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THE EXPANDING SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SHRINKING HERO IN THE NOVELS OF MARGUERITE DURAS

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

THE EXPANDING SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SHRINKING HERO IN THE NOVELS OF MARGUERITE DURAS

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The evolving conception of characterization in Marguerite Duras' novels offers to the student of the mid-twentieth century French novel the rare, if not unique, opportunity to observe the diverse manifestations of the novelistic protagonist, from the traditional heroes through the antiheroes of the New Novel, within the thematic context of a single creative imagination. The evolution of Duras' heroes and heroines serves as a microcosm of the experimentation in serious fiction that has occurred during the literary generations in France since the Second World War. Although in recent years the author's energies have been directed to the theater and, in particular, to the cinema, her twenty novels, spanning a period of thirty years (1943-1973), show a mastery of both the traditional and the avant-garde approach to characterization.

From the publication of her first novel in 1943, the expanding scope of the literary itinerary of Marguerite Duras takes the reader from novels whose protagonists are "coming of age" to the most recent works which signal the end of an age. Ironically, as the verisimilitude of the characters and their world progressively contracts, their philosophical and mythic import is dramatically amplified.

For Marguerite Duras, life is an annihilating passion that is most appropriately expressed by an antithetical and irrational apprehension of reality. There is a progressive feminacy in the characters, be they men or women. The early novels, harmonious and cerebrally conceived, show a masculine, ordered interpretation of reality. With the middle and more recent works, wordy theorizing is replaced by a muted, poetic introversion of experience. The emergence of the psychotic heroes and antiheroes reveals Duras' revolt against the Freudian reality principle which masks the antithetical, destructive nature of human experience.

The itinerary of Duras' characters described in this study is therefore one of a regression beyond the limits of a rational epistemology. This evolution does nothing less than put into question the foundations of modern civilization. It is an itinerary of revolution and destruction on three levels: aesthetic, psychological, and social. The heroes of this literary odyssey permit the reader to view the progressive metamorphosis of heroes into antiheroes, of novels into antinovels, and, ulitmately, of the antinovels into films.

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For My Father and Mother

Lydon and Irene Olson

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THE EXPANDING SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SHRINKING HERO IN THE NOVELS OF MARGUERITE DURAS

CHAPTER I

THE ITINERARY OF DURAS' PROTAGONISTS

Novels, plays, and film scenarios are the media through which Marguerite Duras has gained a considerable French and even international fame during the last three and one half decades. In all three genres, Duras has created both traditional and more abstract, avant-garde works. Although in the last several years, the cinema has become her principal artistic preoccupation, it is the evolution of her novels, spanning a period of thirty years (1943-1973), which will receive our primary focus. More specifically, the significance of this evolution is seen through an analysis of the heteroclite array of Duras' fictional creations and their world. Our thesis is that the gestation, maturation, destruction, and rebirth of the Durasian protagonists throughout some twenty novels not only illuminate the author's own changing approach to reality, but also that the evolution and development of these literary characters reflect to some extent the radical metamorphosis witnessed in the manner of novelistic characterization in general during the generations of French writers since World War II.

The author's own biographical evolution presents a scenario as interesting and almost as unusual as that of her fiction. Born in 1917, in French Indochina (what is now the Southern part of Vietnam), Marguerite Duras grew up there with an older brother and their mother, a teacher. The father had died when Marguerite was only four. In 1932, she began her studies in Paris where she eventually prepared a licence in law and where she also studied mathematics and political science. Duras married Robert Antelme in 1939 (author of L' Espèce humaine). In 1942, she began a life-long association with another writer, Dyonis Moscolo, author of an important work, Le Communisme, by whom she had a son, Jean. Active in leftist politics after World War II, Marguerite Duras started to concentrate on her career as a writer of novels, and somewhat later, of plays and films. During the late fifties and throughout the sixties, Duras staged a half dozen of her plays, some of which are clearly influenced by what has come to be known as the theater of the Absurd. Her collaboration with Alain Resnais in composing the scenario for the internationally famous movie, Hiroshima, mon amour, in 1960, earned her much acclaim and world-wide recognition. Still politically militant and touched by the "events" of May, 1968, Duras continued to produce novels until 1973. Since that date, the author has dedicated her activities almost exclusively to writing and directing artistic, often hermetic films, many of which are re-creations of her more recent novels.[1]

In her "Notes sur India Song," Marguerite Duras made a striking comment on herself as a creative artist, which seems not to limit itself simply to this one published text which complements the film bearing the same name. This surprising self-evaluation perhaps partially explains

the contradictory coexistence in all her works of an active and creative élan vital that mysteriously springs from an otherwise all-pervasive and passive pessimism.

> Je fais des films pour occuper mon temps. Si j'avais la force de ne rien faire je ne ferai [sic] rien. C'est parce que je n'ai pas la force de ne m'occuper à rien que je fais des films. Pour aucune autre raison. C'est là, le plus vrai de tout ce que je peux dire sur mon entreprise.[2]

Duras thus reminds the reader that in écrivain, there is cri vain, but her literary itinerary is to transcend the very dilemma it illustrates.

In view of such a paradox, it is not surprising that the world, in the manner in which Duras presents it, is unlivable for the characters that she has created in her novels. These novels, both the earlier ones of the traditional stamp as well as those more recent ones which flirt with the experimental antinovels, still find themselved inextricably trapped by the essential dilemma of the greater novels of the twentieth century: how to break free from the closed circle of subjective consciousness, and how to create, communicate, and project an authentic yet coherent exterior reality, and, in relation to it, characters who combine phenomonological verisimilitude with a no less human identity.[3]

From the publication of her first book in 1943, the expanding scope of the literary itinerary of Marguerite Duras takes us from novels whose protagonists are "coming of age" to the most recent works which signal the end of an age. Ironically, as the characters and their world tend to become more and more narrow and barren, their philosophical and mythic import seems to grow: "A mesure que le réalisme s'étend, la réalité rétrécit à la manière d'une peau de chagrin" quips one critic of the New Novel.[4] As Duras' heroes undergo a shrinking of substance and a

dissolution of personality that in many ways reflect the situation of the New Novel's antiheroes, they take on a new dimension of significance. As they evolve from the traditional dénouement of the early novels to the stark dénuement of the avant-garde, they embody the general evolution of the mid-twentieth century novelistic protagonist.

The first novels of Marguerite Duras depict in a traditional fashion the coming of age of a young female protagonist as she extricates herself from the entanglements of the family and as she matures psychologically. In style, mood, and content, Les Impudents (1943) and La Vie tranquille (1944) recall the restrictive, stifling labyrinth of the family evoked by François Mauriac in such novels as Le Noeud de vipères. In Un Barrage contre le Pacifique (1950), the first of Duras' novels to receive wide acclaim, and in Le Marin de Gibraltar (1952), a vigorously realistic style and content are reminiscent of the works of Heminway.[5] In the former novel, the protagonists shed their protective coating of adolescence once and for all; in the latter, a quixotic quest for ideal love bogs down in hopeless relativity, made bearable only through an alcoholic and promiscuous complicity. Most of Duras' recurring themes appear already, some only in their incipient form, in these novels of the early period. La Vie tranquille, in particular, constitutes the vital antithesis that characterizes all of Duras' works. The tranquil life worked out by the heroine of this early novel is a provisional victory of Eros and Freud's reality principle over the destructive forces of madness, Thanatos, and the pleasure principle, which dominate the later novels and films. Le Marin de Gibraltar is the epic adventure of the Durasian hero who already attempts to escape through exterior action and rational revolt, what we have called the "Animus Odyssey," from

the numbing restraint imposed on the human spirit when it is subordinated to the imperatives of the tranquil life.

In 1953, Les Petits Chevaux de Tarquinia is new by its heavy, opaque atmosphere and by its preoccupation with the vicarious and vacuous nature of emotion in human relationships: "Aucun amour au monde ne peut tenir lieu de l'amour, il n'y a rien à faire."[6] The following novels become shorter, more like the form of the récit, and these transitional works show the gradual unravelling of the new manner of Durasian prose. More significantly, these works demonstrate an interiorization of experience, a poetic apprehension of reality in contrast to the truculent, philosophic stance of the heroes in Le Marin. These middle works reflect an incipient introversion in Duras' characters' reaction to the human condition, an evolution that we have called the "Anima Syndrome." This progressive introversion later evolves into the illuminating schizophrenia of several Durasian antiheroes.

Following Les Petits Chevaux, the banal yet touching Existential patter of Le Square (1955) and the flagrant mauvaise foi and nostalgic regression of Des Journées entières dans les arbres (1954) recall Sartre's preoccupation with authentic choice and responsibility along with Gide's dilemma of commitment versus the inauthentic wish for an eternal state of availability.[7]

Moderato cantabile (1958), a hauntingly composed reprise of "bovarysme"[8] and a frightening evocation of the Eros-Thanatos theme lived out vicariously, heightens the transitional impetus of the development of Duras' novels. Moderato is a reworking of the antithesis defined in La Vie tranquille. This novel marks the beginning of a revolt against the priorities established in Duras' second novel. The psychological

ravishment of the heroine of Moderato shows the imminent destruction of the tranquil life and the triumph of madness as an approach to reality. Vicarious passion and contemplated violence surface in Dix heures et demie du soir en été (1960) and explode into a gratuitous murder in L'Amante anglaise (1967), which presents the first truly psychotic heroine. Up to this point in Duras' novels, the Eros-Thanatos dichotomy has been structurally manifested in most of the works by a binary representation of reality. The middle novels show a parallel evocation of the protagonists' uneventful, yet erotically tense waiting which is highlighted by some isolated, fatal event of destruction. This duality is fused in the homicidal madness of L'Amante anglaise.

Finally, L'Après-midi de Monsieur Andesmas (1962) and Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein (1964) turn the Proustian notions of the simultaneity and the subjectivity of psychological time into pathological passivity in the first case and into schizophrenic breakdown in the second. In this last group of short novels, or récits, the novelistic genre is brought into question by Duras. Works of psychological, sociological, and political destruction, Détruire, dit-elle (1967) and Abahn Sabana David (1970) take the novel to its degré zéro. The novels become antinovels, and the heroes fade into antiheroes. Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein, with its sequels, or more precisely its thematic extensions, Le Vice-consul (1966), L'Amour (1971), India Song (1973), and La Femme du Gange (1973) recount a sort of secular apocalypse. The concomitant disintegration of the heroes' personality and of the novels' traditional form results in Duras' abandonment of the novel for the less restrictive medium of the cinema.

In this most recent phase, Duras has abandoned altogether or in part the conventions of a paraphrasable plot, traditional characterization, and linear chronological development; the reader thus finds himself firmly ensconced in the realm of the antinovel. Duras' world is bathed in the opaque and disquieting light of a debilitating, sensually intense atmosphere. It is a claustrophobic domain, where the heroes' individual personality dissolves and where chronological time is abandoned in favor of the mindless durée of a geological age. The protagonists have become nameless, faceless forms, anesthetized neurasthenics wandering aimlessly along deserted beaches, perhaps in search of a new set of revitalizing myths and symbols with which to rebuild.

The itinerary of Duras' characters is therefore one of a regression beyond the limits of a rational epistemology. It does nothing less than put into question the foundations of modern civilization. It is an itinerary of revolution and destruction on three levels: aesthetic, social, and psychological. It is an itinerary in which the heroes and even the novel itself are destroyed. Catherine Weinzaepflen has captured the grave consequences of Duras' literary adventure in the following remarks:

> C'est bien d'une question de vie ou de mort qu'il s'agit. Mourir de refoulement. Mentir jusqu'au bout. Ou bien refuser enfin une société régie par la frustration. Telle est la voie sur laquelle Marguerite Duras nous emmène. Et pour ceux qui n'y opposent pas l'obstination de la sclérose, on n'en revient pas impunément.[9]

The evolving conception of characterization in Marguerite Duras' novels therefore presents the student of the mid-twentieth century novel with the rare, if not unique, opportunity to follow the peripeteia of

the evolution of this generation's novelistic protagonist within the thematic context of a single creative imagination. This unilateral focus, this chance to witness the progressive metamorphosis of hero into antihero, of novels into antinovels, and, ultimately, of the antinovels into films, may sensitize our appreciation, if not always our enthusiasm, for the often strange figures which animate, or at least passively take up space, in the highly stylized and self-conscious contemporary experimental novel.

NOTES

[1] Alain Vircondelet, Marguerite Duras, ou le temps de détruire, Ecrivains d'hier et d'aujourd'hui 42 (Paris: Editions Seghers, 1972), pp. 186-187.

[2] Marguerite Duras et al., Marguerite Duras, Collection Ca/Cinéma (Paris: Editions Albatros, 1975), p. 12.

[3] Alfred Cismaru, Marguerite Duras (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1971), p. 15.

[4] Jean-Bertrand Barrère, La Cure d'amaigrissement du roman (Paris: Editions Albin Micel, 1964), p. 102.

[5] Cismaru, p. 17.

[6] Marguerite Duras, Les Petits Chevaux de Tarquinia (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1953), p. 168.

[7] Barrère, p. 109.

[8] Maurice Bruézière, Histoire descriptive de la littérature contemporaine (Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1975), p. 429.

[9] Duras et al., pp. 185-186.

CHAPTER II

THE HEROES' COMING OF AGE

The first three novels of Marguerite Duras recount a coming of age, the difficult transition from adolescence to adulthood, of three female protagonists. In these formative works, Duras, as well as her characters, is establishing her first manner of perceiving and reacting to the human condition within the context of the novel. In the same way as the hero of Plato's Allegory of the Cave, the Durasian figures are at once dazzled and bewildered in a world illuminated by the direct rays of the sun. They are intoxicated, yet fearful before the anguished freedom of existential choice. For Maud of Les Impudents and for Françou of La Vie tranquille, there is a nostalgia for the world of shadows that they have left behind in the claustrophobic, labyrinthine cave of a psychological matrix dominated by a stifling maternal presence. In both women, there is a disturbing tendency to vacillate between a pathological passivity and a compulsively intense activity. Suzanne, of Un Barrage contre le Pacifique, less cerebral and more down to earth in her approach to reality, is giddy with the relative freedom accompanying her emancipatory initiation into the realm of adulthood. On the threshold of life, the characters of Duras' fiction define themselves in relation to their new found freedom; the initiatory step in the singular and revelatory

itinerary of the Durasian protagonist has been taken, or just as significantly, not taken. Jacques Guicharnaud astutely observes that:

> For Marguerite Duras, an act of will begins the minute we decide to put one foot in front of the other. We can of course walk mechanically; but as soon as we are struck by the fact that basically there is no reason to walk, just as Camus' man is struck by a consciousness of the absurd, the slightest gesture becoms an "effort" of the will.[1]

It is these all important, first conscious steps of the protagonists of Duras which are observable in the first three novels. It is the beginning of a unique literary peregrination of which the principal stages illustrate the major preoccupations of the literary generations since the Second World War.

In 1943, Marguerite Duras published her first novel, Les Impudents.[2] It is in the context of this family of "impudents," tenuously held together by a maze of love-hate relationships, that the first character types take form. The significance of the title should be noted; there is a certain puerile petulance which characterizes the protagonists in their avid pursuit of pleasures which can serve to anesthetize their vulnerability to ennui and to existential anguish.

The story of this family is related in the third person by an omniscient narrator; nevertheless, the reader is made to identify with and to experience the events which comprise the novel from the point of view of Maud, the principal figure. She is a young lady of twenty, growing up in France during the period between the First and Second World Wars. Les Impudents is, in many ways, a novel of initiation and maturation, in which Maud tries to extricate herself from familial bonds and to make an independent life of her own. The struggle to create a

comfortable yet liberating relationship within the affective labyrinth of the family recalls the hermetically sealed, bleak family atmosphere depicted in Francois Mauriac's Le Noeud de vipères (1932).[3] Duras describes Maud's family as ". . . une triste existence où chacun n'était que le témoin des faiblesses et des échecs des autres" (p. 19).

The psychological portraits of the Grand-Taneran family give the tone and set the stage for the imminent unfolding of its irreconcilable conflicts. The novel, divided into three parts, begins in the midst of one crisis, and then ineluctably evolves toward another. The exposition, which constitutes the first part, introduces the reader to the family members as they react to the trauma occasioned by the death and possible suicide of Jacques's wife in an automobile accident.

The mother, Mme Grand-Taneran, serves as the cohesive and motivating force without which this family unit would most certainly dissolve.

> Sans elle cependant, la famille n'eût pas existé; chacun y aurait fui les autres sans retour, elle le savait. Mère de ce vieux fils, de cette fille ingrate et certainement méchante, de ce jeune garcon 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 sur ce sol mouvant une citadelle d'indifference, elle se devait à tous. . . . Elle rêvait d'une vie tranquille depuis quelque temps. (p. 21)

This vie tranquille, that is, here, a liberation from the constraints, conflicts, and responsibilities of the family is not only the title of Duras' next novel, but also a recurring preoccupation of her protagonists. In the early novels, however, this struggle to be free of the family and other time-consuming daily activities is most often an abortive effort; in the later novels, when this particular freedom is within reach, the heroes and heroines tend to regard it with ambivalence and

anxiety. The lure of total passivity fascinates and frightens them simultaneously.

Jacques, the vieux fils, whose brief marriage has just ended in tragedy, is a forty-year old arrested adolescent whose business misadventures and amorous caprices have kept tied to his family for financial as well as psychological security. His life consists of: ". . . une succession ininterrompue de plaisirs et de repos, en un continuel exorcisme de l'ennui" (p. 8). Mme Grand-Taneran, when brief moments of lucidity break through her psychological defenses of self-deception and chronic fatigue, acknowledges her maternal disappointment as she reflects on Jacques's fate: "Voici qu'il arrivait maintenant à l'âge mûr et qu'elle assistait à son déclin..." (p. 20).

Maud, the twenty-year old daughter already alluded to as "la fille ingrate et certainement méchante," is probably less wicked than simply devoid of a normal dose of emotional and moral sensitivity. Maud views the feelings of herself and of others with a disquieting distance and objectivity. She appears to consider her affective life as only a dress rehearsal and therefore not worthy of real emotion; yet she knows quite well that this life is all there is. Her mother describes her as "dangereusement repliée sur elle-même" (p. 243) and as having a character "renfermé et violent" (p. 243). Fascinated by, yet resentful and jealous of her brother Jacques, Maud only succeeds in dispelling this abnormally prolonged and latently incestuous attachment when she enters into a relationship with her first lover, Georges Durieux, who curiously resembles Jacques; the former also ". . . aimait éprouver à chaque instant de sa vie cette jeune illusion de pouvoir encore tout entreprendre" (p. 95). Maud definitively breaks with her family when she

denounces Jacques to the authorities, mistakenly believing him wanted by the police for criminal fraud. Her day-long meanderings on foot through the streets of Paris before and after this act of defiance and separation in a state of semi-lucid numbness graphically evoke the familial labyrinth from which she has just emerged. Her unwanted yet unlamented pregnancy and the consequent prospect of an imminent marriage to Durieux she accepts with no apparent joy or regret: "Maud se sentait seule et n'espérait plus rien qu'elle ne connût déjà" (p. 222).

The remaining figures are less fully delineated. These characters, as the preceding ones, are animated by the customary means of the traditional novel. M. Taneran, the second husband of Madame Grand-Taneran, has been exiled by the entire family--his wife, two step children, and even his own son Henri--to a situation where his presence is tolerated only when he does not make it felt. His portrait is superficially yet poignantly drawn. The supposed head of the family being relegated to the role of the ambivalent prisoner, who both loves and hates the familial maze in which he is inextricably entangled again recalls the novelistic families of Mauriac. Henri, the youngest son, is vacillating between the impetuous escapades of late adolescence and the imminent responsibilities of maturity much like Jacques, but with more chronological justification, being about twenty years his junior. The peasant figures who are the neighbors of the Grands' provincial estate are convincingly brought to life, once again within the framework of the traditional novel. Of particular vividness are the indefatigable Mère Pecresse and her painfully deliberate son, Jean. Duras at times succeeds in evoking an entire character or attitude with a concise statement, bordering on the aphorism. As an example, Jean Pecresse's vie

sentimentale is briefly and aptly expressed by the following: "Mais il avait trop attendu l'amour et restait déçu. Il engraissa et s'abétit" (p. 41).

