneven eating habits. This results in extreme fatigue, and the characters complain frequently of being tired. Theirs is not a mere physical weariness; it is a lethargic condition that becomes a permanent part of their existence; it dulls sensation and emotion and thus shelters the friendly, acquiescing victims from actual participation in life. Finally, as one might expect, very little love-making and a great deal of talk about it.<sup>34</sup>

In the following passage one realizes just how important drinking is in the lives of the narrator and Anna. The repetition produces a gentle hypnotic effect:

La nature nous paraissait fade à côté. Je rentrais toujours très fatigué de ces escales. Pour me remonter, je buvais du whisky. J'en buvais de plus en plus. Elle aussi d'ailleurs, elle en buvait de plus en plus. Et nous en bûmes toujours plus à mesure que le voyage avançait. On but le soir. Puis dans l'après-midi. Puis le matin. Chaque jour un peu plus tôt. Il y avait toujours du whisky à bord. Elle buvait depuis longtemps, elle bien sûr depuis qu'elle le cherchait, mais durant ce voyage elle le fit avec plus de plaisir, je crois, qu'avant. Très vite, je bus à son rythme et je cessai complètement, quand nous étions ensemble, de la retenir de trop boire. Sans doute était-ce que nous devions sérieux. C'était surtout du whisky que nous buvions, et aussi du vin, du pernod. Mais le whisky était ce que, bien entendu, nous préférons. Avant d'être américain, cet alcool est en effet celui par excellence des longues recherches en mer. ...Le whisky aidant, parfois, nous lui trouvions de la diversité.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>Cismaru, "Salvation Through Drinking in Marguerite Duras' Short Stories," p. 490.

<sup>35</sup>Duras, Le Marin de Gibraltar, p. 237. (Further reference by page only.)



Toward the end of the novel the narrator suddenly decides to buy another change of clothes and to wash. He and Anna have been sailing all this time and are in such a state of apathy or lethargy that they do not have the energy or desire to change clothes or wash very often. As the narrator says:

Dès Casablanca; achetai trois chemises et je recommençai à me laver et à être propre. Cela aussi fut un peu difficile bien sûr. Mais à Grand-Bassam j'étais redevenu presque tout à fait propre. (p. 236)

The narrator continues describing his condition in the following remark and very poignantly demonstrates his boredom as a state of having nothing better to do:

Pour bien chercher, c'est comme pour le reste, il ne faut faire que ça, et sans remords d'aucune autre activité, sans douter jamais que la recherche d'un seul homme vaille qu'un autre homme y consacre sa vie. Autrement dit, il faut être convaincu qu'on n'a rien de mieux à faire. C'était pour ma part, le cas. Je n'avais rien de mieux à faire. Je veux dire, qu'à le chercher. (p. 236)

Whatever action does occur appears at times to be as futile as the search for the sailor. The narrator describes the boat as though it were a symbol of their own lost movement:

Le bateau se levait comme un cachalot, puis il retombait inerte, dans des gouffres affreux. On aurait pu se demander. Chaque fois s'il remonterait. Bruno se le demanda souvent et Epaminondas quelquefois. Pour nous, ce fut différent Son mouvement continu et vain, il n'avancait pas et durait comme il pouvait, aurait pu nous faire trouver entre nos efforts et les siens une ressemblance. (p. 238).

Waiting and apathy are apparent in Duras' Les Petits Chevaux de Tarquinia. The title itself shows both of the themes since les petits Chevaux de Tarquinia is the name of a frieze on some Etruscan tombs which

Jacques, Sara, Ludi and Gina talk about going to see but never do. Instead of just deciding to go or not to go, there is the apathetic reaction of just postponing the idea of a trip until later. The discussion follows:

--Un petit voyage, dit-il. On ferait Rome d'une traite.  
 Puis Naples. On descendrait jusqu'à Paestum. On  
 pourrait même aller un peu plus loin.  
 --Il vaudrait mieux attendre, dit Diana, avec cette  
 chaleur.<sup>36</sup>

...  
 --J'ai regardé la carte cette nuit, dit Jacques. En  
 allant à Rome on pouvait s'arrêter à Tarquinia pour  
 voir les petits chevaux étrusques de Ludi. Depuis le  
 temps qu'il nous rebat les oreilles avec. A partir  
 de Naples on n'aurait pas plus chaud qu'ici. (p. 189)

...  
 --Dans quelques jours, dit Sara.  
 --Tu pourrais dire pourquoi?  
 --Je n'ai pas envie en ce moment. (p. 189)

...  
 Il a très envie d'aller voir Paestum, dit l'homme. (p. 192)

...  
 Moi aussi, dit-elle, j'avais envie d'aller à Paestum.  
 --Moi aussi, dit Sara. Qui n'aurait pas envie d'aller  
 à Paestum? Mais je ne veux pas qu'on m'y oblige.  
 --On a compris, dit Diana. Elle ajouta: Comme ça  
 personne n'ira à Paestum. C'est comme ça qu'on rate  
 tout... (p. 192)

The conversation oscillates about whether to go or not. There is no particular reason other than it is hot or someone does not want to be obligated to go. The decision is merely postponed or filed away in order to be decided upon later.

Les Petits Chevaux de Tarquinia creates the impression that all anyone does is wait for someone else. The following passage is a good example of this endless chain of waiting:

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<sup>36</sup>Duras, Les Petits Chevaux de Tarquinia, p. 188. (Further reference by page only).

Ils vivaient trop les uns sur les autres, prétendaient les uns, dans une espèce de communauté artificielle parce que sans raison d'être profonde. Ce n'était pas une histoire de communauté artificielle ou non, prétendaient les autres. C'était que l'endroit était trop exigu d'abord, ensuite sans aucune ressource de plaisir, de distraction et que c'était pour cela qu'on comptait tant les uns sur les autres pour se distraire, se baigner se promener, bavarder. Qu'on s'attendait interminablement tous les jours. Et que pour arriver à se baigner à midi, dit une femme, il fallait s'y prendre dès neuf heures du matin, commencer dès le lever à demander à l'un, à l'autre, s'il voulait bien ce jour-là se baigner avec vous. Cela parce que l'un, l'autre, attendait à son tour un autre, un autre autre qui, la veille, lui avait promis d'aller se baigner avec lui mais qui, depuis, s'était engagé avec un autre encore à aller se baigner avec lui. C'était un engrenage d'attentes réciproques, sans fin. (pp. 106-107)

During a similar conversation Ludi, Gina, Jacques, Sara and the grocer talk about the different things to do in a village like the one where they are. The grocer has been invited to visit another village and seems to be at a loss as to what he could do there. The following is part of this conversation:

--Non, dit le vieux, il faut venir. Le village donne à la fois sur la mer et sur la montagne. Un peu comme ici, sauf le fleuve. (p. 235)

...

--Mais qu'est--ce que j'y ferai? demanda l'épicier, toute la journée, qu'est-ce que je pourrai bien y faire? (p. 235)

--Tu te promèneras, dit Ludi. Et puis, tu trouveras bien quoi faire, je suis tranquille. (p. 235)

...

--Je pourrais toujours essayer de venir, dit l'épicier. C'est très près par le car. Une heure.

--C'est difficile de changer sa vie, dit Ludi. Rien au monde n'est plus difficile.

--C'est ceux qui se plaignent le plus de leur vie qui en changent le moins volontiers, dit Gina, c'est connu. (p. 235)

The last part where Gina mentions that those who complain the most are the least likely to change holds true in this novel. Jacques,

Sara, Ludi and Gina complain about the heat, the food and the boredom as do all the other people visiting this same village. An example of what the people talk about as they are eating at the only hotel in the village:

On se parlait, on s'interpellait d'une table à l'autre, et les conversations en général gagnaient toutes les tables de la tonnelle. Et de quoi parlait-on sinon de ce lieu infernal et de ces vacances qu'il en était ainsi de toutes les vacances. D'autres, non Beaucoup se souvenaient avoir passé d'excellentes vacances, tout à fait, réussies. Tout le monde était d'accord sur ce point qu'il était rare de réussir ses vacances, rare et difficile, il fallait beaucoup de chance. En général, personne ne se souvenait avoir passé des vacances aussi ratées que celles-ci. Sur les causes de ce ratage, les avis différaient. (p. 106)

It is evident that conversation is the main action. Other than talking and eating very little else happens. The people spend the major portion of their conversations complaining. While they are eating at the hotel, they complain about the food, and, although there are two other hotels in the village just across the river from them, they reject the possibility of changing.

The management serves the same boring menu. The people get tired of eating the same thing all the time, but the management refuses to change even though the other two hotels offer the possibility of competition. The following quotation presents a good view of the attitudes of the management and the people:

Comme il n'y avait que cet hôtel on n'avait pas le choix d'aller ailleurs, du moins sur cette rive. Et personne ne songeait à aller manger sur l'autre rive où il y avait cependant deux hôtels. Non, on restait sur cette rive torride où on mangeait forcément toujours la même chose, le patron ne craignant aucune concurrence, fût-ce même celle de l'autre rive: du poisson, des pâtes, du bouillon. Le ravitaillement, prétendait le patron, arrivait mal et c'était là la

raison de ce sempeternel menu.  
C'était une habitude à prendre, la plupart des  
clients l'avaient prise. (p. 105)

Boredom, apathy and a motionless present exist also in Le Square.

The entire novel is a motionless expression since the extent of the action is a conversation on a park bench. Duras' young maid and salesman begin a conversation. They begin talking about their own jobs which leads to a discussion of the possibility of a change. A few of their remarks on change are:

Mais entre ce qui vous est arrivé il y longtemps et ce qui vous arrive maintenant, chaque jour, n'a-t-on pas le temps de changer et de prendre goût à autre chose, à quelque chose?

--Eh bien! oui, je ne dis pas, pour beaucoup cela doit arriver, oui, mais pour certains, non. Il y en a que doivent s'accommoder de ne jamais changer. Au fond, ce doit être mon cas. Et vraiment, je le crois, pour moi, cela va durer.<sup>37</sup>

...

--Vous comprenez, Monsieur, si je refusais une fois de faire une chose, n'importe quelle chose, n'importe quelle chose, je commencerais à m'organiser, à me défendre, à m'intéresser à ce que je fais. Je commencerais par une chose, je continuerais par une autre et quoi encore? Et je finirais par m'occuper si bien de mes droits que je les prendrais au sérieux et que je croirais qu'ils existent. J'y penserais. Je ne m'ennuierais même plus. Ainsi je serais perdue. (pp. 61-62)

The young maid continues to say that she is waiting to be chosen by a man to be his wife. Then she will open the door to the dining room when the family is gathered together and announce that she is through working for them. By herself she is not capable of changing her situation. The following contains part of her explanation for not changing:

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<sup>37</sup>Marguerite Duras, Le Square (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1955), p. 18. (Further reference by page only).

- Oui, Mademoiselle, bien sûr ne prenez pas garde à ces réflexions. Elles me viennent à l'esprit à l'occasion de ce que vous me dites, simplement, mais je ne voudrais pas qu'elles vous découragent. Au contraire même, et, voyez-vous, j'irai même jusqu'à vous demander ceci: cette porte, Mademoiselle, quel moment privilégié attendez-vous pour l'ouvrir? Pourquoi ne décidez-vous pas de l'ouvrir, par exemple, dès ce soir?
- Seule, je ne le pourrais pas.
- Voulez-vous dire, Mademoiselle, que n'ayant ni argent ni instruction, vous ne pourriez que recommencer, que cela ne servirait donc à rien?
- Je veux dire cela et aussi autre chose. Je dis que seule, je serais comme, je ne sais pas comment vous dire, comme privée de sens, oui. Seule, je ne pourrais pas changer. Je continuerai à aller à ce bal avec régularité et un jour un homme me demandera d'être sa femme, et alors je le ferai. Avant cela, non, je ne le pourrai pas. (pp. 70-71)
- ...
- Il faut qu'on me choisisse une fois. De cette façon j'aurai la force de changer. (p. 71)

Anne Desbaredes in Moderato Cantabile echoes a similar idea of being apathetic toward change when she talks about an inevitable fixed routine around which her life revolves:

- On ne peut pas éviter les heures fixes, comment faire autrement? Je pourrais vous dire que je suis déjà en retard sur l'heure du dîner si je compte tout le chemin que j'ai à faire. Et aussi, j'oubliais, que ce soir il y a dans cette maison une réception à laquelle je suis tenue d'être présente.
- Vous savez que vous ne pourrez faire autrement que d'y arriver en retard, vous le savez?
- Je ne pourrais pas faire autrement. Je sais.<sup>38</sup>

The reader finds monotony and boredom in the fixed routines and idle conversations. Anne verbally expresses this in the following statement about people not knowing what to do with themselves in this town:

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<sup>38</sup>Duras, Moderato Cantabile, p. 114. (Further reference by page only).

- Parfois encore, c'est l'été et il y a quelques promeneurs sur le boulevard. Le samedi soir surtout, parce que sans doute les gens ne savent que faire d'eux-mêmes dans cette ville.
- Sans doute, dit Chauvin. Surtout des hommes. De ce couloir, ou de votre jardin, ou de votre chambre, vous les regardez souvent. (p. 112)

In Dix Heures et Demie du Soir en Été there are four people waiting.

Paestra's lonely vigil on the roof tops reflects, as it were, Maria's lonely vigil on the balcony; as he waits for his inevitable capture and death at dawn, so she waits for the inevitable moment of consummation of desire for which Pierre and Claire are waiting.<sup>39</sup>

In the following passages Maria is waiting for the right moment to go get Rodrigo in her car:

Personne ne s'est réveillé dans la ville. Rien ne se produit. La forme, est restée drapée dans son imbécillité. Dans l'hôtel rien n'a bougé. Mais une fenêtre s'est éclairée dans la maison qui touche à l'hôtel. Maria se recule légèrement. Il faut attendre.<sup>40</sup>

As she arrives to pick up Paestra, waiting rather than action plays an important part:

Maria, sereinement, lève la main, encore. Il répond encore. Ah quelle merveille. Elle a levé la main pour lui signifier qu'il doit attendre. Attendez, disait sa main. a-t-il compris? Il a compris...Maria recommence, patiemment, raisonnablement. Attendez, attendez Rodrigo Paestra. Attendez encore un peu, je vais descendre, je vais venir vers vous. (pp. 79-80)

One of the lengthiest periods of waiting takes up the entire novel of L'Après-midi de Monsieur Andesmas. As the title suggests this "publication is built around the solitary waiting of the old man whose

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<sup>39</sup> Brée, p. xiv.

<sup>40</sup> Marguerite Duras, Dix Heures et Demie du Soir en Été (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1960), p. 75. (Further reference by page only).

name appears in the title."<sup>41</sup> Monsieur Andesmas is waiting to give instructions to an architect for the construction of a terrace. However, he never succeeds in having it built during the novel.

From time to time, the old man casts a glance on the village below. There some sort of holiday is being celebrated. And the gay musical fragments which sporadically reach his ears emphasize his painful loneliness and contrast, in mood and tempo, with the static, petrified existence he leads.<sup>42</sup>

Here is a description of his waiting which shows that glances at his watch are followed by periods of dozing off to sleep:

M. Andesmas souleva son bras, regarda sa montre, vit qu'il était 4 heures. Ainsi, pendant le passage du chien, Michel Arc avait commencé à prendre du retard sur l'heure du rendez-vous qu'ils avaient fixé ensemble, il y avait deux jours, sur cette plate-forme. Michel Arc avait dit que 4 heures moins le quart était une heure qui lui convenait. Il était 4 heures. Son bras une fois retombé, M. Andesmas changea de position. Le fauteuil d'osier craqua plus fort. Puis, de nouveau, il respira régulièrement autour du corps qu'il contenait.<sup>43</sup>

Lol Stein in Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein is a very inactive person. Most of her walks and reasons for going out are due to her curiosity as a voyeur. For Lol, action is something she watches other engage in. Since her life is static in itself, the only enjoyment of action appears to be gained through the action of others, especially those she knows something about personally. Jack Hold, whom she watches in his clandestine love affair with Tatiana, knows that Lol is outside the hotel

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<sup>41</sup>Cismaru, Marguerite Duras, p. 100.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 101.

<sup>43</sup>Marguerite Duras, L'Après-Midi de Monsieur Andesmas (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1962), p. 13.



in the field watching his window. He remarks about Lol's presence in the following statement:

Tout à coup la blondeur n'a plus été pareille, elle a bougé puis elle s'est immobilisée. J'ai cru qu'elle devait s'être aperçue que j'avais découvert sa présence. Nous nous sommes donc regardés, je l'ai cru. Combien de temps?<sup>44</sup>

Lol must feel that this is redeeming a portion of her lost and boring existence although she has only an apathetic approach to life as she must live it. "As we have guessed, watching Tatiana make love to Jack Hold affords only an indirect and temporary pleasure to the bored psychic, lifeless Lol."<sup>45</sup> There are several occasions where Lol, herself, remarks that she is bored with her life:

Puis elle se plaignit, plus explicitement, d'éprouver une fatigue insupportable à attendre de la sorte. Elle s'ennuyait, à crier. Et elle criait en effet qu'elle n'avait rien à penser tandis qu'elle attendait, réclamait avec l'impatience d'un enfant un remède immédiat à ce manque. Cependant aucune des distractions qu'on lui avait offertes n'avait eu raison de cet état. Puis Lol cessa de se plaindre de quoi que ce soit. Elle cessa même petit à petit de parler. Sa colère vieillit, se découragea. Elle ne parla que pour dire qu'il lui était impossible d'exprimer combien c'était ennuyeux et long, long d'être Lol V. Stein.<sup>46</sup>

Duras thus draws the reader, completely into this expression of apathy, boredom and lethargy. If the reader becomes lulled while reading a description such as this, it is due to the fine and acute awareness of the author's insight into human feelings.

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<sup>44</sup>Duras, Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein, p. 141.

<sup>45</sup>Cismaru, Marguerite Duras, p. 111.

<sup>46</sup>Duras, Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein, pp. 23-24.

The theme of alienation and solitude is, of course, a major theme which, at one time or another, has been treated by many authors of the twentieth century. Alienation presents itself in a variety of forms. One may talk about the estrangement of a person from another person or persons, the withdrawal of a person's affections, a mental derangement, a physical isolation, or a lack of communication with an individual or society as a whole. Marguerite Duras' treatment of the theme of alienation, although it touches on all of these, is based primarily on a lack of communication. Within the presentation of a lack of communication she weaves, in particular, mental derangement along with the other means of alienation.

The lack of communication is apparent in Les Petits Chevaux de Tarquinia. Duras' dry and empty dialogue parallels the empty, isolated lives of the characters.

As we view the world of Bitter Camparis, that society devoured by the solitude of togetherness and the boredom emanating from uneventful events, we are prompted to weight our own participation in that world, to measure carefully the exact position we occupy in it, to relate our ennui to that of Sara, our frustrations to hers also, our desires and our hopes as well.<sup>47</sup>

The "solitude of togetherness" to which Cismaru refers is common in the novels of Marguerite Duras. Here, in Les Petits Chevaux de Tarquinia, as in many other novels, she paints a vivid picture of people, friends who talk constantly to each other without saying anything and of those who, similarly listen without hearing a word. The following passage

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<sup>47</sup>Cismaru, Marguerite Duras, p. 63.

is an example of the conversation which, at best, could pass for chatty discourse:

- Oh! que je n'aime pas ce goût qu'elle a pour toutes les vieilles gens du monde, dit-il. Il le dit presque devant Gina qui était revenue de chez elle.
- Qu'est-ce qu'il a dit?
- Qu'il aime les pâtes aux vongole à la folie, dit Diana.
- Demain tu en auras d'autres, dit Gina, mais celles--là tu ne les auras pas.
- Ce n'est pas ce que je disais, dit Ludi, je disais que je n'aimais pas ce goût que tu as pour toutes les vieilles gens du monde.
- Alors, tu veux continuer, dit Gina en s'asseyant.
- Je préférerais que tu me trompes, à la fin, dit Ludi.
- Bitter campari, dit Diana, c'est magique.
- Oui, dit l'homme, j'aime de plus en plus ça. Tout le monde en reprit, sauf Ludi.
- Non, je vais rentrer, dit-il, et manger ces pâtes aux vongole avant qu'elle les donne à ces vieux cons.<sup>48</sup>

Within this small group of people who are vacationing it is quite evident that loneliness and isolation are feelings which all share: "Chacun parla de sa ville avec une évidente nostalgie, un peu comme d'un exil." (p. 244)

A painful lack of communication occurs in the relationship of the young maid and the traveling salesman of Le Square. In the conversation which begins on a park bench, each character reveals a substantial amount of information about himself. In this revelation, which consumes the entire novel, the reader recognizes, once again, two people who feel isolated. Through the slowly unwinding dialogue one gains a feeling for

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<sup>48</sup>Duras, Les Petits Chevaux de Tarquinia, pp. 57-58. (Further reference by page only).

both the maid and the salesman, a feeling which is more personal than mere empathy. This feeling seems to enhance the description of each character as a solitary and silent person lost in the midst of so much action which appears to be passing him by. At one point they both admit to feeling isolated. The salesman admits this as he mentions briefly at the outset:

--C'est-à-dire que je n'ai jamais très bien su comment ces choses-là se décidaient. Je ne connais personne en particulier, je suis en peu isolé.<sup>49</sup>

Soon after the beginning of their conversation the reader notices that two conversations appear, in other words, two monologues. The maid and the salesman are both speaking, one waiting for the other to finish before starting his own portion; however, at this point they seem to be speaking at each other rather than with one another. To underline the alienation found in dialogue the maid admits that her days are like a desert with nothing in them for her:

--Sans raison. Alors la conversation prend un tour moins général.

--Et alors, Monsieur, et alors?

--Je ne reste jamais plus de deux jours dans chaque ville, Mademoiselle, trois au maximum. Les objets que je vends ne sont pas d'une telle nécessité.

--Hélas! Monsieur. La brise qui s'était assoupie s'éleva de nouveau, balaya de nouveau les nuages et, à la tiédeur soudaine de l'air, on devina encore une fois les promesses d'un proche été. Mais vraiment, comme il fait beau, aujourd'hui, répéta l'homme.

--Nous approchons de l'été.

--Peut-être, Mademoiselle, ne commence-t-on jamais, excusez-moi, et que c'est toujours pour demain.