The plot through which these traditionally but cogently delineated portraits emerge may be briefly summarized. The entire Grand-Taneran family, with the exception of M. Taneran, who remains in the Parisian apartment, leaves the city to spend a summer vacation at its provincial property in the Haut Quercy. The mother manages to sell the property to a rich peasant family, the Pecresses, but fails both to reform Jacques and to unite the two families by marrying Maud to Jean. Through the course of the long, hot, and oppressive summer, Maud's growing rejection of her family and her slowly crystallizing erotic sensibilities bring her, upon the family's return to Paris, to a definitive separation from them and to an imminent marriage with Georges Durieux, her lover and the father of her unborn child.

Les Impudents is above all the story of Maud's coming of age. Without apparent effort, the heroine drifts away from the influence of her mother and brother. By replacing Jacques with Georges, Maud makes the amorous transfer which is essential to her psychological independence. Les Impudents is, however, more than just a novel of initiation. It is also a work showing destruction and implied renaissance--the disintegration of the family unit is paralleled by Maud's projected marriage and her unborn child. This destruction-renaissance pattern unfolds slowly, within a traditional context of linear chronological time; however, the events of the summer appear to take place on a subjective level as well, where time passes as in a slow-motion cinematographic time sequence. Sensuous, erotic appetites lie dormant, tentative,

immanent as well as imminent, waiting and then suddenly becoming aroused in the hot, lazy days of summer where the atmosphere is heavy, opaque, almost claustrophobic. There is no corresponding release. The work seems to progress like multiplying cells magnified and photographed with a time-lapse method so that the observer can perceive their biologically normal yet almost obscene groping toward life and light. It is the period of l'attente. The theme of waiting characterizes almost all of Duras' novels. As Maud says, ". . . elle savait que le temps seul apporterait un dénouement à leur aventure" (p. 186). The Thanatos-Eros theme is also present in a latent state. Maud's fist sexual union with Georges occurs during the tension-filled mood precipitated by the suicide of one of Jacques's mistresses. Moreover, certain characters who are to become stock players in Durasian fiction are already present: the indulgent mother figure, the ineffectual old son and the fascinating brother who are united in one protagonist in this novel, and the disturbingly distant and emotionally deficient daughter. "Maud se sentait envahie par une amertume qu'atténuait, il est vrai, un sentiment de détachement si immense, qu'elle crut ne les avoir jamais aimés" (p. 12). Moreover, Maud's arrested affect is evidenced in her expression as she ". . . arbora un sourire posé sur ses traits comme un masque, mais qui n'effleura pas ses yeux" (p. 13). Henri Hull evaluated Les Impudents in the following fashion:

> Le premier roman de Marguerite Duras laissait peu présager ses livres à venir. En effet, Les Impudents est un roman d'une facture traditionnelle dont le « climat » se situe du côté de François Mauriac ou de Julien Green. On en retiendra cependant, l'espèce de fascination qu'exerce le héros sur sa soeur, cette même fascination qu'exercera le beau Nicolas sur sa soeur Françou dand La Vie tranquille.[4]

The novel is definitely of the traditional stamp. Its characters are presented with psychological verisimilitude by an omniscient narrator. In addition to the influence of Mauriac and Green, one can even sense that of the nineteenth century master of the novel, Balzac. In Les Impudents, there is a Balzacian preoccupation with money, property, and a minute description of the living environment of the protagonists which helps to define their personalities. However, it also seems clear that the characters and the themes in Les Impudents are in their incipient phase. The next novels are to define the characters with more precision and to potentialize their latent significance.

As in Les Impudents, the events which constitute La Vie tranquille[5] show the maturation and liberation of a young female protagonist, Françou, as she instinctively emerges, without apparent volition, from the anesthetizing labyrinth of familial ties and tedium to face the painful reality of her own existential situation. The two titles suggest an assagissement which is intriguing yet probably misleading; La Vie tranquille is not the suppression of impudence. It is an illusive, unattainable chimera, an ironic statement of the underlying contradiction of existence, the antithetical nature of reality. It is the longing to be simultaneously en soi and pour soi, to incarnate the peace and purity of non-being while retaining an active awareness of self. It is the urge to embrace life, and it is at the same time the temptation of immobility, a total submission to the caprices of the durée. Jean-Luc Seylaz sees in the main character's inconsistency or ambivalence a sign of her age: "Nous avons affaire à un être qui n'a pas encore pris forme, à un être en mue; et le sens du livre est précisément ce lent mouvement par lequel Françou s'installe dans son destin . . . mouvement qui se confond pour elle avec la cristallisation de sa destinée d'amoureuse. . . ."[6]

La Vie tranquille begins abruptly in the midst of one crisis precipitating the liberation of Nicolas, the brother of the heroine, and then slowly and inexorably works its way toward another crisis and liberation, Françou's coming of age. Unlike the previous work, La Vie tranquille is related in the first person by Françou Veyrenattes, its main character. Françou embodies the contradiction of the title: there is a strange co-existence of activity and passivity, an intensification of the same ambivalence which characterized Maud and her mother in Les Impudents.

The opening scenes depict the confused aftermath of Nicolas's fatal beating of his uncle Jérôme, the family parasite whose adulterous relationship with his nephew's wife, Clémence, had been denounced by Françou. After the unmourned death of Jérôme and the departure of Clémence, Luce Barragues, long enamoured of Nicolas, begins to visit the family with regularity, and a brief period of hope animates the normally unfeeling ennui of the household: Nicolas, Françou, their mother and father, and Tiène, friend of Nicolas and Françou's lover. However, when Luce appears to forget her first love and becomes infatuated by Tiène, Nicolas commits suicide. Françou, shattered by the events of the summer, leaves the family farm for a brief vacation by the sea. There she goes through an existential moment of crisis. After witnessing the drowning of an anonymous swimmer, without emotion and without calling out for help, Françou reassembles her disintegrating identity and returns home to marry Tiène. This provisional affirmation of life, however, leaves the reader unsettled, if not unconvinced. The "happy ending" is more an unimaginative, tenacious perserverance, devoid of strong feelings and joyful expectations. As with Maud at the end of Les Impudents, the

coming of age is signaled by a resignation to and recognition of the medocrity of life, that is, la vie tranquille. The naive exuberance and great expectations normally associated with youthful protagonists on the verge of their first marriage are more a conscious, calculated surrender to the instinct of self-preservation, in spite of lost illusions and hopeless futility.

The characterizations of the Veyrenattes family and their intimate associates stand out less clearly as individual portraits than do the protangonists of the Grand-Taneran family in Les Impudents; this is primarily due to the preeminence of Françou, the first person narrator. The other characters are perceived by the reader as extensions of the consciousness of Françou. Nevertheless, their identities do materialize sufficiently to allow the recognition of their similarity to the protagonists of the previous novel and of those to come. In addition, the very nature of this set of characters lacks that dose of humanity, that spark of vital spontaneity, which Bernard Pingaud describes in the following fashion:

> Ces personnages sont inhumains parce qu'ils n'ont pas incarné, c'est-à-dire individualisé, l'humain (l'humanité) dont ils sont faits et qui les baigne. M. Duras décrit, à travers eux, l'indifférence ou l'absence d'être qui caractérise ce que, faute d'un terme meilleur, nous appellerons la non-incarnation. A la substance mentale et affective qui traverse leur être physique, ces pures formes ne donnent identité ni visage; ils sont la vie, privée de leur vie.[7]

These protagonists thus prefigure already the dehumanized forms of Duras' later manner. The murder of Jérôme will temporarily interrupt the tranquil life, the unfeeling void of non-existing, and force Françou and Nicolas to make an existential choice. This confrontation, this

sensitized state, however, will be of short duration; authentic life is too painful. Nicolas commits suicide, and Françou comes dangerously close to insanity before opting to marry Tiène and to reinstate the tranquil life. Alfred Cismaru poignantly summarizes the dilemma of the characters in this way:

> La Vie tranquille is a touching story written in the first person and told with a great sobriety of means. Because of frequent understatements which help to emphasize the platitudes of life, it is rich in the never-ending search, conscious or unconscious, ardent or passive, for an elusive absolute, a role, a pose, a mask--a reason.[8]

Jérôme is the family parasite, a well-intentioned yet amoral, emotionally arrested, middle-aged adolescent, reminiscent of Jacques in Les Impudents. His financial misadventures have ruined the family, and his sexual relationship with Clémence, his nephew's wife, has led to the mortal altercation with which the novel begins. Nicolas, the brother who occupies to an abnormal extent the thoughts of his sister Françou is strong, abrupt, taciturn, introverted. His bemused reticence and brooding foreshadow his untimely death. Nicolas's murder of Jérôme has perhaps prefigured his own suicide; in Jérôme, Nicolas sees what he may become--the untamed outsider, an unloved old child. His friend, Tiène, is but a sosie of Nicolas, a convenient and socially acceptable beneficiary for Françou's incestuous yearnings. It is interesting to note that Tiène is a homonym for four present subjunctive forms of the verb tenir, meaning to hold on to and to cherish. Luce Barragues is the incarnation of Eros, whose captivating presence is a catalyst which dispells the inveterate passivity of the household. Clémence is self-effacing and weak, but her sexuality also plays an important role in the

story. "Clémence devait avoir un ventre doux, des seins laiteux et bas, une force molle vite enfoncée" (p. 44-45). The parents, especially after the death of Nicolas, vegetate in a state of pathological passivity. The strong maternal figure, central in Les Impudents, is absent. Françou catches her mother's impotent senility in a striking pose: "Son regard est devenu indiscret, il se pose sur vous et vous fixe avec une intensité vide" (p. 130). All these characters are not definitively delineated; the reader knows them only as they are reflected in the consciousness of the one real protagonist, Françou.

"Désordre, ennui, désordre" (p. 46). This is the way Françou, twenty-four year old French provinciale, characterizes her existence. It is for her, moreover, ". . . une vie qui traîne le long des années et de mon âge sans y jamais entrer" (p. 21). Totally shattered by the events of that August recounted in Part one of the novel, she decides to spend some time alone by the sea. This holiday or vacation is the second part of the novel, and her return to les Bugues constitutes Part three. It is the second part, the period of self-discovery by Françou, which is of major interest.

In fact, Part two of La Vie tranquille starts where the later novels begin, and often end. Personality disintegration by the sea, without benefit of exposition (past, memory) or dénouement (future resolution) is the subject of several novels. At this point in the development of the Durasian protagonist, however, the main character is equipped with a past, a present, and a probable future. Linear languishing triumphs over circular non-happenings. Coming of age still dominates over rejection of being, and flesh and blood protagonists animate the fiction as opposed to the spectral, manic mannequins who

stylistically and symbolically pose and posit in the works of the later manner. Moreover, the place setting of a vacation by the sea will often be the location for the characters of Duras in many of the subsequent novels. "On est en vacances de soi-même qui ne sert à rien en attendant" (p. 168). This heightened state of availability (disponibilité) in the preferential setting of the Durasian protagonist, where the symbolic interplay of wave, sand, and sun strips the characters of their civilization, is echoed in Francou's Pascalian lament: "Dans un ordre qui ne sent pas, on est ce rien de désordre qui sent" (p. 168). As in L'Etranger of Camus, the characters of Duras awaken to a realization of their unapproachable solitude while lying on the beach under the direct rays of the sun. "Avant moi, il n'y avait rien à ma place. Maintenant, il y a moi à la place de rien. C'est une succession difficile" (p. 144). This vital transition is the subject for Françou's pilgrimage to the sea.

In Part one, the first person past tense narration created the tone of the journal intime. In Part two, abrupt changes in the manner of narration reflect the personality crisis of the narrator. For the rest of the novel, the present tense stream of consciousness first person narration replaces the organizing past tense used in the exposition. Periodically, other changes in the style signal the mental abberrations of the protagonist. For example, while alone in her hotel room, Françou's mirror image usurps the narration; thus, without transition, a third person extension of Françou takes over.

> Là, dans ma chambre, c'est moi. On croirait qu'elle ne sait plus que c'est d'elle qu'il s'agit. Elle se voit dans l'armoire à glace; c'est une grande fille qui a des cheveux blonds, jaunis par le soleil, une figure brune. Dans la chambre,

> elle tient une place encombrante. De la très petite valise ouverte, elle tire trois chemises pour avoir l'air naturel devant celle qui la regarde. Tout en évitant de se voir, elle se voit faire dans l'armoire à glace. (p. 121)

This temporary shift in narration is a stylistic sign of the imminent personality crisis of Françou--a loss of center brought on by the death of Nicolas. The third person intrusions of the sosie into the first person narrative are a cogent grammatical device which graphically portrays the shifting perspectives of Françou's shattered psyche. These third person incursions seen above underline Françou's alienation; the return to the first person demonstrates her groping for sanity, the struggle against her menacing counterpart. Françou's will fights to regain the comforting oneness of memories and yearnings, and the integrated consciousness to order them.

> Je crois que c'est le deuxième soir que c'est arrivé. Je n'y avais pas pris garde la veille. Je n'avais pas remarqué que lorsque la porte de l'armoire à glace était entrebaillée, le lit s'y reflétait tout entier. J'étais couchée lorsque je me suis aperçu couchée dans l'armoire à glace; je me suis regardée. Le visage que je voyais souriait d'une facon à la fois engageante et timide. Dans ses yeux, deux flaques d'ombre dansaient et sa bouche était durement fermée. Je ne me suis pas reconnue. Je me suis levée et j'ai été rabattre la porte de l'armoire à glace. Ensuite, bien que fermée, j'ai eu l'impression que la glace contenait toujours dans son épaisseur je ne sais quel personnage, à la fois fraternel et haineux, qui contestait en silence mon identité. Je n'ai plus su ce qui se rapportait le plus à moi, ce personnage ou bien mon corps couché là bien connu. Qui étais-je, qui avais-je pris pour moi jusque-là? Mon nom même ne me rassurait pas. Je n'arrivais pas à me loger dans l'image que je venais de surprendre. Je flottais autour d'elle, très près, mais il existait entre nous comme une impossibilité de nous rassembler. Je me trouvais rattachée à elle par un souvenir ténu, un fil qui pouvait se briser d'une seconde à l'autre et alors j'allais me précipiter dans la folie. (p. 122-123)

Precariously perched between adolescence and adulthood, Françou is dizzy before the abyss of existential choice. She is an aging child who, disappointed in advance for having waited too long, is desperately trying to impose her will on her life while there is still time. Reflecting on her childhood, she feels a sense of loss:

> Et maintenant le temps est vieux. Une fois qu'on a perdu la faculté d'oubli, on manque définitivement d'une certaine vie. C'est cela sans doute sortir de l'enfance.
>
> Elle, je l'ai vécue dans Nicolas. A ma place il a vécu mon enfance. (p. 131)

Although she realizes her childhood was lived vicariously, Françou envisages the future with reticence and reluctance, at times assuming an attitude reminiscent of Sartrian bad faith. Her maturity is slipping through her fingers just as her childhood did.

> Il me semble que mon passé c'est demain qui commencera vraiment à le contenir. A partir de demain soir, le temps comptera. Pour le moment, tout autre passé que le mien m'appartient davantage. Celui de Tiène ou de Nicolas par exemple. C'est parce que l'on ne m'a pas prévenue que je vivrais. Si j'avais su que j'aurais un jour une histoire, je l'aurais choisie, j'aurais vécu avec plus de soin pour la faire belle et vraie en vue de me plaire. Maintenant, c'est trop tard. Cette histoire a commencé, elle me mène vers où elle veut, je ne sais pas où et je n'ai rien à y voir. Bien que j'essaye de la repousser, elle me suit, tout y prend rang, tout s'y décompose en mémoire et rien ne peut plus s'inventer. (p. 126)

Toward the end of her two-week stay at the seaside, Françou witnesses from the beach the drowning of a solitary swimmer, too far out to be rescued. Lulled by the regular pattern of the waves and the play of the sunlight on the water, she remains motionless, emotionless even, before the man's death. She makes no attempt to move or to cry out; she has no thought to communicate what she has seen. Indeed a sense of well-being engulfs her consciousness:

> Les vagues arrivaient toujours par rangées régulières à fleur de mes yeux. Sempiternellement, elles arrivaient. Je ne voyais qu'elles, les vagues. Bientôt elles étaient ma respiration, les battements de mon sang. Elles visitaient ma poitrine et me laissaient, en se retirant, creuse et sonore comme une crique. Le petit phare éteint, sur la gauche, je ne le voyais plus, ni les rochers ni les maisons. Je n'avais plus de parents ni d'endroit où revenir, je n'attendais plus rien. Pour la première fois je ne pensais plus à Nicolas. J'étais bien.
>
> Il n'y avait personne sur la plage. Personne n'avait vu l'homme se noyer que moi. (p. 175)

The allusion to the death of Nicolas suggests that the drowning man may be a symbol of the final exorcism of her childhood and adolescent obsessions centered around her beloved brother. Nevertheless, Françou's total lack of emotion, her immobility and passivity, her heightened sensitivity to the surroundings with no critical organizing of sensorial input and the lack of an appropriate reaction show a blunting of affect and a seclusiveness indicative of the initial stages of process schizophrenia.[9] Even at the beginning of the novel, Françou's restricted affect was evident in her detached manner of attending to Jérôme during his agony. Indeed this emotional shallowness is a frequent characteristic of the Durasian protagonist.

Later that same day, alone in her hotel room, Françou recalls the events of the summer and poses the ethical question of whatever moral responsibility she might bear:

> Elle est bien arrivée la mort de Jérôme, mais Nicolas aussi est mort. Clémence est partie, Noël est abandonné. Les parents sont devenus quasiment déments, finis.
>
> Il aurait pu m'arriver bein davantage, par exemple de mourir ou de perdre Tiène (ce qui revient au même). Evidemment on peut dire que c'est de ma faute. Mais quoi? Dans tous ces événements, je reconnais mal quelle a été ma part. Impossible non seulement de retrouver la trace d'un remords mais de reconnaître dans ce qui est arrivé ce que j'ai voulu, ce que je n'ai pas voulu, ce à quoi je m'attendais, ce à quoi je ne m'attendais pas. (p. 176)

Françou's penchant for eschewing moral responsibility is accompanied by a desire to regress, to refuse life. In Part three, Françou is returning to les Bugues, and her thoughts wander as she walks in the rain from the train station to the family farm: "Je voudrais être bien tranquille dans un endroit chaud et ne plus bouger" (p. 197). The protagonist's yearning to return to the unconscious well-being of the fetus is paralleled by a painfully sensitive and intellectualized consciousness: "Quand je me remets à penser à quelque chose, je pense aussi que je recommence à penser" (p. 198). The dilemma of an incompatible antithesis between the conscious self seeking a haven from awareness is an abiding characteristic of several of Duras' heroes. At this point in their development, sexual love is the one apparent absolute which constitutes a solace, a reason that provides a provisional palliative, if not an actual solution to the paradox of existence. Françou is at once aware of the sublimely ridiculous aspects of the phallic pose. Fantasizing about Tiène while still at the beach, she thinks of all those men with whom she will never share a sexual complicity because of her love for Tiène. Her sexuality embraces the life force, even as her psyche rejects it.

> Pourtant il y a tous les autres. Ils existent. Avec leur sourire. Je ne les verrai pas me chercher. Je ne les regarderai pas me découvrir. Je ne les écouterai pas s'aplatir sur moi dans toute leur confiance et se relever confusément, à la façon de ces oiseaux qui se relèvent sur la grève où le vent les a jetés. . . .
>
> J'aime Tiène. Ce n'est plus une chose qui peut encore arriver. Elle est déjà arrivée. C'est fait. J'aime. J'aime Tiène. Même de loin, je sens très bien que je ne veux plus d'un autre que lui. Ce que je croyais qui me tenait le plus à coeur jusqu'ici s'est évanoui. Mais il me reste toujours cette envie de Tiène. C'est là, endiguée entre mes hanches, une espèce de sagesse plus sage que moi et qui sait mieux que moi ce que je veux. (p. 130)

Françou's crisis is an existential one, the irreconcilable paradox of the pour soi and the en soi, implicit in the title, La Vie tranquille. This title is apt, for it depicts the contradiction facing the young protagonist. In order to be, one must violate the tranquility of non-being. In a word, one must mutilate life in order to live it. To remain forever disponible would be never to live fully. Françou's choice is ambiguous. The richness of the image of the man's drowning is central to understanding Françou's existential choice, her coming of age. The drowning can be seen as the celebration of life in death. Indeed, Thanatos and Eros have been linked throughout the novel. Jérôme must die so that Nicolas may live. When Nicolas dies, Françou is free to love Tiène. Therefore, the sense of well-being she experiences after the man drowns is perhaps logical. The drowning can be perceived as a slow-motion danse macabre, the transition from the death of her childhood into an ongoing life force, traditionally symbolized by the sea. On the other hand, the drowning can be seen as a less happy metaphor. The stranger's death may represent the annihilation of Françou's own élan vital, a ritual of ultimate regression, an initiation to bad faith. The heroine's decision to marry Tiène and live as everyone else may be an attempt to blot out vulnerability and sensitivity, by her touchingly tenacious appeal to the tranquil life. The latter interpretation seems more likely. Toward the end of her solitary homeward march through the rain, Françou recalls once more the tragic peripeteia of her coming of age.

> Je pourrais essayer de m'arrêter là sous la pluie et refuser d'avancer mais ça ne servirait à rien. Ce serait toujours une place pour moi, une façon de place. Si Nicolas avait pensé à ça, il n'aurait pas pris la peine de souffrir pour Luce et pas

> pris la peine de se tuer. C'est un petit sot. Mais je voudrais bien l'embrasser. Ah! le tenir serré une bonne fois. Je suis vieille. Du moment que je ne pourrai plus jamais l'embrasser, je suis vieille de toutes mes années futures. Depuis ce séjour à T... j'en suis sûre. Tous ces drames et puis celui-là, ce noyé. Je me suis surchargée de drames, partout ils ont éclaté, de tous les côtés. Et j'en suis responsable. Du moins on pourrait le croire, mais moi, je sais que ça m'est égal. Il n'y à rien à faire contre l'ennui, je m'ennuie, mais un jour je ne m'ennuierai plus. Bientôt. Je saurai que ce n'est même pas la peine. On l'aura la vie tranquille. (p. 206)

As Martin concluded in the closing chapter of Candide, man was born to live "dans les convulsions de l'inquiétude, ou dans la léthargie de l'ennui."[10] The tranquil life is the manifestation of that same antithesis.

The only alternative to this apparent capitulation to Sartrian bad faith is insanity, an epistemology of not being in the world, which certainly conceals more than it reveals. Insanity, as an approach to reality, is provisionally rejected by Françou. It reemerges later in Moderato cantabile and Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein. Once at home, Françou reflects on her parents' quiet lunacy, their silent cries of mourning: "La folie pareille à la raison, la raison, pareille à la folie. Il n'y a qu'épier la folie sans esprit de raison et alors elle s'explique d'elle-même, se fait comprendre" (p. 210). As Françou concludes, ". . . il faut que douleur de mort d'enfant se passe comme douleur de mettre enfant au monde . . ." (p. 210). In a world where birth is viewed as a capital crime, punishable with death, insanity will be a viable option to the tranquil life for the tortured psyche of the Durasian protagonist.

La Vie tranquille is then a contradiction, a putting into question of the nature of being, an awakening, at times a capitulation of ideals,

but, most of all, it is a perseverance--a coming of age. Its title unites the same vital antithesis as does Moderato cantabile, which extends the limits of the Durasian heroes' experience of reality. It is somehow appropriate that Marguerite Duras dedicated this novel to her mother.

As Bernard Pingaud points out, with La Vie tranquille, the Durasian protagonist's evolution has begun:

> Il convenait, pensons-nous, d'insister sur La Vie tranquille. C'est un chef-d'oeuvre et un chef-d'oeuvre méconnu, sinon inconnu. Le second roman de M. Duras dans l'ordre chronologique, il explique et annonce la suite de l'oeuvre, premier volet d'un grand ensemble. Toute lecture sérieuse des livres de cet auteur doit commencer par ce roman-là.[11]

Un Barrage contre le pacifique, first published in 1950,[12] is the last of a sort of trilogy; Les Impudents, La Vie tranquille, and Le Barrage are each concerned with a young protagonist on the verge of leaving home, of breaking free from an adolescent approach to reality, cushioned by parental authority, in order to assume the freedom of an autonomous individual. Although the parent-child relationship is often evoked in later works, the point of view of the protagonist is never again that of the child, however much this pristine state may be wished for. The Durasian character comes of age and leaves home in Un Barrage contre le Pacifique. The cast of characters recalls the familial relationships of the two previous novels; the absence of a strong paternal figure, a domineering mother reminiscent of Mme Grand-Taneran of Les Impudents, Joseph, the cherished brother, and Suzanne, the young female protagonist, are figures common to all three works. A ubiquitous, omniscient narrator relates their story, thus offering a wider yet less profound perspective than did

the subjective narration of Françou in La Vie tranquille. It is significant to note that only in this last work of the first manner does the mother die. Moreover, while the imminent marriages of Maud and of Françou mark the conclusion of the first two novels, this tacit reaffirmation of the family is absent in Un Barrage contre le Pacifique. The conclusion of the latter is the dissolution of the family: the death of the mother and the departure of the children, whose new freedom exists for its own sake, without as yet any direction or sense of commitment.

Un Barrage contre le Pacifique is to a much greater degree than the two previous novels a product of a double heritage: the influence of the American novel on the French intellectual climate during the years immediately following World War II and the autobiographical elements stemming from the author's experience as a child and adolescent growing up in French Indochina. The vigorous tone of a realistically elliptical and straight-forward dialogue reveals the increasing influence of the American novel on Marguerite Duras;[13] Germaine Brée states that Un Barrage is a story in the manner of the American novel à la Hemingway.[14] Armand Hoog also points to the American influence on Duras in the early works.

> Marguerite Duras began, then, by drawing in some measure her inspiration from the American novel. That is apparent in La Vie tranquille (1944), a pleasant but somewhat disconcerting narrative, a curious mixture of the farmyard and Saint-Germain-des-Prés, of urban nausea and rustic odors, of Erskine Caldwell and Jean-Paul Sartre. That is even more evident in the volume which first made Marguerite Duras known to the great public, Un Barrage contre le Pacifique (1950).[15]

Un Barrage most certainly has its share of the characteristics of the American novel popular in France at that time: a combination of ". . . adventure, brutality, drunkenness, gaiety, geographical excursions,

earthiness, automobile outings, sexual aggressiveness and psychological 'behaviourism.'"[16] The autobiographical heritage of the novel is, however, equally visible. It is a fictionalized account of an autobiographical subject--the memories of Marguerite Duras touching her mother, one of her two brothers, and their life on a colonial concession in South Vietnam.[17]

> The Indochinese themes, the grallatorial birds, the shore, the dike, the administrative underworld, they all come from the personal recollections of Marguerite Duras, who in fact spent part of her youth in the Far East. But the American South, seen through the eyes of Caldwell and Faulkner, is superimposed upon it. The Citroën B 12 has a disquieting resemblance to the Model T Ford of which the movies have made such an excessive use. And then the rocking chairs of this colonial paradise, the poor whites, the bare feet, the desperate obstinacy of the decadent family squatting obstinately on its ruins until the end. We recognize all that. We have seen it elsewhere.[18]

The Indochinese setting, the American influences, and the very particular vision of Duras fuse in the creation of this novel praised by Gaëtan Picon for ". . . la complexité et l'éclectisme des moyens. . . ."[19]

The plot, more involved than in the previous works, is concisely and forcefully presented on the back cover of another Gallimard edition of Un Barrage.

> La mère, c'est une ancienne institutrice du Nord de la France, jadis mariée à un instituteur. Impatients et séduits à la fois par les affiches de propagande et par la lecture de Pierre Loti, tous deux tentent l'aventure coloniale. Après quelques années relativement heureuses sur la côte du Pacifique, non loin du golfe de Siam, le père mourut, et la mère resta seule avec deux enfants, Joseph et Suzanne. Elle joua dix ans du piano à l'Eden Cinéma, fit des économies, obtint après d'infinies démarches une concession à la Direction générale du cadastre, laquelle Direction, n'ayant pas reçu de dessous de table, lui attribua à dessein une concession incultivable. La mère, qui n'avait d'autre but que de laisser un petit bien à ses enfants passionnément aimés, s'entêta. Elle eut l'idée de construire contre les grandes marées du Pacifique un barrage qui protégerait ses terres et celles de ses voisins. Le barrage fut construit par des centaines de paysans séduits par son espoir. Le Pacifique et ses

> crabes traversèrent le barrage comme s'il avait été une feuille de papier à cigarette. C'est à ce moment que débute le roman de Marguerite Duras. La mère, Joseph, qui a vingt ans, Suzanne, qui en a dix-sept, vivent péniblement dans leur bungalow délabré, au milieu de leur concession temporaire, sans cesse menacés d'en être privés par l'administration du cadastre. La mère est malade, Joseph et Suzanne commencent à «avoir marre» de leur misère. Que faire? L'énergie et l'espoir n'ont pas quitté la mère, qui calcule, combine, avec une sorte de folie méticuleuse, rusée et lucide, tant elle a peur du départ définitif, qu'elle sait inéluctable, de ses enfants. Les colères et les amours de Joseph, la résignation de Suzanne, les intrigues d'un M. Jo, fils dégénéré d'un richissime trafiquant de terrains, pour séduire la jeune fille, la mort de la mère et le départ des enfants pour une vie peut-être meilleure, peut-être pire, sont ici décrits avec une puissance qu'on ne peut rapprocher que de celle de Conrad dans ses meilleurs récits. Cette désolante aventure baigne dans le soleil, l'alcool, le cinéma de la ville, l'immense misère physique et morale des indigènes et des blancs pauvres roulés par une administration abjecte, un désespoir total qui fait passer brusquement les personnages de l'intense, de l'hystérique rigolade à la tristesse la plus affreuse, enfin une sensualité violente. A côté des vivants, une vieille Citroën B 12, un phonographe et un diamant defectueux jouent un rôle majeur.[20]

From this background, the main elements of the fiction of Duras take shape. Un Barrage is a crystallization of themes, character traits, psychological obsessions and compulsions, and significant objects, accessories which accompany the protagonists on their itinerary. Some have already surfaced in Les Impudents and La Vie tranquille; others become evident only in this last of the initiation novels. All three works form the mold from which Duras' characters evolve; Un Barrage, however, is a longer novel, presenting a wider and more diversified reality than the hermetic, provincial nature of the first two. Moreover, the omniscient narrator of Un Barrage creates three characters of about equal importance and verisimilitude--Suzanne, Joseph, and the mother, whereas Maud and especially Françou serve as the central focus of their respective fictional worlds.

Thematically, there is a reprise of the Thanatos-Eros association as well as an initial manifestation of the Durasian character's penchant for vicarious experience. In addition, the themes of the encounter (la rencontre), the slow maturation of passion (l'attente amoureuse), and the protagonists' coming of age are also peripherally evoked in the following paragraphs. Suzanne's predilection for the cinema, a predilection shared by Duras herself, provides the setting.

> Le piano commença à jouer. La lumière s'éteignit. Suzanne se sentit désormais invisible, invincible et se mit à pleurer de bonheur. C'était l'oasis, la salle noire de l'après-midi, la nuit des solitaires, la nuit artificielle et démocratique, la grande nuit égalitaire du cinéma, plus vraie que la vraie nuit, plus ravissante, plus consolante que toutes les vraies nuits, la nuit choisie, ouverte à tous, offerte à tous plus généreuse, plus dispensatrice de bienfaits que toutes les institutions de charité et que toutes les églises, la nuit où se consolent toutes les hontes, où vont se perdre tous les désespoirs et où se lave toute la jeunesse de l'affreuse crasse d'adolescence. (p. 165)

The scenario of the film that Suzanne sees gives a preview of the fascinating figure who animates the next novel of Duras, Le Marin de Gibraltar. She is as free as her ship, superbly indifferent, yet overpowered by destiny, or by the lack thereof.

> C'est une femme jeune et belle. Elle est en costume de cour. On ne saurait lui imaginer un autre, on ne saurait rien lui imaginer d'autre que ce qu'elle a déjà, que ce qu'on voit. Les hommes se perdent pour elle, ils tombent sur son sillage comme des quilles et elle avance au milieu de ses victimes, lesquelles lui matérialisent son sillage, au premier plan, tandis qu'elle est déjà loin, libre comme un navire, de plus en plus indifférente, et toujours plus accablée par l'appareil immaculé de sa beauté. Et voilà qu'un jour de l'amertume lui vient de n'aimer personne. Elle a naturellement beaucoup d'argent. Elle voyage. C'est au carnaval de Venise que l'amour l'attend. Il est très beau. . . . Il dit je vous aime. Elle dit je vous aime aussi. Le ciel sombre de l'attente s'éclaire d'un coup. Foudre d'un tel baiser. Gigantesque communion de la salle et de l'écran. On voudrait bien être à leur place. Ah! comme on le voudrait. Leurs corps

> s'enlacent. Leurs bouches s'approchent, avec la lenteur du cauchemar. Une fois qu'elles sont proches à se toucher, on les mutile de leurs corps. Alors, dans leurs têtes de décapités, on voit ce qu'on ne saurait voir, leurs lèvres les unes en face des autres s'entrouvrir, s'entrouvrir encore, leurs mâchoires se défaire comme dans la mort et dans un relâchement brusque et fatal des têtes, leurs lèvres se joindre comme des poulpes, s'écraser, essayer dans un délire d'affamés de manger, de se faire disparaître jusqu'à l'absorption réciproque et totale. Idéal impossible, absurde, auquel la conformation des organes ne se prête evidemment pas. Les spectateurs n'en auront vu pourtant que la tentative et l'échec leur en restera ignoré. Car l'écran s'éclaire et devient d'un blanc de linceul. (pp. 165-166)

The coming of age theme and the role of the cinema are re-emphasized several pages later.

> Avant de faire l'amour vraiment, on le fait d'abord au cinéma, disait-elle. Le grand mérite du cinéma c'était d'en donner envie aux filles et aux garçons et de les rendre impatients de fuir leur famille. Et il fallait avant tout se débarrasser de sa famille quand c'était vraiment une famille. (p. 175)

The main characters of Un Barrage incarnate additional themes associated with the novels of Duras; the psychological portraits of these protagonists resume and prefigure certain behavior patterns, some of which border on the aberrant, that are to particularize the Durasian protagonist. Suzanne is the kindred spirit of her borderline schizophrenic predecessors, Maud and Françou, whose attente amoureuse is culminated by a sexual initiation through which she transfers her incestuous fascination for her brother, Joseph, to a conveniently accessible fraternal double, in the person of Agosti. Unlike the previous works, in Un Barrage, there is a second, simultaneous initiation and incarnation. Joseph, is the beloved brother, the model for the "old boy," the eternal adolescent and révolté, reminiscent of Jacques in Les Impudents and Nicolas-Jérôme in La Vie tranquille, and suggestive of the aging son in Des Journées entières dans les arbres.

He too comes of age in Un Barrage. The strong and aberrational maternal figure, who vacillates between a truculant stance and a neurasthenic pose, recalls Mme Grand-Taneran and prefigures the parents manqués of subsequent works. Moreover, in Un Barrage, the reader encounters two new character types: M. Jo, the long-suffering, eternally rejected soupirant, whose descendant will be the vice-consul, a symbolic incarnation of Thanatos, in the final cycle of novels introduced by Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stien; and Lina, the sensual seductress of Joseph, who is the prototype for the mesmerizing figure of Anne-Marie Stretter, Durasian incarnation of Eros, whose haunting silhouette pervades the aforementioned Lol V. Stein cycle. Clearly, with the development of these characters, the exposition, the formative first act of what might be termed the tragedy of the Durasian protagonist, draws to a close. The characters face the dilemmas imposed by the widely accepted notion that psychological, philosophical maturation accompanies physiological maturation.

Suzanne provides a continuity with Les Impudents and La Vie tranquille; the soul sister of Maud and Françou breaks free from her familial roots, but she, unlike them, does so without passing through an existential crisis and without engaging herself in marriage, an unspoken reaffirmation of the couple and of the family. Suzanne, less cerebral than Françou, impatiently accepts new experiences with a sense of wonder. She does not analyse them as would Françou; rather she instinctively reaches out for her share. Embued with the romantic films through which she has vicariously experienced what love must be, she is the naive victim of illusions which must inevitably be rejected lest they lead to a self-destruction comparable to the fatal dénouement of Emma in Madame Bovary.[21] Suzanne's amorous expectations are marked by an adolescent dogmatism and an

idealistic exclusivity which conceal more than they reveal about the true nature of experience. Suzanne, however, seems to possess a certain down to earth equilibrium which will permit her to make the transition from the uncompromising mental set of the adolescent to the necessary reality of compromise that characterizes what is called emotional maturity.

> Dans le seul livre qu'elle eût jamais lu, comme dans les films qu'elle avait vu depuis, les mots: je t'aime n'étaient prononcés qu'une seule fois au cours de l'entretien de deux amants qui durait quelques minutes à peine mais qui liquidait des mois d'attente, une terrible séparation, des douleurs infinies. Jamais Suzanne ne les avait encore entendus prononcés qu'au cinéma. Longtemps, elle avait cru qu'il était infiniment plus grave de les dire, que de se livrer à un homme après l'avoir dit, qu'on ne pouvait les dire qu'une seule fois de toute sa vie, et qu'ensuite on ne le pouvait plus jamais, sa vie durant, sous peine d'encourir un abominable déshonneur. Mais elle savait maintenant qu'elle se trompait. On pouvait les dire spontanément, dans le désir et même aux putains. (pp. 198-199)

Suzanne's inexorable evolution toward the loss of her innocence is manifested in her long solitary walks during the family's stay in the colonial capital occasioned by the mother's desire to sell the diamond that Suzanne had extracted from the hapless M. Jo. This stay in the city to sell the diamond occurs late in the novel, and it is important to all three protagonists. It is the mother's last chance to obtain financial security for her children. It is during this time that Joseph meets his amorous benefactress, Lina, whose emotional and financial support will enable him to leave home. And for Suzanne, it is her first direct experience with the emancipating milieu of a large city. The self-consciousness, the vulnerability, and the vacillations of Suzanne, unaccustomed to the cosmopolitan setting, become clear during these daily promenades. Indeed, the promenade is not new to the Durasian protagonist. Maud walks compulsively all day long when she denounces Jacques to the police, thus

making her definitive break with the family-centered world. Francou also walks for hours through the rain upon her return home by train from the sea shore. During this long walk, she is deciding the direction her life is to take: she opts for the vie tranquille. The promenade on foot or motorized, will continue to be significant in the later novels. For Suzanne and for Joseph, the promenade en automobile has a particular significance; it represents an escape, the freedom of mobility without the loss of secure surroundings. There is a magical quality in the following description of the ride in M. Jo's car:

> Suzanne accepta. Elle monta dans l'auto de M. Jo. On y était bien. M. Jo propose à Suzanne de faire un tour. L'auto glissait dans la ville pleine de ses semblables, luisante. Lorsque la nuit fut venue l'auto glissait toujours dans la ville et tout d'un coup la ville s'éclaira pour devenir alors un chaos de surfaces brillantes et sombres, parmi lesquelles on s'enfonçait sans mal et le chaos chaque fois se défaisait autour de l'auto et se reformait seulement derrière elle... C'était une solution en soi que cette auto, les choses prenaient leur sens à mesure qu'elle avançait en elles, c'était aussi le cinéma. D'autant que le chauffeur roulait sans but, sans fin, comme on ne fait pas d'habitude dans la vie... (p. 197).

In addition to the automobile and the cinema, a recurring musical motif also possesses for Suzanne and Joseph the mystical power to evoke the imminence of their departure, the end of their waiting. The popular standard "Ramona" is the theme song of their initiation to life, of their incipient liberation.