--Ah! Monsieur, si vous dites cela, c'est qu'aujourd'hui,

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<sup>49</sup>Duras, Le Square, pp. 15-16. (Further reference by page only).

pour vous, est quand même assez plein pour vous distraire de demain. Pour moi, aujourd'hui ce n'est rien, un désert. (p. 48)

The relationship between Anne and Chauvin in Moderato Cantabile is built on isolation. Seclusion strengthens the alliance; and when aloneness cannot exist or no longer does, it begins to deteriorate.

The relationship between Anne and Chauvin proves only that an alienation from society is possible, for a short time, and that the structures and restrictions of bourgeois respectability can be avoided without permanent danger by those rebels who repent and return within the orderly mechanism of accepted decorum. Just as the child learns eventually the meaning of moderato cantabile, so do hero and heroine discover the futility of stubbornness, of contradiction, of revolt, as evidenced in their final separation.<sup>50</sup>

The almost-affair which almost takes place between Anne and Chauvin is a bit awkward. Both participants must use wine and an induced state of intoxication to assist the growth of the relationship which springs out of curiosity concerning the murder of a total stranger. As the wine separates the characters from their present and different social positions, so does the state of inebriation serve as a form of alienation for them. Germaine Brée remarks:

There is, in fact, no affair; only five confrontations in a bar, a hand placed on hers, a brief kiss on Anne's cold lips. The scandal is in Anne's total alienation from society, the alienation of intoxication, and the revelation of an obsessive sexual desire lived to the limit of annihilation. Moderato Cantabile is a modern re-statement of the incompatibility of individual passion with the orderly mechanism of social decorum.<sup>51</sup>

Marie and Rodrigo in Dix Heures Et Demie Du Soir En Été are both victims of a love triangle and, therefore, become outsiders in their

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<sup>50</sup>Cismaru, Marguerite Duras, p. 91.

<sup>51</sup>Brée, p. xii.

situations. Rodrigo caught his wife with another man and shot them both. When Maria, her husband, Jacques, and a female companion arrive at a hotel in Spain, Rodrigo is in hiding from the police. Maria realizes with much pain that Jacques and Claire, the female companion, are sexually attracted to each other and that it is just a matter of hours before the fulfillment of their desire. Maria begins to drink heavily upon their arrival. Intoxication serves to remove her from the painful situation in which she has found herself, and provides her with a comforting state of isolation. Germain Brée parallels the lonely waiting of both Maria and Rodrigo:

Paestra's lonely vigil on the roof tops reflects, as it were, Maria's lonely vigil on the balcony; as he waits for his inevitable capture and death at dawn, so she waits for the inevitable moment of consummation of desire for which Pierre and Claire are waiting. At ten-thirty on that summer night, the three vigils come together in Maria's perception. She sees Paestra's figure dimly outlined against the chimney tops as the silhouettes of Pierre and Claire, entwined, appear on the balcony over her head.<sup>52</sup>

Although Maria comes to life somewhat in her attempt to help Rodrigo escape, she later returns to her liquor and manzanillas and resigns herself to alienation through intoxication.

The solitary wait of Monsieur Andesmas in L'Après-midi de Monsieur Andesmas is a reflection of the solitary and lonely life he must lead. Cismaru makes this comment of him:

A fatigued, obese old man simply sits in front of his house located on a hilltop above an unnamed Mediterranean village. As the book unfolds, a progressive lassitude, physical and spiritual, grips the hero and causes in him an almost total disassociation from life. His waiting is practically uninterrupted, absolute;

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<sup>52</sup>Ibid., p. xiv.

...  
 From time to time, the old man casts a glance on the village below. There some sort of holiday is being celebrated. And the gay musical fragments which sporadically reach his ears emphasize his painful loneliness and contrast, in mood and tempo, with the static, petrified existence he leads.<sup>53</sup>

Monsieur Andesmas appears to be comfortable with his isolation, because he makes no effort to break loose from this situation. At least he tolerates it in a manner which the reader sees as one of actually looking forward to solitude as he would look forward to a quiet rest. Marguerite Duras describes his wait in a pleasant fashion:

L'attente de M. Andesmas finit une fois de plus par redevenir tranquille. Le soleil était encore haut. Du moment qu'il l'avait dit, il attendrait jusqu'au soir. Il sait que la petite fille a oublié le vieillard. Comment faire autrement qu'attendre? Attendre l'auto de Valérie. Il rigole. Il est enfermé dans la forêt par Valérie--son enfant.<sup>54</sup>

There is very little left for him to do but to wait for his daughter, Valerie, and Michel Arc, the architect. In fact, it appears as though his only link to life and society comes through his daughter. Through the years he seems to have disassociated himself almost completely and lives almost as a recluse except where his daughter is concerned. He has no friends or relatives left to care about him: "Les amis de M. Andesmas n'existent plus. Une fois l'étang acheté, personne ne passera plus. Personne. Exception faite des amis de Valerie." (p. 17)

The solitude of togetherness coupled with the alienation of insanity both appear in Le Vice-Consul. The Vice-Consul, Jean-Marc de H.,

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<sup>53</sup>Cismaru, Marguerite Duras, p. 101.

<sup>54</sup>Duras, L'Après-Midi de Monsieur Andesmas, p. 60. (Further reference by page only).

is an outsider in the diplomatic society of Calcutta. He has behaved strangely and without explanation and, therefore, is treated much of the time as an outsider. In the following extract the reader sees a part of the loneliness and isolation which the Vice-Consul must feel although he is physically part of a group:

Chaque soir le directeur du Cercle parle des Indes et de sa vie. Et puis le vice-consul de France à Lahore raconte ce qu'il veut sur la sienne. Le directeur du Cercle sait s'y prendre avec le vice-consul: il raconte des choses anodines que le vice-consul n'écoute pas mais qui, quelquefois, à la fin, déclenchent sa voix sifflante. Parfois le vice-consul parle très longtemps de façon inintelligible. Parfois son discours est clair. Ce que deviennent ses paroles dans Calcutta, le vice-consul semble l'ignorer. Il l'ignore. Personne, à part le directeur du Cercle, ne lui adresse la parole.<sup>55</sup>

Even though the Vice-Consul tries to communicate with people, he does not succeed. This brief excerpt shows quite succinctly just how isolated he is through the lack of communication with one of his peers:

Le vice-consul demande:  
 --Est-ce que vous croyez qu'il est nécessaire de donner un coup de pouce aux circonstances pour que l'amour soit vécu?  
 Le directeur ne comprend pas ce que veut dire le vice-consul.  
 --Est-ce que vous croyez qu'il faut aller au secours de l'amour pour qu'il se déclare, pour qu'on se retrouve un beau matin avec le sentiment d'aimer?  
 Le directeur ne comprend pas encore. (p. 76)

The solitude of togetherness is underlined by the other characters who fill space in this novel.

Their vain efforts to communicate, their stutterings, their perseverance, through trial and error, their capitulation, are rendered more poignantly than in any

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<sup>55</sup>Duras, Le Vice-Consul, p. 75. (Further reference by page only).



preceding novel in the senseless dialogue of the men and women who attend the soiree at the Embassy: for their questions about and to the Vice-Consul remain totally unanswered; no one is capable of solving the riddle, neither the guests, nor the officials who have seen his dossier, nor the hero himself.<sup>56</sup>

An example of this futile conversation loaded with unanswered questions depicts quite clearly the idleness and mundane chatter of the group at the Embassy party. The only link among these people is that they are part of a group at a particular instance; otherwise, there is a complete and unignorable lack of cohesion:

On pense: Le vice-consul ne part pas. Cet homme est tout à fait seul. Dans la vie l'est-il toujours autant? Toujours? A sa place, d'autres ne chercheraient-ils pas, par exemple, vers l'idée de Dieu? Qu'a-t-il trouvé aux Indes qui le déchaîne? Ne savait-il pas avant de venir? Lui fallait-il voir pour savoir? (pp. 134-135)

...

Ne rien lui dire, pense Charles Rossett, rester sur ses gardes. Il n'a sans doute pas encore vu Michael Richard, D'ailleurs, quelle importance? Que voit-il? Elle, on dirait, elle seulement.

--J'ai envie de champagne, dit Charles Rossett, depuis que je suis ici, je bois trop...

On entend la réponse: Je n'ai rien à dire sur les raisons...

On songe: Et quand il a été confirmé dans ce qu'il croyait qu'était Lahore avant de la voir il a appelé la mort sur Lahore.

Une femme: Le prêtre dit que Dieu fournit l'explication si on le prie. Quelqu'un se moque.

--Vous verrez, dit le vice-consul à Charles Rossett, ici, l'ivresse est toujours pareille. (pp. 137-138)

Running parallel to the story of the Vice-Consul is the story of the insane Cambodian girl. This is the more interesting of the two since she is alienated from society through her own insanity. Cismaru takes note of this dual presentation in the following remark:

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<sup>56</sup>Cismaru, Marguerite Duras, p. 115.

The plot, whatever there is of it, is dual: on the one hand, there is the haunting story of an Oriental girl, chased away by her mother because of a youthful mistake that resulted in pregnancy; on the other, there is the description of the cosmopolitan world centering around the French Embassy in Calcutta, a world of partying political functionaries in which Peter Morgan, the author of the story mentioned, moves. Throughout the novel, the starving, the leper and that of the spiritually deprived (the bored, the alcoholic, and the semi-lunatic), are constantly juxtaposed in such a way as to achieve "a somewhat hypnotic effect upon the reader."<sup>57</sup>

The following excerpt is a description of part of the reason for the Cambodian girl's growing state of insanity:

La faim à Pursat, depuis Pursat, certes, mais aussi le soleil, le manque de parler, le bourdonnement entêtant des insectes de la forêt, le clame des clairières, bien des choses approfondissent la folie. Elle se trompe en tout, de plus en plus, jusqu'au moment où elle ne se trompe plus jamais, brusquement jamais plus puisqu'elle ne cherche plus rien. Ce qu'elle mange dans ce périple si long? Un peu de riz aux abords des villages, oui, parfois, des oiseaux égorgés par les tigres et laissés là en attendant l'odeur faisandée, des fruits, et puis des poissons, avant le Gange, déjà.  
Combien d'enfants fait-elle? A Calcutta où elle trouve l'abondance, les poubelles pleines du Prince of Wales, le riz chaud devant une petite grille qu'elle reconnaît, elle est devenue stérile.  
Calcutta.  
Elle reste.  
Il y a dix ans qu'elle est partie. (pp. 70-71)

The insane Cambodian girl is essentially harmless although she is frightening because of her wild appearance and mannerisms. Claire's insanity in L'Amante Anglaise goes a step further. During the novel, which is the interrogation of Claire and other who knew her, the reader finds that she is responsible for a senseless and bizarre murder. She has killed her deaf and dumb cousin, Marie-Thérèse, cut her body up into

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<sup>57</sup>Ibid., p. 112.

several pieces and dropped them off an over-pass onto different trains passing below. There apparently was never any quarrel or any reason for the murder. Claire, also, is alienated because of her madness. This extract provides an understanding of her unusual reasoning:

- La voyiez-vous différente de vous malgré son infirmité?
- Mais non, voyez, morte, non.
- Et vivante?
- Vivante, la différence c'est qu'elle était très grosse, qu'elle dormait très bien tous les soirs et qu'elle mangeait beaucoup.<sup>58</sup>
- ...
- Et s'il y a une raison mais qu'on ignore, une raison ignorée.
- Ignorée de qui en ce moment?
- De tous. De vous. De moi.
- Où est cette raison ignorée?
- En vous?
- Pourquoi? Pourquoi pas en elle, ou dans la maison, dans le couteau? ou dans la mort? oui, dans la mort. La folie est-elle une raison?
- Peut-être.
- A force de chercher sans trouver, on dira que c'est la folie, je le sais.
- Tant pis. Si la folie est ce que j'ai, si ma maladie c'est la folie, je ne suis pas triste.
- Ne pensez pas à ça.
- Je n'y pense pas. C'est vous qui y pensez. Je sais quand les gens pensent que je suis folle, je l'entends au son de la voix. (pp. 168-169)

The interviewer asks many questions which Claire answers in her own way, leaving the interviewer at the same place where he started: Why did she kill? Where was the head of the victim? There has been a conversation of sorts between them, but the purpose for the interview was never accomplished.

In Duras' Détruire Dit-Elle alienation appears in a different light. As the title indicates, "destroy" is the key word in this form of

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<sup>58</sup>Duras, L'Amante Anglaise, p. 147. (Further reference by page only).

alienation. This novel deals with the destruction of all social lines or restraints, in other words, the destruction of all inhibition, conformism and all else that has been established as socially acceptable in thought and behavior. Philippe Boyer points out the rupture with the exterior world of rules and regulations in his comment on Max Thor: "Max Thor se montre bien ici soumis à la force de son propre désir incarné par Stein. Dès lors il va peu à peu transgresser toutes les règles du monde extérieur, du monde de l'ordre..."<sup>59</sup> The desire Boyer mentions does not have the usual connotation of passion in the romantic sense, but the desire of being the other person. This is a destruction of inner self limitations. This alienation, which set out to destroy not only social restraints but also those within the individual, is mixed with madness. Marguerite Duras links madness with society in this statement: "A madman is a person whose essential prejudice has been destroyed: the limits of the self."<sup>60</sup> Duras also defines capital destruction as "the destruction of someone as a person."<sup>61</sup> She goes on to mention that this destruction with which she deals in Détruire Dit-Elle applies also to the destruction of the memory and of judgment. In other words, she is in favor of ignorance in order to obtain a clean slate and to start over again:

I am speaking, if you will, of man's passage through a void: the fact is, he forgets everything. So as to be able to start over. I hope that he will thus be reborn,

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<sup>59</sup>Philippe Boyer, "Trois êtres de désir," La Quinzaine Littéraire, no. 75 (16-30 juin 1969), 5.

<sup>60</sup>"Destruction and Language," interview trans. by Helen Lane Cumberford, in Destroy She Said, trans. by Barbara Bray (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1970), p. 109.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., p. 108.

if you will. If this were true, one could return, providing one were exceptionally prudent, to a state of knowingness...Knowledge seems to me to be at once suspect and desirable. A certain kind of knowledge. In any case, I am basically against the sort of knowledge that is the province of certain people, the kind of knowledge that is cut and dried--the laws of knowledge.<sup>62</sup>

In this interview Duras continues to proclaim that starting with a clean slate is the only way to reach absolute zero.<sup>63</sup>

The idea of destruction appears early in the novel. Alissa vocalizes the idea and her husband, Max Thor, smiles at her, understanding the meaning of it: "Elle se retourne. Son regard revient. Lentement. 'Détruire; dit-elle.'<sup>64</sup> A few pages later the reader learns that la destruction capitale, which Duras has defined as the destruction of someone as a person, will come at the hands of Alissa: "La destruction capitale en passera d'abord par les mains d'Alissa, dit Stein. Vous êtes bien de cet avis?" (p. 34) As soon as Alissa talks to Elisabeth alone she invites her into the forest: "Vous voulez venir dans la forêt? Brusquement, une certaine peur dans le regard d'Elisabeth Alione." (p. 109)

Just before time for Elisabeth to leave, Alissa remarks: "C'est trop tard, dit Alissa. Pour...? Pour vous tuer--elle sourit--, c'est trop tard." (p. 98) Here Alissa has given up hope of changing Elisabeth, of destroying the former life and beliefs of Elisabeth. However, later on in the afternoon while Max Thor, Stein, Alissa are visiting with Elisabeth and her husband, Bernard, Elisabeth states: "Je deviens folle,

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<sup>62</sup>Ibid., p. 110.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., p. 111.

<sup>64</sup>Marguerite Duras, Détruire Dit-Elle (Paris: Editions De Minuit, 1969), p. 34. (Further reference by page only).

dit doucement Elisabeth Alione." (p. 109) This shows Elisabeth's acceptance of the new world presented by Thor, Stein and Alissa, and that some of her former prejudices have been destroyed. Therefore, a new person is coming into existence. This metamorphosis is reinforced when Thor says: "Elle l'a oublié, dit Max Thor, maintenant." (p. 117) The moment of the completed metamorphosis comes with the vomiting of Elisabeth which signifies her rejection of her former self and former life. In the following passage the reader sees that this rejection is pleasant to her:

--Vous avez vomi? demande Alissa.  
 Elisabeth a beaucoup de mal à former ses mots.  
 --Oui.  
 --Comment était-ce?  
 ...  
 Elisabeth réfléchit. Elle sourit.  
 Agréable, dit-elle.  
 --Bien, dit Stein, bien. (p. 119)

Marguerite Duras explains this vomiting and the panic of Elisabeth which preceded it as the last time Elizabeth panics. By vomiting she give up her former life. She does not know this, but she does know that it was a gratifying experience.<sup>65</sup>

One of the first remarks at the beginning is that death, or destruction, comes through the hands of Alissa. The purpose of Alissa's desire to annihilate Elisabeth's former life is to free her from inner restrictions or self-limitations and to destroy her identity. Boyer adds that there is also the annihilation of what Elisabeth has in order to reveal what she is:

Il s'agit ici de détruire les êtres dans ce qu'ils ont  
 (Elisabeth a mari qui lui même a une femme:

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<sup>65</sup>"Destruction and Language," trans. by Helen Lane Cumberford, p. 109.

rapport économique de propriété) pour les dévoiler à ce qu'ils sont: êtres de désir et de peur. C'est pourquoi Elisabeth résiste à Alissa. --"Je suis quelqu'un qui a peur de tout..." Ce qui veut dire: je deviens folle, je deviens ce que je suis, c'est à dire vous.<sup>66</sup>

At the end of the novel this idea of death by Alissa is reiterated:

--Qu'est-ce qui aurait été possible?  
Stein ne répond pas.  
--Le désir? demande Max Thor, l'usure par le désir?  
--Oui, par votre désir.  
Silence.  
--Ou la mort par Alissa, dit Stein.  
Silence.  
--Nous n'avons plus le choix, dit-il. (p. 131)

Not having a choice is probably a repetition of Duras' idea that destruction, or the death of a life linked to restrictions and established actions imposed by society, is absolute in order to obtain a clean slate.

The novel ends with music coming from the forest. According to Philippe Boyer this music which the three characters, Alissa, Max Thor and Stein all hear is symbolically the final rupture from the outside world:

Trois êtres qui savent alors entendre la même musique. --"C'est la musique sur le nom de Stein, dit-elle." dit Alissa qui sait détruire, ouvrir les grandes brèches dans les murailles de l'ordre social. Et cette musique de ressac qui vient de la forêt, musique sur le nom et du lieu de désir, marque enfin, discrète et violente, la radicale rupture--quand écrire c'est aussi bien détruire: donner la parole au désir et tenter de le faire entendre.<sup>67</sup>

The fact that Thor tries to write a novel and ends by saying that Stein will write it for him, paralleled to the fact that this novel has been written by Marguerite Duras, seems to imply this last idea

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<sup>66</sup> Boyer, p. 5.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

mentioned by Boyer: that to write is also to destroy, since it stems from the desire to be understood. This is perhaps what the characters, Alissa, Thor and Stein, have in common with their creator, Duras. They all are striving to be understood through destroying all that has previously been established as knowledge, as historical facts, and as society, in order to start again from a tabula rasa.

The forest in Détruire Dit-Elle represents history as Stein explains it: "Pourquoi dans la forêt? Il lève la tête, rencontre les yeux bleus, se tait. Elle est classée monument historique, dit Stein." (p. 126) Throughout the novel, the mentioning of the forest always produces a response of fear and uncertainty. Alissa is the first to ask about the forest:

--Il y a la forêt.  
Elle la regarde, ne regarde que la forêt tout à coup.  
--Oui.  
--Elle est dangereuse? demanda-t-elle.  
--Oui. Comment le sais-tu?  
--Je la regarde, dit-elle, je la vois.  
Elle réfléchit, les yeux toujours au-delà du parc, vers la forêt.  
--Pourquoi est-elle dangereuse? demande-t-elle.  
--Comme toi, je ne sais pas. Pourquoi?  
--Parce qu'ils en ont peur, dit Alissa.  
Elle s'adosse à sa chaise, le regarde, le regarde. (pp. 33-34)

This forest, therefore, represents Marguerite Duras' ideas of the established knowledge, of historical facts, which she feels should be destroyed because of all the pre-judgment involved. The forest is the historical past which tries to prescribe the present plan of action and to predict the future plan of action of people and society. The characters fear it because it would not allow the freedom of new and unique experiences which they seek.



A victim of history appears in Duras' next novel, Abahn Sabana, David. When asked why she used a German Jew, Duras replied that we are all German Jews, we are all strangers.<sup>68</sup> Therefore, the character of the German Jew is the symbol of alienation. This alienation is the rupture from society which is perhaps due to the way society tends to pigeonhole people, events and ideas.

For the most part, Abahn, Sabana, David, is Duras' political statement on the Jewish situation. However, from the point of view of alienation, it serves significantly to show a malady within society: society alienating its own people. Jean Bessière supports Duras' idea of historical alienation in the following remark:

En choisissant un juif pour héros, l'auteur maintient sa dialectique du néant et de l'amour, de la vie et de la mort, présente encore un personnage en rupture avec le réel, mais place la problématique de l'individu dans l'ordre historique, et non plus psychologique.<sup>69</sup>

Abahn realizes his solitude and at the same time links it to the solitude of the race: "Tu es seul aussi? Oui, avec les juifs."<sup>70</sup> Abahn makes this announcement early in the novel. The reader is at once aware that Abahn is much like many of Duras' other characters who find themselves isolated from society through no fault of their own merely through their particular situation which seems to be formed from a world of prejudice. Again Bessière comments:

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<sup>68</sup>"Destruction and Language," trans. by Helen Lane Cumberford, p. 109..

<sup>69</sup>Duras, Moderato Cantabile, notes par Jean Bessière (Les Editions de Minuit 1958; rpt. Paris: Bordas, 1972), p. 18.

<sup>70</sup>Marguerite Duras, Abahn, Sabana, David (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1970), p. 25.