> Lorsqu'ils partiraient ce serait cet air-là, pensait Suzanne, qu'ils siffleraient. C'était l'hymne de l'avenir, des départs, du terme de l'impatience. Ce qu'ils attendaient c'était de rejoindre cet air né du vertige des villes pour lequel il était fait, où il se chantait, des villes croulantes, fabuleuses, pleines d'amour. (p. 75)

Indeed, "Ramona" accompanies the events of their coming of age: Joseph's liaison with Lina, his enchantress and the Gina of his Stendhalian chasse au bonheur; Suzanne's first kiss and, later, her first sexual encounter when she gives herself to Agosti, the young man who reminds her of her brother Joseph. This melody is reprised, eternalized in each of these decisive moments. Moreover, when Suzanne, repulsed and unable or unwilling to reciprocate the amorous advances of M. Jo, agrees to satisfy at least his voyeuristic impulses by secretly permitting him to view her nudity as she showers, it is in exchange for a new phonograph for Joseph, whose singular fascination for his records in general, and for "Ramona" in particular, is forcefully expressed in the following passage:

> Et lorsqu'il avait fait jouer tous ses disques et qu'il déclarait invariablement: «Je me demande ce qu'on fout dans ce bled», elle l'approuvait pleinement, même si la mère gueulait. Avec Ramona, c'était inévitable, l'espoir que les autos qui devaient les emmener loin, ne tarderaient plus à s'arrêter, devenait plus vivace. Et, disait Joseph de ce phono, «quand on n'a pas de femmes, pas de cinéma, quand on n'a rien du tout, on s'emmerde un peu moins avec un phono». (p. 61)

But among all the objects which attenuate the ennui while exciting their hopes, it is still the magic of the movie screen which illuminates the passage of Suzanne and Joseph from the claustrophobic domain of adolescence to the intoxicating semblance of freedom awaiting them in the realm of adulthood. For them, coming of age is an escape; they do not consider the consequences of their emancipation.

> Pour Suzanne comme pour Joseph, aller chaque soir au cinéma, c'était, avec la circulation en automobile, une des formes que pouvait prendre le bonheur humain. En somme, tout ce qui portait, tout ce qui vous portait, soit l'âme, soit le corps, que ce soit par les routes ou dans les rêves de l'écran plus vrais que la vie, tout ce qui pouvait donner l'espoir de vivre en vitesse la lente révolution d'adolescence, c'était le bonheur. (pp. 106-107)

The end, or rather the beginning, comes quickly. The inevitable sexual initiation of Suzanne with Agosti, the expected death of the mother, who has been gravely ill for some time, occur within a week of each other. Suzanne is to leave forever the family concession and rejoin Joseph in the city where she hopes to make her fortune. This long-awaited transition is natural, yet painful.

> Elle mourut peu après le retour d'Agosti. Suzanne se blottit contre elle et, pendant des heures, elle désira aussi mourir. Elle le désira ardemment et ni Agosti, ni le souvenir si proche encore du plaisir qu'elle avait pris avec lui, ne l'empêcha de retourner une dernière fois à l'intempérance désordonée et tragique de l'enfance. (pp. 313-314)

It should be noted that Suzanne's attitude upon coming of age is opposed to that of Maud and Françou. The latter question and then submit to the natural order of things. Their stories end with their respective marriages. Suzanne, on the other hand, is defiant; she is ready for adventure. In much the same way as Eugène de Rastignac's famous <u>défi</u> "A nous deux maintenant!" in the closing scene of <u>Le Père Goriot</u>, Suzanne contempuously views the city as a challenge to be conquered by her blossoming sexuality.

> "Tu as de beaux seins."
> La chose avait été dite tout bas. Mais elle avait été dite. Pour la première fois. Et pendant que la main était à nu sur le sein nu. Et au-dessous de la ville terrifiante, Suzanne vit ses seins, elle vit l'érection de ses seins plus haut que tout ce qui se dressait dans la ville, donc c'était eux qui aurait raison. (p. 198)

<u>Un Barrage contre le Pacifique</u> is equally Joseph's story; during the several months which constitute the <u>durée vécue</u> of the novel, he also comes of age. At twenty, Joseph is three years older than Suzanne. The

figure of the brother haunts the early novels: Jacques in Les Impudents, Nicolas in La Vie tranquille, and Joseph in the present work. Perhaps the autobiographical nature of Un Barrage makes the characterization of Joseph the definitive expression of a fraternal fascination in evidence from the very inception of the fictional world of Marguerite Duras. Moreover, it is significant that this is the first time that Duras has attempted the creation of a male character who is important in his own right; previously, the male protagonists had functioned as influences or figures of fascination for the female character who constituted the primary point of focus in Duras' approach to fictional reality. In a very real way, Joseph and Un Barrage attest to the psychological adage, alluded to by Duras in Les Parleuses, that memory is the primordial psychic phenomenon, not judgment or rational choice; and Un Barrage is for its author "le vrai livre sur la mémoire."[22] In it, Duras' characters already incarnate personality syndromes that remain constant, even in the later works. A character analysis of Joseph is useful not only for an appreciation of Un Barrage; it describes a prototype that will serve as a model, an archetype, for the male protagonists of the later works.

Joseph is a figure for whom that veneer of civilization which represses most of man's anti-social outbursts is uncommonly thin and transparent. There is a latent violence in Joseph; untamed by the amenities, his scornful and abrasive swaggering strikes fear in the heart of his more civilized, more decadent peers, such as M. Jo and the agents of the colonial government who represent respectively the unfair distribution of wealth and the flagrant injustice and corruption of the governmental authorities. For the mother and for Suzanne, Joseph is the incarnation of the noble savage. He is unwilling to bend under the socializing pressures which are normally

an integral part of growing up; his mother laments his poor spelling and general lack of education. Having grown up in the jungle, he resembles the wild animals he so recklessly hunts. Joseph seems destined to live on the fringes of society, without the sense of commitment necessary to form a career or a marriage. As his mother says, ". . . il partira toujours de partout comme il est parti de toutes les écoles où je l'ai mis... C'est avec moi qu'il sera reste le plus" (p. 268). Joseph definitively breaks with his mother and sister when he becomes wildly enamoured of a wealthy, older, married woman, Lina, whom he had encountered in a cinema of the city where the mother was trying to sell the diamond extracted from M. Jo. He is to return to his mother and sister only twice after his fugue with Lina: once to take them home from the city and once again upon his mother's death. Joseph's coming of age occurs, then, in the context of an amorous fugue, a flight from reality and responsibility. This double evasion prefigures such unforgettable characters as the aging gigolo in Des Journées entières dans les arbres, the travelling salesman of Le Square, and the male companion in Le Marin de Gibraltar; it is reminescent of Jacques in Les Impudents and of Nicolas/Jerome in La Vie tranquille.

The education of Joseph by Lina is not only important in the initiation of the former; it is a unique depiction by Duras of the amorous encounter. The rencontre amoureuse is to be a recurring subject in the novels, but for Duras this kind of encounter is normally a painfully slow and cautious process. In Moderato cantabile, Dix heures et demie du soir en été, Le Square, Les Chantiers, the diffident, taciturn, vacillating figures approach each other with awkward and anxious gestures which proceed so tentatively and hesitatingly that the reader has the impression that he is witnessing the formation of a couple which takes place in a

different temporal context--an oneiric realm where the figures move in slow motion through an atmospheric opacity which seems to give a visual and tactile quality to the abstract concept of time. The coming together of the sexes is a ceremony whose ritual implies a temporal sacrifice which cannot be eschewed. What is to become the inexorable march of a complete dramatic evolution is, in Un Barrage, reduced to the stichomythia of a single scene.

If, however, the union of Joseph and Lina is unique in the spontaneous and carefree abandon with which they rush toward each other, it is nevertheless typical of the encounter theme in Duras' novels in several ways. For one thing, they meet in a cinema, the privileged place of this novel, which underscores the Durasian predilection for vicarious experience. Moreover, Lina is accompanied by her inebriated husband whose presence serves as a passive witness to the unfolding of their complementary lust. The voyeuristic role of an onlooker will be more fully exploited in Dix heures et demie du soir en été and Le Ravissement de Lol. V. Stein, as the couple is progressively replaced by the couple-à-trois. Finally, their passion takes form in an atmosphere imbued with the intoxicating influence of alcohol. Several of the most unforgettable characters of Duras are alcoholics, such as Maria in Dix heures et demie. Alcohol is especially appropriate in the world created by Duras because of its effects; it excites and liberates as it depresses and deadens. This ambivalence is at the very heart of Duras' best characterizations; it is the co-existence of the pour soi and the en soi, of Eros and Thanatos. Their incompatibility is the inherent tragedy of the human condition.

Duras describes Joseph's discovery of Lina in a strikingly sensuous manifestation of superior page-quality narration. In the darkness of the

movie theater, Joseph is not able to see Lina all at once. Through the light reflected from the movie screen, he discovers her slowly, feature by feature, in enticingly fragmented glimpses of her physiognomy, half-concealed in the shadows. He is moved by Lina's smile and voice as she explains the presence of her husband, sleeping in the seat on her other side. When he lights her cigarette, Joseph continues to catalog, admire, and recrystallize her traits into the incarnation of his ideal.

> J'ai allumé une allumette et je la lui ai tendue. Alors j'ai vu ses mains, ses doigts qui étaient longs et luisants et ses ongles vernis, rouges. J'ai vu aussi ses yeux: au lieu de fixer la cigarette pendant qu'elle allumait, elle me regardait. Sa bouche était rouge, du même rouge que ses ongles. Ça m'a fait un choc de les voir réunis de si près. Comme si elle avait été blessée aux doigts et à la bouche et que c'était son sang que je voyais, un peu l'intérieur de son corps. (p. 227)

Lina is the first manifestation of what Duras calls her "modèle féminin," Anne-Marie Stretter, whose presence will dominate the last novels.[23] She is an anima figure, at times an incarnation of Eros, the life force; at others, she embodies the malefic temptress of Thanatos, the femme fatale, in the full sense of the term. For Joseph, she is the benevolent aspect of the anima, a kind of surrogate parent whose seductive conquest liberates him from his childhood and his reliance on his real mother.

At one point, Duras incorporates the subject of the film which is playing into the amorous interplay of the two spectators. It is the very scene which haunts the protagonists of Moderato cantabile. It shows the underlying violence associated with the sexual encounter, a constant motif in the fictional world of Duras.

> Je n'avais jamais senti une telle main dans la mienne. Elle était mince, j'en faisais le tour avec deux doigts, elle était souple, souple, une nageoire. Sur l'écran une femme s'est mise à pleurer à cause de l'homme mort. Couchée sur lui, elle sanglotait. On ne pouvait plus se parler. On n'en avait plus la force. Doucement, j'absorbais sa main dans la mienne. (p. 228)

The scene of the woman embracing her dead lover and the mesmerizing presence of Anne-Marie Stretter's prototype show the primoridal significance of Un Barrage contre le Pacifique.

After the cinema, the threesome go from bar to bar. Joseph and Lina become intoxicated with alcohol as well as with their growing desire for each other. Finally, the husband, who by this time is totally inebriated, passes out, giving Lina and Joseph the opportunity to consummate their passion. As Joseph's waiting is almost at an end, he reflects about the renaissance, the reincarnation which is changing him forever.

> «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 reconaissais plus. Il me semblait que j'étais devenu intelligent en une nuit, que je comprenais enfin toutes les chose importantes que j'avais remarquées jusque-là sans les comprendre vraiment. . . . 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 me l'a fait sortir. . . . Et c'est l'alcool qui m'a illuminé de cette évidence: j'étais un homme cruel. Depuis toujours, je me préparais à être 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. 239-240)

It should be expressly noted here that alcohol is the catalyst which liberates the élan vital from the inhibitions and anxieties which tend to stunt the emotional growth of the individual, to eternalize l'attente. On the other hand, the continued use of alcohol deadens the consciousness and

causes a hiatus, a false sense of stasis, a vie tranquille--a sort of suspended animation where the sempiternal child inhabits an evolving mortal body, subject to the vicissitudes of inevitable deterioration. For Joseph and certain of the later protagonists of Duras, passion facilitated by alcohol (ce mélange de désir et d'alcool) has the power to give birth to the man in the child. The tragic paradox of this passion inspired by alcohol is its frequent association with death. As in Tristan et Iseut,[24] love will often be a fatal destiny for the Durasion protagonist; and the love philtre in both the Tristan story and the fictional world of Duras is an alcoholic potion. Not only for Joseph, but for many of the heroes in the later works, alcohol is the agent which simultaneously stimulates and anesthetizes the characters so that they have the courage or the thoughtlessness to fall in love. The opening stanza of Baudelaire's "Hymne à la beauté" gives a strikingly parallel vision of the initial apprehension of passion and the concomitant role of alcohol.

> Viens-tu du ciel profond ou sorts-tu de l'abîme,
> O Beauté! ton regard, infernal et divin,
> Verse confusément le bienfait et le crime,
> Et l'on peut pour cela te comparer au vin.[25]

If Un Barrage is the story of an initiation to life, a secular baptism that marks the transition from adolescense for Suzanne and Joseph, it is also the story of the disintegration, dementia, and death of the mother. The portrait of the mother is forceful, unforgettable; she embodies certain psychological characteristics, predilections, and obsessions which remain relevant throughout many of Duras' novels, from Madame Grand-Taneran of Les Impudents, to the mother in Des Journées entières dans les arbres, and to the moribund father figure in L'Après-midi de Monsieur Andesmas.

The mother of Un Barrage, however, is the most powerfully drawn of all the parental figures in Duras' fiction. This may be due to the autobiographical nature of this work. The mother and her story are largely based on Marguerite Duras' recollections of her own mother, of one of her two brothers, and of their uncultivable concession in Vietnam. The corruption of the colonial officials, the construction of the dikes to prevent the incursions of the Pacific are painful memories, not figments contrived by the author.[26] In Un Barrage, Marguerite Duras has recreated her own childhood, and with it, the anger, the anguish, and the indignation suffered by her real mother. As the novelist comments in her narration: "La vie était terrible et la mère était aussi terrible que la vie" (p. 124).

It is probably significant that neither the mother's first name nor the family name of Joseph and Suzanne is ever given. The mother is always referred to simply as la mère. The action of the novel begins just after the defeats of the mother, the last of which was the collapse of the dikes, and ends with her death. In a real way, Un Barrage is the poignant defeat of the maternal instinct.

The mother's characterization serves as a prototype for later protagonists. Her predilection for sleep as an escape from reality is indicative of certain neurotic and psychotic symptoms found in characters of future novels. Her tenacious dedication to her children, her righteous indignation toward the corruption of the representatives of the colonial government, her unswerving determination once she has formed a project give her a presence and a force which dominate much of the novel. There is a tacit complicity between her and her children with which she builds a wall between them and the outside world, but that barrier is menaced by the same fate as that of the dikes. The coming of age of her children is

symmetrically paralleled by the imminence of her death. Midway through the novel, the ambivalence of the mother's precarious balance between binges of psychasthenic activity and the neurasthenic, premeditated oblivion of excessive sleep is convincingly evoked in the following paragraph. The choice of vocabulary once again reveals Duras' affinity for metaphors that suggest an opaque, almost viscous atmosphere.

> Bientôt la mère s'endormit tout à fait. Et tout d'un coup, la tête ballante, la bouche entrouverte, complètement en allée dans le lait du sommeil, elle flotta, légère, dans la pleine innocence. On ne pouvait plus lui en vouloir. Elle avait aimé démesurément la vie et c'était son espérence infatigable, incurable, qui en avait fait ce qu'elle était devenue, une désespérée de l'espoir même. Cet espoir l'avait usée, détruite, nudifiée à ce point, que son sommeil qui l'en reposait, même la mort, semblait-il, ne pouvait plus le dépasser. (p. 124)

Through the mother, Marguerite Duras attacks the evils of colonialism, the greed of corrupt, cowardly government officials, and exposes the extreme poverty of the indigenous peoples. The death of starving children is vividly shown in such striking images as the following: "Et les bouches roses des enfants étaient toujours des bouches en plus, ouvertes sur leur faim" (p. 103). In one specific instance, the mother takes in one infant, a starving one-year-old girl who dies despite all possible efforts to save her. The infant was left by its nomadic mother who had carried it on her back for hundreds of miles. This brief episode prefigures the young mother whose story is told in Le Vice-consul. Duras also describes the jungle and the forests which serve as a cadre for the European mother and her two children; at one point, the author refers to the natural setting as a swarming world, united ". . . dans une indifférenciation de commencement de monde" (p. 139). This image will become an appropriate description of the setting for some of the later novels, such as L'Amour.

The mother's death is prepared by striking descriptions of her progressive separation from the realm of the living: "Elle avait des gestes lents comme si sa longue attente dans le noir l'avait ankylosée jusqu'à l'âme" (p. 141). The trip to the colonial city to sell the diamond is the last project undertaken by the mother. Joseph's departure and Suzanne's amorous interlude with Agosti are paralleled by the continued decline of their mother's health. At the moment of her death, a succession of three facial expressions shows the ambivalence of her character, which is emphasized by the antitheses in the first and the last sentences.

> Pourtant, peu avant qu'elle eût cessé de respirer, les expressions de jouissance et de lassitude disparurent, son visage cessa de refléter sa propre solitude et eût l'air de s'adresser au monde. Une ironie à peine perceptible y parut. Je les ai eus. Tous. Depuis l'agent du cadastre de Kam jusqu'à celle-là qui me regarde et qui était ma fille. Peut-être c'était ça. Peut-être aussi la dérision de tout ce à quoi elle avait cru, du sérieux qu'elle avait mis à entreprendre toutes ses folies. (p. 313)

Un Barrage contre le Pacifique concludes then with the death of the mother, and the coming of age of Joseph and Suzanne. The struggle between the antithetical yet concomitant forces of Thanatos and Eros is one manner of characterizing human existence.[27] It is a way of incarnating the paradoxes of the human condition which Duras will use with increasing frequency in the novels to come. One need only to think of Duras' famous film and its revealing antithetical title- Hiroshima mon amour. Perhaps the title of the present work is equally revelatory. The obvious futility of the erecting of earthen dikes against the mighty sea, sempiternal symbol of the life force, creates an image not unlike the one in the Myth of Sisyphus. Un Barrage contre le Pacifique is a fitting expression of the poignant nobility of human endurance and of the inevitability of

the natural order. If the former is an expression of the tragic sense of life and of the courage to be, the latter is an apt metaphor for the ineluctability of life and death and for the somehow ennobling folly which is a necessary part of being human.

As the characters of Marguerite Duras come of age, the salient facets of their collective personality are established. In general, the protagonists are borderline schizophrenic types; they feel dispossessed and have a dangerous fascination for violence, although a pathological passivity accompanied by a state of chronic depression most often represses their destructive impulses. They frequently seem to prefer a vicarious acting out of emotions as opposed to real affective commitment. Always in search of an amorous complicity with another dispossessed person, they usually intoxicate themselves in order to have both the audacity to reach out for love and the numbness to accept rejection and solitude. They are equally obsessed by the passing of time, l'attente, and its role in the realization of the amorous encounter which they feel will disspell their boredom and sense of uselessness. This search for ideal love is almost inevitably linked to death. Although these characteristics evolve and eventually manifest themselves differently, the basic syndrome of the Durasian protagonists' personality makeup remains essentially constant.

Artistically, the manner of presentation of the protagonist will change more drastically than the characters themselves. In the first three novels, there is careful attention given to the creation of three-dimensional, believable individuals. Verisimilitude in the traditional sense of the word is obviously an important concern of the author. Indeed, the only major criticism of the characterization in these early novels involves this matter of credibility; Alfred Cismaru rightly points out

that at times the young, provincial heroines show unusual philosophical sophistication and psychological perspicacity for their age and situation.[28] In the later works, the preoccupation with verismilitude becomes less important. The Durasian character is soon to become an incarnation of symbols as the novelist evolves toward the aesthetic and philosophical tenets of the adherents of the New Novel. Commenting on Un Barrage in 1974, Duras says:

> Enfin, je l'ai raconté, pas complètement, dans le Barrage. Evidemment, dans le Barrage, je voulais pas raconter tout. Je voulais que ce soit harmonieux. On m'avait dit: « Il faut que ce soit harmonieux. » C'est beaucoup plus tard que je suis passée à l'incohérence.[29]

The first step toward what Duras calls incoherence has been taken. The mold for the characters has been cast and the first stage of their itinerary defined.

NOTES

[1] Jacques Guicharnaud, "Woman's Fate: Marguerite Duras," Yale French Studies, XXVII (1961), p. 109.

[2] Marguerite Duras, Les Impudents (Paris: Libraire Plon, 1943). Subsequent references to this work are in the text.

[3] Alfred Cismaru, Marguerite Duras (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1971), p. 20.

[4] Henri Hell, "L'Univers romanesque de Marguerite Duras," in Marguerite Duras' Moderato cantabile (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1958), p. 120.

[5] Marguerite Duras, La Vie tranquille (Paris: Gallimard, 1944). Subsequent references are in the text.