Il vient à la fin de la longue ligne d'étrangers  
 auxquels Marguerite Duras donne le pouvoir de dire  
 notre vérité: meurtriers, domestiques, ouvriers,  
 bourgeois, tous gens déracinés et déplacés, qui  
 n'entretiennent aucun rapport spécifique avec  
 l'Histoire.<sup>71</sup>

In dealing with alienation the reader comes across a vehement statement by Marguerite Duras: that destruction is necessary because so much alienation exists in our present day society. She advocates a Utopian idea of starting over again from a tabula rasa by erasing all pre-formed ideas, knowledge and established historical facts, in other words, anything which might be employed to prescribe present or future actions from something which was established in the past.

The themes of love, alienation, waiting-boredom and freedom are powerfully depicted in Marguerite Duras' novels. They are enhanced by her style which is direct and simple, yet undeniably poetic at times.

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<sup>71</sup>Duras, Moderato Cantabile, notes par Jean Bessière (Les Editions de Minuit 1958; rpt. Paris: Bordas, 1972), p. 18.

## CHAPTER IV

### STYLE AND STRUCTURE

After having undergone several periods of change, the style of Marguerite Duras has evolved into a present-day style of sophistication. At first neither Marguerite Duras nor her style were very remarkable or outstanding. With experience her style of writing improved and matured from novel to novel. Through this maturation Duras shed her dependency upon other styles and other authors. She now writes with much self-assurance, and it is this self-confidence which allows her more freedom and experimentation in her writing. It is the change from her more conventional style to her non-conventional style of today which links Duras to the nouveau roman group of writers.

The style of Marguerite Duras began as a very close imitation of the American novel. Were it not for her present popularity and skill, the first few novels she wrote would be lost among many other first-attempts by authors who did not achieve recognition in the literary world. Duras transcended the so-called conventional novel: the novel with a story to tell, a plot, character description and psychological development.

Her fifth novel, Les Petits Cheveux de Tarquinia, was her turning point, a bridge between the conventional novel and the anti-novel, or nouveau roman.<sup>1</sup>

Marguerite Duras' first novel, Les Impudents (1943), shows how the author begins her career as a novelist. As Alfred Cismaru says of this novel: "Les Impudents is not really an American-type novel. Actually, it is difficult to label. It is a beginning, an obscure beginning entirely unnoticed by the wartime literary critics of occupied France."<sup>2</sup>

Les Impudents is logically divided into three parts by the author. In accord with the structure of a traditional novel, the first part is essentially an exposition, presenting the family and Jacques, the main catalyst, for most of the family's problems. He is the oldest of the three children, a forty year old playboy who manages to lose or, in some manner, gamble away every penny of his own money plus all the money he borrows, either from a bank or his family. The main character is Maud, twenty years old and the second of the three children. The third child is a younger step-brother, Henri. The atmosphere which prevails in this family is less than amiable.

Duras' omniscient presentation of each character gives the reader a very definite impression of each one of them. Jacques, who will be considered first, seems to be totally without scruples. He squanders his wife's dowry less than a year after they had married, and without any

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<sup>1</sup>Alfred Cismaru, Marguerite Duras (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1971), p. 58.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 20.

reservation, goes to anyone who will lend him money, especially his mother and sister, Maud. Of course, none of the money is ever paid back. He never even mentions paying Maud or his mother; instead, he demands money as though they owed it to him. Jacques is an irresponsible, lazy playboy. The only action in which Jacques is involved is that of frequenting local bars and banks. In fact, Marguerite Duras states that the most significant thing he ever did was to marry: "Il s'était marié avec Muriel il y avait à peine un an et ce mariage constituait l'événement le plus important de sa vie car il n'avait jamais rien fait."<sup>3</sup> However, his wife died in a car wreck after they had been married for almost a year. Thus, Jacques' chances for settling down and assuming responsibility are diminished, as he returns to the bars and gambling places in order to soothe his despair at her death.

Money is the driving force in Jacques' life. His wife turned over all her fortune to him to use as he pleased, which he does:

L'argent de sa femme avait fondu aussi rapidement que les gains réalisés par d'incertaines opérations.... Muriel, qui avait confié sa fortune à Jacques, avait toujours ignoré comment il l'employait. (p. 8)

When Muriel's money runs out, Jacques turns to his mother for financial assistance. Sometimes she complains, but she always gives him the money.

One such instance follows:

--Je sais que tu ne peux pas m'avancer beaucoup, mais fais ce que tu pourras. Un billet de cent francs me suffira. Il faut que je tienne.  
--Je croyais ta femme riche, ripostait sa mère. Tu trouves que je n'ai pas assez de charges?

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<sup>3</sup>Marguerite Duras, Les Impudents (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1943), pp. 3-4. (Further reference by page only).

Il ne répondait rien pour ne pas gêner ses affaires, car il devinait que ses difficultés iraient croissant. Et effectivement Mme Taneran avait lâché de moins en moins d'argent, au moment même où les besoins de son fils n'avaient cessé d'augmenter. (p. 9)

Jacques is totally consumed by his love for money. He becomes a different person when he has money in his possession, since it seems to give him a feeling of domination:

Il avait toujours besoin d'argent. Voilà de beaucoup ce qui importait le plus dans sa vie. Il se trouvait au centre d'un tourbillon, d'un vertige d'argent.

Lorsqu'il en avait, il devenait un autre homme. Il possédait à un point si aigu le sens de son inanité, qu'il le dépensait bêtement, le jetait par les fenêtres, s'illusionnait en quelques jours de quoi pouvoir tenir un mois. Il se renippait, invitait tous ses amis et, dans le magnifique dédain que lui permettait son opulence provisoire, il ne paraissait plus chez lui de toute une semaine, dans cette famille qui savait faire durer l'argent d'une façon si honteuse, si sordide, comme d'autres ménagent leurs forces, leur plaisir, comme un domestique asservi ménage ses maîtres. (pp. 7-8)

Jacques obviously likes to wield his influence and power over his family as well as his friends. His inability to manage money, or anything else, with any hint of responsibility combined with his desire for money causes Jacques to be the catalyst for many of the problems which arise later in the novel.

Maud appears to be the only one who shows any real love toward the members of her family. Yet this love is also accompanied by hate, especially toward Jacques. Maud loves her brother, but she sees the deplorable way he treats everyone in the family with his total insensitivity to anyone's needs except his own. The following passage is a good representation of the love-hate relationship between Maud and Jacques. It shows her disgust when he asks her for money, which she nevertheless

does not refuse to give him:

Tout à coup Maud ne trouva plus de raison à sa présence dans une chambre où elle n'entrait jamais d'ordinaire. Cette minute d'intimité avec son frère l'humiliait autant qu'une concession qu'elle eût faite à un ennemi.

Elle se leva. Il la rappela faiblement. Elle ne s'illusionna pas une seconde sur le ton charmeur, presque féminin, qu'il venait d'adopter.

Gêné, d'ailleurs, il ne savait comment s'expliquer...  
 --Je t'ai appelée, je n'ai plus le sou...  
 J'ai emprunté pour la faire mieux soigner. Et à  
 maman, tu comprends, je ne peux pas lui demander  
 ça...

Retrouvant son sang-froid, elle pesa le pour et le contre, rapidement, comme quelqu'un qui a l'habitude de telles affaires.

Déjà, le regard de Jacques devenait fixe et froid parce qu'elle était lente à répondre.

--Combien veux-tu?  
 Maude ne répondit pas. Elle prit son son sac, compta le peu d'argent qu'elle avait et affirma:  
 --Tu auras le reste demain. (pp. 14-16)

It is easy to see the disgust Maud feels for Jacques, yet at the same moment she softens and lends him all the money she has. She realizes Jacques' weaknesses and his selfishness and is torn between hatred for his conniving ways and love for him as her brother.

Henri is scarcely more than a shadow in this first part. He appears to be very quiet and aloof without showing much interest, if any at all, in what the family does. His father, Monsieur Taneran, is also very much in the background.

Monsieur Taneran is the only character who is actually afraid of anyone in the novel: he is afraid of Jacques and is easily intimidated by him. He has had to start back to work in order to support his new

family, and it is this factor which seems to take him away from the house and Jacques' overbearing presence:

Taneran revenait du ministère de l'Instruction publique où, a soixante ans passés, il s'était vu obligé de reprendre du service afin de subvenir aux lourdes charges qui; depuis son mariage, avaient complètement absorbé sa fortune personnelle.

A vrai dire, son entourage s'accommodait facilement de son sacrifice. Il faut ajouter que depuis qu'il travaillait, Taneran échappait un peu à la tyrannie des siens et s'en trouvait bien aise. Il ne s'était jamais accoutumé en effet aux contraintes inévitables qu'implique la vie de famille, et il vivait d'autre part dans la crainte constante de son beau-fils, Jacques Grand...

Il avait eu un fils, Henri, et, s'il lui vouait une secrète et grande tendresse, il avait été très vite obligé de se faire à l'idée qu'il n'était nullement payé de retour.

Ainsi Taneran vivait en apparence dans une grande solitude. (pp. 5-6)

Through this brief explanation of Taneran's situation, Duras elicits a sympathetic response from the reader who suddenly becomes aware that this seemingly quiet man is practically denied any importance or love within his own household. One, therefore, begins to reason that perhaps Monsieur Taneran has given up trying to communicate with a family in which everyone appears to be self-centered.

Madame Grand-Taneran possesses a great ability to manipulate people. If Jacques' main flaw or vice is the love of money, then the main vice of Madame Taneran is the love of power and the feeling of superiority. She always wants to be in command of the situation. The love-hate relationship once again becomes apparent between Jacques and his mother:



"Elle le détestait parce que l'amour a des basfonds pleins de haine."

(p. 9)

A few pages later the reader gains even a better insight to the true nature of Madame Grand-Taneran. The love-hate relationship which has appeared previously comes again into view. It is evident that this type of relationship exists for each member of the family. The following passage shows how the novelist describes as an omniscient narrator:

Mère de ce vieux fils, de cette fille ingrate et certainement méchante, de ce jeune garçon pervers, femme de cet homme qui ne s'en allait pas, à cause, croyait-elle, de la bonne table et parce qu'il avait réussi à se construire sur ce sol mouvant une citadelle d'indifférence, elle se devait à tous. Pendant un instant elle souhaita d'être une vieille femme paisible dont la tâche serait terminée et à qui il serait facile de mourir ou de vivre comme elle l'entendrait. Elle rêvait d'une vie tranquille depuis quelque temps. Pourquoi gardait-elle ses enfants auprès d'elle, son fils aîné surtout? Pourquoi le maintenait-elle étroitement en tutelle? Pourquoi l'habituaient-elle à ne pouvoir se passer de sa présence, ce qui prolongeait anormalement sa maternité? Oui, elle aurait dû se détacher de Jacques au plus vite. Parfois, cette pensée la traversait comme un éclair, et elle en était effrayée ...Il fallait se méfier des enfants qui vous pillent corps et biens...La fin de de cette servitude, maintenant, il semblait qu'elle ne pût même pas l'envisager...(pp. 21-22)

The words used to describe the children: vieux fils, fille ingrate et méchante, jeune garçon pervers reveal the attitude of Madame Taneran toward her children. The author uses words which are not loving and warm, in order to show resentment and disapproval. This disapproval also applies to her husband. In the description here is a man who has successfully built une citadelle d'indifférence. The choice of words leaves the impression that there is a blight on this family's relationship to each other.

In the middle of the quotation are three rhetorical questions each beginning with pourquoi. The repetition of pourquoi strengthens the idea of dissatisfaction with the situation.

Duras continues to reveal the mother's resentment in the phrase: qui vous pillent corps et bien; and ends with a strong final declaration of servitude.

The major portion of the novel is contained within the second part which shows the author's predilection at this point in her career for a style and structure which develop the traditional character, psychology and events or the plot.

At the beginning of the second section the family moves to their country estate, Uderan, which has been abandoned for several years and has started to deteriorate. Duras begins this section with a background explanation of the new situation. Her narrative style is one of long descriptive sentences which sometimes ramble. However, the vocabulary remains simple and unaffected. It is this common quality of the language which lends a conversational tone to the narrative passage. Note in particular the constant repetition of the verbs avoir and être. This repetition gives a monotony to the choice of words and has a dulling effect of the author's style. The following passage is typical of this style:

Les Pecresce étaient les voisins les plus proches d'Uderan. Leurs arrière-grands-parents avaient été métayers du domaine et avaient racheté la métairie dont l'un des propriétaires s'était trouvé dans l'obligation de se séparer. Depuis lors, cette propriété s'était régulièrement agrandie des aliénations que les premiers possédants effectuaient une à une, afin de faire face à l'entretien de la grande demeure de la seconde métairie.

L'ancienne métairie était flanquée maintenant d'une belle habitation de maître et d'un grand jardin. Les Pecresse, devenus de riches paysans, n'avaient pas borné leurs ambitions.

Malheureusement ils n'avaient eu qu'un fils et c'était autour de ce personnage que s'échafaudaient leurs ambitions.

On en avait parlé un moment donné comme du meilleur parti de la région, tant par l'importance du bien qui reviendrait, que par sa prestance qui était belle. Ajoutons qu'il avait fait quelques études, ce qui lui conférait au village une certaine dignité intellectuelle. (pp. 34-35)

Madame Grand-Taneran and Madame Pecresse discuss the feasibility and monetary practicality of a marriage between Maud and Jean, the only son of the Pecresses. Cismaru quite aptly summarizes the situation in the following manner:

...the Tanerans' hosts are rich peasants, and the Uderan property, ruined as it is, has no value except to an unwitting buyer. Madame Pecresse is a shrewd business woman: she will buy the Uderan for 50,000 francs, but her son will marry Maud in the bargain, without the necessity of a dowry, and the Pecresses will thus become tied with the aristocratic landlords that the Tanerans are. Maud, aware of the machinations of the two women, would resist, even if she were in love with Jean, for the fun of opposing her mother whom she despises more and more.<sup>4</sup>

Maud, however, does not feel even the slightest attraction to Jean who appears to her to be very dull and uninteresting. Jean does not express any concern one way or the other about his own future or his future bride. He abides by his mother's decision without question. In the following description Duras clearly presents Jean's weakness of character through such expressions as: taciturne, timide, l'on pouvait mener facilement and si la mère n'avait fait bonne garde. Other unpleasant qualities are suggested by the use of: un nigaud, simple tâcheron, avare and radoteur.

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<sup>4</sup>Cismaru, Marguerite Duras, p. 22.

Cependant, Jean atteignit ses vingt-cinq ans sans s'être décidé au mariage. On ne le voyait nulle part et sa mère veillait à ce qu'il ne fréquentât. Il devint taciturne et timide. Les filles se découragèrent. (p. 35)

Jean passa pour un nigaud que l'on pouvait mener facilement, une bonne affaire en somme, pour une fille habile, si la mère n'avait fait bonne garde. Il ne se plaisait pas chez lui et travaillait aux champs aussi durement qu'un simple tâcheron. Il aurait pu avoir des ouvriers. Mais les Pecresse, s'ils se dépensaient à l'ouvrage, tenaient à leurs sous. On dit bientôt de Jean qu'il était avare et un peu radoteur aussi. (p. 37)

As Maud's love for Georges grows so, also, does her hatred for her brother, Jacques. Maud knows her brother well and when the opportunity arises for her to use incriminating evidence against him, she does not ignore it. Maud finds the body of the one of Jacques' girlfriends in a river. Everyone believes it is suicide, everyone that is, except Maud, who believes the girl had been pushed into the river. However, Maud uses this incident to her own benefit by promising not to tell that she suspects this to be murder, in exchange for which Jacques will minimize his power and the influence which he seems to wield over Georges. Thus Maud will be able to see him more often. The author reveals his fear and suspicions in the following:

Sans se l'avouer, il craignait sa soeur parce qu'il la soupçonnait d'être son ennemie la plus irréductible. Il n'était pas sûr qu'elle ne dévoilerait rien à leur mère s'il osait lui reprocher d'accaparer Georges Durieux, d'autant plus qu'il ne se sentait pas tout à fait certain qu'elle fût sa maîtresse. (p. 112)

Using very few words such as craignait, soupçonnait, son ennemie la plus irréductible Duras captures the immense feeling of the fear which Jacques now experiences toward Maud.

The author possesses a great ability for realistically presenting emotions. In her choice of words and the pauses which are scattered throughout the dialogue, Duras writes a conversation representative of real life situations. The following dialogue is a good example of how Duras mixes words with pauses in order to reveal the reasoning process of Madame

Taneran:

--Ça tombe bien! Je m'en doutais, que tu en avais assez. Moi je le trouvais trop vieux pour toi. Je voulais te dire, ici on ignore que tu es demeurée chez Durieux...Tu n'es pas sortie, tu as été prudente, c'est très bien...Les Pecresse qui savaient la chose se sont tus. Tu apprendras à les connaître, ce sont de braves gens...Alors, je te disais que... Nous partons te chercher, tu viens d'Auch, de chez ta tante, la soeur de Taneran, tu entends? chez laquelle tu auras passé quinze jours...Après, et bien après, il te faudra accepter ce qu'on te proposera, car tu es bien compromise... (p. 205)

The author captures the essence of Madame Taneran's surprise as she tries to explain that she made the arrangement for the marriage and for the Pecresses to buy Uderan for 50,000 francs at the urging of Jacques in order to pay off his debts:

--...Alors, tu attends un enfant? Ce mariage avec Jean Pecresse, tu penses bien que ce n'est pas moi...C'est Jacques. Je sais bien qu'il l'a fait pour notre bien à tous, remarque, mais tout de même ça m'a été dur d'accepter...Que veux-tu! Je te savais chez Durieux, mais il n'a jamais voulu que j'y aille, de crainte d'éveiller des soupçons...

Elle souffla un instant avant d'ajouter:

--Il est plus prudent que moi, c'est entendu. Maintenant qu'allons-nous devenir? J'ai touché et même entamé largement les cinquante mille francs. Oui, il a fallu rembourser les meubles! Et puis Jacques avait des dettes. ... (pp. 206-207)

Duras handles the words in such a manner as to show an emotional change within Madame Taneran. The preceding quotation develops the view of the mother as a shrewd business woman. Suddenly Duras changes the tone of the dialogue and skillfully manipulates the change within Madame Taneran from a rational and calculating mother to that of a mother who deserves pity as a victim of circumstance. The author uses expressions such as: ce n'est pas moi...C'est Jacques; Que veux-tu!; plus prudent que moi and Jacques avait des dettes for the purpose of showing how she looks for sympathy from Maud.

The third and final section of the novel brings together all the events and ties them into the climatic episode of Maud's maturation in the culmination of her hatred for her family and especially for Jacques. Her hatred is ignited when she realizes that the 50,000 francs which they paid for Uderan will go to pay off Jacques' debts. Cismaru sums it up in this manner:

It is then that her own hatred takes shape, that it ceases to be dormant or patient and it seizes upon the occasion in order to commit that one act which will make her position unequivocally clear to others and to herself: her own hostility springs forth, unashamed and liberating the moment she finds herself in the ante-room of a police station, facing the sergeant on duty and telling him that Jacques is back in Paris, hiding from creditors and police.<sup>5</sup>

It is easy to trace the culmination of this hatred. Duras' language in the following quotation builds from an eagerness to turn Jacques over to the police to express emotions of hostility and hatred. The eagerness comes through in the phrase combien facile. Hostility is

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 23.

apparent in these expressions: un visage défiguré par la peur and la honte en petites tâches blêmes. The point at which Maud's hatred is obvious is in her picturing Jacques' death: au moment de sa mort; la très belle laideur.

Maud, songeait: 'La police?' Par un effort d'imagination, oh! combien facile! elle voyait Jacques entre deux agents, avec un visage qui rappelait celui qu'il avait montré un certain soir à l'auberge.

Un visage défiguré par la peur et sur lequel s'inscrirait peut-être encore la honte en petites tâches blêmes, autour des lèvres et des yeux. Celui dont on pouvait penser qu'il serait celui de Jacques au moment de sa mort. Un visage faiblement balancé au dessus de la vraie tristesse et qui pour la première fois rappellerait celui de son enfance, enfin surgie et éblouie par la mort toute proche. De ce visage volerait en éclats toute la vanité si vivante, la sempiternelle complainte du plaisir, la très belle laideur.

Duras continues to describe strong feelings. Through the use of the words désir de meurtre: comme on désire tuer une bête she expands the proportion of Maud's hatred to produce thoughts murderous to the extent of comparing Jacques to an animal.

A vrai dire, Maud ne savait pas ce qu'elle faisait là. Elle devinait seulement qu'elle irritait Jacques, de toute sa faiblesse, de toute sa détresse simplement présentées, jusqu'au désir de meurtre: comme on désire tuer une bête inoffensive après l'avoir blessée sans y penser, sans haine. (p. 229)

In the author's description of Maud's emotions this overwhelming hatred seems to the reader to spread like a disease to include Madame Taneran in the expression sa mère à elle, était morte. In the following few sentences Duras quickly ends Maud's feelings for her mother:

Elle n'y pouvait rien. Sa mère à elle, était morte, la nuit dernière. Elle la voyait, ensevelie dans le souvenir de l'absent, seule avec le vieux Taneran... (p. 236)

The manner in which Duras ends this novel will become her trademark throughout the rest of her novels, that of leaving much of the ending for the reader to imagine. Although the reader may question the intent and purpose of the characters and their behavior, Duras successfully completes pictures of true-to-life people and is particularly adept in the descriptions of the problems, personality and behavior of the women characters.

Duras' poetic style appears in the novel in the descriptions of the landscape. There are a few passages which warrant mentioning for their beauty. The first passage is to be found on the first page of the novel:

Maud ouvrit la fenêtre et la rumeur de la vallée emplait la chambre. Le soleil se couchait. Il laissait à sa suite de gros nuages qui s'aggloméraient et se précipitaient comme aveugles vers un gouffre de clarté. Le 'septième' où ils logeaient semblait être à une hauteur vertigineuse. On y découvrait un paysage sonore et profond qui se prolongeait jusqu'à la traînée sombre des collines de Sevres. Entre cet horizon lointain, bourré d'usines, de faubourgs et l'appartement ouvert en plein ciel, l'air chargé d'une fine brume ressemblait, glauque et dense, à de l'eau. (p. 1)

The combination of q words such as de gros nuages qui s'aggloméraient et précipitaient comme aveugles vers un gouffre de clarté and l'air chargé d'une fine brume se ressemblait, glauque et dense, à de l'eau has a definite visual appeal in the images of cloud, air and water.

Another passage showing Duras' fine perception of nature is toward the end of the novel. As the words verdissaient, blanche lumière, l'ombre fluide blend together they paint the countryside for the reader. There is also a delicate fluidity of sound produced by the 's' and 'ch' sounds in the words: touchait, moissons, moissonneurs, seules, verdissaient,



blanche, celle, fraîches, surgir, espace, passait and vitesse. To add to this description are verbs which give energy: touchait, surgir, troublait, passait and eût fui. The combination of all these elements creates outstanding images:

Juin touchait à sa fin. Les moissons attendaient les moissonneurs. Seules, les vignes, étalées sur les flancs des coteaux, verdissaient encore sous la blanche lumière, préférant pour mûrir celle plus tendre et plus rêveuse de l'automne. Les hommes dans leurs fraîches maisons attendaient, pour surgir de nouveau au grand jour, que s'accomplît l'été.

Rien ne troublait la torpeur de l'espace et de la campagne, sinon, de temps en temps, l'ombre fluide d'un nuage qui passait bas et à une étrange vitesse, comme s'il eût fui le calme inquiétant du ciel. (p. 193)

This ability to phrase a description poetically is one of Duras' stronger points. In the succeeding novels the reader can expect more of the poetic element. It becomes more and more graceful as her skill improves with each successive novel. Then, as the ultimate achievement of being able to use a particular element within an author's works, Duras' last novel, L'Amour, could possibly be considered a long prose poem.

Les Impudents, as a traditional novel, presents the traditional structure of exposition, conflict, and dénouement. At times, the author seems a bit sluggish in her exposition as though she were encumbered by the careful completeness of involved descriptions; yet, at other times, Duras employs an economy of words, usually found in the dialogue, as though she, too, were tiring of the slowness of the story and were trying to speed things up a little. This succinct style of presenting dialogue will, also, become a trademark of Duras' writing style.

Marguerite Duras, having first drawn inspiration from the American novel, continues under its influence in her third novel, Un Barrage Contre le Pacifique. Armand Hoog summarizes the type of American novel translated in Europe at that time as:

...that on balance agreeable combination of adventure, brutality, drunkenness, gaiety, geographical excursions, earthiness, automobile outings, sexual aggressiveness and psychological 'behaviorism.'

...That is even more evident in the volume which first made Madame Duras known to the great public, Un Barrage Contre le Pacifique (1950).<sup>6</sup>

The structure of Un Barrage Contre le Pacifique is quite similar to that of her first novel, Les Impudents. The author divides the book into two parts: the first describes the squalid family life of Suzanne, Joseph and their mother in a native hut outside Ram; the second part presents their adventure in the city where they go to sell the diamond ring which Monsieur Jo gave to Suzanne. Once again the author follows the conventions of exposition, conflict and dénouement in her novel, only this time she writes with more authority and with much improvement and maturity in her style.

Duras' realism is the most poignant element in this third novel. It strongly resembles that found in the writing of Steinbeck and Hemingway. Duras sets Un Barrage Contre le Pacifique in her native Indochina. This fact perhaps explains the intensity of emotion in the novel, but whatever the reason, the descriptions are some of her very best. It is certain that, although her style remains strong and she gains more world

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<sup>6</sup>Armand Hoog, "The Itinerary of Marguerite Duras," Yale French Studies, no. 23-24 (1959), pp. 68-69.

wide literary recognition from her later works, the realism and the force of the emotions in her descriptions here are never better or more powerful:

Il y avait beaucoup d'enfants dans la plaine. C'était une sorte de calamité. Il y en avait partout, perchés sur les arbres, sur les barrières, sur les buffles, qui rêvaient, ou accroupis au bord des marigots, qui pêchaient, ou vautrés dans la vase à la recherche des crabes nains des rizières. Dans la rivière aussi ou en trouvait qui pataugeaient, jouaient ou nageaient. Et à la pointe des jonques qui descendaient vers la grande mer, vers les îles vertes du Pacifique, il y en avait aussi qui souriaient, ravis, enfermés jusqu'au cou dans de grands paniers d'osiers, qui souriaient mieux que personne n'a jamais souri au monde. Et toujours avant d'atteindre les villages du flanc de la montagne, avant même d'avoir aperçu les premiers manguiers, on rencontrait les premiers enfants des villages de forêt, tout enduits de safran contre les moustiques et suivis de leurs bandes de chiens errants. Car partout où ils allaient, les enfants traînaient derrière eux leurs compagnons, les chiens errants, efflanqués, galeux, voleurs de basses-dours, que les malais chassaient à coups de pierre et qu'ils ne consentaient à manger qu'en période de grande famine, tant ils étaient maigres et coriaces. Seuls les enfants s'accommodaient de leur compagnie. Et eux n'auraient sans doute eu qu'à mourir s'ils n'avaient pas suivi ces enfants, dont les excréments étaient leur principale nourriture.<sup>7</sup>

The description continues to magnify the filth, the starvation of people in a land too poor to support them, and the squalid conditions under which these people, natives and poor whites, live. Death is commonplace, or perhaps, a blessing in disguise to relieve some of the people of this miserable existence, especially the children:

Il en était de ces enfants comme des pluies, des fruits, des inondations. Ils arrivaient chaque année, par marée régulière, ou si l'on veut, par récolte ou par floraison.

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<sup>7</sup> Marguerite Duras, Un Barrage Contre le Pacifique (Paris: Gallimard, 1958), pp. 98-99. (Further reference by page only).

Chaque femme de la plaine, tant qu'elle était assez jeune pour être désirée par son mari, avait son enfant chaque année. A la saison sèche, lorsque les travaux des rizières se relâchaient, les hommes pensaient davantage à l'amour et les femmes étaient prises naturellement à cette saison-là. Et dans les mois suivants les ventres grossissaient. Ainsi, outre ceux qui en étaient déjà sortis il y avait ceux qui étaient encore dans les ventres des femmes. Cela continuait régulièrement, à un rythme végétal, comme si d'une longue et profonde respiration, chaque année, le ventre de chaque femme se gonflait d'un enfant, le rejetait, pour ensuite reprendre souffle d'un autre. (p.99)

Duras reinforces the cycle and repetition of the birth of children through the repetition of the words enfant, femme, ventre and étaient combined with words listed in a series like des pluies, des fruits, des inondations. These elements produce a circular effect.

In the following description the author paints a very realistic and depressing picture of a peasant's life. She permeates the description with death, disease and unhappiness. In order to capture these feelings Duras repeats forms of the word death: mourait, morts; and uses other words which are frequently linked with death: sépulture, choléra, mangue verte and enfants affamés. She brings about a sadness by using expressions such as pleurait, se noyaient dans le rac and mouraient d'insolation ou devenaient aveugles.

...Car il en mourait tellement que la boue de la plaine contenait bien plus d'enfants morts qu'il n'y en avait eu qui avaient eu le temps de chanter sur les buffles. Il en mourait tellement qu'on ne les pleurait plus et que depuis longtemps déjà on ne leur faisait pas de sépulture. Simplement, en rentrant du travail, le père creusait un petit trou devant le case et il y couchait son enfant mort. Les enfants retournaient simplement à la terre comme les mangues sauvages des hauteurs, comme les petits singes de l'embouchure du rac. Ils mouraient surtout du choléra que donne la mangue verte, mais personne dans la plaine ne semblait

le savoir. Chaque année, à la saison des mangues, on en voyait, perchés sur les branches, qu sous l'arbre, qui attendaient, affamés, et les jours qui suivaient, il en mourait en plus grand nombre. Et d'autres, l'année d'après, prenaient la place de sur ces mêmes manguiers et ils mouraient à leur tour car l'impatience des enfants affamés devant les mangues vertes est éternelle. D'autres se noyaient dans le rac. D'autres encore mouraient d'insolation ou devenaient aveugles. D'autres s'emplissaient des mêmes vers que les chiens errants et mouraient étoufflés. (pp. 99-101)

Although such stark realism is sometimes shocking to read, Marguerite Duras does not use it for shock effect. It is merely a side of life to which she is well accustomed, and to lighten or leave out such description would not render the true picture of such a life in this deprived section of Indochina. Therefore, her depictions of the condition of life and the seemingly callous attitude of the people toward death cause the reader to marvel at her adeptness in wording her passages to capture just the right mood and then to transfer this mood to the reader, thereby setting the story in the proper atmosphere necessary for understanding the reasons why the characters do what they do. As in her first novel, the author maintains the third-person point of view throughout the novel in order to establish the correct settings and psychological patterns for her characters so that they may be understood in the perspective which she intended.

The mother of Suzanne and Joseph tries for a while to help some of the children. However, she soon becomes discouraged by their dying and feels that her efforts are no longer accomplishing anything. The following is a description of what happened to the last child she took into the family:

La petite fille vécut trois mois. Puis un matin en effet, tandis qu'elle la déshabillait pour la laver, la mère s'aperçut que ses petits pieds étaient enflés. La mère ne la lava pas ce jour-là, elle la recoucha et l'embrassa longuement: 'C'est la fin, dit-elle, demain ça sera ses jambes et après ça sera son coeur. Elle la veilla pendant les deux jours et la nuit qui précédèrent sa mort. L'enfant étouffait et rendait des vers qu'elle lui retenait de la gorge en les enroulant autour de son doigt. Joseph l'avait enterrée dans une clairière de la montagne, dans son petit lit. Suzanne avait refusé de la voir. Q'avait été bien pire que pour le cheval, pire que tout, pire que les barrages, que M. Jo, que la déveine. La mère qui pourtant s'y attendait, avait pleuré des jours et des jours, elle s'était mise en colère, elle avait juré de ne plus s'occuper d'enfants, 'ni de près ni de loin'. (pp. 102-103)

The realism with which Duras paints the people and land and the piteous conditions under which the people are forced to exist, gives a clear understanding of the characters in this novel.

Duras begins her exposition with the background of the mother and family. The appeal of an exotic life in the Colonies is too much for the mother and her husband, both school teachers, to resist:

Fille de paysans, elle avait été si bonne écolière que ses parents l'avaient laissée aller jusqu'au brevet supérieur. Après quoi, elle avait été pendant deux ans institutrice dans un village du Nord de la France. On était alors en 1899. Certains dimanches, à la mairie, elle rêvait devant les affiches de propagande coloniale. 'Engagez-vous dans l'armée coloniale', 'Jeunes, allez aux colonies, la fortune vous y attend.' A l'ombre d'un bananier croulant sous les fruits, le couple colonial, tout de blanc vêtu, se balançait dans des rocking-chairs tandis que des indigènes s'affairaient en souriant autour d'eux. Elle se maria avec un instituteur qui, comme elle, se mourait d'impatience dans un village du Nord, victime comme elle des ténébreuses lectures de Pierre Loti. Peu après leur mariage, ils firent ensemble leur demande d'admission dans les cadres de l'enseignement colonial et ils furent nommés dans cette grande colonie que l'on appelait alors l'Indochine française. (p. 18)

After the death of the father things become very difficult for the entire family. The mother begins giving piano lessons and works as a pianist for the Eden Cinema but there is still never enough money for her and the two small children. She saves up money to buy a concession of land from the government. She could pay off the mortgage with the money to be made from the harvest; however, the government retained the right to take the land back if it was not properly cultivated according to government inspection. What the mother did not know was that during the rainy season the land flooded. At first this did not trouble her too much because she had visions of building a retaining wall to protect the crops from the invading waters. She even convinced the natives of the region that their crops would also be spared if they would help her build a large enough retaining wall. So they all joined hands in a magnificent show of confidence in the idea of the retaining wall. They were not aware that the crabs, would proceed to eat on it until there was little left to call a wall; thus, the rains washed away the crops. With much strength and determination the mother came up with another plan for a dike that would be stronger than the wall barrier, but the crabs ate holes in it so that it had the appearance of a sieve. The result is despair and utter hopelessness on the part of the mother and the natives. This seemed to be the beginning of the break in the strength and hope of the now aging woman. She even went so far as to seek help from the cadastral government agents in order to build some kind of protection from the sea. They merely sneered at her and continued threatening that they could still take away her land.

The two children, Joseph and his younger sister, Suzanne, reflect the wilderness in which they live. They recognize their mother's power, though, as absolute; they are, therefore, not at liberty to do as they please as long as she lives. Throughout this jungle type of existence they all entertain in some fashion a hope of escaping someday. Joseph finds a small amount of freedom in his hunting. Sometimes he is gone for days, away from this poverty and filth. No one complains of his expeditions, no matter how long they might take, because he keeps meat on the table with the animals he shoots. Suzanne sits for hours by the side of the road in hopes that someone will stop, perhaps to ask directions, and take her with him. Their old phonograph is the only thing which sustains these hopes. They have a few records and play them over and over incessantly. Their favorite record is "Ramona" which has come to symbolize escape for them. They also have one old movie magazine that they can read to take their thoughts away from their meager existence. Both Joseph and Suzanne are caught up "in the messy web of Ma's barrages (against the sea, against the cadastral government, against Mr. Jo, indeed against the universe)." <sup>8</sup>

On the second page of the novel the author gives a forewarning of an event to come around which the novel revolves. Duras, still in her conscientious effort to make sure that the reader is fully aware of what is happening, gives the following statement after Joseph, Suzanne and their mother decide to go into town: "Et c'est le lendemain à Ram qu'ils

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<sup>8</sup> Cismaru, Marguerite Duras, p. 37.



devaient faire la rencontre qui allait changer leur vie à tous." (p. 10)

This event turns out to be meeting Monsieur Jo, the son of a wealthy plantation owner. Suzanne, then, becomes the object of his desire. Her mother has hopes that they will marry; then they will all be saved from their destitute life by Monsieur Jo's money. In the following explanation of Monsieur Jo, the omniscient author describes him as an insipid young man:

M. Jo était l'enfant dérisoirement malhabile de cet homme inventif. Sa très grosse fortune n'avait qu'un héritier, n'avait pas une ombre d'imagination. C'était là le point faible de cette vie, le seul définitif: on ne spéculait pas sur son enfant. On croit couvrir un petit aigle et il vous sort de dessous le bureau un serin. Et qu'y faire? Quel recours a-t-on contre ce sort injuste? (p. 54)

Later Monsieur Jo's character is compared to a blemished diamond which he gives Suzanne. As Suzanne's mother visits several jewelers and finds that the diamond is not so high quality as Monsieur Jo had told her, she begins to see the comparison between the blemishes of the diamond and those of Monsieur Jo. The author penetrates the thought processes and tells what the mother thinks as she visits the jewelers. The expressions toujours enveloppée du même papier, un défaut grave and un crapaud can apply both to the diamond and to Monsieur Jo.

Munie de la bague enfermée dans son sac et toujours enveloppée du même papier de soie dans lequel l'avait mise M. Jo, la mère commença à parcourir la ville pour essayer de la vendre le prix que M. Jo avait dit qu'elle valait: vingt mille francs. Mais le premier diamantaire auquel elle le proposa en offrit dix mille francs. Il lui annonça que le diamant avait un défaut grave, un 'crapaud', qui en diminuait considérablement la valeur....Mais après qu'un quatrième diamantaire lui eut encore parlé de crapaud, elle ne manqua pas de commencer à trouver une relation obscure entre ce défaut au nom si évocateur et la personne de M. Jo. Après

trois jours de démarches, elle commença à la formuler, d'une façon assez vague il est vrai. (p. 152)

Suzanne is depicted as a young girl who is extremely flattered that someone so rich as Monsieur Jo should take such an interest in her. She has not had a boyfriend before. She is only interested in Monsieur Jo because of his background, his gifts and his fancy car. Otherwise, she seems very unaffected by his presence. Suzanne is very dependent upon her mother. She follows orders which her mother gives her, but she depends upon Joseph to give her support and advice. Early in the novel the reader discovers her close attachment to Joseph:

Suzanne attendait que Joseph vienne la chercher pour aller se baigner. Elle ne voulait pas sortir la première de dessous le bungalow. Il valait mieux l'attendre. Quand elle était avec lui, la mère criait moins. (p. 15)

Upon the advice of Joseph, Suzanne tells Monsieur Jo that he can no longer come to see her. He knows that Joseph hates him, and he therefore, is afraid of Joseph, so he does as he is told.

Joseph is the one to whom Suzanne and her mother both cling. He is a very colorful character, very much a part of the wild and unsophisticated country where he lives. His emotions are the most intense throughout the novel. He loves and hates with such passion that the reader can almost feel the tension going on within him. The following excerpt is one such example of his love intermingling with his hate. Duras communicates his love and compassion for his sister by trying to give her helpful advice with the command: Il faudra que tu te souviennes de ces histoires. At the same time she demonstrates his great love for his mother in the phrase: il n'aimerait jamais aucune femme comme il l'aimait. The author

then juxtaposes his love with his resentment of her power over his life by saying: mais vivre avec elle, non, ce n'était pas possible.

C'était tellement intenable de se rappeler ces choses sur elle, qu'il était préférable pour lui et pour Suzanne, que la mère meure: 'Il faudra que tu te souviennes de ces histoires, de l'Eden, et que toujours tu fasses le contraire de ce qu'elle a fait.' Pourtant, il l'aimait. Il croyait même, disait-il, qu'il n'aimerait jamais aucune femme comme il l'aimait. Qu'aucune femme ne la lui ferait oublier. 'Mais vivre avec elle, non, ce n'était pas possible.' (p. 245)

Through Joseph's actions and advice Suzanne glean information and lessons as to how she must act in order to survive in this world. They are not the most admirable qualities one could set before a young girl just learning to deal with worldly problems, but they suffice as the only example Suzanne has to follow.

As Joseph relates the story of the mistress he has found to support him, the reader gains great insight into Joseph's nature and how it is changing. This is an example of how Duras' style is slowly evolving for she has put more emphasis upon the dialogue than she did in her first novel. The revelation of Joseph's change comes from his conversation with Suzanne rather than as a descriptive passage told from the author's third-person point of view:

--'C'est là, tout seul, que je me suis dit que j'étais en train de changer pour toujours. J'ai regardé mes mains et je ne les ai pas reconnues; il m'était poussé d'autres mains, d'autres bras que ceux que j'avais jusque-là. Vraiment je ne me reconnaissais plus. Il me semblait que j'étais devenu intelligent en une nuit, que je comprenais enfin toutes les choses importantes que j'avais remarquées jusque-là sans les comprendre vraiment. Bien sûr, je n'avais jamais connu de gens comme eux, comme elle et aussi comme lui. Mais ce n'était pas tout à fait à cause d'eux. Je savais bien que s'ils étaient aussi libres, aussi pleins de

liberté, c'était surtout parce qu'ils avaient beaucoup d'argent. Non, ce n'était pas à cause d'eux. Je crois que c'était d'abord parce que j'avais envie d'une femme comme jamais encore je n'avais pas à cause d'eux. Je crois que c'était d'abord parce que j'avais envie d'une femme, et ensuite, parce que j'avais bu et que j'étais saoul. Toute cette intelligence que je me sentais, je devais l'avoir en moi depuis longtemps. Et c'est ce mélange de désir et d'alcool qui la fait sortir...Et c'est l'alcool qui m'a illuminé de cette évidence: j'étais un homme cruel, un homme qui quitterait sa mère un jour et qui s'en irait apprendre à vivre, loin d'elle, dans une ville. Mais j'en avais eu honte jusque-là tandis que maintenant je comprenais que c'était cet homme cruel qui avait raison. (pp. 237-238)

Duras here gives the exposition more through dialogue than third person narrative, and she presents the conflicts for the most part, within these dialogues. The main obstacles of conflict are: the crabs who keep eating away any type of barricade against the sea, the cadastral agents who refuse to give any assistance to the people living on the land concessions, and the inability to sell the diamond for enough money to pay off the mortgage.

At the end, even when the problem of the unrelenting cadastral agents seems obvious to all except the mother, she restates the necessity to do something about the land. The author emphasizes the endurance of the mother by letting her explain:

—Tu le sais, tu le sais que j'ai travaillé pendant quinze ans pour pouvoir acheter cette concession. Pendant quinze ans je n'ai pensé qu'à ça. J'aurais pu me remarier, mais je ne l'ai pas fait pour ne pas me distraire de la concession que je leur donnerais. Et tu vois où j'en suis maintenant? Je voudrais que tu le voies bien et que tu ne l'oublies jamais. (p. 301)

The third and final conflict of the plot is the hoped-for selling of the diamond which Monsieur Jo gave Suzanne. The diamond

brings the most hope with it because through the selling the family might be saved from their miserable existence.

--J'aurais dû m'en méfier dès le premier jour de ce crapaud, dès que je l'ai vu pour la première fois à la cantine de Ram.

Ce diamant à l'éclat trompeur, c'était bien le diamant de l'homme dont les millions pouvaient faire illusion, qu'on aurait pu prendre pour des millions qui se donneraient sans réticence. Et son dégoût était aussi fort que si M. Jo les avait volés. (p. 153)

In this renunciation of both the diamond and Monsieur Jo the mother vents her disappointment and frustration at not begin able to realize all the worth which either of them had led her to believe was attainable. The presence of the ring and M. Jo had buoyed her hopes beyond reality.

Even among the descriptions of such a wretched environment Duras writes poetic passages. One such example is found in the following:

Le soir tombait vraiment très vite dans ce pays.  
Dès que le soleil disparaissait derrière la montagne, les paysans allumaient des feux de bois vert pour se protéger des fauves et les enfants rentraient dans les cases en piaillant. Dès qu'ils étaient en âge de comprendre, on apprenait aux enfants à se méfier de la terrible nuit paludéenne et des fauves. (p. 26)

Although the scene the author is painting is not romantic nor breath-takingly beautiful, the reader still is impressed with the choice of words which like bois vert, terrible nuit paludéenne lend an air of poetry to this rude, jungle-like style of living. This is reinforced by the great variation of action expressed in the verbs: tombait, disparaissait, allumaient, se protéger, and rentraient. The words blend together nicely and there is a pleasing consonance in the repetition of the "p"

sound. Duras' flair for lyrical prose increases as she writes, and it becomes more apparent in later works.

Marguerite Duras' fifth book is often acclaimed as the novel which bridges the transition between the first four traditional novels and the remainder of her writing which can be considered part of the movement of the nouveau roman. Since no author makes a sudden and complete transformation from one style of writing to another, the conventional style of writing and the beginnings of Duras' new tendencies toward the nouveau roman are quite apparent in this particular novel, Les Petits Chevaux de Tarquinia (1953).