[6] Jean-Luc Seylaz, Les Romans de Marguerite Duras (Paris: Archives des lettres modernes, 1963), pp. 12-13.

[7] Bernard Pingaud, Ecrivains d'aujourd'hui 1940-1960 (Paris: Grasset, 1960), p. 209.

[8] Cismaru, p. 29.

[9] James C. Coleman, Abnormal Psychology and Modern Life (Glenview, Illinois: Scott, Foresman and Co., 1976), p. 293.

[10] Francois-Marie Arouet, dit Voltaire, Candide ou l'optimisme in Romans et contes, Ed. H. Bénac, (Paris: Editions Garnier, 1960), p. 219.

[11] Pingaud, p. 210.

[12] Marguerite Duras, Un Barrage contre le Pacifique, Edition Livre de poche (Paris: Gallimard, 1958). Subsequent references are in the text.

[13] Cismaru, p. 35.

[14] Germaine Brée, "The Contemporary French Novel 1950-1960," French Culture Today (Summer 1961), p. 4.

[15] Armand Hoog, "The Itinerary of Marguerite Duras," Yale French Studies 24(Summer 1959), 69.

[16] Hoog, p. 68.

[17] Marguerite Duras and Xavière Gauthier, Les Parleuses (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1974), p. 231.

[18] Hoog, p. 70.

[19] Gaëtan Picon, Panorama de la nouvelle littérature française (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), p. 162.

[20] Marguerite Duras, Un Barrage contre le Pacifique (Paris: Gallimard, 1958), back cover of book.

[21] Cismaru, p. 42.

[22] Duras, Les Parleuses, p. 231.

[23] Marguerite Duras and Michelle Porte, Les Lieux de Marguerite Duras (Paris: Les éditions de Minuit, 1977), p. 65.

[24] Alain Vircondelet, Marguerite Duras, ou le temps de détruire, Ecrivains d'hier et d'aujourd'hui 42 (Paris: Editions Seghers, 1972), p. 18.

[25] Charles Baudelaire, Baudelaire, Les Fleurs du mal, ed. Antoine Adam (Paris: Editions Garnier Frères, 1961), p. 28.

[26] Duras and Porte, Les Lieux, pp. 58-59.

[27] Rollo May, Love and Will (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1969), p. 85.

[28] Cismaru, p. 32.

[29] Duras, Les Parleuses, p. 139.

CHAPTER III

THE DRUNKEN BOAT: THE ANIMUS ODYSSEY

The heroes and heroines of Marguerite Duras' novels have come of age. Endowed with psychological verisimilitude and a collective personality whose syndrome provokes a guarded prognosis, these literary figures are ready to incarnate the aesthetic and philosophical preoccupations of their author. Duras is now suitably equipped to follow her literary destiny; the novelistic itinerary that the Durasian protagonist is about to trace is significant in that its course encompasses the theories and vagaries, the philosophical predilections and fictional fancies of the post World War II generations. Through a vision that is uniquely particular, Marguerite Duras has sounded in her prose an approach to reality that finds fraternal echoes among many of her distinguished contemporaries. The experiences of her heroes and heroines reflect the very essence of our brave old world, which, when viewed from the perspective of her most recent works, seems on the brink of a crisis of ontological proportions.

The anguished adolescence of these protagonists has given way before the painful consciousness of psychological maturity, which is the realization that adolescent uncertainty and awkwardness are not just a temporary malady afflicting the young, but are part of the very essence of being, at any age. The characters must then live without appeal,

without the childish myth that the adult's reality is fortified by verities, absolutes, and certainties. They realize that growing up means knowing and accepting the fact that one never does grow up, at least not in the metaphysical sense. The adolescent nature inherent in the Durasian protagonists' spirit lulls them into a false sense of youthfulness and of a sempiternal disponibilité as, silently and inexorably, the physical and mental signs of senescence insidiously make their presence felt. From the young seafaring protagonists of Le Marin de Gibraltar to the solitary immobility of M. Andesmas, whose senses, beleaguered by the decay of old age, strain to make out the sights and sounds surrounding his hilltop panorama of the sea, the essence of Duras' characters, defined in the coming-of-age novels, remains intrinsically unchanged. The maturity of the Durasian protagonist is a fictional working out, or, more precisely, a working through the obsessions and compulsions created and brought to life in the first three novels. In Le Marin, there is a synthesizing quest directed toward the antithetical forces of being. Through a modern odyssey, the Durasian characters apprehend and personalize the vital forces which threaten to annhilate their aprioristic values. Through a vicarious apprehension of a viable approach to reality through her characters' experiences, Duras' definitive themes emerge and take shape in this novel. Duras, the creative writer, comes of age thematically, during the amorous odyssey of the couple in Le Marin. The next nine novels will constitute a deductive analysis of the thematic dialectic established in Le Marin. The subsequent novels, those of the Lol V. Stein cycle, institute a ceremonial reenactment, a symbolic introverting of the same basic themes.

Besides signaling the thematic maturation of Duras, Le Marin also establishes a dichotomy in the author's manner of characterization which is essential to an understanding of her novels. Le Marin is a manifestation of the animus, or the male principle; the female principle, or the anima, dominates in those novels which immediately follow Le Marin. Although the use of these terms is not meant to suggest a Jungian interpretation of Duras' characters, the psychological and artistic connotations associated with the animus and the anima are strikingly appropriate in characterizing the evolution of the heroes' approach to reality. Paul Claudel has depicted this animus-anima metaphor of man's duality in his miniscule masterpiece, Parabole d'Animus et d'Anima: pour faire comprendre certaines poésies d'Arthur Rimbaud.[1] Animus' lusty vigor and a rationally conceived "dérèglement de tous les sens" are indeed evident in Rimbaud's Le Bateau ivre.[2] In both Claudel and Rimbaud, the animus is a reorganizing principle, casting about helplessly, hopelessly frustrated by its very essence. The anima, on the other hand, is the embodiment of an inner itinerary, an interiorization of the life force, a harmonizing principle in the cacophony of existence. The animus is the reckless abandon of the élan; the anima is an immanent, intuitive taming of the cosmos. Although the animus and the anima always coexist, it is nevertheless possible that one may be sometimes dominant, sometimes passive. Le Marin is like Le Bateau ivre; it concerns a drunken ship whose voyage is symbolic. Animus' spirit dominates here as Duras works out her thematic, rationally conceived approach to reality. In Le Marin, the only one of the author's novels which has a male narrator, Anna, the acompanying anima figure, becomes this narrator's mediator and mentor.

In the novels following Le Marin, the anima spirit dominates. Like the haunting harmonics of Verlaine, the other half of French literature's couple maudit, the tone of these novels is like a musical deuxième voix, that accompanies the imperatives of "l'impair." In Le Marin, animus is the prime mover of a synthesizing epic; in later novels, anima is the singer-composer of a strange and beautiful lyric. The animus-anima antithesis is thus at the very center of the Durasian protagonist's itinerary.

Le Marin de Gibraltar, first published by Gallimard in 1952,[3] is unique from several points of view. It is Duras' second novel of the new decade; it is the first of her novels which is situated totally outside the confines of any familial unit. It is the first time Duras has attempted to narrate an entire novel from a male point of view. It is the only one of the novels which recounts an active quest, an odyssey. Moreover, it is the only novel to encompass such a wide symbolic and geographical scope. Le Marin occupies a seminal position in the evolution of the novels; this first set of mature Durasian protagonists assumes an existential pose before the antithetical forces of the human condition that is of primordial significance. The novels which follow reexamine and re-create the dynamics of this initial taming of the cosmos by Duras' heroes.

The fictional events which comprise Le Marin are concisely and intelligently summarized by J.-L. Seylaz in the following commentary:

> Un homme en train de gâcher sa vie trouve, dans la torpeur de vacances italiennes, le courage de tout quitter (son métier, sa compagne) pour essayer de vivre véritablement. La chance se présente, pour lui aussi, sous la forme d'une rencontre: celle d'une femme belle et riche, propriétaire d'un yacht, qui

> sillonne les mers en quête de l'homme qu'elle aime (un légionnaire déserteur recherché pour assassinat, avec lequel elle a vécu quelques brèves périodes de bonheur après lesquelles, chaque fois, l'homme a disparu). Elle cherche donc, depuis trois ans, «le marin de Gibraltar», d'un continent à l'autre, de Sète à Cotonou, selon les informations que lui transmettent d'anciens membres de son équipage qui croient l'avoir repéré. En attendant de retrouver ce grand amour, elle emmène de temps en temps sur son bateau un homme qui lui plaît. C'est ainsi qu'elle embarque le narrateur, désormais libre de toute attache, et que commence leur aventure.
>
> Le courage d'une rupture, la chance d'une rencontre et, à partir de là, le lent mûrissement d'une passion au rythme d'une vie oisive et de pérégrinations capricieuses, tel est le schéma du Marin de Gibraltar (1952).[4]

As in La Vie tranquille and Un Barrage contre le Pacifique, the rough realism and sexual aggressiveness of the American novel and the urban nausea of Saint-Germain-des-Prés[5] combine in Le Marin de Gibraltar; the increasingly personal stamp of Duras, however, synthesizes these elements into a style that is uniquely hers. The oppressive opacity of the atmosphere, the uneasy torpor of a claustrophobically confined space, and the powerfully slow, unsteady pace of the action, as though it were being viewed through the distorting gape of an alcoholic,[6] come together in a provocative style that is to become an integral part of her approach to and fictionalization of reality. Just as her characters have attained their majority, the author's style in Le Marin assumes and imposes the independence of its maturity.

For the first time, Duras' characters are homeless; they are adrift, in the figurative as well as the literal sense of the term. The couple relationship, which is central to most all of Duras' works, is the prime mover behind the actions of the characters. In this first outing of the mature protagonist, one witnesses the disintegration of one couple, that of the nameless narrator and Jacqueline, and the formation and evolution

of a second one, comprised of the same narrator and Anna, the woman whose quest constitutes the title of the novel. The sailor of Gibraltar is the symbolic incarnation of pristine innocence and of Eros, the spirit and force of life itself;[7] he is the sailor who does not fall from grace with the sea. That he is from Gibraltar is significant; this strategic meeting place of two continents, of two seas, is the catalyst of Eros, embodied in the sailor, which will hurl the narrator into a new continent of experience.

At this point, Duras' main characters are perhaps the most believable and the most apt to elicit an empathic response from the reader. Duras has now the requisite experience and skill to depict with three-dimensional verisimilitude the psychic and physical phenomena of the character's world. Since their symbolic significance is as yet in its incipient stages, the progressive shrinking of the characters has not begun.

The personality types whose birth and maturation were depicted in the coming-of-age novels are to be constants in Duras' fiction. As with Maud and, especially, Françou, the narrator of Le Marin is bogged down in the very special Durasian alternative before the vital question of to be or not to be; that is, how to deal with the anxiety inherent in defining oneself through commitments, without precipitating the fear of existentially stunting or arresting one's potential essence. While Françou acquiesces to the vie tranquille when faced by la nausée, the narrator is to abandon this temptation in favor of an active quest for a mystic union with the forces of Eros. To do this and thereby incarnate his authenticity, he must reject Jacqueline, whose mindless optimism and

instinctual grasp on life are reminiscent of Maud and Suzanne. Jacqueline is the prototype for the indefatigable maid in Le Square. The forces of Eros are represented in the symbol of the sailor and in the person of Anna; the latter is the epitome of the anima, with its attendant antitheses of the angelic and the demonic, of the benevolent Virgin Mary and the malific femme fatale. To the narrator, Anna will be the guide and mediator to the inner world. Such an anima figure is not unusual in fiction; Sir Henry Ryder Haggard's She, which is also an African adventure story, is a work in which the title character incarnates the role of the anima.[8] Anna is the sosie of Lina from Un Barrage; her ultimate manisfestation will be the mesmerizing, captivating figure of Anne-Marie Stretter in the Lol V. Stein cycle. The marin, whose significance is evidenced by the title, is the only character who lacks verisimilitude; this is due mainly to his necessary absence. Symbolically, he is the animus figure; as a fictional character, he is the heir to the untamed, prolonged adolescence of the brother figures in the early novels; his descendants will be the amiable gigolo of Des Journées entières dans les arbres and the perverted male virgin, an incarnation of Thanatos, in Le Vice-consul. Like the anima, the animus, the male personification of the unconscious in women, has both constructive and destructive manifestations.[9] In this novel, the sailor-animus is more the life-giving call of Eros than a malevolent demon of death.

The three protagonists are best understood when viewed in their roles within the context of the two couples which they successively form. On vacation in Italy, the narrator and Jacqueline, who have been living together for two years and who both work in the Statistics Office

of the Ministère des Colonies, have just hitched a ride from a local worker who is driving them from Pisa to Florence. The driver is friendly and invites the narrator to his home town of Rocca, a small village on the nearby coast, for the upcoming weekend. The narrator tentatively accepts. In Florence, there is an unbearable heat wave which plunges the narrator into the depths of an existential crisis, reminiscent of Sartre's nausée. The alcoholic distortion of his vision and the opacity which bathes the surroundings are evoked in this passage where he realizes the precariousness of his hypersensitive psychological state.

> Nous partîmes de la cafétéria. Elle continua à parler de Giotto. Elle me donna le bras. Comme d'habitude. La rue se referma sur moi. Le petit café m'apparut soudain, océanique.
>
> Pour la première fois depuis que je vivais avec cette femme, j'eus quoi? honte, oui, de sentir son bras enlacé au mien.
>
> La goutte d'eau qui fait déborder le vase existe. Même si on ne sait pas quel cheminement incroyablement compliqué, labyrinthique, cette goutte d'eau a fait pour arriver jusque dans le vase et le faire déborder, ce n'est pas une raison pour ne point y croire. Et non seulement y croire mais enfin, je le crois, quelquefois, se laisser déborder. Je me laissai déborder tandis qu'elle parlait de Giotto (p. 30).

The narrator spends his days sheltered from the burning rays of the sun, drinking in a cafe, while Jacqueline indefatigably, compulsively visits the traditional tourist attractions. Jacqueline is the very essence of existential inauthenticity, a positive, well-intentioned person, but whose vacuity at times recalls that of a porcelain Polly-anna. Like Sartre's viscous metaphors, Duras' images repulse the sensibilities. Duras couches such characters' vital presence in bodies which seem to be indiscreet, pulsating masses of protoplasm in the orgastic throes of feeling themselves alive. The hypersensitivity of the narrator

recalls Roquentin's revulsions, or even the decadent vulnerabilities of a Des Esseintes. In a word, Jacqueline's plodding insousiance is unbearable to the narrator. She has the mindless arrogance to go right on living happily, without even realizing that she is de trop. As he intensely watches her truculent, unthinking optimism, the narrator is at once repelled and put into a state of wonder before Jacqueline's tenacity, her shameless lack of existential anguish, in short, her provocative manner of imposing her presence. Spiritually alienated by this self-satisfied id, quivering with contentment, he dreams of escaping from the mindless tyranny of the everyday routine and of finding solace with a more kindred spirit. His hopes are vaguely centered on the weekend invitation to go to the coastal village of Rocca. The fraternal overtures of the Italian driver have sensitized the narrator's awareness of his freedom to make another life. The canicular heat wave in Florence and the prospect of fraternal bathing in Rocca recall the pestilence-ridden city of Oran and the redemptive power of the metaphor of the swimmers in La Peste.

> Je retournai encore une fois avec eux, ces poissons que la chaleur avait tués.
>
> Les heures les plus fécondes étaient celles de la nuit, lorsque nous étions couchés. Je ne pouvais plus faire la part de la chaleur de la ville et celle de la chaleur à elle. . . . Non, j'étais sur qu'il existait des êtres dont le corps endormi aurait exhalé une chaleur supportable, fraternelle. La sienne, à mes yeux, la trahissait, dénonçait son optimisme d'éclatante et obscène facon. . . . C'est alors que chaque nuit, un même fleuve m'apparaissait. Il était grand. Il était glacé, vierge de toute trace de femme. Je l'appelais doucement la Magra. Ce nom à lui seul me rafraîchissait le coeur. Nous étions seuls tous les deux, lui, ce chauffeur, et moi. Il n'y avait personne dans le paysage que nous deux. Elle, elle avait totalement disparu de ma vie. Nous nous promenions le long du fleuve. Il avait tout son temps. C'était un long samedi. Le ciel était couvert. De temps en temps nous

> plongions, munis de nos lunettes sous-marines, pas dans la mer, dans ce fleuve, et nous nagions côte à côte dans un univers inconnu, d'une verte et sombre phosphorescence, parmi les herbes et les poissons. (pp. 35-36)

They are swimming in a river close to where it empties itself into the sea. The narrator's explicit predilection for "la rencontre des fleuves et de la mer" (p. 48) reflects his fascination with the antithetical forces of life and death implicit in this watery interplay. The river's strong, virile currents coursing through the channels of its banks until it disperses itself in the delta and abandons itself in the sea are not unlike the throacic thrusts, abdominal convolutions, and the inevitable genital explosion-implosion of human sexuality. The river-sea metaphor implies the androgenous tranquility that the protagonists frenetically seek.

It is during a visit to the Museum of Saint Mark that the narrator's existential prise de conscience is culminated, illuminated. Upon seeing the angel of the painting entitled the Annunciation, a depiction of the Biblical scene in which an angel announces to Mary that she is to give birth to the Savior, the narrator is made conscious of his own personal salvation through existential accountability. The Durasian preoccupation with the baptismal, rejuvenating qualities of water (seas, rivers) and their atmospheric extension, the watery opacity of the temporal flow, are illustrated by the following paragraph:

> Depuis quatre nuits que je rêvais à ce fleuve, je n'avais presque pas dormi. Je m'aperçu brusquement de ma fatigue, elle était phénoménale. Mes mains posées sur mes genoux avaient le poids du plomb. Par la porte, il entrait une lumière verte, peinte, que renvoyait le gazon du jardin. Le tableau, les touristes et moi-même baignions dans la peinture. C'etait très, très reposant. (p. 38)

The Annunciation reveals to the narrator the coming of his new born sensitivity to existence. It constitutes a baptism, the initiation into an awareness of the indecency of happiness and the tranquil life. Unlike the shameless characters of Les Impudents, the narrator has intuited a higher order of impudence. From the uninspired copyist of birth and death statistics, he has become a sort of priest, a privileged interpreter, witnessing to the meaning of life and death. Indeed, the following passage is the recounting of a belated, spiritual coming of age.

> Je restai sur le banc très longtemps, plus longtemps que ne le méritait sans doute le tableau, plus d'une demi-heure. L'ange, bien sûr, était toujours là. Je le regardais machinalement mais sans le voir, tout attentif que j'étais au soulagement qui suivait ma découverte. Il était grand. Mon imbécillité s'en allait de moi. Immobile, je la laissais s'en aller. Après avoir retenu très longtemps une énorme envie de pisser, j'arrivai enfin à pisser. Et quand un homme pisse il est toujours attentif à le faire le mieux possible et jusqu'à la dernière goutte il reste attentif. Ainsi je faisais. Je pissais mon imbécillité jusqu'à la dernière goutte. Et puis ce fut fait. Je fus calme. Cette femme, auprès de moi, recouvra lentement son propre mystère. Je ne lui voulus plus le moindre mal. En somme j'étais devenu majeur en une demi-heure. Ce n'est pas tout à fait une façon de parler. Une fois majeur je recommençais à voir l'ange. (p. 39)

The narrator's separation from Jacqueline, from his work at the Registry Office, and from all that his life has been is imminent; this separation, his encounter with Anna, and his decision to make a new life are realized in the hazy vapors of an alcoholic binge. According to the narrator, he who has not known the craving for pastis under the hot sun of a beach has never felt the ". . . immortalité de la mortalité de son corps" (p. 67). The first man of modern times, opines the narrator, was he who first felt the need for, and then conjured up the first

apéritif. (p. 68). The narrator then continues with this semi-serious account of the mythos of the cocktail.