Armand Hoog remarks about Duras' changing style in Les Petits Chevaux de Tarquinia:

But after 1953 the manner and tone of her work reach a new level...The fictional material is here reduced to nothing more than an unfolding and transition, a certain breadth of pure time, without plot, without action as traditionally understood, almost without names (at least without family names).<sup>9</sup>

Pierre de Boisdeffre points to Les Petits Chevaux de Tarquinia as the novel which bridges the span between Duras' American novel and the anti-novel or nouveau roman.

The structure of Les Petits Chevaux de Tarquinia no longer flows along the lines of exposition, conflict or plot, and dénouement. Here there is exposition through the third-person point of view and through dialogue, and an unfolding of semi-interesting events, none of which, however, constitutes a plot or conflict. Jacques and his wife, Sara, and

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<sup>9</sup>Hoog, "The Itinerary of Marguerite Duras," p. 71.

their son and maid accompany their friends, Ludi and Gina, along with another woman, who perhaps is Jacques' mistress, to a small Italian resort for a vacation. After establishing this fact the remainder of the novel is merely the passing of time for these people for whom nothing seems to have much importance. The conversations which take place are mundane and boring. No one appears to have much of an opinion on anything except the heat, the only point on which there is agreement, therefore, it is one of the main topics of conversation:

--La chaleur, dit Sara. Et ce chemin idiot, sans un seul arbre jusqu'à la plage. Je ne peux plus le supporter. Il me dégoûte, je ne peux plus le supporter.<sup>10</sup>

Any questions are usually repeated later and probably without eliciting any response. An example of this indifferent attitude is the following passage:

--Je suis sûre que même l'autre rive doit être plus fraîche.  
--Il y a douze ans que je viens ici, tu n'y connais rien, avait dit Ludi.

Jacques n'avait pas d'avis quant à la différence entre les deux rives. Pour Sara, il était évident qu'un vent frais devait y souffler toutes les nuits. (p. 12)

Through endless dialogue of boring and everyday topics Duras lets the reader experience the weightiness of time, boredom and fatigue felt by the characters:

--Elle a de la chance, dit Sara, elle est très intelligente.  
--Qu'est-ce que ça à voir?  
--Rien. C'est une réflexion que ça me fait. C'est la femme la plus intelligente que tu aies connue.  
--Je crois, oui. Mais ça veut rien dire.

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<sup>10</sup> Marguerite Duras, *Les Petits Chevaux de Tarquinia* (Paris: Gallimard, 1953), pp. 14-15. (Further reference by page only).

--C'est dommage, dit Sara.  
 --Quoi?  
 --Que tu me l'aies donnée.  
 --Pourquoi?  
 --Parce que je n'ai rien à en faire, de l'intelligence.  
 (p. 142)

This type of dialogue which persists throughout the novel, marks the major change between this novel and the first four novels.

The description which Duras employed so abundantly before is now at a minimum. Her descriptions now are also more brief like this description of the maid:

Elle était toute prête, chaussée d'escarpins vernis, à talons hauts, violemment fardée, elle ressemblait à une jolie petite putain. (p. 128)

Meals and weather occur and are received in the same languid attitude of the characters. There are a young boy who has been blown up by a mine left from the war, his parents, who refuse to sign the death certificate, a man who comes with a new boat, and a small forest fire. The man with the boat is the highest point of interest for these people who exist in a somnambulant state. A major concern for them is the perturbing, if anything in the novel could possibly be classified as perturbing, question of who will get to ride in the boat next. Other than that, the events come and go as though viewed through a haze. It is this condition of stupor and languor, reflected in the dialogue, which causes the novel to move along at such a slow pace. The dialogue is repetitive and monotonous and it produces a lulling effect upon the reader as though he were a part of this less than exciting vacation. It is this immobility of the novel which strikes the reader as one of the qualities produced by the New Novelists.



Les Petits Chevaux de Tarquinia is divided into four chapters which contain some symmetry in that they begin in much the same manner. The repetitiveness used here is, also, an aspect linked to the movement of the nouveau roman. Compare the beginning paragraphs from each of the four chapters:

(Ch. 1) Sara se leva tard. Il était un peu plus de dix heures. La chaleur était là, égale à elle-même. Il fallait toujours quelques secondes chaque matin pour se souvenir qu'on était là pour passer des vacances. Jacques dormait toujours, la bonne aussi. (p. 9)

(Ch. 2) Mais lorsqu'elle s'éveilla, le temps, encore une fois, s'était levé.

Elle n'avait dormi qu'une heure. Elle se leva doucement pour ne pas réveiller l'enfant qui dormait toujours. La bonne n'était pas encore rentrée. Jacques aussi dormait toujours. (p. 63)

(Ch. 3) Le lendemain, la chaleur était toujours là, égale à elle-même.

Il n'était pas tombé une goutte d'eau dans la nuit. La brise n'avait pas été très forte et le feu, dans la montagne, n'avait pas beaucoup gagné. Sara se réveilla encore une fois la première, encore une fois vers dix heures. Elle trouva l'enfant assis au même endroit que la veille, sur les marches de la véranda en train de contempler le jardin déjà écrasé de soleil. (p. 136)

(Ch. 4) Mais lorsqu'elle se réveilla, le temps, encore une fois, s'était levé. La sempiternelle petite brise s'était remise à souffler, comme chaque jour, depuis qu'ils étaient arrivés. (p. 199)

The similarity is the repetition not only of the situation but also the vocabulary. It is the same type of repetition Duras uses throughout the novel which creates a semi-hypnotic state in the reader. In each introduction to the four chapters Sara is getting up. In three of them she is getting up in the morning and in the third one she is getting

up from a nap. The words and the gestures, if not the same, are similar. There is the repetition of the words: toujours, encore, la chaleur, se réveilla, and la brise. They appear in almost the same sentence structure with the same articles, nouns and verbs. Duras' use of repetition creates an effective atmosphere of desolation, boredom and a state of ennui.

Cismaru remarks of her style in this novel that:

Les Petits Chevaux de Tarquinia may be said to be one of Marguerite Duras' best attempts at fiction. Her pen is no longer that of a beginner: it has gained assurance, audacity; it has learned how to position and repeat words in order to create the unmistakable mood of desolation that she wishes to impart; it has perfected, above all, that ability to combine a number of characteristics of the American-type novel with the touching, crushing but nevertheless still cathartic facets of aliterature...Marguerite Duras' novel can thus be viewed as an awakening agent, a springboard to lucidity. And even the most placid reader is bound to be affected to some degree.<sup>11</sup>

The poetic element is stronger in this novel than it has been in the past few. Once again, Duras creates beautiful passages of description of the landscape even though the people here are suffering from the heat. Here are several examples of this poetic technique which Duras is perfecting:

Le fleuve coulait à quelques mètres de la villa, large, décoloré. Le chemin le longeait jusqu'à la mer qui s'étalait buileuse et grise, au loin, dans une brume couleur de lait. (p. 10)

Ils s'en allèrent. Le chemin, après la place, n'était plus éclairé. Mais le fleuve reflétait la clarté du ciel et on y voyait suffisamment clair. Il était très proche. La marée montait. On entendait le bruissement de l'eau le long des berges, par saccades, au rythme lent de la houle. (p. 126)

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<sup>11</sup>Cismaru, Marguerite Duras, p. 63.

In these passages the author's words are well arranged like le fleuve coulait à quelques mètres de la villa, large, décoloré. The phrasing is simple: ils s'en allèrent, il était très proche. They impart the feeling of an outdoors that is clean, refreshing and serene. The reader is as much at peace with this countryside as any of the characters could be.

Le Square, the sixth novel of Marguerite Duras, shows a mature author who has complete control over the characters and the events. Actually, the events could be narrowed to just one: that of the conversation which takes place between two people who meet on a park bench. This meeting constitutes the plot. This is a reflection of Duras' attempt to simplify and refine her style. Le Square presents an isolated, brief moment in the lives of two people who, until now, were total strangers. The importance of the novel lies not in the simplicity of the plot or brief episode but in the emotions and thoughts which are intensely expressed at this particular moment. Germaine Brée mentions this particular idea of the novel:

These are moments when, coming out of their isolation, her characters are willing to communicate, or to make an attempt at communication. To speak one to the other is in essence to relate. That is why the dialogue is the key to Marguerite Duras's world and why, no doubt, her stories move so easily from narrative to stage or scenario.<sup>12</sup>

The characters make more of an effort to communicate in Le Square than they do in Les Petits Chevaux de Tarquinia. The maid and the man discuss their jobs with one another and bring out the good and

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<sup>12</sup> Marguerite Duras, Four Novels by Marguerite Duras (New York: Grove Press, 1965), Germaine Brée's Introduction, p. iv.

bad points of each. Such a discourse is in the following extract:

- Oui, Monsieur, sans doute, mais voyez vous, s'aller de ville en ville, comme ça, sans autre compagnie que cette valise, mai, c'est ça qui me rendrait folle.
- On n'est pas toujours seul, je vous ferai remarquer, seul à devenir fou, non. On est sur des bateaux, dans des trains, on voit, on écoute. Et, ma foi, si l'occasion de devenir fou se présente, on peut se faire à l'éviter.
- Mais, arriver à se faire une raison de tout, à quoi cela me servirait-il, puisque ce que je veux c'est en sortir et que vous, Monsieur, cela ne vous sert qu'à toujours trouver de nouvelles raisons de ne pas en sortir?
- Pas exactement, non, puisque, si une occasion valable de changer de métier se présentait à moi, je la saisisrais aussitôt; non, elle me sert aussi à autre chose, par exemple à me rendre compte des avantages que comporte quand même ce métier, qui sont, d'une part, de voyager tout le temps...<sup>13</sup>

In the above quotation, the two people are making an earnest effort to have their point of view understood and to try to understand the other's point of view. This is quite the contrary of the conversation in Les Petits Chevaux de Tarquinia where no one has or expresses an opinion, and there is no effort to have any understanding brought to anyone's attention.

There is essentially no plot and no intrigue in this novel. The psychology of the characters can only be perceived from the comments contained in the dialogue. The author has removed herself from the scene and does not intervene to tell the reader what is happening or what should be expected. She leaves all this entirely to the characters themselves

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<sup>13</sup>Marguerite Duras, Le Square (Paris: Gallimard, 1955), p. 26.

and lets each one give his own identity through the course of the novel by the use of direct discourse. The following quotation reveals some of the inner feelings and thoughts of the maid and the man as they sit on a park bench:

--...C'est vraiment un tout petit métier que le mien, il est insignifiant, et c'est à peine un métier, en somme, à peine suffisant pour un homme, que dis-je, pour une moitié d'homme. Alors je ne peux pas même un instant envisager un changement de ma vie comme celui-là.

--Alors, Monsieur, dans votre cas, peut-être, encore une fois, vous suffirait-il de changer de métier?

--Mais, même, de ce métier, comment en sortir? Comment sortir de ce métier qui ne me permet même pas de penser à me marier? Ma valise m'entraîne toujours plus loin, d'un jour à l'autre, d'une nuit à l'autre, et même, oui, d'un repas et elle ne me laisse pas m'arrêter et prendre le temps d'y penser suffisamment. Il faudrait que le changement arrive vers moi, je n'ai pas le loisir d'aller vers lui. Et puis, oui, je l'avoue, non seulement j'ai le sentiment depuis toujours que personne n'a besoin de mes services ni de ma compagnie, mais il n'arrive même, parfois, de m'étonner de la place qui, dans la société, me revient. (pp. 23-24)

Germaine Brée notes the art of Duras' style and her isolation of a brief moment in the existence of a character or characters:

Though Marguerite Duras thus isolates what might appear as a fragment of existence, she does not present fragments of experience, but within the limits set by the molding of the narrative, she reaches toward an essential moment when, in a flash of awareness, the inner truth of a situation comes to light in the form of pure emotion.<sup>14</sup>

The next quotation is such an example of a moment out of the maid's world. Duras uses dialogue to let the character describe a moment which holds a very deep, strong-felt emotion of her idea of having to be

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<sup>14</sup>Duras, Four Novels by Marguerite Duras, Germaine Brée's Introduction, p. v.

chosen. This is, perhaps, the one principle of her explanation for her own existence; it is, without a doubt, her most intensely felt idea:

--Vous comprenez, Monsieur, vous comprenez, je n'ai jamais été choisie par personne, sauf en raison de mes capacités les plus impersonnelles, et afin d'être aussi inexistante que possible, alors il faut que je sois choisie par quelqu'un, une fois, même une seule. Sans cela j'existerai si peu, même pas vouloir choisir à mon tour. C'est pour-quoi je m'acharne tant sur le mariage, vous comprenez.

(p. 72)

At this remark the man, obviously moved by such a statement, points out to her the fact which she has overlooked, that of being able to do the choosing:

--Oui, Mademoiselle, sans doute, mais j'ai beau faire, je ne vois pas très bien comment vous espérez être choisie si vous ne pouvez choisir vous-même. (p. 72)

Duras' dialogue is remarkable throughout the novel considering that these two people form a bond through everyday cliches and situations because they both are making a conscious attempt, however awkward it may appear at times, to communicate. The following extract shows their need to assert an identity and, thereby, momentarily interrupt the isolation which they must usually feel as they continue in their meager professions:

--Comme si l'on prenait peur tout à coup d'être comme en est, d'être comme on est au lieu d'être autrement, au lieu même d'être autre chose, peut-être?

--Oui, d'être à la fois comme tous les autres, et d'être on même temps comme on est. Oui, c'est cela même, je crois, d'être de cette espèce-là plutôt que de n'importe quelle autre, de celle-là précisément...

--Si compliquée, oui, Monsieur, je comprends.

--Parce que de l'autre peur, Mademoiselle, celle de mourir sans que personne s'en aperçoive, je trouve qu'elle peut devenir à la longue une raison de se réjouir de son sort. Lorsqu'on sait que sa mort ne fera souffrir personne, pas même un petit chien, je trouve qu'elle s'allège de beaucoup de son poids.

--J'essaie de vous vomprendre, Monsieur, mais non, je le regrette, je ne le puis pas. Est-ce parce que les femmes sont différentes? Moi, je sais que je ne pourrais pas me supporter, comme vous le faites, seule, avec cette valise. Ce n'est pas que je n'aimerais pas voyager, non, mais sans des affections quelque part dans le monde, qui m'attendraient, je ne pourrais pas le faire. Encore une fois, je crois bien que je préfère en être encore où j'en suis. (pp. 30-31)

Cismaru makes these remarks concerning this dialogue:

Under the writer's pen the girl and the man remain entirely subjective, themselves. This is a particularly touching aspect of Le Square, for it emphasizes the very personal qualities of characters who, refusing to speak and feel for all the others in their class, speak and feel for me.<sup>15</sup>

The conversation between the man and the maid is marked with truthful statements or ideas. They do not disguise any of their remarks or hesitate to reveal their own opinions for the sake of the other one's feelings.

In Le Square Duras' style has improved a great deal, as Cismaru notes in the following:

In Le Square Marguerite Duras appears to have come to terms with the old problem of creating characters who achieve an emotional intensity and unity going beyond the limits of the outer events related. These, held to the barest minimum and uncorroborated by the author's descriptive interventions, benefit effectively from the carefully written verbal exchanges between the couple, in the accuracy of the nuances they express, in the restrained images they evoke, sometimes in the sober richness and timid sensuality which dot the conversation; that is, in themselves; in the truest and most painfully explored fibers of the speakers.<sup>16</sup>

Since the novel is almost pure dialogue, there is the noticeable absence of author interference and her ideas. This is the major strength

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<sup>15</sup>Cismaru, Marguerite Duras, p. 86.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

of Le Square. The reader feels more intimately involved with the characters because he gleans the inner psychology and depth of feeling directly from the words spoken by the characters themselves and not from what the author says about them. In other words, there is no intermediary, just a one-to-one relationship of the reader to the maid and the man.

The structure is symetrically similar to that of Les Petits Chevaux de Tarquinia. The novel is divided into three parts each one resembling the other two. Compare the beginning of each of the three chapters:

(Ch. I) L'enfant arriva tranquillement du fond du square et se planta devant la jeune fille.  
 --J'ai faim, déclara-t-il.  
 Ce fut pour l'homme l'occasion d'engager la conversation.  
 --C'est vrai que c'est l'heure de goûter, dit-il.  
 La jeune fille ne se formalisa pas.  
 Au contraire, elle lui adressa un sourire de sympathie. (p. 9)

(Ch. II) L'enfant arriva tranquillement du fond du square et se planta de nouveau devant le jeune fille.  
 --J'ai soif, déclara-t-il.  
 La jeune fille sortit un thermos et une timbale de son sac.  
 --C'est vrai, dit l'homme, qu'après avoir mangé ses deux tartines il doit avoir soif.  
 La jeune fille montra le thermos et le déboucha. Du lait encore bien chaud fuma dans le soleil. (p. 81)

(Ch. III) L'enfant arriva tranquillement du fond du square et se planta devant la jeune fille.  
 --Je suis fatigué, déclara-t-il  
 L'homme et la jeune fille regardèrent autour d'eux.  
 L'air était moins doré que tout à l'heure, effectivement. C'était le soir.  
 --C'est vrai qu'il est tard, dit le jeune fille.  
 L'homme, cette fois, ne fit aucune remarque La jeune fille nettoya les mains de l'enfant, ramassa ses jouets et les mit dans le sac. Toutefois, elle ne se leva pas encore du banc. L'enfant s'assit à ses pieds et attendit, tout à coup lassé de jouer. (p. 143)



The repetitiveness used in the beginning of each chapter l'enfant arriva tranquillement du fond du square is not only another link to the school of the nouveau roman, but also a stylistic device to give novel balance and continuity. As Germaine Brée says of the style: "The Square tends toward equilibrium, stasis, and the complete, carefully spoken paragraphs give the requisite impression of weight and balance."<sup>17</sup>

The poetic element mentioned in the preceding novels of Marguerite Duras is extremely limited in Le Square due to the fact that the novel consists almost entirely of dialogue. However, there is one noticeable poetic moment included in the dialogue. It comes at a point where the man is describing a garden to the young maid:

...Je ne pouvais pas me décider à quitter ce jardin. La brise s'était donc levée, la lumière est devenue jaune de miel, et les lions eux-mêmes, qui flambaient de tous leurs poils, bâillaient du plaisir d'être là. L'air sentait à la fois le feu et les lions et je le respirais comme l'odeur même d'une fraternité qui enfin me concernait. Tous les passants étaient attentifs les uns aux autres et se délassaient dans cette lumière de miel. Je me souviens, je trouvais qu'ils ressemblaient aux lions. J'ai été heureux brusquement. (pp. 56-57)

The combination of the words like la lumière est devenue jaune de miel and l'air sentait à la fois le feu et les lions blend into a beautifully expressed sentiment. The reader is transported into this moment of serenity and happiness described by the man. This impressive display of the choice of words like flambaient de tous leurs poils and bâillaient du plaisir continues to be one of Marguerite Duras' exceptional gifts.

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<sup>17</sup>Duras, Four Novels by Marguerite Duras, Germaine Brée's Introduction, p. x.

Le Square places Duras on the frontier of the nouveau roman, for, as Cismaru explains it:

To begin with, the author had been flirting with the New Novel for a long time, and Le Square appears to be a natural outgrowth of earlier tendencies maturing and kept under a masterful control. Moreover, the label 'a tour de force' does not take into consideration the writer's concern, in this novel, for essentially human emotions which appeal even more than the unusual bittersweet dialogue of the composition.<sup>18</sup>

This new style of story telling which brings to light patterns of emotions true to life and honest without analyzing them, will remain the main focal point of Duras' style throughout her other novels.

Moderato Cantabile, Marguerite Duras' seventh novel contains some stylistic devices which link her even more closely to the New Novelists. Several critics have pointed out a musical influence in Duras' style. Germaine Brée says of Moderato Cantabile:

In form and mood, Moderato Cantabile (1958) is quite different from The Square, more fluid and musical, and apparently less coherent in its development. 'Moderato cantabile' suggests a tempo and lyrical mode that are in direct contradiction with the violence of the crime, with the fierce desire that engulfs Anne and Chauvin, and with the strange new detached mode of perception Anne acquires in her state of intoxication.<sup>19</sup>

The novel begins with a music lesson in which Anne is listening to her son play a sonatina by Diabolli. A sonata is a musical composition consisting of three or four movements in contrasting keys. The use of a sonatina to open the novel lays the foundation for the juxtaposition of contrasts in the events which take place. For example, Anne's son is playing the sonatina which the reader would expect to produce a tranquil

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<sup>18</sup> Cismaru, Marguerite Duras, p. 87.

<sup>19</sup> Duras, Four Novels by Marguerite Duras, Germaine Brée's Introduction, pp. xi-xiii.

state in the people listening to the music. Anne, however, is nervous, pacing around the room, making nervous gestures until the music teacher finally remarks: "--Quelle nervosité, dit la dame en les regardant tous deux d'un air réprobateur."<sup>20</sup>

Anne's son is also restless and fidgets at the piano. Several times he stops and refuses to play as his teacher instructs him to do. Duras, with miraculously deft fingers, writes one short paragraph which juxtaposes his nervousness with the sounds of the sea and a poetic description, le rose du ciel, of the sky:

L'enfant ne bougea pas davantage. Le bruit de la mer dans le silence de son obstination se fit entendre de nouveau. Dans un dernier sursaut, le rose du ciel augmenta. (p. 16)

It is this type of skill, the adept handling of words like une plainte longue, continue, s'éleva...en fut brisé and the brevity, puis elle s'arrêta, net, which Duras employs throughout which makes a remarkable composition of Moderato Cantabile. Another presentation of contrasts occurs immediately after the child's refusal to play:

Dans la rue, en bas de l'immeuble, un cri de femme retentit. Une plainte longue, continue, s'éleva et si haut que le bruit de la mer en fut brisé. Puis elle s'arrêta, net. (p. 16)

It is eventually this shrill scream which leads Anne to become involved with Chauvin and, therefore, with her desire to break the monotony of her life. The scream comes from a woman just before she is killed by her lover for reasons Marguerite Duras never explains. Anne becomes envious of the desire which must have led up to this murder.

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<sup>20</sup> Marguerite Duras, Moderato Cantabile (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1958), p. 16. (Further reference by page only).

Victoria Weiss points out that Marguerite Duras uses time carefully to her best advantage, whereas, some of the New Novelists tend to distort or destroy conventional time. There is a conventional chronology of time and events unfolding during the process of the eight chapters of the novel. Weiss also brings to the reader's attention Duras' use of tenses in her verbs. In Moderato Cantabile he remarks upon the strategy behind the use of these verb tenses. All of the narrative parts of the book are in the past tense except in Chapter VII, where the present and future tenses appear. The events occurring within the chapter are: the dinner party, the pacing outside Chauvin's house and Anne's intoxication.<sup>21</sup>

The use of the present tense in Chapter VII lends a feeling of dramatic intensity. The present tense reinforces the drama of the inner conflict and turmoil which Anne is experiencing, as she is torn between conforming to society's expectations and breaking away from her dull life. Duras changes to the future tense in the final paragraphs of this chapter where Anne vomits, as Weiss declares in her article, because the vomiting is the inevitable result of abandoning herself to drink and, thereby, causing the dissolution of her marriage. Therefore, Anne's future will be a matter of returning to the routine established over several years of marriage and trying to atone for her brief adventure or waywardness.<sup>22</sup>

The act of vomiting could, however, be viewed in a slightly different light than that of Anne's paying for her drinking escapade. One

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<sup>21</sup>Victoria Weiss, "Form and Meaning in Marguerite Duras' Moderato Cantabile," Critique, XVI, no. 1 (1974), pp. 79-87.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., pp. 79-87.

of the characteristics of Duras' style is that she does not impose a definite, unalterable ending for the reader; therefore, the reader is free to choose his own ending or come to his own conclusions about what may happen at the close of the novel. It is conceivable that Anne's vomiting could represent her rejection of her static, dull existence. She does return, in the final chapter, to the café to meet Chauvin one last time. She mentions several times that she is afraid. Perhaps Anne is afraid of the future because of her rejection of her previously monotonous life. She then relives the death of the murdered woman. Duras uses words like mains froides, pose mortuaire and rite mortuaire to describe their last meeting, the way they touch, as though she were describing dying or dead people:

Leurs mains étaient si froides qu'elles se touchèrent illusoirement dans l'intention seulement, afin que ce fût fait, dans la seule intention que ce le fût, plus autrement ce n'était plus possible. Leurs mains restèrent ainsi, figées dans leur pose mortuaire. Pourtant, la plainte d'Anne Desbaresdes cessa. (P. 149)

Elle s'avança vers lui d'assez près pour que leurs lèvres restèrent l'une sur l'autre, posées, afin que ce fût fait et suivant le même rite mortuaire que leurs mains, un instant avant, froides et tremblantes. (pp. 152-153)

In this way Anne's death-wish becomes possible. On the last page Anne admits that she is dead, thus, Anne has been able to relive psychologically the passion and death of the woman who was murdered at the beginning of the novel.

Chapter VII is the most interesting from the viewpoint of style. Throughout the chapter Duras intermingles events, again in juxtaposition, which create an impression of Anne's dizziness and intoxication. The

author is so skillful at mixing the multiple events that the reader retains an impression that this is one incident. The following example of Duras' artful mixture of events comes from the first few paragraphs:

Sur un plat d'argent à l'achat duquel trois générations ont contribué, le saumon arrive, glacé dans sa forme native. Habillé de noir, ganté de blanc, un homme le porte, tel un enfant de roi...

De l'extrémité nord du parc, les magnolias versent leur odeur qui va de dune en dune jusqu'à rien. Le vent, ce soir, est du sud. Un homme rôde, boulevard de la Mer. Une femme le sait.

Le saumon passe de l'un à l'autre suivant un rituel que rien ne trouble, sinon la peur cachée de chacun que tant de perfection tout à coup ne se brise ou ne s'entache d'une trop évidente absurdité. Dehors, dans le parc les magnolias élaborent leur floraison funèbre dans la nuit noire du printemps naissant. (p. 125)

When the eating begins, the author quite unobtrusively places the scenes of the people devouring the meal together with the passion devouring Anne and Chauvin, who is pacing back and forth outside:

Le service du canard à l'orange commence. Les femmes se servent. On les choisit belles et fortes, elles feront front à tant de chère. De doux murmures montant de leurs gorges à la vue du canard d'or. L'une d'elles défaille à sa vue. Sa bouche est desséchée par d'autre faim que rien non plus ne peut apaiser qu'à peine, le vin. (p. 134)

Il ne mange pas. Il ne pourrait pas, lui non plus, nourrir son corps tourmenté par d'autre faim. (p. 131)

Marguerite Duras depicts the events of the man pacing outside, of Anne nervously and impatiently trying to get through dinner, yet all the time thinking of Chauvin, and of the guests at the dinner-party consuming the food in the same way using repetition like par d'autre faim. With this style Duras maintains a close relationship between the devastating passion of Chauvin and Anne and the consumption of the food.

Marguerite Duras continues to show an affinity for some of the trademarks of the New Novelists in her use of repetitions, lack of specific details and most noticeably in this particular novel, the broken fragments of dialogue. As Germaine Brée notes:

Unlike the girl and the man in The Square, they do not speak in carefully constructed sentences and coherent paragraphs. They speak in snatches, hesitantly, re-stating fragments of the theme, their exchange of words revolving around a hidden center, which is their urge to relive the passion of the couple that had died.<sup>23</sup>

The dialogue is usually in fragments and interrupted portions of conversation. Although there are many unfinished parts of the dialogue, they seem to fit together, rather like a collage to form an idea of the whole:

--La dernière fois, dit-elle, j'ai vomi ce vin. Il n'y a que quelques jours que je bois...  
 --Ça n'a plus d'importance désormais.  
 --Je vous en prie...supplia-t-elle.  
 --Au fond, choisissons de parler ou de ne rien dire, comme vous le voudrez. (pp. 146-147)

The narrative, also, is brief and compact. The sentence structure is extremely simple, without many specific details:

Elle but son verre de vin d'un trait. Il la lâissa s'empoisonner à son gré. La nuit avait envahi définitivement la ville. Les quais s'éclairèrent de leurs hauts lampadaires. L'enfant jouait toujours. Il n'y eût plus trace dans le ciel de la moindre lueur du couchant. (p. 117)

This brevity of style lends a balance that enhances the novel with a fluid poetry in the words. In Moderato Cantabile, more so than in any of Duras' preceding novels, there is a simple poetic rendering of

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<sup>23</sup>Duras, Four Novels by Marguerite Duras. Germaine Brée's Introduction, p. xiii.

style. Poetic language, zébrures noires and nuages ocres, is scattered throughout the novel in the narrative passages:

Les couleurs du couchant devinrent tout à coup si glorieuses que la blondeur de cet enfant s'en trouva modifiée. (p. 15)

...Devant eux, à l'extrémité sud de la ville, l'horizon était obscurci de zébrures noires, de nuages ocres que versaient vers le ciel les fonderies. (p. 50)

La sonatine se faisait sous les mains de l'enfant--celui-ci absent--mais elle se faisait et se refaisait, portée par son indifférente maladresse jusqu'aux confins de sa puissance. A mesure qu'elle s'échafaudait, sensiblement la lumière du jour diminuait. Une monumentale presque île de nuages incendiés surgit à l'horizon dont la splendeur fragile et fugace forçait la pensée vers d'autres voies... Le bruit de la mer mêlé aux voix des hommes qui arrivaient sur le quai monta jusqu'à la chambre. (pp. 101-102)

Duras mingles the musical atmosphere, la sonatine se faisait sous les mains de l'enfant, with the diminishing of the light, the clouds, sky and the voices of men with the sounds of the sea. It is, in effect, a cinematic rendering of the scene and surroundings. This technique, which mixes sound with color and sight is another stylistic link with the New Novelists.

The critic, Henri Hell, in remarking on the musicality of the composition calls Moderato Cantabile a true classical work:

Moderato Cantabile, modéré et chantant, tel est bien le roman de Marguerite Duras, dans sa composition qu'on peut dire musicale... Ces différents thèmes se fondent en un tout harmonieux, sorte de musique de chambre, secrète et intense, qui suit les lois difficiles de la limpidité et de la concision. Avec ce livre lisse et rigoureux, sans analyse psychologique, sans formules de moraliste, sans fausse élégance de style, Marguerite Duras a écrit l'un des plus beaux récits classiques français qu'on ait lus depuis longtemps. Il est vrai,



qu'à l'encontre de tant de nos jeunes écrivains, elle n'a pas décidé de refaire Adolphe ou la Princesse de Clèves.<sup>24</sup>

Jean Bessière observes that Marguerite Duras modifies her style in this novel and breaks farther away from the traditional novel:

Depuis Moderato Cantabile et parallèlement au 'nouveau roman', Marguerite Duras modifie les rapports traditionnels du lecteur et du livre; elle pourrait faire siemela déclaration de Robbe-Grillet: 'Car loin de le /le lecteur/ négliger, l'auteur aujourd'hui proclame l'absolu besoin qu'il a de son concours, actif, conscient, créateur. Ce qu'il demande, ce n'est plus de recevoir tout fait un monde achevé, plein, close sur lui-même, c'est au contraire de participer à une création, d'inventer ainsi à inventer sa propre vie.'<sup>25</sup>

Duras has successfully seized a privileged moment in life and put it into writing without adding any of her own beliefs or analyses to the events. Bessière continues to note that the logic of Duras' composition and the intrigue are not in the traditional light of presenting a story but an adventure in which a woman finds herself:

La logique de la composition de Moderato Cantabile est ainsi opposée à celle du roman traditionnel, où le personnage est doué d'une certaine autonomie (les auteurs l'expriment en disant qu'une fois le personnage suffisamment caractérisé, il faut le laisser aller de lui-même) et trouve, dans le temps, dans le sens de la durée, le moyen d'enrichir sa conscience de lui-même et d'évoluer. La logique de Moderato Cantabile est, au fond, celle d'une introspection où le 'pourquoi a-t-il tué?' se transforme en un 'qui suis-je que m'est-il promis?' Le roman devient un acte de connaissance en mettant sur le même plan intériorité et événements extérieurs.<sup>26</sup>

Duras does not, however, follow the extreme modes of expressing cold, abstract and disintegrated themes of some of the New Novelists.

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<sup>25</sup> Marguerite Duras, Moderato Cantabile (Paris: Bordas, 1972), p. 26. (Notes par Jean Bessière).

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 30.

She manages to keep a human element in the stylistic devices which she chooses in common with the New Novel movement.

Détruire Dit-Elle, the thirteenth novel of Marguerite Duras, brings into light a good example of her new type of fiction. The characters are in an isolated situation, in a convalescent hotel. Bessière suggests that this is a type of human experiment where the malades of society are gathered. He also predicts that the only cure for the malades is the total destruction of bonds with society.<sup>27</sup>

Elizabeth Alione is a wealthy woman suffering from depression after having lost a child immediately after birth. She keeps to herself, eats and reads alone, until she meets Thor, his wife, Alissa, and Stein who is both a friend of Thor's and Alissa's lover. These three people seem to pose a threat to Elizabeth. She likes them and is, at the same time, afraid of them. Alissa, Thor and Stein are free of limitations which they and society impose on them. They try to persuade Elizabeth to become like them and lose the identity which society has prescribed for her.

There is a great deal of looking at others and some voyeurism throughout the novel. This element seems to come from Duras' existential code, which has just become perceptible, where there must be the fidelity of another person's gaze in order to sustain one's existence:

Stein ne s'arrête pas devant eux mais il les regarde.<sup>28</sup>

"Il y a dix jours que je vous regarde", dit Max Thor.  
(p. 44)

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>28</sup> Marguerite Duras, Détruire Dit-Elle (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1969), p. 38. (Further reference by page only).

Max Thor détourne son regard très légèrement vers Alissa, Alissa qui la regarde sans attention particulière, semble-t-il. (p. 47)

Voyeurism is also contained in some of the looking which occurs between the characters. Alissa and Stein openly admit it:

--Nous faisons l'amour, dit Alissa, toutes les nuits nous faisons l'amour.  
--Je sais, dit Stein. Vous laissez la fenêtre ouverte et je vous vois.  
--Il la laisse ouverte pour toi. Nous voir. (p. 52)

This newness of style in Détruire Dit-Elle causes the reader to wonder at times what actually is happening. Yet at the same time Duras manages to sustain the interest in the novel.

It is in this novel that Duras poignantly renders the idea of desire of the other. There are no names used for some time at the beginning. The descriptions of the characters are so similar that, even when names are given, there remains some uncertainty of identity. Thor and Stein are a great deal alike in physical appearance. Then, of course, there is the phonetic similarity between the names of Alissa and Elisa. Also, there is the German semantic similarity of Thor (the god with the hammer) and Stein (\$ stone). Twice in the beginning pages of the novel where Duras expresses the idea of being fascinated and troubled at the same time. The first time Stein reads from a letter:

--'Madame, lit Stein. Madame, il y a dix jours que vous regarde. Il y a en vous quelque chose qui me fascine et qui me bouleverse dont je n'arrive pas, à connaître la nature.' (p. 26)

The second time this idea appears is shortly after Stein read the letter. Thor says:

--Il y a dans cet hôtel quelque chose qui me trouble et qui me retient... (p. 38)

These statements seem to echo the reader's impressions of Duras' presentation and style within Détruire Dit-Elle. The particular style of this novel captures the interest and curiosity of the reader in a much different manner from any of her preceding novels. Claude Mauriac remarks upon the obscurity which appears here:

C'est de l'excès même de la clarté que naît l'obscurité.  
Aucune prise ne nous est donnée. Nous flottons au  
gré d'un courant invisible.<sup>29</sup>

Later in the same article Mauriac refers to Duras as a "poète de l'invisible. De l'inaudible. De ce que nos sens ne peuvent capter, mais qui n'en est pas moins réel."<sup>30</sup> Marguerite Duras is able to touch the reader in a manner even the reader finds difficult to describe.

The intermingling of identity, as Germaine Brée phrases it, is part of "an ever fluid interchange and relationship between the self and the desired other."<sup>31</sup> The style, therefore, is a format for the ideas. It is a reflection of the author in idea and composition, both being parallel.

The structure, at a glance, is noticeable different from Duras' previous novels; though it is still mostly dialogue, it has a visual impact as a poem with much white space on the page. It seems to be a long prose poem in the way the sentences and lines are arranged on the

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<sup>29</sup>Claude Mauriac, "Le Cinéma, fluide amour, art volatil," Le Figaro Littéraire, no. 1228 (1er-7 déc. 1969), pp. 37-38.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

<sup>31</sup>Duras, Four Novels by Marguerite Duras, Germaine Brée's Introduction, p. xvi.

page. The following section of the novel is an ~~example~~ of spacing:

Alissa fait signe qu'elle l'ignore.  
Elles se taisent.

--Il y a deux ans lorsqu'elle  
est arrivée chez moi, une nuit,  
Alissa avait dix-huit ans, dit  
Max Thor. (p. 63)

The language, although quite simple, is not particularly remarkable for its beauty. However, in its simplicity it still retains a flowing quality:

Crépuscule dans l'hôtel. Dans la lumière de néon  
de la salle à manger la voici encore, décolorée,  
vieillie.

Tout à coup, dans un geste nerveux, elle verse de  
l'eau dans son verre, ouvre les flacons, prend des  
pilules, avale. (p. 14)

Duras' choice of words in Détruire Dit-Elle is extremely simple and clear. Her language is refined and thinned down as though it were meant for the theatre. In the subtle clarity there lies a hidden ambiguity because the content and ideas are much more complex and perplexing than the language would lead one to believe. Consider the first page of the novel:<sup>32</sup>

Temps couvert.  
Les baies sont fermées.  
Du côté de la salle à manger où il se trouve, on ne  
peut pas voir le parc. Elle, oui, elle voit, elle  
regarde. Sa table touche le rebord des baies. (p. 9)

In this simple and straightforward presentation of language there is also an abruptness of change, whether in the scene or the actions of the characters. This abruptness brings to mind the directions and

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<sup>32</sup>"Look Out," Times Literary Supplement, no. 3499 (March 20, 1969), p. 286.

asides written into plays:

Le rire s'espace. Elle les regarde chacun à leur tour. De l'effroi arrive dans les yeux. Le rire cesse.

Crépuscule dans le parc.

--C'est bien, dit Max Thor.

Elisabeth Alione vient de jouer.

Elle a réussi à faire passer la boule sous l'arceau du croquet. (p. 87)

Bessière finds the type of style used in this novel to be a result of writing for the cinema and the theatre. As he says:

L'écriture de Détruire, Dit-Elle, participe du cinéma et du théâtre. Marguerite Duras a découvert, en réalisant ses films, qu'il est inutile de construire la phrase, qu'il n'y a là que temps perdu. Aussi tout est-il en perceptions dans le texte. Seule une série de notations descriptives réduites à un mot, seul un dialogue aux répliques brèves peuvent créer une impression d'immédiate, et transformer l'écrit ou la parole en spectacle.<sup>33</sup>

In this novel there is still another new element in Marguerite Duras' style. She continues to simplify and reduce language and dialogue to the essentials. In this manner she manages to show a style which is intimate and human. At this point in her career, Duras has removed from her writing all elements which are not absolutely necessary, and yet, her ideas continue to progress into a more complex state: one requiring much thought and time in order to be able to examine and consider these ideas with attention and in detail. In her abandoning of the conventions in style and exposition, she moves closer and closer to the anti-novel of the New Novelists.

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<sup>33</sup>Duras, Moderato Cantabile, (notes par Jean Bessière), p. 22.

The latest novel of Marguerite Duras is L'Amour (1971) her fifteenth novel. It completes the evolution of her style and represents the culmination of all its major elements. All the traditional components of style, as far as exposition, background, plot, dénouement and character development are concerned are conspicuous because of their absence in L'Amour. Therefore, it fits more precisely into the format of the nouveau roman.

The structure of the novel follows very much that of Détruire Dit-Elle: it appears to be more like a prose poem than a novel. There is much white space on the page separating sentences and paragraphs from each other. The first few pages illustrate this tendency:

Cet homme a le pas régulier d'un prisonnier.

Le jour baisse.

La mer, le ciel, occupent l'espace. Au loin, la mer est déjà oxydée par la lumière obscure, de même que le ciel.

Trois, ils sont trois dans la lumière obscure, le réseau de lenteur.

L'homme marche toujours, il va, il vient...bouge.

Il se met à marcher.

Quelqu'un marche, près.<sup>34</sup>

The language used in the above narration is extremely brief, yet quite poetic, oxydée par la lumière obscure, in the description of the sea, light, and the sky. Duras has condensed her language to the barest minimum without losing her fascinating poetic quality.

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<sup>34</sup> Marguerite Duras, L'Amour (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), pp. 8-9. (Further reference by page only).

The dialogue also appears in a different structure within the novel. It is set to one side of the page:

...Le voyageur la suit des yeux longtemps, jusqu'à sa disparition derrière la masse noire. Il dit:

--Il vient de passer là-bas,  
il marchait vite, il ne  
regardait rien.

Elle dit clairement:

--Il cherche -- elle ajoute  
--il faut le laisser. (p. 36)

The dialogue itself is sparse and broken into sentence fragments, much like the narration. A few long sentences are interspersed in the abruptness of the short fragmentary sentences.

There are no names used, similar to the style of Robbe-Grillet, except of the town, S. Thala, and the fact that a woman claims that she is S. Thala. Therefore, Duras achieves complete anonymity with L'Amour. The author uses the words un homme, un autre homme, une femme and un voyageur to refer to her characters. There has been no background information to explain the reason for what is taking place. In fact, the action itself is not clear at times because there is a switching back and forth from one event to another. The ambiguity of events, linked to the anonymity of the characters and the monotonous style of the author produce a dream-like effect. This effect is sustained by the somnabulous pace of the novel, which brings to mind La Modification of Butor, preceding L'Amour by some fourteen years.

As in Détruire Dit-Elle, there is quite a bit of looking in the novel. This seems, again, to be a reflection of Duras' ties to existentialism and the need to establish the existence of persons and things by



glances:

Un homme.

Il est debout, il regarde: la plage la mer...

Il ne bouge pas. Il regarde.

La mer, la plage, il y a des flaques, des surfaces d'eau calme isolées.

Entre l'homme qui regarde et la mer, tout au bord de la mer, loin, quelqu'un marche... (p. 7)

On entend: le pas s'espace. L'homme doit regarder la femme aux yeux fermés posée sur son chemin.

Oui. Le pas s'arrête. Il la regarde.

... La femme est regardée. (p. 10)

L'Amour, perhaps, can be considered as the culminating point of Marguerite Duras' writing both in technique and in content. Her profession as a writer has undergone many different influences which have left an indelible mark upon her style as it matures. L'Amour, her most recent novel, captures the essence of her writing and shows the major elements of her style. She has eschewed the conventional presentation of exposition, narration, plot, dénouement and character development. There is no longer any conventional suspense or psychology in her work. The characters are viewed in a light free from labels, explanation, analysis and philosophy. Dialogue remains of utmost importance, but the vocabulary has been reduced to a skeleton in comparison to her first novels. Her poetic prose, however, has remained constant throughout her work.

Bessière remarks that Duras manifests a spontaneity which resembles automatic writing. This leads the author to create freely without first planning where she would like the novel to go. He continues to emphasize the total freedom in Marguerite Duras' style and the fact that there could not possibly exist any strategy at all in her writing. This is quite apparent in the last few of her novels, especially in L'Amour.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>Duras, Moderato Cantabile, (notes par Jean Bessière), p. 13.

Marguerite Duras, herself, claims that the only worry should be the use of language because it is through la parole that true communication occurs between the author and the reader. The message itself is not as important as the contact established between the author and the others which will be the most important. For Duras, the novel has three channels through which to present meaning: (1) communication between the author and the novel, (2) communication between the reader and the novel, and (3) the communication of the novel on its own merit.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid. pp. 12-14.