> —Celui qui par un beau matin, plein de force et de santé, est revenu de chasser pour retrouver sa petite famille et qui au moment de rentrer dans sa case et d'y retrouver son bonheur, s'est mis à humer l'air verdoyant des forêts et des rivières et à se demander ce qui pouvait bien lui manquer, alors qu'il avait femme, enfant et tout ce qu'il fallait et qui a rêvé d'un apéritif avant qu'on l'invente, celui-là, c'est le vrai génial Adam, le premier vrai traître à Dieu et notre frère à tous. . . .
>
> —Ce ne fut pas la pomme de l'arbre que le serpent désigna, ce fut, celle pourrie qui était tombée par terre. Notre Adam à nous s'est penché sur la pomme pourrie, l'a humée et elle lui plut. Dans la pomme pourrie, dans l'acide fermentation bulleuse et véreuse de la pomme à calvados, il découvrit quoi? —l'alcool. Il en eut besoin parce qu'il était intelligent. (p. 68)

The Durasian hero then waits for godet, not Godot.

The painful rupture between the narrator and Jacqueline and the eruption of the former's dormant passion for Anna, the rich and mysterious proprietor of the white yacht known as the Gibraltar, takes place in and around the small hotel in Rocca during a twenty-four-hour period. The events of this turning point in the narrator's life are facilitated by the preferred Durasian catalyst, alcohol. It both attenuates the guilt and pain of rejecting an uncomprehending and shattered Jacqueline and gives the courage necessary in order to approach and seduce Anna. At the open-air public ball, Anna begins to tell the narrator her story of the sailor from Gibraltar. The familiar mixture of alcohol and music aids the diffident heroes of Duras in realizing a rencontre amoureuse.

The narrator's voyage with Anna comprises the rest of the novel. Theirs is an unending, existentially on-going odyssey, the quest for a revitalizing mythos, reevaluated and resynthesized in terms of the psychological and philosophical sensibilities of twentieth-century

Western man, for whom life has become a fleeting temporal flow of ". . . historic becoming. . . . The fictional world of Madame Duras is the movement of time, at once creating and isolating personality; the tilting of time toward a past which a second later is transformed into an empty nothingness."[10] In this world, Anna and the narrator are caught up in a vortex of contradictions where the Cartesian epistemology is no longer a sure guide. The introverted, antithetical nature of their quest is couched in metaphors of a universe where conventional landmarks are reversed. The narrator's first panoramic view of Florence has already sensually evoked his descent into a reality à rebours. "Elle brilla au-dessous de nous comme un ciel renverse. Puis, tournant par tourant, on descendit dans sa profondeur" (p. 24). Now, a week later, as he begins his sea journey with Anna, she shows him an atlas of a universe turned upside down.

> Elle avait son atlas entre les mains et je lui dis de me le montrer. . . . Il ne signalait des continents que les seuls contours habités, mais très précisément--elle me montra Rocca, le petit point que ça faisait, perdu entre mille autres points, sur la côte italienne. Il indiquait aussi les fonds et les courants, ce qui faisait que les continents, blancs et vides, étaient aussi nus que les mers, d'habitude. C'était l'atlas d'un univers renversé, d'un négatif de la terre. Elle prétendait le connaître par coeur. (p. 140)

Duras' heroes recognize their inherent alienation in a world where man's innate yearning for a fixed center and for eternal life are negated by the diluting of identity in time, of life which dissolves in existence.[11] It is not unlike Pascal's depiction of man impotently posed between les deux infinis, but without the redemptive grace of a divine intercession. In the course of the journey, their growing love

for each other will be reflected in their shared vocation as myth makers; through this calling, they are to anthropomorphize and thereby tame the indifferent forces of nature.

The yacht leaves the Italian coast and makes its way to Sète. During the voyage, Anna recounts in detail the story of the sailor from Gibraltar. This eternal traveler of mysterious origins, wanted for the gratuitous murder of a rich American industrialist, was ". . . un homme que la vie n'avait pas habitué à l'enfer de la vie quotidienne" (pp. 171-172). These long conversations are literally punctuated by alcoholic drinks and by nervous laughter, signs of their initial reticence. Their laughs are the vocal equivalent of the blush. Anna asks the narrator to reciprocate her confidences by telling her the story of his life, but he is unable to respond.

> Je restai debout, près d'elle qui était allongée sur la couchette. Je crois bien que je tremblais.
> —Parle-moi, dit-elle.
> —Je ne peux pas.
> J'essayais de rire.
> —Je n'ai jamais parlé à personne au fond. Je ne sais pas. (p. 188)

They arrive at Sète where Epaminondas, a sailor of Greek origin and the namesake of an adventuresome Theban general, had summoned them. This sailor, a former member of Anna's crew, had mistakenly thought that he had located the marin. In order to follow up another lead, they sail on toward Africa. The narrator's taciturnity still inhibits the development of the couple; Le Marin is an epic of the attente amoureuse, in which time alone can be the catalyst which engenders a lasting passion. And for Anna, as for all those for whom life is not sufficient, one must

at once be for her a lover, on the one hand, and a myth tamer on the other. The long hiatus in their verbal and sexual relations is the necessary waiting period for time to potentialize the narrator's creative élan as a myth maker; in order to be a soupirant worthy of Anna's love, he must create or incarnate in some way a myth equal to Anna's absolute, the marin. The time of the voyage is an initiation to the mythos of Eros. The outcome of their amorous encounter is taking on the significance of a struggle bewteen man and the gods. This duality is reflected in the shifting of temporal perspectives. As Anna and the narrator pass by the Rock of Gibraltar, the mythic temporality of their quest is evoked.

> Le rocher s'éloigna et avec lui la troublante et vertigineuse actualité du monde. Et le détroit arriva et avec lui sa non moins troublante et non moins vertigineuse inactualité. Les eaux, insensiblement, changèrent de couleur. La côte de l'Afrique s'éleva, sèche et nue comme un plateau de sel. (p. 223)

In Tangiers, the narrator first sets foot on the Dark Continenet, having left behind the civilized decadence of Europe. Seated in a terrasse de café, the alter and confessional of Duras' heros, the narrator reflects on the increasing import of the adventure he is living.

> Ce fut là, à cause sans doute de la fatigue, que je ne compris plus rien à l'histoire qui m'arrivait, et qu'il m'apparut que je n'aurais jamais la force de la vivre. Mais cela ne dura pas. Le temps de fermer les yeux et de les rouvrir, cela était passé. . . . Je n'étais pas mort d'amour pour la femme du marin de Gibraltar. (p. 225)

Later, that same day, the narrator insists that Anna go on a walk with him through the busy streets of Tangiers. Their promenade à deux

is significant; the compulsive walking which occurred at the denouements of Les Impudents and La Vie tranquille, as well as Suzanne's strolling in Un Barrage, are solitary walks. Anna is inebriated, and as they walk, the narrator must help her navigate the busy streets. Anna's alcoholic aura excites the narrator's ardor; her drunken désinvolture, the provocative abandon of her airy gate, and the heady flow of her undone hair consecrate this contemporary Venus.

> Je ramassai le chapeau. Elle se remit à marcher, les cheveux dénoués. Les gens s'arrêtaient pour nous regarder passer. Elle ne s'en apercevait pas. Je ne l'avais jamais vue dans un pareil état. J'étais en nage. . . . J'étais aussi saoul qu'elle, de la regarder. (p. 229)

At last the narrator can begin to speak honestly with Anna, to play his role in the sophisticated love game she personifies. His prolonged reticence, his diffidence are melting away under the rays of the African sun. The temporal term of his amorous initiation is ending. As a proof, he has been developing a symbolic quest of his own, as a sign of good faith and as a possible replacement to the mythic marin, whose very existence is menaced by the far-reaching implications of the narrator's emergence as the spiritual as well as the physical violator of the sailor's mistress. After days of silence, Anna's patient coaxing and caresses have freed the citadin and aroused in him the epic élan of the call of the wild. His promise to speak to her of love can now be fulfilled. The epic hero of the narrator's mythos is to be the koudou, a rare African game animal that Hemingway, in his The Green Hills of Africa, used to embody the idea of "Pursuit as Happiness."[12] With the epic ring of Epaminondas' name and the roar of the lion, the narrator announces

his rebirth to Anna in the deafening din of Tangier's rush hour traffic. Through Hemingway's serious pun on the Declaration of Independence, the narrator declares his independence by offering himself to Anna in the form of a surrogate sailor, a complementary alternative to her pursuit of happiness myth; his alternative is the koudou which symbolizes "Pursuit as Happiness." Anna's understated acquiescence, when she says that it is no longer the sailor that she is waiting for, is the turning point of the novel.

> —Je te parlerai, dis-je, le soir, sous la tente, pendant que le lion rugira. On emmènera Epaminondas?
> —Non.
> —Je te parlerai, dis-je.
> —Non, dit-elle, il n'y a plus de koudous.
> —Le monde en est plein, dis-je, tu n'y connais rien.
> —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 qui vient plus vite. Les koudous sont faits pour ça, pour les petites attentes. Il faut que tu t'y habitues.
> Elle ne repondit pas. C'etait difficile de parler, il fallait presque crier. A intervalles reguliers, celui des feux rouges, c'etait un cataclysme de bruit qui s'abbattait sur nous. (p. 232)

The moment of the <u>aveu amoureux</u> is imminent. Under the rays of the meridional sun, the Durasian ingredients of the amorous encounter are reunited: the promenade, the hot sun, the inner warmth and delicious giddiness of alcoholic intoxication, the couple's searching for a cinema, the temple of the vicarious mode of being. Duras turns the simple, everyday manner of crossing a city street into an event of considerable dramatic intensity. The temporal specificity of the action sequence attests to her cinematographic flair. The geometrics of the scenario technique remind one of Robbe-Grillet. This scene raises familiar

themes: the brush with death that accompanies the declaration of love, the woman's scream which will be echoed in Moderato cantabile, and the declaration itself. These ingredients are temporally and spacially arranged in a division of seemingly simultaneous events into a magnified, decelerated view of their chronological components. The instants that immediately precede the aveu are thus experienced in a novelistic version of slow motion. The temporal exigencies intrinsic in their quest for love are dramatically evoked in these long seconds just before the declaration. Their brief exchange that coincides with the end of the second signal shows the extent of their shared understanding of the situation. In order to avoid waiting another three minutes, the average duration of the policeman's signaling sequence, the couple dangerously attempts to cross the street just as the traffic officer directs the vehicles to start. They just make it across in time, narrowly escaping with their lives. The aveu comes at that split second when the policeman's signal changes, as they make their concerted lunge past the path of the oncoming truck, just after the woman's scream. Their complicity, manifested in the singular-plural subject on, is total as they surge past the truck and toward the median.

Their crossing over is a metaphor for the eternal challenge of the life force before the contingencies of time and death.

> —Regarde l'agent, dis-je.
> Elle le regarda et sourit. J'attendis une fois, puis deux fois, le signal de l'agent. Chacun des passages, soit des piétons, soit des camions durait trois minutes. Il y avait beaucoup de monde.
> —C'est long, dit-elle.
> —Très long.
> Le second signal cessa. Ce fut au tour des camions de passer. Un camion chargé de caisses démarra puissamment. Il

> n'y avait plus personne sur le passage clouté. L'agent fit un demi-tour sur lui-même et il écarta les bras comme un crucifié. Je la pris par les épaules et je l'entraînai en avant. Elle vit tout, le camion qui démarrait, le passage vide des piétons. Elle se laissa faire. Pour la première fois, je n'eus plus du tout le sentiment de la traîner en avant. On s'élanca. L'aile du camion frôla ma jambe. Une femme cria. Un peu avant d'arriver au refuge, juste après le cri de la femme, et dans les vociférations de l'agent, je lui dis que je l'aimais. (pp. 234-235)

After Tangiers, the narrator and Anna become "sérieux" (p. 236); that is to say, what started as a mere passing fancy has the possibility of becoming the kind of love idealized by the marin. The renewed intensity of their amorous quest is matched by an increase in their daily consumption of alcohol. They drink to assuage the anxiety accompanying the slow distillation of an amorous passion. Anna and the narrator must continue searching for the marin to give their own love the necessary time to reach its fruition. It is not yet ready to assume the burden of eternity. Theirs is a delicate balancing of contradictions--they must believe it is possible to find the marin; they must continue to search for him, yet they must not find him, except within themselves.

> —L'éternité, c'est beaucoup, dis-je.
> —Est-ce qu'on ne dit pas, dit-elle, que rien ne vous en donne davantage le sentiment qu'un grand amour? Que rien, en somme, n'y ressemble plus?
> —Les petits amours au jour le jour, dis-je, ont d'autres avantages.
> —Ceux-la, dit Laurent, en riant, ne sont pas tristes à voir.
> —Ils ne sauraient que faire, ceux-là, de l'éternité, dis-je, la vie leur suffit.
> —Dites-moi, dit-elle, quel est le signe annonciateur de la fin d'un grand amour?
> —Que rien, apparemment, ne l'empêche de durer toujours, dis-je, non?
> —Et ceux, dit Laurent en riant, ceux que tout empêche de durer toujours?

—Ah! ceux-là, dis-je, comment savoir encore?
—Je n'aurais jamais cru, dit Anna, que la chasse au koudou était aussi gaie. (pp. 258-259)

In Leopoldville, Anna, the narrator, and several of their companions engage in a long, seriocomic discussion of the Ice Age and the existence of large reptiles known as saurians (sauriens). They are fascinated by the thought of glaciers, as they represent the opposite climatic setting to the extreme heat of equatorial Africa. Anna raises the question of life forms frozen in a state of suspended animation, a state of hibernation as opposed to the estivation of the besotted travelers. "—Sous la glace, dit Anna, il devait y avoir de tout petits animaux qui attendaient que ça fonde" (p. 263). Their evocation of geological time brings up the question of man's evolutionary destiny, the question of the survival of the species. Their conversation then turns to the question of the atomic threat: "—C'est curieux, dit le barman, même en partant de l'époque glaciaire, on en revient toujours aux bombes atomiques. C'est comme qui dirait, une loi" (p. 268).

The ensuing conversation disintegrates into games of semantic autism between Anna and the marin searchers: simplifications, mystifications, echolalic exchanges, and drunken hilarity constitute a pastiche like the dialogues found in the theater of the Absurd.

—Si on changeait de crémerie? demanda Legrand à Anna sur le ton confidentiel.
—On n'est pas pressés, dit Epaminondas. Jojo, il me plaît.
—C'est vrai, qu'on n'est pas pressés, dit Anna.
—On a toute la vie devant soi, dis-je.
—I am saurien, dit Jojo, ça veut dire quelque chose en anglais.
—Ah ah! s'esclaffa Epaminondas, I am very saurien!
—Vous venez de... demanda Legrand.

—Cotonou, dit Anna, en se tordant.
—Et vous? me demanda Legrand.
—Contonou, dis-je, en me tordant aussi.
Legrand prit un air totalement incompréhensif. Puis il se reprit:
—C'est quand même marrant, la vie, dit-il, et on vous parlait justement des sauriens et de tout le bordel.
—C'est vrai, dis-je, et même de l'époque glaciaire on a parlé. (p. 271)

The juxtaposition of non sequitur clichés is a sort of incantatory exorcism of the Cartesian camouflage that coats language with the power to conceal more than it reveals. As in Ionesco's plays, the characters, behind the semantic playfulness of their dialogue, make an heroic attempt to break through the barriers of human communication.[13] Duras has written a half-dozen avant-garde plays.

The one constant that unifies their meandering jibberish is the sauriens. The French name of these reptiles phonetically suggests the future stem of savoir combined with rien, nothing. These will-know-nothings are a foreshadowing of the vacuous, benumbed beachcombers found in L'Amour and La Femme du Gange. These estivating saurians will constitute Duras' later manner of characterization.

The expedition of Anna and the narrator continues as they leave Leopoldville and penetrate further into the heart of Africa, following the Congo for some time. At this point, the narrator is at last able to talk with ease to Anna, telling her how one hunts the koudou, just as she had told him how one hunts sailors from Gibraltar at the outset of their peregrinations. The narrator again refers to the American novel he is going to write, a novel which is to be Le Marin de Gibraltar. As Hemingway, in one of his stories, takes the reader from the crowded world of the rue Mouffetard and the Place Contrescarpe to the virgin

snows of Kilimandjaro, the narrator's American novel will make the journey from the canicular estivation in Florence to the Ouellé (Uele) plateau which gently climbs toward the snowy heights of Kilimandjaro. In its shadow, the narrator's koudou myth come of age: the koudou and the sailor, at once competing and complementary in their roles, are symbols of innocence and love unadulterated and untamed by the rules of society. There is, however, one important distinction between these two Durasian symbols for love: there exists a sterility in the superhuman, absolute nature of the sailor figure, like the potent yet not potentialized vitality of the childless Don Juan, literature's personification of the male (Thanatos) principle; whereas the koudou is the actualized vitality of the unadulterated life force present in nature, the procreative force of Eros, the humanization of the symbolic absolute. Thus the narrator is metaphorically offering Anna a chance for human salvation from the barren thanatopsis of her quest, in the shadow of the white (like Anna's ship) peaks of Kilimandjaro, Hemingway's magnificent symbol for Thanatos. Anna must decide between the sempiternal yet absent absolute of love and the provisional, vulnerable love that can be directly experienced within the confines of the human condition. The narrator, who started out as a vicarious surrogate for Anna's erotic absolute, is now asking his mistress to sacrifice her legendary lover for their own humanity. His American novel is to tell this story. Its metaphoric scope is alluded to in the following dialogue:

> —Qu'est-ce que vous direz d'autre? demanda-t-elle doucement dans votre roman américain.
> —Nos nombreux voyages, dis-je. Ça sera un roman très maritime, forcément.
> —Vous direz la couleur de la mer?

—Bien sûr.
—Et quoi encore?
—La torpeur des nuits africaines. Le clair de lune. Le tamtam montboutou dans la savane.
—Et quoi encore?
—Qui sait? Peut-être un festin anthropophagique. Mais la couleur de la mer à toutes les heures du jour, ça, assurément.
—Ah, j'aimerais bien que les gens prennent ça pour un récit de voyages.
—Ils le prendront, puisque nous voyageons.
—Tous?
—Peut-être pas tous. Une dizaine, peut-être pas.
—Et ceux-là, qu'est-ce qu'ils croiront?
—Ce qu'ils voudront, tout ce qu'ils voudront. Mais vraiment, tout ce qu'ils voudront.
Elle se tut. La tête toujours sur ses bras.
—Parle-moi encore un peu, dit-elle tout bas.
—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-là sera le seul. C'est un peu ça, le bonheur.
—Ah, dit-elle doucement, que ce serait terrible si les koudous n'existaient pas. (pp. 282-283)

They finally arrive in the isolated village where Gégé, the man they think may be the sailor from Gibraltar, is supposed to be. They find that the adventurer, wanted by the police, has had to flee just before their arrival. As Anna is trying to communicate with Gégé's native mistress, a strange odor insidiously engulfs the village clearing. From the woman's description of Gégé, in particular the location of a certain scar, Anna is satisfied that he is not the marin. Anna's mounting anxiety and her subsequent relief show clearly that she has become afraid of actually finding the sailor. The mysterious scent is discovered to be that of a koudou, being cooked by the natives. Gégé had killed it in honor of Anna's coming. Symbolically, the burning sacrifice of the koudou occurs simultaneously with Anna's failure once again to find the marin. Implicit in this scene is the reciprocal sacrifice inherent in human love: it is the mutual renunciation of absolutes in

favor of each other's humanity. The narrator-koudou becomes a living transubstantiation of an undying, yet unlivable absolute. The narrator-koudou is the sacrificial lamb, the imperfect human incarnation of the absolute. He will simultaneously replace the sailor on the human level and thus make possible the perpetuation of the latter on a mythic level. If the sailor were ever found, life would contaminate him. If they stopped searching, the myth would die, and with it their most intimate and beautiful complicity. The sailor mirrors their relationship; they are becoming the object of their quest. When Anna tastes the koudou meat offered to her by Gégé's mistress, it is the latter who alone perceives the fruition of love between Anna and the narrator. After all, the young native woman is also the lover of a marin de Gibraltar.

> Elle détacha elle-même trois morceaux du flanc ruisselant du koudou et nous le tendit. Alors seulement je levai les yeux sur Anna.
> —C'est bon, dit-elle, le koudou.
> Elle avait de nouveau le visage que je lui connaissais. Les flammes du brasier dansaient dans ses yeux.
> —C'est la meilleure chose du monde, dis-je.
> Seule la femme, je crois, comprit que nous nous aimions. (pp. 292-293)

When they return to Leopoldville, they find that their ship, the Gibraltar, has burned in a refueling accident. Only the bar and the upper deck were spared; precisely those two parts of the yacht which had most specifically witnessed the spiritual renaissance of the narrator. They buy another yacht and soon set sail once again in search of the legendary sailor.

The subtle merging of contradictions in the amorous trilogy of marin-Anna-narrator form a precariously balanced ménage à trois that

foreshadows the three-part couples of the later novels. J.-L. Seylaz sensitively perceives the taming of paradoxes which constitutes the structural evolution and points to the symbolic content of the novel.

> Dans sa quête obstinée d'un homme insaisissable, Anna apparaît en effet comme une femme à la poursuite d'une espèce d'amour superlatif (le plus grand amour du monde) en face duquel toutes les autres relations humaines ne peuvent être qu'imparfaites et précaires. Dès lors le mouvement du livre, qui nous montre Anna passant de l'espoir à la crainte de retrouver le marin de Gibraltar, puis à l'aveu que cette quête ne sera plus pour eux qu'un prétexte à de nouvelles navigations, constitue une leçon: celle d'un renoncement à l'absolu, du renoncement à un grand amour impossible qui s'est voulu éternel, au profit d'une liaison précaire qui a trouvé peu à peu une chance de durée. En d'autres termes une invitation à savoir préférer un amour humain, à vivre dans la vérité des sentiments et dans le temps. Sans doute continueront-ils à chercher ensemble le marin; mais qu'est-ce finalment que le plus grand amour du monde si ce n'est l'absolu éprouvé comme impossible, le point de fuite de la perspective traditionnelle, la limite qui donne à leur amour sa relativité, son caractère provisoire, c'est-à-dire son humanité.[14]

Le Marin is Duras's embracing of the human condition, whereas the latter novels often portray the breakdown of the couple and the eventual interiorization of this alienation on the subjective level. This novel, however, is a love story, but more than that, it is the story of love itself. Anna and the narrator meet in a confrontation of the ideal and the real; theirs is a marriage of the antithetical forces which underlie the nature of human experience.

In the tradition of such divergent moralists as La Rochefoucauld, Baudelaire, and Pascal, Duras, then, sees the human situation in terms of its antithetical nature. From virtues to their corresponding vices, from Idéal to Spleen, from the mediating intuitions of the affect which attenuate the imperatives of the intellect, Duras' protagonists incarnate

these dichotomies. Amorous complicity, like Cocteau's beautiful lie that speaks the truth, in the guise of the couple, becomes the mediator of the antitheses of the human condition. Like the paired outcasts in En Attendant Godot, the Durasian quest and its concomitant attente are personified in the dynamics of the couple. When these fringe figures unite to form a couple, they resolve, within the boundaries of human potentiality, the antithetical forces which constitute the paradox of being, where life is seen as an exile. The unification of man's duality in the sexual and emotional complicity of the couple is the apprivoisement, the ultimate anthropomorphism, of what is perceived as a divine principle. The narrator, Anna, and the sailor are a sort of secularized trilogy of the human condition. The happy ending of Le Marin is the fact that it does not end at all. The apparent aberrance and frivolity of their quixotic quest are like a tale told by an idiot, signifying everything.

If the characters come of age in the first three novels, thematic maturation has occurred in Le Marin. The subsequent novels are a magnified dissection, a decelerated reworking of the thematic dynamics of Le Marin: Rupture, rencontre, and apprivoisement of the other taking place through a heavy, viscous temporal flow. In no other of Duras' novels do these three phenomena evolve in their totality, nor with such relative rapidity. Henceforth, the novels devolve toward the isolating magnification of but one of these phenomena, with an accompanying, complementary amaigrissement of the characters' psychological depth. This breaking apart or compartmentalization of themes is mirrored in the schizophrenic distortion and disintegration of the heroes and heroines. The flesh of verisimilitude is progressively stripped away in favor of a

stylizing reification in the manner of Robbe-Grillet of the antithetical forces which undergird human experience.[15] The following novels are a tranche de durée as much as a tranche de vie, and the former breathes life into the characters caught in the imminence of a rencontre or a rupture. This temporal element is primordial; its flow potentializes and regulates the maturation rate of human emotions. The durée is the essential ingredient that permits the heroes' psychological evolution. Thus the novels of Duras become an apprivoisement of the durée, a temporal anthropomorphizing, a semantic and ontological substantiation of human experience. The pure, mindless durée of astronomical time is redefined, domesticated in terms of human volition and expectancy.

After Le Marin and Les Petits Chevaux de Tarquinia, Duras presents less and less a narration describing an historical, linear, chronological sequence of events; the author does not create an essentialistic document depicting human experiences like Balzac or Duhamel--on the contrary, her novels become an existential témoignage, a verbal transubstantiation of the temporal dynamics of being. Duras does not write about temporality; her skrinking novels become a semantic incarnation of duration. The works are both the signifié and the significant. They are the transubstantiation of durée and of the antithetical tension produced by the simultaneous call of Eros and Thanatos. The narrator's bathing in the reflected light of the angel in the Annunciation and Anna's eating the meat of the koudou show these characters as neophytes being initiated into what will ultimately be an abdication of psychological verisimilitude in favor of a ceremonial incarnation of symbolic significance. Le Marin is Duras' last novel that proposes to create a

fictional reality capable of unifying and synthesizing the disparate elements which make sense out of a réalité vécue; essentially, starting with Les Petits Chevaux, her works begin an itinerary leading toward an ultimate destruction of the mendacious illusion of an integrated and purposeful universe. Her novels are becoming less and less a reconstruction or a representation of reality; they aim to be the état brut of human experience. They are to be no longer a fictional representation of the human situation, but rather a phenomenological happening--the novelistic equivalent of the theater of the Absurd or the avant-garde cinema.

In the context of Claudel's animus-anima parable, there is, moreover, a nuanced shifting from the rational apprehension of reality mirrored in the epic odyssey of Le Marin to the interiorized, estivating couples in Les Petits Chevaux de Tarquinia. The latter novel is basically the contemplation of an amorous adventure that is not undertaken, just as Moderato cantabile is anima's song of the vicarious alternative, a tentative counterpoint to the imagined overtones of overwhelming passion. The heroes after Le Marin are more often besottedly bemused bystanders in contrast to the intoxicated innovators of Anna's quest. Dominated by the anima, the later heroes poeticize more than they act, they are silent more than they speak. Their silence is reminiscent of Françou's "cathédrales de vent"[16] as opposed to animus' Tower of Babel, dramatically acted out in bars across Africa by Anna and her boisterous entourage in Le Marin. The reflective pause punctuates more and more Durasian discourse as anima figures animate the novels; Alain Vircondelet refers to the heroes' silence by suggesting that their ". . . sagesse,

leur repliement s'abritent sous leurs silences. C'est comme une hantise, une idée fixe. . . ."[17] Their pose is that of a poetic eavesdropper trying to make out the "confuses paroles" of Baudelaire's forest of symbols in "Correspondances."[18] The role transfer from animus to anima as the protagonists' prime mover constitutes a turning point in the evolution of Duras' characterization. The muses themselves, goddesses of the anima, are progressively embodied as heroes and heroines in the works whose creation they have inspired.

The novels through Le Marin de Gibraltar have created a fictional reality which parallels and rationally reflects the real world--that ill-defined consensus of sensorial input that is perceived, communicated, and accepted as being real. After Le Marin, Duras turns inward as she analytically dissects the temporal and semiological phenomena of her creation. The author will destroy (Détruire, dit-elle) what she has created in order to discover its mythos. What follows is a series of ever shorter novels or récits which depict a thematic dissection and magnification, accompanied by a schizophrenic splintering of the protagonists into a personification of alienating obsessions and compulsions. The antithetical procedure of the forme, which goes from creative evolution to deductive devolution, appropriately incorporates the dichotomous forces which animate the reality of the fond. It is as though Duras, the cinematographer, is doing her filming during the first four novels. The constituting phenomena and the animating principles of the philosophical and psychological landscapes are sensitively recorded. Afterwards, she analytically studies her film by editing it, enlarging and repeating key scenes, at times employing slow-motion techniques in

order to make visible all the perceivable elements. This second stage in Duras' manner is at once destructive and creative; it is the inevitable irony of mutilation which is inherent in most art, Camus's ". . . déchirement perpetuellement renouvelé."[19] Such therapeutic and aesthetic surgery takes one back to a classical definition of art: the fusion of the utile and the agréable.

NOTES

[1] Paul Claudel, Oeuvres en Prose. Bibliothèque de la Pléïade. ed. J. Petit (Paris: Gallimard, 1965), pp. 27-28.

[2] Arthur Rimbaud. Oeuvres. éd. Suzanne Bernard (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1960), pp. 128-131.

[3] Marguerite Duras, Le Marin de Gibraltar (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1952), p. 30. All further references to this work appear in the text.

[4] Jean-Luc Seylaz, Les Romans de Marguerite Duras (Paris: Archives des Lettres Modernes, 1963), p. 16.

[5] Armand Hoog, "The Itinerary of Marguerite Duras," Yale French Studies, 24(1959), 69.

[6] Jacques Guicharnaud, "Woman's Fate: Marguerite Duras," Yale French Studies 27(1961), 112.

[7] Rollo May, Love and Will (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1969). p. 81.

[8] Carl G. Jung, Man and his Symbols (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1964), pp. 187-188.

[9] Jung, p. 198.

[10] Hoog, pp. 70-71.

[11] Hoog, p. 72.

[12] Carlos Baker, Hemingway: The Writer as Artist (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1963), p. 165. "Pursuit as Happiness" is the title of Part IV of the Green Hills of Africa.

[13] Martin Esslin, The Theater of the Absurd (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Co., 1961), p. 139.

[14] J.-L. Seylaz, pp. 17-18.

[15] Alain Vircondelet, Marguerite Duras ou le temps de détruire (Paris: Editions Seghers, 1972), p. 92.

[16] Duras, La Vie tranquille, p. 170.

[17] Vircondelet, p. 129.

[18] Clarles Baudelaire, Baudelaire, Les Fleurs du mal, ed. Antoine Adam (Paris: Edtions Garnier Frères, 1961), p. 13.

[19] Albert Camus, "L'Artiste et son temps", in Essais d'Albert Camus, éd. R. Quillot (Paris: Gallimard and Calmann-Levy, 1965), p. 1090.

CHAPTER IV

INTERIOR SONGS: THE ANIMA SYNDROME

After having explored the confines of exterior reality in the animus odyssey of Le Marin, the Durasian protagonists turn inward to discover and experience the limits of their inner reality. These heroes and heroines of the second manner engage in a spiritual journey not unlike that of Baudelaire's poetry; these novels and récits of the anima syndrome constitute Les Fleurs du mal of Marguerite Duras. The characters peregrinate through their own personalized realms of Spleen and Idéal, vacillating between states of a paralyzing ennui, often nourished by Le Vin, and brief moments of an almost Proustian rapture, illuminating and transcending the anesthetizing compromises of the vie tranquille. Their Voyage, after having exhausted the normal range of the human experience, ends in a twilight-zone reality (L'Après-midi de Monsieur Andesmas), where death and madness are the only hope for finding l'inconnu and an alternative to Françou's tranquil life, forever shattered.

In this mature phase, the heroes evolve through a series of nine novels and récits in which, progressively, they begin to cast off the painted, three-dimensional flesh of verisimilitude in order, ultimately, to don the ceremonial masks of symbolic figures. This ultimate regression

to a mythic realm will eventually manifest itself in the third and most recent stage in the itinerary of the Durasian hero. In L'Amour (1971), the wraith-like figures have lost all verisimilitude as particular human beings, but their symbolic significance has expanded proportionally to their lack of believability. In the novels of this second manner, however, the characters, although no longer presented with the depth and traditional realism of the coming-of-age heroes, have not as yet shrunk to the depersonalized status of the typical antihero. The protagonists of these works have retained their humanity and their effectiveness as representatives of the pathos of the human situation. It is the manner of their presentation that has changed. As the characters become more introverted and alienated, the psychological distance between the author and her characters dramatically increases. Duras has abandoned the psychological analyses of the early novels, which told a story, in order to create and concentrate upon the psychological event itself. If the narrative scope has narrowed, the dramatic intensity has increased. Expositional chronology and character development have been dispensed with in favor of dialogue and pictorial scenes which give the impression of having been artistically selected and recorded through the impersonal eyes and ears of a movie camera. Thus a classic sobriety of means and manner and an application of certain dramatic and cinematographic techniques vividly animate the shrinking protagonist and illuminate the contracting space of his claustrophobic reality.

In this chapter and the one which follows, the reader witnesses a progressive interiorization of experience. In the "Interior Songs," the characters still remain within the bounds of psychological normalcy. In

the next chapter, the schizoid figures of the anima syndrome are ravished by a vision of absolute passion; this vision provokes in them a fugal flight from reality, which leaves them on the brink of psychosis. Ultimately, the antiheroes of the most recent novels fall victim to the pathological compulsions seen in the psychotic episodes of such figures as Lol V. Stein and the vice-consul.

The nine novels and récits which comprise the anima syndrome and its violent sequel are, for the most part, psychological events, inwardly apprehended by the protagonists. The exterior quest recounted in the Mediterranean and African journeys of Le Marin has been replaced by the inner geography of the protagonist's perception and poetization of a duration which slowly reveals a decisive emotional event in the making. Often, this internal event is paralleled by an exterior event which symbolizes the emotional turning point being experienced by the main character. In Les Petits Chevaux de Tarquinia (1953), the second of several holiday novels, the heroine relates the temptation of an adventure that is never undertaken. It is a reaffirmation of Françou's vie tranquille, by a more mature heroine; gone is the boisterous impudence of the iconoclastic couple in search of the mythic sailor. Des Journées entières dans les arbres (1954) reincarnates the figure of the beloved older brother, encountered in the coming-of-age novels. Now middle-aged, he is an unmarried gigolo, living on the fringes of bourgeois society. His mother's ambivalence, and finally, her preference for the child who has refused the compromises of becoming a responsible adult, comprise this belated coming-of-age novel. Le Boa, Mme Dodin, and Les Chantiers are récits which accompany the title work in Des Journées. The first

two works constitute a nostalgic, retrospective re-creation of the heroes who animate Duras' early novels of the realistic stamp; in Les Chantiers, the author returns to her new, second manner of characterization, already announced in Les Petits Chevaux. The novels which follow Des Journées incorporate many of the characteristics of the New Novel--apparent dissolution of plot and characterization, impersonal descriptions, and a preference for a réalité subie over a réalité agie;[1] however, Duras' heroes, although diminished in number and verisimilitude, remain vibrantly human.[2] In Le Square (1955), a man and a woman, both of whom are dispossessed and introverted, engage in a diffident dialogue, reminiscent of the hilariously tragic chatter of the Theater of the Absurd, in the hope of escaping their loneliness. In Moderato cantabile (1958), the introversion of experience reaches an impasse similar to that attained by the extroversion of the couple in Le Marin. Moderato cantabile, a poetized reprise of the vie tranquille, is rejected by the protagonists, ravished by a vision of absolute passion. In Freudian terms, the long dormant pleasure principle (cantabile) erupts and shatters the social order and emotional security of the reality principle (moderato), which normally postpones and sublimates the id's demands for immediate, often destructive gratification.[3] In this novel and the subsequent one, Dix heures et demie du soir en été (1960), the protagonists are on the brink of madness; they act out vicariously, through a sort of fugal counterpoint, a vision of absolute passion which they themselves are unable to incarnate. In contrast to the baroque design and atmosphere of Moderato and Dix heures, L'Après-midi de Monsieur Andesmas (1962) takes place with classic clarity in the calm of a summer

afternoon.[4] This final novel of the anima syndrome and of the subsequent fugue of its ravished heroes marks an end and a new beginning; it incorporates the death of the rational protagonist, all those who have compromised with the reality principle and the vie tranquille, and it signals the emergence of the pathologically schizoid heroes who animate the third and apparently definitive manner of the author's novelistic characterization.

In Les Petits Chevaux de Tarquinia, first published in 1953[5], a substantial change has occurred in Duras' manner of characterization as well as in the form of the novel itself. The difference in scope between this work and Le Marin is striking. Indeed, Pierre de Boisdeffre points out that Duras:

> fait le pont entre le roman américain, style Hemingway, et la nouvelle école, avec Les Petits Chevaux de Tarquinia . . . ou le décor tropical et les passions brûlantes de ses premiers livres font place à la plage symbolique sur laquelle se déroule le ballet abstrait du désir et de la mort.[6]

Armand Hoog also sees in this novel a turning point in Duras' fiction:

> But after 1953 the manner and tone of her work reach a new level. I should be tempted to see, in Les Petits Chevaux de Tarquinia and in Des Journées entières dans les arbres, Madame Duras' two perfect accomplishments. 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).[7]

Thus a contracting of the novels' spacial and temporal elements is to accompany a progressive dénuement in the manner of presenting the protagonists.

Les Petits Chevaux, Duras' first novel of the second manner, is the second of the so-called "holiday novels."[8] The holiday is the moment privilégié of the Durasian hero. Vacations liberate the characters from their mundane routines and allow them to make new encounters. It is the time to ". . . se retremper . . . dans l'inintelligence du monde" (p. 71). This image suggests an inner quest that clearly belongs to the intimate, immanent realm of the anima; it constitutes a sharp contrast to the outwardly directed, myth-making odyssey recounted in Le Marin, the first holiday novel. It appears that with Les Petits Chevaux, Duras' novels, like those of many of her contemporaries, have " . . . abandoned that great urge to be all-encompassing, to unify, to explain as the Creator might, to become a summa of man's knowledge and activities."[9] If the scope of this and of the subsequent novels has become more narrow, the revelatory artistry is in no way less profound. Les Petits Chevaux is the apologie du quotidien as a work of art. It is Anima's diary, "une étrange et merveilleuse chanson."[10]

The story unfolds during two days at the seaside, on the Italian coast in a setting almost identical to that of Rocca, described in Le Marin. The canicular heat wave, the longing for rain, the river, and the sea are reunited in Les Petits Chevaux. There are not, however, any impudent myth makers like those found in Le Marin among the couples estivating on the steaming beaches; indeed, there is a return to Françou's vie tranquille. Duras' heroes have gone back to the symbolic beach whose therapeutic and thematic roles were first worked out in Part Two of La Vie tranquille. They will never leave it completely. The symbolic role of the sea in Duras' fiction is captured in this passage taken from

the earlier novel where Françou is at first enticed, then seduced and ravished by the watery personification of life and death:

> Un soir, j'ai été près de la mer. J'ai voulu qu'elle me touche de son écume. Je me suis étendue à quelques pas. Elle n'est pas arrivée tout de suite. . . . . Puis je l'ai vue, ingénuement, s'en étonner, jusqu'à me renifler. Enfin, elle a glissé son doigt froid entre mes cheveux.
>
> Je suis entrée dans la mer jusqu'à l'endroit où la vague éclate. Il fallait traverser ce mur courbé comme une machoire lisse, un palais que laisse voir une gueule en train de happer, pas encore refermée. La vague a une taille à peine moins haute que celle d'un homme. Mais celle-ci ne se départage pas; il faut se battre avec cette taille qui se bat sans tête et sans doigts. Elle va vous prendre par-dessous et vous traîner par le fond à trente kilomètres de là, vous retourner et vous avaler. Le moment où l'on traverse: on surgit dans une peur pure, l'univers de la peur. . . . On est les yeux dans les yeux pour la première fois avec la mer. On sait avec les yeux d'un seul regard. Elle vous veut tout de suite, rugissante de désir. Elle est votre mort à vous, votre vieille gardienne. C'est donc elle qui depuis votre naissance vous suit, vous épie, dort sournoisement à vos côtés et qui maintenant se montre avec cette impudeur, avec ces hurlements?[11]

In Les Petits Chevaux, the main characters, like Françou, are wedded to the sea, and, in this work, the amphibious existence on the beach constitutes the entire setting.