## CHAPTER V

### MARGUERITE DURAS: the reality of a woman's world

In Marguerite Duras' descriptions of human relations she particularly and vividly captures the essence of the world of women and their problems. In her work, men always play secondary roles; the central emphasis is upon women, like Maud in Les Impudents; la mère in Un Barrage Contre le Pacifique; Anna in Le Marin de Gibraltar; the maid in Le Square; Anne in Moderato Cantabile; Maria in Dix Heures et Demie du Soir en Été; Lol. in Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein; and Claire in L'Amante Anglaise. All of these women find themselves in situations that not only reveal character, but also many of the essential problems of being female in the twentieth century.

Marguerite Duras is quickly emerging upon the literary scene as one of the most talented women writing today in France. She creates strong female characters in her novels. These characters make a lasting impact upon the reader by reflecting attitudes, problems, and emotions of the twentieth century woman. The impressions of these women are real and memorable, demonstrating Duras' ability to capture vigorously in words a woman's world.

In Duras' first novel, Les Impudents, Maud fights against a world and a family whose ideas and attitudes she finds difficult to accept. Maud knows the partial treatment given to the oldest son in a family. She watches her older brother take full advantage of his privileges, even if it means sacrifice to others. As a woman Maud faces marriage arranged for her by her mother in order to strengthen the family financially. The main emotional problem which plagues Maud throughout the novel is one of having been taught that a woman is patient, loving, forgiving, and acquiescing. As a result of these ideas Maud: 1) struggles against controlling her hatred for her brother and mother; 2) tries to repress her distaste for their actions; 3) suppresses her own personal desires and wishes. Later, as she learns how to cope with these different emotional aspects, Maud matures from an obedient school-girl into a woman when she finally acknowledges that: 1) she does hate her brother and mother; 2) it is acceptable to dislike their actions; 3) it is reasonable to have desires and wishes and to pursue them.

At the beginning of the novel the reader is quite aware of the resentment Maud feels for her older brother, Jacques. He never helps the family but, instead, squeezes each member for more money. Under these circumstances, Maud loses what little sisterly compassion she now feels for him. Because Maud is able to perceive Jacques' unfairness, she finds him disgusting:

Par la porte de la salle à manger, par l'étroit couloir noir et nu, parvenaient les sanglots de Jacques. . .  
Maud ne sentait rien que son coeur qui battait pesamment.  
Un dégoût difficilement surmontable roulait en elle mais

son corps le contenait bien, pareil à la berge solide  
d'un torrent.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, Maud loses her compassion for her brother because she can no longer feel love for someone who treats her, as well as the rest of the family, as non-existent until he needs financial support.

At this point, although Maud has not vocalized any of her opinions or ideas, the reader already has a clear understanding of her concealed discontent and her strong sense of independence. At Uderan Maud grows independent of her family as though, by being here, she feels unshackled from the social pressures of the city. For here, in the country surroundings of Uderan, Maud does exactly as she wants, no longer yielding to the wishes of her mother.

Maud discovers that her mother and Madame Pecresse have arranged to marry her to the son, Jean, but she refuses to have anything to do with him. She is repelled by Jean Pecresse and has no intention, whatsoever, of marrying him. Maud has fallen in love with Georges Durieux, who has been in Jacques' company. Although Georges is indifferent towards Maud, she makes up her mind that such indifference is temporary:

Dans son opposition muette, elle engageait toute la  
volonté d'une femme décidée à triompher coûte que  
coûte d'un refus dont elle ignorait même la cause.  
(p. 75)

With this statement, the author portrays Maud's strength and self-assertiveness. She goes to see Georges one evening for the sole purpose of being made love to by him for two main reasons: first, because of her strong attraction to him physically; second, because of her desire to

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<sup>1</sup>Marguerite Duras, Les Impudents (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1943), p. 3.

place herself in a compromising position to spite her mother and her brothers who plan to marry her to the spineless Jean Pecresse. Maud's decision to have Georges make love to her is a positive move for her in light of the alternative: letting her mother marry her to Jean. It is a clever manoeuvre, one which will definitely make it impossible for Madame Grand-Tanneran to carry out the pre-arranged marriage.

After spending the night with Georges, Maud returns to the Pecresses and her family only to find that they have been spying on her and know where she has been. She suddenly realizes their inflexibility in marrying her to Jean and that they will not let her leave the Pecresse property alone again. Stricken with fear, Maud decides that she must leave, once more, on a more permanent basis in order to protect herself:

L'horreur qu'elle ressentait à se retrouver encore une fois parmi les siens lui laissait son entière lucidité d'esprit. 'Il n'y a plus qu'à descendre,' se dit-elle, et elle s'y décida calmement.

Certes, elle ne pourrait plus leur tenir tête avec sa fierté passée! Mais elle désirait les fuir avant tout, éviter l'intimité désormais odieuse à laquelle ils la convieraient colère passée.

Sa décision prise, elle s'accouda à la fenêtre un instant. L'image de son amant lui revint alors, distincte et figée. (pp. 145-146)

Maud is a very determined young lady and once she has made up her mind to do something she lets nothing interfere. She has decided to go back to Georges and to live with him for the remainder of their vacation in the country. No one comes for her until the day of the family's departure for Paris.

Walking along the path which leads from Georges' home to the Pecresses, Maud's mother begins to inform her of the agreement between

the two families and the terms of the arrangement to marry Maud to Jean. This cold-blooded discussion is more than Maud can stand at the moment and she quickly states that she is pregnant and cannot marry Jean.

Maud feels the need now to act openly and honestly about her feelings towards Jacques which she has been fighting to conceal. There have been more letters from the bank warning him of his precarious financial position. Maud suddenly releases all her pent-up hatred and disgust for Jacques and goes to the police to tell them that he is back in town.

Maud's final gesture towards her brother is the culminating point of her maturation since she can now deal with her emotions honestly and act as she feels without guilt or remorse of any kind. She is now completely free from her dependence upon her family. At this point, she has acquired her independence and her womanhood. She has been frustrated by the pressure to obey her family, and yet has seen clearly that in order to live the life she desires, she must disobey their wishes. Maud does this for she is strong-minded enough to know what she must do and what makes her happy; therefore, she goes about making her own decisions without any help from anyone else in order to achieve her happiness.

Maud overcomes her inhibitions about her true feelings. As she faces each emotion and problem and acknowledges that it exists, she is maturing. At first Maud represses much of what she truly feels in order to conform to beliefs of her family and society. She is honest about her own desires and emotions. As she allows them to exist and realizes that it is acceptable not to feel sisterly or filial compassion, that it is all right to despise actions of members of her family, she grows towards

womanhood. Thus, at the end of the novel, Maud is a woman with a good understanding of who she is and what she wants.

La mère, in Un Barrage Contre le Pacifique could possibly be regarded as a study in endurance and suffering. The novel begins with the story of how the mother and her husband happened to go to Indo-China, and the reader glimpses a young, idealistic woman in search of adventure and a challenge to prove herself in a new world and new environment. She is gullible and the posters representing life in the colonies in Indo-China picture unrealistic plantation owners, wealthy, and in leisurely surroundings. They have an enormous impact upon this young woman.

Several years later after the death of her husband, la mère hears of the land concessions the government has for sale where she can raise crops. The idea of independence in being her own boss and growing rice on her own land appeals to the mother and she works for ten years to save enough money to buy a concession of land.

When she and her children move to the concession, they plant the rice, then wait proudly for it to grow. The rains come, and to the anguish of the family, wash away the seedlings. What the government failed to tell the mother about the land was that the China Sea flooded the entire area during the rainy season and, therefore, made it virtually impossible to grow anything at all. Idealism and perseverance, once again, prevail in the mother. She has an idea about building a dam to keep the water back and seems to share the author's statement about ideas:

Comme quoi une idée est toujours une bonne idée, du moment qu'elle fait faire quelque chose, même si tout est entrepris de travers, par exemple, avec des chevaux moribonds. Comme quoi une idée de ce genre est toujours



une bonne idée, même si tout échoue lamentablement, parce qu'alors il arrive au moins qu'on finisse par devenir impatient, comme on ne le serait jamais devenu si on avait commencé par penser que les idées qu'on avait étaient de mauvaises idées.<sup>2</sup>

The leadership qualities of the mother make it possible for her to convince the people that her idea will work for all of them if only she can get them to help her build the retaining walls. She informs the government agents of her project to build the walls to hold back the water. They do not protest but merely let her continue in her naïveté without warning her of the crabs and their powers of destruction:

Forte du délai que lui avait valu son bungalow, la mère mit les agents de Kam au courant de ses nouveaux projets. Ceux-ci consistaient à demander aux paysans qui vivaient misérablement sur les terres limitrophes de la concession de construire, en commun avec elle, des barrages contre la mer. Ils seraient profitables à tous. Ils longeraient le Pacifique et remonteraient le rac jusqu'à la limite des marées de juillet. Les agents, surpris, trouvèrent ce projet un peu utopique, mais ne s'y opposèrent pas.

(p. 23)

The mother continues to persuade the peasants that they are doing the right thing to try to fight for the land and to try to convert the flooded lands into productive lands. She is forceful and unwavering in her pleas:

Une vieille femme sans moyens qui leur disait qu'elle avait décidé de lutter les déterminait à lutter comme s'ils n'avaient attendu que cela depuis le commencement des temps. (p. 45)

After many long months of work to build these retaining walls, the floods come. With the floods come, even more importantly, the crabs who proceed to eat holes in the walls so that all the water comes through. This destroys all hope of the people of the area who slaved to build the walls.

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<sup>2</sup>Marguerite Duras, Un Barrage Contre le Pacifique (Paris: Gallimard, 1958), p. 10.

They give up. No one had thought about the destruction of the crabs and no one knew how to prevent the crabs from eating away the walls.

Following the destruction of the walls, la mère becomes ill. She suffers from several severe attacks of epilepsy. However, she does not entirely give up hope. Later she begins to make plans for another wall of concrete. Now she needs to think of a way to get the concrete which they would need in order to build such a large wall. Illness and old age wear down her resistance. She is much more realistic than she has ever been, but, although she faces starvation, poverty, death and filth every day of her life, she retains a spark of hope that some day she can figure out just the right scheme to get her and her children out of this place and into a city where they can work and try for a better type of existence:

Elle avait aimé démesurément la vie et c'était son espérance infatigable, incurable, qui en avait fait ce qu'elle était devenue, une désespérée de l'espoir même. Cet espoir l'avait usée, détruite, modifiée à ce point, que son sommeil qui l'en reposait, même la mort, semblait-il ne pouvait plus le dépasser. (p. 122)

Hope is destroying this woman and yet, at the same time, it is the only thing which is strong enough to sustain her through this ugly, rugged world which she must face daily.

The mother's plans take on a different perspective and importance which inspires more hope in her and in the rest of the family when Suzanne's suitor, Monsieur Jo, gives Suzanne a diamond ring. Seen through the mother's eyes, this ring represents their ticket to freedom, an escape from this repulsive existence. The family goes to the city to try to sell the diamond ring to the highest bidder. However, the mother believes

the ring to be worth much more than any of the four jewelers offer to pay for it. She refuses to give it up so easily and for such a low price.

The mother then entrusts the ring to her son, Joseph, to sell. Joseph leaves his mother and sister to stay with a wealthy woman. Not knowing where Joseph is, the mother takes Suzanne and returns home. She is physically broken. Her spirits are low because her son has deserted them without selling the ring. She dies from a seizure not many days later.

Throughout this novel the mother is a woman of amazing strength and hope in the face of so much suffering. She is an intelligent woman who uses her intelligence to help her make the plans which she firmly believes will better the situation of the family. However, in spite of her intelligence, la mère is victimized by the cadastral agents for two reasons: 1) she is a woman; 2) she is poor. Yet, in the face of all her troubles, the mother's leadership abilities remain steadfast. She organizes her projects well and convinces the peasants that they should help her with them for the improvement of their standard of living. This woman, who after becoming a widow takes on the responsibilities of both a mother and a father, does not shrink from a world where the living conditions are extremely harsh and cruel for any living being. She tries her utmost to do the best she can and perseveres through any situation. The mother must be admired as a woman who knows the fear of starvation. She resides in a world of the disadvantaged. Her strength lies in her endurance and her hope. The mother is a woman who lives one type of life while hoping for another, and consequently, is doomed to suffering

as an optimistic woman living in a pessimistic world. She represents some admirable qualities of women, those of endurance, patience and sacrifice.

Anna, in Le Marin de Gibraltar, is also a woman of great perseverance. She is compelled to search every port, no matter how distant, in order to find a man she once knew and loved, le marin de Gibraltar:

--On peut vous demander à vous aussi ce que vous faites?  
demandai-je.

Elle réfléchit un peu.

--Je cherche quelqu'un, dit-elle, je voyage.

--Lui?

--Oui.

--Vous ne faites que ça?

--Que ça. C'est un travail énorme.<sup>3</sup>

Considering the background of this woman, Anna, the reader comes to believe that, because of the consuming desire to find the sailor, perhaps the sailor represents an ideal, happiness for her. She marries the owner of a yacht. Later she meets the sailor and falls in love with him, but he disappears one day after going ashore.

After Anna and her husband return to London, she leaves him. Anna's husband then shoots himself. She is ostracized from the wealthy society of her husband's acquaintances for obvious reasons. She goes to Paris to wait for the sailor to come back to her since her husband is dead. He comes one day and stays with her for five weeks then leaves again without telling her where he was going. It is at this point that Anna starts to sail from port to port, from sea to sea, so that she can

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<sup>3</sup>Marguerite Duras, Le Marin de Gibraltar (Paris: Gallimard, 1952), p. 105.

find the love and the happiness that she knew for such a brief time with this sailor.

Anna probably has been disillusioned as a young girl. Although the reader does not know much of her life before she ran away from home, one can guess that she is searching for adventure and an ideal happiness as almost any young girl does. She marries the wealthy owner of the yacht while still very young. This provides Anna with financial security and the yacht supplies adventure for her, but she still lacks happiness, in this case, love.

Throughout the voyage, Anna's main companions are the yacht and the whiskey bottle, intermingled on occasion with crew members and a lover or two. Much drinking takes place. This drinking is not just for the sake of drinking, but for the purpose of becoming drunk. Anna is an alcoholic who drinks to free herself from boredom and loneliness. She is a woman seeking an ideal, love, and happiness, in other words, paradise. So far in her life she has experienced love only briefly. Anna, although she is rich, is very isolated and lonely. Through drinking she can find a release from her boredom and ease her passage through reality by blurring it until she finds what she needs to make her life complete and happy.

The reader becomes more aware that the marin de Gibraltar is more than just a lover from the past in reading passages describing him, such as the one given here:

Les ressources de M. le marin de Gibraltar sont nombreuses et variées. Elles portent en général sur ce que les blancs appellent ici le trafic. Je crois que ce mot désigne une activité commerciale à la fois nouvelle, originale et, comme on dit, très personnelle. Ce trafic porte sur les objets de notre artisanat dahoméen et aussi sur l'or. Il n'est

pas seul à le faire. On dit que M. le marin de Gibraltar a des hommes à lui dans toute l'Afrique, en particulier dans la Côte-d'Ivoire, dans la Nigeria, dans le Soudan oriental, mais aussi dans le Fouta-Djalon, à Labbé, et jusque dans le bassin de l'Ouellé chez les peuplades montboutous,...

Chez nos âmes simples, nos bergers des hauts plateaux, il passe pour davantage encore, pour un homme imprenable et protégé des dieux. (pp. 244-245)

Throughout the description of the sailor, there arise many stories about him which, at times, cause one to believe that, perhaps, this is some legendary figure and not a real man at all. As the last part of the quotation suggests, this is a man who is impregnable and protected by gods. With the mentioning of all the different countries one gets the feeling that he is everywhere, that no boundaries can contain him. If this man is so unconquerable, impossible to locate and so fortunate as to gain the protection of the gods, is he, then, real? The impression rendered here is the image of a demi-god. It consequently seems more logical to maintain that the sailor in question is nothing more than an illusive butterfly of happiness which Anna is trying, in all desperation, to capture for her very own. The sailor, for all practical purposes, exists only within her mind and she must either destroy the idea or incarnate it into other mortal forms in order to achieve her desire. Until Anna allows herself to experience some of these illusive qualities within the real world, she continues to drink, and, therefore, in her state of drunkenness erases all the pain of her failure to find the sailor. If she could bring herself to see in other people some of the qualities for which she is searching she could then begin to experience some happiness in her relationship with them.

The narrator gives an alternative explanation of happiness. He begins to explain what the hunt for a koudou, a bird, signifies:

--Lorsqu'on dort, dis-je, et qu'on le sait là,  
étendu devant la tente, alors, on croit qu'au-  
delà de ce koudou, ce serait trop, qu'on n'en  
aura jamais d'autre, que celui-la sera le seul.  
C'est un peu ça le bonheur. (p. 283)

In mentioning that more than one kudu would be too much and that she will never have another, the narrator, perhaps, is referring to dreams. In this particular case it could be a dream of the perfect love, the ideal which always remains just beyond reach. The narrator might be stating that happiness is contained in dreams, even though these dreams may not be attainable.

Anna is an independent who must find strength from someone or something because she has been left alone to face the world. She is rejected by the wealthy society for her behavior, unacceptable according to social dictates. Society would prefer that a woman of her wealth attend parties, operas and benefits and, thereby, link her money to a respectable position and name. She should be concerned with her appearance, clothes, and companions. However, Anna lives in contradiction to all of the expectations which society places on women of her wealth. These aspects of society provide none of the happiness and adventure she desires.

Anna seems to be faced with the need to fill a void inside herself. Every day she encounters a world of boredom and loneliness, and almost as often, seeks refuge in a bottle of whiskey. Why whiskey and not another type of alcohol? Because in the American novels the characters

always drink whiskey. It is an American drink. Anna is quite familiar with the novels of Hemingway and, therefore, associates her voyages and predicaments with those appearing in the American novel of adventure. Through Anna's association with the American novel, the reader glimpses the idealism and excitement which she expects to find in life. This is typical of many young women who find life dull and boring: they turn to the excitement of novels. The more they read, the more dissatisfied they become with their own lives. With such dissatisfaction and boredom comes a typical response: they turn to alcohol to lull the senses and the pain of boredom. Anna is a young and idealistic woman who seeks more than what society has in store for her. Rejecting society's wishes, she alienates herself, and as a bored and lonely woman, becomes an alcoholic.

Another of Duras' women is the maid in Le Square. She is in contrast with Anna because the maid possesses a strength which she does not believe herself to have. Yet, she is like Anna for she has a great deal of perseverance. The young girl admits that she has these qualities of perseverance, endurance and patience while talking to the man about her job:

--Voyez-vous, je pensais qu'il fallait, pour faire ce travail-là, certaines qualités indispensables...des qualités d'endurance, de patience plutôt, et aussi de persévérance.<sup>4</sup>

Here is a young woman who is a maid for a very wealthy family. She has many responsibilities around the house and seems to handle these with ease because she remarks that she does her job well and that the

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<sup>4</sup>Marguerite Duras, Le Square (Paris: Gallimard, 1955), p. 14.



family trusts her. Yet, she takes for granted ~~her~~ independence and ability to cope with these responsibilities because they ~~are~~ easy for her. In her humble way, the young maid fails to see just ~~how~~ important she is to the household and just how important her duties ~~are~~.

The man on the bench asks her if she has ever thought about changing jobs. The maid replies that by herself ~~she~~ cannot change her situation. She continues to say that she is waiting to be chosen by some man for marriage. Then, only after having been chosen, will she be able to change.

The fact that this young maid knows that she will someday quit her job and exactly how she will break the news to the family proves that she has an independence which, at this point, is hidden within her; yet this strength exists. Her determination on this point is apparent in the following quotation:

--Oui. Mon état n'est pas un état qui puisse durer.  
Il est dans sa nature de se terminer tôt ou tard.  
J'attends de me marier. Et dès que je le serai,  
c'en sera fini pour moi de cet état. (pp. 18-19)

--J'ouvrirai cette porte du salon, Monsieur et voilà,  
ce sera fait d'un seul coup et pour toujours. (p. 68)

The poor young girl labors under some dictates which society imposes upon her and other young women of the time: that a woman's existence comes not from herself and her own identity, but from a husband. If the maid were to stop and take a long look at herself in a mirror, she would, no doubt, be surprised at her good qualities. She is a very capable maid who responds to many responsibilities well. She is patient and kind and is quite determined to better her condition, in her opinion,

by eventually getting married. The maid, although she does not fully realize it, is independent and mature because she already knows her desires and what would make her happy. However, she operates under the handicap that she does not have the ability to be successful and happy without a husband. This one thing, and only this, can give her the support she needs in order really to live and be happy. She waits and longs for a husband: "Non, desormais, il me faut un homme pour lequel j'existerais, alors je le ferai." (p. 110) The maid, although young, seems to be quite mature and realistic. She sets a goal, marriage, and makes plans about her future and what she will do once she has been chosen as a wife. She always remains very realistic about her job situation and the possibilities for her future.

Anne Desbaresdes of Moderato Cantabile has plenty of self-confidence and money. However, there exists in her all-too-well-planned life a void which she seeks to fill. Anne turns to alcohol as a release from boredom and to a story of a murdered woman with whom she tries to identify in order to feel some emotion.

One day Anne hears some noise at a café and goes to see what the trouble is. She sees a woman lying dead and her lover bending over, kissing her. There has been a lover's quarrel and he has killed the woman. To Anne this is the greatest fulfillment of desire: to love someone so much that deep frustration occurs and the loved one is murdered, only to cause the murderer to realize that he loved her even more. For several days she meets a man, Chauvin, in the bar and each day implores him to tell her all that he knows about the murder. It seems very

important to her that she know all the details possible about happened. She enjoys talking about the love and desire that must have existed between the two lovers.

At each meeting with Chauvin Anne drinks more and more wine until she becomes inebriated. She drinks in order to forget her social position, and so that she can more easily experience psychologically the desire, pain and death of the murdered woman.

Anne's life previously consisted of a fixed routine with her carrying out the services of a dutiful wife. She appears to be so void of emotion that, at times, she looks at her son with surprise and wonders if, indeed, she has not invented him out of her own imagination:

--Quelquefois je crois que je t'ai inventé, que ce n'est pas vrai, tu vois.

L'étonnement de Anne Desbaresdes, quand elle regardait cet enfant, était toujours égal à lui-même depuis le premier jour.<sup>5</sup>

Anne is a woman who has been used as a show thing, like the women at the party who are covered with jewels according to their husbands' bank rolls:

Les femmes sont au plus sûr de leur éclat. Les hommes les couvrent de bijoux au prorata de leurs bilans. (p. 130)

Anne now realizes the need to feel desire, fear, love; and the only way she knows to accomplish this is through the use of alcohol in order to become free from inhibitions about who she is and what she should or should not do in society's eyes. The only way for her to feel intense

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<sup>5</sup>Marguerite Duras, Moderato Cantabile (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1958), p. 46.

human emotions is to become psychologically the murdered woman who was killed in a moment of extreme passion.

Anne represents a woman of the upper-class, one who has all the material things money can buy. She is not plagued by starvation as is the mother in Un Barrage Contre Le Pacifique. As a modern, wealthy woman, Anne is plagued by an emotional void in her life similar to that of Anna in Le Marin de Gibraltar. In her search for emotions or anything to replace her boredom, she begins to drink too much. By becoming drunk, she can release all tension and inhibitions which have been placed upon her by society. In a drunken state she feels free to pretend to be someone else, the murdered woman. She turns to this identity because this woman possessed one important thing which Anne could never buy: a deeply involved emotional life. Through inebriation Anne tries to feel some of the same emotions and thoughts that this other woman must have felt.

Anne is a prototype of a twentieth century woman who has material wealth, yet must turn to alcohol in order to escape her mundane life. She seeks freedom in the state which drinking too much can produce. She must either change her life from within herself or remain doomed to finding her escape only through the use of alcohol.

The woman, Maria, in Duras' Dix Heures et Demie du Soir en Eté is a very realistic woman who appears to have a good deal of common sense. She admits that she is an alcoholic and faces the fact that there is no longer any love between her and her husband, Pierre. The only bond holding them together now is their daughter, Judith. Maria is, also, much aware of the desire which their friend, Claire, and Pierre feel for each other;

and does not try to fool herself about the real reason why Claire accompanied them on this short vacation to Spain. Maria acknowledges that Claire is quite attractive and does not blame her husband for having an affair with her. Surprisingly, Maria is objective about this affair. She even goes as far as making conscious efforts to let them be alone. In the following quotation Maria is hesitating to return to Pierre and Claire in the dining room:

Il n'est pas beaucoup plus tard que dix heures du soir.  
L'heure est dépassée à laquelle elle aurait dû les  
rejoindre dans la salle à manger, arriver, s'introduire  
entre leurs regards, s'installer, et leur redire une  
nouvelle fois encore cette surprenante nouvelle.<sup>6</sup>

In one section, when Maria realizes that the love she and Pierre once shared is dying, she refers to Claire in an unusually tender manner as "ce fruit si beau de la lente dégradation" of their love. (p. 81) It takes a tremendous amount of strength and rationale to make a statement like that about her husband's mistress. It shows that Maria exercises self-control even though she must be experiencing strong emotional feelings.

At times Maria watches Pierre and Claire in intimate embraces or just the way they look at each other. She does not experience jealousy but a type of appreciation for the love they obviously share. It almost appears to be a feeling of satisfaction in that she is glad that Pierre has a woman to love who also loves him at a moment when his wife no longer can love him.

Maria is an alcoholic and, although her husband pleads with her not to drink so much, she resorts to alcohol as often as possible. The

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<sup>6</sup> Marguerite Duras, Dix Heures et Demie du Soir en Été (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), pp. 43-44.

following shows Maria referring to herself as an alcoholic: "tu m'attendes à la salle à manger, le réveil des alcooliques doit être solitaire." (p. 118).

The author does not supply enough information to establish whether or not Maria became an alcoholic before she knew of the affair between Claire and Pierre or afterwards. It certainly could be argued that Maria turned to drinking as a manner of escape from having to face the fact that her husband is unfaithful to her. It is, perhaps, the many observations of Pierre and Claire together that drive Maria back to the bottle eachtime. Her objectiveness is a result of a painless feeling derived from senses dulled by alcohol.

Although the cause of Maria's drinking problem is not clear, it is certain that she is a woman of endurance and has a sense of independence. Throughout the novel, which describes the trip to Spain, she must endure the situation between her husband and his mistress, and Maria's acceptance of defeat when she thinks about her looks and realizes that she is not as pretty as she once was:

Elle passe sa main sur son visage. C'est aux mains sur son visage qu'elle le sent, qu'elle le sait, qu'elle fut belle mais qu'elle a commencé à l'être moins. C'est à la façon, sans aucun ménagement, dont elle passe les mains sur son visage, qu'elle sait qu'elle a accepté d'être défaite, à jamais. (p. 119)

Maria's independence comes in her insistence on helping the criminal, Rodrigo Paestra, escape from the police. This is the only time in the novel that Maria takes definite steps to accomplish a goal. Perhaps she sees this situation as one in which she might be able to help; or perhaps, she identifies with Rodrigo in feeling that they share a

hopelessness in each of their own lives. Whatever the reason, Maria plans to help Rodrigo. She sees him hiding on the roof across from her balcony. In the middle of the night when she thinks everyone is asleep, she slips down to the garage to get her car. She calls to him softly and motions for him to get in her car and hide. She successfully gets past the police because she tells them that she is a tourist at the hotel and cannot sleep, therefore, she is going out for a ride. Then Maria lets Rodrigo out in a field and promises to return for him around noon, then goes back to the hotel. However, soon after Maria leaves him, Rodrigo shoots himself. Perhaps Maria's alcoholism is like Rodrigo's death, a form of suicide.

Another interesting woman is Lol V. Stein in Duras' novel, Le Ravisement de Lol V. Stein. She is somewhat demented after having an emotional breakdown when her fiancé runs off with an older woman. Due to this breakdown, a slight change occurs in the mind, and, therefore, in Lol's behavior. She sees herself as suffering from an inferiority complex from having been jilted as the following description of her condition explains:

Cette prostration de Lol, son accablement, sa grande peine, seul le temps en aurait raison, disait-on. Elle fut jugée moins grave que son délire premier, elle n'était pas susceptible de durer beaucoup, d'entraîner une modification importante dans la vie mentale de Lol. Son extrême jeunesse la balayerait bientôt. Elle était explicable: Lol souffrait d'une infériorité passagère à ses propres yeux parce qu'elle avait été abandonnée par l'homme de T. Beach.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Marguerite Duras, Le Ravisement de Lol V. Stein (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), pp. 24-25.

Lol's family and friends treat her as a weak and fragile girl who cannot endure pressure or mental strain. Everyone considers Lol not quite in full control of her mental faculties: Therefore, no one asks for any explanations of her actions, no matter how irregular they seem.

The man who marries Lol, Jean Bedford, is intrigued by her and finds her fascinating. The first time Jean meets Lol is when she follows him home one evening:

Cette conduite intrigua Jean Bedford. Evidemment il pensa à la folie mais ne la retint pas. Ni l'aventure. Elle jouait sans doute. Elle était très jeune. (p. 27)

When Lol is spoken to, she appears charmingly passive and unconcerned with everything, even her own safety at being out by herself at night. She appears unaware that she has followed Jean. Jean, knowing Lol's background, does not ask for a reason for her actions as he understands and realizes that she would have no explanation to offer. Jean calls Lol's mother, who comes over to get her and take her home.

Shortly after this incident, Jean marries Lol. Lol has no opinion on the question of marrying him, but neither does she oppose it. Therefore, she finds herself married one day to Jean Bedford. To Jean, Lol is not insane, merely different.

Jean and Lol move to U. Bridge. Here Lol seems to be happy and encourages Jean in everything he does, in business, in music, even in relationships with other women:

Elle paraissait confiante dans le déroulement futur de sa vie, ne vouloir guère changer. En compagnie de son mari on la disait à l'aise, et même heureuse. Parfois elle le suivait dans ses déplacements d'affaires. Elle assistait à ses concerts, l'encourageait à faire de la musique, l'encourageait à tout ce qu'il aimait



faire, à la tromper aussi, disait-on, avec les très jeunes ouvrières de son usine. (p. 36)

Perhaps it is due to a feeling of inferiority that Lol runs the household in a very strict manner. Everything happens at a certain time each day and she does not vary the schedule. Along with this rigid schedule which Lol imposes is the fact that she is an immaculate housekeeper as the following examples state:

Un ordre rigoureux régnait dans la maison de Lol à U. Bridge. Celui-ci était presque tel qu'elle le désirai , presque, dans l'espace et dans le temps. Les heures étaient respectées. Les emplacements de toutes choses, également. On ne pouvait approcher davantage, tous en convenaient autour de Lol, de la perfection. (p. 37)

Elle consacrait ses matinées entières à sa maison, à ses enfants, à la celebration de cet ordre si rigoureux qu'elle seule avait la force et le savoir de faire régner,... (p. 49)

Lol's obsessive compulsion for order and cleanliness is probably a result of her inferiority complex. She may feel that she has missed the type of marriage she wanted or was in some way cheated by the boy who broke the engagement. Therefore, she builds her ego by excelling in the cleaning and running of her household. Perhaps this provides some sort of release of tension or self-pity.

Jean and Lol eventually move back to Lol's hometown, of S. Tahla. Lol begins to go for walks in the afternoons. During one of these walks she recognizes her former best friend, Tatiana, meeting a man. Lol is strangely attracted to the man because he resembles her first boy friend, the one who broke their engagement. She delights in the fact that she has discovered that Tatiana is having an affair with this man. She pursues this one step further: she follows them to the

hotel and watches the window of their room from the field behind the hotel.

Lol even goes so far as to invite Tatiana, her husband and her lover, Jacques, for dinner in order to get to know them better. The purpose for this seems obvious: the better Lol knows Tatiana and Jacques, the more she can feel close to them and to their relationship. Consequently, Lol encourages them to keep meeting at the hotel and at each meeting, Lol is there experiencing their love with them as a voyeur.

Lol is an insecure woman who asserts authority in the only way she knows how: by establishing a routine for her household and making sure that it is as clean as it can possibly be. The insecurity or doubt as to whether or not she can cope emotionally with frustration, or the feeling that she possibly has missed something in her life leads her to seek fulfillment through voyeurism. This is the safest way possible for her to experience love or an affair. Lol probably gains a completeness of emotional feeling in observing her best friend's love affair with a man who, oddly enough, resembles the boy to whom Lol was first engaged. People view Lol as different and strange in her ways. Lol is weak and finds difficulty in coping with some of life's harsh aspects. Therefore, she hides from these problems and finds sanctuary in her mental weakness or strangeness. Lol is, also, a shy woman whose only assertiveness appears in her rigid management of the household. Many women find security in a home and family much as Lol does, but this alone does not satisfy Lol's emotional needs. Thus, she turns to voyeurism.

Claire, in Duras' L'Amante Anglaise, possesses total freedom through her insanity. Claire claims that she was driven to insanity

because she was incapable of dealing with the intelligence within her. As Claire's husband, Pierre, describes in this excerpt, Claire could not distinguish between reality and fiction:

Les choses de l'imagination elle ne les comprenait pas. Une histoire inventée, une pièce à la radio par exemple, on n'arrivait pas à lui faire admettre qu'elle n'avait jamais existé.<sup>8</sup>

As this example shows, Claire's vision of reality is different from that of most. It is difficult for her to understand the imagination of other people, even though hers is quite strong itself. Therefore, it would seem logical for her to spend the major portion of her life living through her imagination as Pierre remarks:

...elle ne comprenait pas l'imagination des autres. Son imagination à elle, c'est sûr, c'est certain, était très forte. Elle devait tenir une place plus grande que tout le reste dans sa vie. (p. 89)

Claire's husband tries for a while to help her with her reading and writing, to improve her knowledge of things by asking her questions over what she reads. Pierre is not successful so he stops. This makes Claire seem to be stupid, whereas, she may be an intelligent person who is merely unable to cope with all her intelligence and, therefore, rebels against all formal education and any attempt to help her learn. During the interview she admits:

Je dois vous dire que quelquefois je me suis sentie très intelligente sur ce banc en ciment. A force de rester immobile, tranquille, l'intelligence me venait, j'avais des pensées intelligentes. (p. 151)

This admission that she has intelligent thoughts which come to her is

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<sup>8</sup> Marguerite Duras, L'Amante Anglaise (Paris: Gallimard, 1967), p. 86.

quite surprising. Perhaps Claire really is an intelligent woman who does not know what to do with her intelligence and who, consequently, slips into the world of insanity for freedom from this tremendous responsibility. Claire's husband, also, makes a remark to the effect that maybe, if her friend Alfonso had been smart enough to understand Claire, he could have guessed what would happen and helped to prevent it:

Persone n'aurait pu le deviner. Mais s'il y avait eu quelqu'un à Viorne qui aurait peut-être pu comprendre qu'elle allait à la catastrophe, c'aurait été Alfonso, oui. Si Alfonso avait été intelligent il l'aurait compris. (p. 122)

The destruction of Claire's mental capacity is quite possibly the result of creativity and intelligence turned in upon itself by constant frustration. The frustration of not knowing what to do with intelligence, apparently, is the major cause of her insanity. Perhaps, it is when these intelligent thoughts begin to appear to her that she fights against them, therefore, behaving in an insane manner because she is not able to explain or to rationalize what is happening to her. The murder which she has committed could realistically be the result of pent-up frustration coming out in an aggressive act. Otherwise, there is no reason for Claire to have killed her deaf-mute cousin, Marie-Thérèse, and chopped her body into several pieces. As many people have testified, Claire had never before shown any signs of violence or any signs of dislike for her cousin. For twenty-one years Claire and Marie-Thérèse had gotten along well.

The interviewer is not interested in Claire primarily because of the murder but because she is someone who has never come to terms with life itself: "--Plutôt parce que c'est quelqu'un qui ne s'est jamais

accommodé de la vie." (p. 99) Therefore, Claire must appear to him as a person who is not criminally insane, but one who rejects all acceptable practices of dealing with life.

Considering the fact that Claire is insane, she makes a few extremely lucid remarks, such as the one given below:

--Parce que je dis tout ce qu'on veut que je dise et que ça n'y change rien. J'ai compris que si je me taisais le résultat serait le même, on me garderait aussi bien. (p. 138)

The fact that Claire states that whether or not she tells them what they want or nothing at all, they will keep her in prison shows an astonishing amount of perception on her behalf. With this remark the reader begins to question whether she is actually insane or not, or whether or not it is society who is insane. Perhaps society is responsible for Claire's insanity.

To all outward appearances Claire is a very meek and calm woman who most people claim is insane. She has never shown any signs of violence before the murder and, afterwards, remains just as calm as before. Claire remarks that she was afraid while she was in the process of disposing of the body. She admits that this fear almost drove her crazy:

--Non, ce que j'étais en train de faire me faisait tellement peur, je n'avais peur de rien d'autre. J'avais peur à devenir folle dans la cave. (p. 135)

Claire is isolated by her uniqueness and also by her fear. If she is afraid of her intelligence, then the obsession to kill may have been her only way to conquer or release the fear. It may be that she is a victim of her own mind, and realizing that she could not cope with her intelligence and the world, Claire finds solace in a world of insanity.

Evidently, the refuge of insanity is not enough to take away the fear and frustration she must be experiencing. These inner frustrations and fears about what to do with herself find their way to the surface through an overt act of aggression, in this case, a brutal and bizarre murder.

Marguerite Duras' depiction of women is very real and creates a vibrant image of each woman as a human being first, then as a character within a novel. Through each woman the reader has a glimpse of various problems, strengths, weaknesses, attitudes, emotions, and ambitions which these women experience. With such vast possibilities at hand, Duras picks and chooses an assortment of women in contrasting situations. They are rich, poor, middle-class, educated, uneducated, bored, afraid, tired, mentally sound, completely insane, and alcoholics. Duras magnificently captures the essence of each woman and her world as though she, herself, were intimately familiar with it.

Through Marguerite Duras' uncanny ability to choose just the right word and set it in an equally appropriate situation, she creates living, believable, mature women so close to life that the reader might wonder at times if, indeed, he is not reading a biography or a collection of tales as people have reported them. If nothing more were said about Marguerite Duras' talent, it could be maintained that she represents honestly the attitudes, problems and emotions which many women might encounter in today's society.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION

As a novelist Marguerite Duras' role in the literary world is twofold: first, she is a mirror of the main literary currents, reflecting popular techniques in writing; second, and perhaps foremost, she is an important link between the traditional novel and the nouveau roman.

Duras' main literary techniques evolve from a style acceptable to the traditional novel mandates to a unique style of her own which comes closer to the ideas proclaimed by critics to belong to the nouveau roman. The growth of the nouveau roman has come under much criticism encompassing several different opinions as to whether or not it is a result of a literary or philosophic movement. This point may never be completely resolved; however, the birth of the nouveau roman appears to be the result of a high degree of dissatisfaction with the twentieth century novel form inherited from the nineteenth century novelists such as Balzac and Zola. Therefore, the group of writers who turned away from the traditional novel did so, not in a philosophic movement, but more in a literary movement as a type of research necessary in order to promote the growth of the novel

as an art form. Butor and Robbe-Grillet both admit that the nouveau roman is a type of literary research:

Cette volonté de recherche ("Le Roman comme recherche" est le titre d'un essai de Butor, et Robbe-Grillet affirme: "Le Nouveau Roman n'est pas une théorie, c'est une recherche") explique qu'il soit de toute façon impossible de fixer le Nouveau Roman: il est différent avec chacun de ses tenants, en constante évolution de livre en livre pour chacun d'entre eux. Très rapidement, les Nouveaux Romanciers se sont engagés dans des voies très différentes de celles qu'ils avaient paru suivre dans les années cinquante-cinq: l'univers mental qu'ils vont peindre sera de plus en plus exclusivement celui du Créateur, et le roman va disparaître au profit de formes plus larges, plus souples, plus proches du poème. L'histoire de l'écriture et de l'écrivain devient peu à peu le sujet obsédant de leurs oeuvres récentes. Le Nouveau Roman montre la voie au 'livre futur'.<sup>1</sup>

Vivian Mercier also upholds this idea of research in the nouveau roman in her book when she comments that:

By no means all the New Novelists think of themselves exclusively as artists, however. Butor, Robbe-Grillet, and Mme Sarraute all hint in their essays at the possibility that they are scientists, capable of making new discoveries about human experience if they use their instrument, the novel, aright.<sup>2</sup>

Although Marguerite Duras is grouped with other writers under the title of a New Novelist, she remains, as the other New Novelists do, a highly individualized writer. Since her first novel, published in 1943, she has continually improved and expanded her writing talents.

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<sup>1</sup>J. Bersani, M. Autrand, J. Lecarme, B. Vercier, ed., La littérature en France depuis 1945 (Paris: Bordas, 1970), pp. 578-579.

<sup>2</sup>Vivian Mercier, The New Novel from Queneau to Pinget (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1971), p. 16.



Duras' characterizations begin in the traditional fashion as perfected by the nineteenth century novelists. The characters are described so that the reader sees them as the author wishes them to appear. Thus, reflecting trends in the literary movement in the first few novels, Marguerite Duras begins to acquire a style all her own. She continues to show influences of major literary techniques but instead of stopping here, she adds her own charm to these techniques and colors them in a hue to become more and more distinctly recognized as that of Marguerite Duras. As Duras matures she is able to free herself from the patterns previously established for novelists. Consequently, she begins to use less individualization of character and more anonymity.

The main themes recurring throughout Duras' novels are those of love, freedom, waiting-apathy and alienation. These themes are not unique in themselves; however Marguerite Duras does present them in various ways showing several different facets of each theme. Such an example of variations on a theme is the theme of love as it appears in the novels: Les Impudents, Le Marin de Gibraltar, Les Petits Chevaux de Tarquinia, Moderato Cantabile, Détruire Dit-Elle and L'Amour. In these novels the reader finds love linked to hatred, the ideal, isolation, death and destruction.

Marguerite Duras' style of writing has also gone through a great metamorphosis. In its weak beginnings her style was actually an imitation of her predecessors, the traditional novelists. Later she begins to incorporate many techniques employed by writers referred to as anti-novelists. This is the reason she is now linked with this group of

writers as a New Novelist, even though she continues to deny any alliance with any school or group of writers. As Germaine Brée points out:

Marguerite Duras has never been an essayist, an exponent of esthetic theories and ideas. But she shares with her contemporaries the desire to discard many of the rather wornout conventions of the traditional novel, conventions which she put to effective use in her first works.<sup>3</sup>

Duras' style has evolved through several periods of change and today she has a remarkably sophisticated style, unique from that of any other novelist.

There is more to Marguerite Duras' writing than characterization, style and theme. Although she transcends the identities of male and female characters in order to present universal situations and problems, a very important aspect of Duras' novels is her presentation of the essence of a woman's world in twentieth century society. The author's characterization of women reflects attitudes, problems and emotions common to women today. Duras reveals in her novels the sensitivity of a woman who knows human needs, human frailty and the impact of emotion. Therefore, to a great extent, she can be considered a distinctly feminine writer. Cismaru summarizes Duras' abilities like this:

...she has succeeded in synthesizing the qualities of what is generally called the 'American Novel' with the engaging aspects of the New Novel now raging throughout Europe. She has managed to become neither so famous as Hemingway, for example, nor so notorious as Alain Robbe-Grillet. But her ability to combine the forces of the old with the lucidity of the new seems to assure her place in modern French literature.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Duras, The Four Novels of Marguerite Duras, Germaine Brée's Introduction, p. iv. (New York: Grove Press, 1965).

<sup>4</sup>Alfred Cismaru, "Marguerite Duras and the New Novel," Dalhousie Review, XLVII, no. 2 (summer 1967), p. 211.

As evidenced in her novels, Duras will probably continue to change, to experiment in search of a form which resembles no other novel. Duras, herself, explains writing in this way:

Ou la musique. Ou la révolution. Ou la mort. Ou l'humour. Ou ce que chacun voudra. Lire ce livre, c'est l' écrire. A cause de cela un livre où l'on se sent libre.<sup>5</sup>

Marguerite Duras is an author with much talent and originality. As she continues her endeavors in the field of literature she surely will carry with her a great impact. Duras is an important author in French literature today who promises an even brighter future for the development of the French novel.

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<sup>5</sup> Madeleine Chapsal, "Le plus beau sujet de Marguerite Duras," L'Express, no. 925 (31 mars - 6 avril, 1969), pp. 60-61.

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