Thematically, in addition to the metaphoric presence of the sea, there are other parallels between this novel and La Vie tranquille. A sudden and gratuitous death, the blunted affect of the female protagonist who is at once tempted and intimidated by life's call to adventure, and the ultimate rejection of the epic vocation in favor of an introverted quest for apparent normalcy and tranquillity constitute a thematic composition first acted out in La Vie tranquille, and subsequently reenacted by the Durasian protagonist in a series of variations. In the variation which is Les Petits Chevaux, Sara is the protagonist

who must decide between her husband Jacques (the tranquil life) and Jean, a solitary tourist, who wants her to share with him a life of adventure on his beautiful boat. The fatal event, the vital fatality which parallels the routine gestures and tedious dialogue of the vacationers, is the death of a young man killed while trying to disarm an abandoned World-War-Two mine. The refusal of the victim's mother to sign the death certificate captures the imagination of the small seaside community. The willful passivity of her defiance has all the impudent impotence expressed in the title of Duras' third novel, Un Barrage contre le Pacifique. And the pacific life forces ultimately prevail over the individual's rebellious stance, in a kind of oceanic pathetic fallacy, which dramatically exposes the phallic fallacy of the animus pose. In the end, Sara, unlike the narrator of Le Marin, rejects the possibility of an amorous adventure and remains with her family, even though she does manage one adulterous encounter with Jean. The vespertine tryst does not announce the beginning of a rebellious voyage as it did in Le Marin in virtually the same setting. Moreover, the mother's obstinate refusal to accept her son's mortality acquiesces before the mundane imperatives of everyday existence. This simultaneous appeasement of Eros and Thanatos is a recurring theme in the author's symbolism. As Boisdeffre's phrase "abstract ballet of desire and death"[12] indicates, Les Petits Chevaux is a tediously choreographed capitulation to the vie tranquille. More appropriately, it can be envisaged as the semantic transubstantiation of life itself, as Duras perceives it. Les Petits Chevaux marks the point at which the author abandons the neo-realistic viewpoint, and with it, the animus-like penchant for theoretical

demonstrations, in order to simply animate, to incarnate a tranche de durée by imposing on it the immanent, vital qualities of the anima. Once again in the words of Boisdeffre, Duras ". . . ne vise pas à la démonstration de tel ou tel procédé littéraire, mais à l'élucidation d'un domaine particulier de l'existence. Chez elle, il y a moins de théorie et plus d'humanité."[13]

The style of the novel reflects the stifling, oppressive atmosphere of the meridional summer. The banal, repetitive dialogues translate an ennui that consumes the heroes' lucidity and vitality. The slow, minutely exact narration of the vacationers' every move casts a temporal spell, like that of Virginia Woolf and Proust.[14] They wake up, take showers, and go to the beach. They play and they get bored. They talk about the heat, drink excessively, and eat regularly. It seems as though nothing is happening. Indeed, there are few events which actually take place, but for Duras, life presents few actual events. For the most part, people anticipate potential happenings and ruminate about past ones. It is, therefore, appropriate that the heroes spend their time waiting, contemplating what may happen. Like the sea, Duras' temporality is endlessly undone and endlessly rebegun like the interplay of the waves.[15] The cyclical sameness of time is rendered especially vivid by a periodic repetition of certain sentences. The initial and closing sentences of the novel's four chapters (Chapters I and II cover the late morning-early afternoon and the late afternoon-evening of the first day--Chapters III and IV cover the same time periods of the second day) echo each other in a symmetrical reprise of key phrases, such as: "elle s'endormit dans cet espoir" (pages 52, 168, and 221); and "la

chaleur était (toujours) là, égale à elle-même" (pages 7 and 115). This merging of the forme and the fond in a style that incorporates the illusion of a slow, melodic time flow is an integral part of Duras' second manner.

The objective third-person narrator recounts the low-keyed, insignificant peripeteia of the two day tranche de durée that constitutes Les Petits Chevaux from the perspective of Sara, the main character. All the principal characters appear in the first chapter. Besides Sara and her husband, Jacques, their unmarried friend, Diana, and the couple of Ludi and Gina are also major characters. Sara's little boy and the impudent maid who watches after him complete the group of vacationers. Jean, Sara's mysterious admirer, soon joins them in their leisure activities. In addition to those on holiday. there are those characters who are present because of the young man killed by the exploding mine--his parents and the village grocer who takes an unusual interest in their fate.

The geographical setting and the one real event which touches the lives of these protagonists are deftly sketched in the impressionistic élan of three sparse paragraphs near the beginning of the novel. Duras skillfully suggests the mythic import of the setting, the parallel symbolism of the fatal accident and the boat, and the primordial role of temporality with a rapidity and a sobriety of means that are typical of the author's active phases of narration. Duras' prose style, like the personality of many of her heroines, vacillates between active bursts of volition and the passive plodding of the attente. These seven sentences describe the genesis scene, the lieu privilégié of the Durasian characters,

not only in Les Petits Chevaux, but also of such divergent works as Le Marin and L'Amour. This setting is the fertile crescent of Duras' heroes and heroines.

> Le fleuve coulait à quelques mètres de la villa, large, décoloré. Le chemin le longeait jusqu'à la mer qui s'étalait huileuse et grise, au loin dans une brume couleur de lait. La seule chose belle, dans cet endroit, c'était le fleuve. L'endroit par lui-même, non. Ils y étaient venus passer leurs vacances à cause de Ludi qui lui, l'aimait. C'était un petit village au bord de la mer, de la vieille mer occidentale la plus fermée, la plus torride, la plus chargée d'histoires qui soit au monde et sur les bords de laquelle la guerre venait encore de passer.
>
> Ainsi, il y avait trois jours de cela, exactement trois jours et une nuit, un jeune homme avait sauté sur une mine, dans la montagne, au-dessus de la villa de Ludi.
>
> C'était le lendemain de l'accident que l'homme qui possédait ce bateau était arrivé à l'hôtel. (pp. 8-9)

For the first time in Duras' novels, the characters are not endowed with a past; the reader knows no more about them than what they say and do within the temporal confines of about forty-eight hours on the beach. Moreover, although Duras never, even in the more conventional novels, attempted to paint complete portraits of her heroes in the manner of Balzac, in this work, even fewer physical characteristics are given than before. The protagonists' last names remain unknown. However, these figures seem familiar, for they incarnate the same elements and situations as the heroes of the early novels. Excessive alcoholic consumption by the sea during a heat wave, a violent event that gives rise to a metaphysical reexamination of existence, an encounter with an erotic stranger who possesses a beautiful boat, and the possibility of a rupture with the tranquil life all mingle in the ennui and exacerbated expectancy of the attente. Although the characters have begun to shrink in

proportion to the growth and maturation of the author's thematic dialectics, the former still retain a respectable layer of psychological and physical verisimilitude, if not the spontaneously generated allure of such impudent ingénues as Françou and Suzanne.

Sara is the first married heroine, the first protagonist to be a mother as well as a lover, the first main character to have participated in the founding of a family. The fringe figures of the early novels have apparently settled down to the serious business of actually living the tranquil life. Besides the evident kinship between Françou and the heroine of Les Petits Chevaux, Sara also shows herself to be a descendant of Suzanne, the female protagonist of Un Barrage. While contemplating the geste auguste of a fisherman, Sara recalls her childhood and the loss of a beloved brother.

> Près de l'île, sur sa gauche, un pêcheur tout seul jetait son filet. Il le ramenait très lentement, tournait sur lui-même comme une ballerine et le jetait d'un seul coup: le filet se déployait, immense devant lui, immense vraiment par rapport à l'homme minuscule qui en disposait. Puis le pêcheur recommençait, lentement, toujours avec la même intelligence et la même patience. . . . Il lui suffisait d'un peu d'attention et elle entendait encore les piaillements des singes dans les palétuviers, mêlés à la rumeur de la mer et aux grincements des palmiers dénudés par le vent. Ils étaient tous les deux, le frère, et elle, Sara, dans le fond de la barque, à chasser les sarcelles. Le frère était mort.
>
> C'était ainsi que devait se faire une vie. Sara croyait s'être faite à cette certitude et désirait s'y cantonner.
>
> L'homme ramena encore une fois quelques poissons. Le frère était mort, et avec lui, l'enfance de Sara. (pp. 53-54)

The reappearance of the brother figure and of the tropical jungle backdrop tie Sara to the earlier heroines. Her expressed preference for a life of adventure recalls Le Marin and prefigures Des Journées entières dans les arbres. Her use of the verb se cantonner, meaning to confine

within a circumscribed area or to withdraw within oneself, is significant as it is used on several occasions in the novel, and especially since it signals, with this work, the inception of Duras' progressive dénuement of verisimilitude from the introverted hero.

If Sara recalls past heroines, she is nonetheless a precursor of the future protagonists. Les Petits Chevaux constitutes a lieu de rencontre on the itinerary of the Durasian hero and a turning point in his/her evolution. This decisive reorientation is manifested by a turning inward, a growing introversion in contrast to the extroverted agressiveness of Un Barrage and Le Marin. Sara's predilection for the hotel as the ideal home for those who, like her, have a caractère difficile and her envisaging life after thirty as a mere échéance, fortell the imminent dispossession of the Durasian hero, a falling from grace, an inability to remain sempiternally dans les arbres.

> Elle aurait préféré être à l'hôtel qu'ici dans la maison. Si elle avait pu, elle aurait vécu à l'hôtel. Car Sara ne désirait plus les maisons à elle, les appartements, la vie commune avec un homme. Jeune, elle les avait désirés. Maintenant que c'était, croyait-elle, le moment de vieillir, elle aurait préféré que cela se passât différemment et que cette échéance se déroulât ailleurs, par exemple dans l'anonymat de l'hôtel. (pp. 54-55)

This incipient introversion is the first step toward the cultivated autism of the later heroes. The hotel, also a lieu de rencontre, is to be the setting for several of the later novels--Les Chantiers, Détruire, dit-elle, L'Amour.

Sara occupies the focal point of what little plot there is in Les Petits Chevaux. Like the narrator of Le Marin, she is tempted to make a break with the tranquil life, represented by her ambivalent

attachment to her son and her husband Jacques. Also as in Le Marin, the seductive figure is a solitary voyager who owns a beautiful boat. In this novel, however, the sexual roles have been reversed. Jean, with the "regard avide et vert de la liberté" (p. 20), has taken on Anna's role of the temptress in Le Marin; Sara, although she has one sexual encounter with the mysterious stranger, ultimately decides against making a definitive break with the tranquil life. Basically, she is afraid; symbolically frightened by the sea, she is intimidated by all forms of the life force--her maternity and her sexuality. Neurasthenic, she lacks the necessary volition to change her life; even the common, everyday decisions, such as when to go to the beach, represent for her an "heure cornélienne" (p. 118). Sara, then, rejects Jean and the call of the unknown. She is not to be a marin de Gibraltar: "--Je ne suis pas faite pour les voyages héroiques, dit Sara" (p. 160). After all, the tacit complicity between the woman (anima symdrome) and her immediate environment takes precedence over any urge to explore unknown realms (animus odyssey). The author points to this female sensitivity that captures the intimate relationship between the individual and his everyday surroundings: "Il n'y a que les femmes qui habitent les lieux, pas les hommes."[16]

Diana, a close fiend of Jacques and Sara, although more cerebral, has much in common with the latter. Indeed, all the characters seem to exist only in as much as they are perceived by Sara. Diana, unlike Sara, has refused to " . . . s'installer, dans la vie . . ." (p. 120). Like Sara, however, Diana is struck by a paralyzing vertigo before any manifestation of the antithetical forces of a reality à rebours. Like

the narrator in Le Marin, when he views Anna's maritime atlas of a world à l'envers, Diana contemplates the irreality of the bottom of the ocean. The experience disturbs her. In addition to its effect on Diana, the description of the sea is significant from a stylistic point of view. The reader is struck by the similarity of vocabulary and technique that Duras employs in evoking the watery translucency of the sea and in describing the airy realms of the sky covering the land--hence the heavy, almost tactile opacity, the asphyxiating, claustrophobic qualities so characteristic of her landscapes:

> C'était l'envers du monde. Une nuit lumineuse et calme vous portait, foisonnante des algues calmes et glacées du silence. La course des poissons striait son épaisseur d'insaisissables percées. De loin en loin, la vie apparemment cessait. Alors des gouffres nus et vides apparaissaient. Une ombre bleue s'en élevait, délicieuse, qui était celle d'une pure et indécelable profondeur, aussi probante sans doute de la vie que le spectacle même de la mort. Mais Diana cria qu'il fallait partir.
>
> —Vous ne savez pas, dit Diana, que nous ne sommes pas des gens à pouvoir supporter le fond de la mer? (p. 130)

Diana's close relationship with Jacques and Sara is unusual because of her single status. Jacques claims to have sacrificed whatever amorous impulses he may have felt for Diana to his love for Sara. The three remain the best of friends. This voyage à trois is reprised in Dix heures et demie du soir en été, and the delicate affective balance attained in Les Petits Chevaux is shattered. Later, in Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein and Le Vice-consul, variations of the amour à trois reoccur. Diana and Sara's friendship, not unlike that of Jules et Jim, the French film classic, seems destined to an unhappy outcome. Diana defends what appears to be her celibate status by a statement that prefigures the vicarious alternative incarnated in Anne Desbaresdes, the

protagonist of Moderato cantabile: "—Tout amour vécu est une dégradation de l'amour, déclara Diana en riant. C'est bien connu" (p. 88).

Jacques, like Sara, is tempted to make a break with the tranquil life, but, in the end, he too acquiesces, capitulates before the stern exigencies of the unknown: "—Moi je voudrais m'en aller, dit Jacques, voyager. J'en crève. Ne plus travailler pendant deux ans et voyager" (p. 119). But Jacques, like Sara, is not made for the voyage héroïque. In its place, he proposes a relatively easy journey to a modestly interesting site--les petits chevaux de Tarquinia. These equestrian tombs, dating from the Etruscan civilization, are among the Greek and Roman ruins at Paestum, located on the Gulf of Salerno about ninety-five miles from Naples. Jacques points out that there is an especially beautiful temple dedicated to Poseidon, Greek god of the sea, particularly appropriate for these estivating sea worshippers. The proposed journey, however, is clearly a tame alternative to the virile odyssey recounted in Le Marin. The little horses, the mighty spirit of equus immobilized in stone, constitute a striking contrast to the vigorous, coursing gait of the koudous. Jacques is thus symbolically proposing a renunciation of the quest, a pilgrimage to placate the divinities of the tranquil life. Jacques and Sara find that they are inextricably tied to one another by their reciprocal repression of the epic élan. The Durasian protagonist has lost his disponibilité: "On ne peut pas vivre toutes les vies ensemble . . ." (p. 176). Jacques eloquently states the terrible sense of loss that accompanies any choice, once it has been made. It is especially poignant when it regards the affect. Jacques is speaking of the necessary compromise inherent in psychological maturity, in which

the existential experience of love falls short of fulfilling the essentialistic expectancy.

> Je le voudrais de toutes mes forces. Je voudrais de toutes mes forces pouvoir par exemple partir tout seul. Sans toi.
> Elle se leva et pénétra dans le couloir. Il se leva aussi.
> —Je le voudrais, dit-il encore, je voudrais y arriver.
> —J'y suis arrivée, lui rappela-t-elle.
> —Je sais.
> Il la suivit dans l'ombre fraîche du couloir.
> —Excuse-moi, dit-il.
> Elle vint contre lui.
> —Depuis quelques années, lui dit-elle, quelquefois, la nuit, je rêve d'hommes nouveaux.
> —Je sais. Moi aussi je rêve de femmes nouvelles.
> —Comment faire?
> —Aucun amour au monde ne peut tenir lieu de l'amour, il n'y a rien à faire.
> —On ne peut rien trouver, rien faire?
> —Rien, dit Jacques. Va dormir. (pp. 167-168)

Jean, a mysterious stranger, who has come to lure Sara away from her affective ties to the tranquil life, can be seen as the embodiment of the animus figure in the female psyche. Like Le Marin's Anna, the captivating anima presence in the male, Jean, as an animus figure, may assume a positive or a negative influence on Sara's perception of herself and others. As a positive force, the animus can be the synthesizing incarnation of meaning and the mediator of the creative forces. As a negative manifestation, the animus can induce in a woman's psyche ". . . a strange passivity and paralysis of all feeling, or a deep insecurity that can lead almost to a sense of nullity. . . ."[17] This is a strikingly apt depiction of Sara's state of being. It seems possible that her longing for a vacation from the exigencies of her affect, like Françou's "vacances de soi-même qui ne sert à rien en attendant,"[18] and her sense of nullity incarnate the negative effects of the animus in

women. Her ultimate rejection of Jean, however, and the tacit reaffirmation of her roles as wife and mother that this implies may signal a restructuring of the self that will permit a positive incorporation of the animus principle. More likely is the probability that she remain impotently posed in a tense and senseless torpor, sempiternally ravished by a call to adventure which she has neither the volition nor the courage to undertake. Sara, like Françou, has reached a state in which ". . . on a trop laissé grossir l'attente pour qu'elle puisse jamais trouver de prétexte à sa taille."[19]

From a thematic point of view, Jean reunites many of the elements which normally accompany the rencontre amoureuse in Duras' fiction. He invites Sara to an open-air ball much like the one evoked in Le Marin--an admixture of music, dancing, alcohol, and tentative, exploratory dialogue. "Blue Moon" animates the airy expanse of the evening just as "Ramona" epitomized the call to adventure for the young protagonists of Un Barrage. Jean's nuanced overtures to Sara, like the narrator's aveu in Le Marin, pronounced in the din of Tangiers traffic, are almost unheard midst the impudent cries from the crowd: "Lorsque l'homme parla, sa voix était presque couverte par la musique des bals et les cris des joueurs" (p. 99). The familiar male image of the river as it empties into the sea is associated several times with Sara's infatuation for Jean. The river, unlike the ocean, is made for the "petites attentes" (p. 62), which are amenable to man's measures of duration as opposed to the mindless eons of geological time used to approximate the untamed temporality of the seas. Sara's admiration for the river has sexual undertones: "—Quand même il y a ce fleuve, dit Sara. On ne peut pas se

lasser de le regarder. Ce que c'est beau les fleuves, surtout quand ils arrivent à leur fin, énormes, comme celui-ci" (p. 107). Sara associates the river with Jean at the moment she abandons herself to him: "Ils se regardèrent. Sara vit dans ses yeux le fleuve qui brillait" (p. 108).

Gina and Ludi, the other married couple, are more extroverted than Jacques and Sara. They quarrel openly, yet seem inextricably dependent one upon the other. Ludi's boyish good humor and Gina's indefatigable optimism form a contrast with Sara and Jacques's reflective melancholy. Gina is reminiscent of Jacqueline, the compulsively self-satisfied companion whom the narrator abandons in Rocca for Anna. Like Voltaire's Candide, Ludi represents an enlightened anti-intellectualism, a vigorous and well-intentioned Pyrrhonism. He is the sempiternal child who remains dans les arbres:

> —J'ai déjà entendu dire que Ludi était si enfantin qu'il ne devait avoir aucune idée en tête, dit Diana.
> —Par des gens qui avaient des idées?
> —Qui en étaient pourris, dit Sara.
> —Est-ce que Ludi a une idée sur cette idée-là?
> —Aucune. Il en est bien content, c'est tout.
> —Et les gens qui viennent de loin pour l'interroger, qu'est-ce qu'ils en tirent?
> —Rien, dit Sara. Il leur dit: Vous savez, moi, j'ai aucune idée sur rien. (p. 70)

The remaining characters, although they are secondary and sparsely drawn, each suggests, nevertheless, a familiar theme. The maid is superbly impudent, recalling the heroes and heroines of Duras' first novel. Jacques and Sara tolerate her insubordination, her diatribes, her "petit visage orgiaque et sale" (p. 117) with an ambivalent complicity that is heartily condemned by their friends.

The local grocer, after a lifetime of self-repression necessary to maintain the vie tranquille, incarnates one of the author's most cherished antitheses--to understand is to go mad, to reject psychological maturity, the separation of the child's integrated view of reality and imagination:

> —Moi, j'ai compris, avec les enfants, dit l'épicier. Autrefois, non, mais maintenant. . . . (p. 39)
>
> . . . . . .
>
> —Je comprends tout, dit-il, c'est curieux, depuis quelque temps surtout. Ça, je le comprends, je crois même que je pourrais comprendre plus encore. C'est un peu comme si j'étais devenu fou. (p. 42)

The grocer has spent his life waiting in vain for what he calls "l'occasion de la plus grande gentillesse" (p. 141), an opportunity to tap his latent heroism, and he bitterly laments his fate.

The old parents, keeping vigil beside their son's coffin, witness to that violent event, the fatal mine explosion, which dramatizes, magnifies, and parallels the less intense, more pervasive and disparate experiences of the main characters.[20] The technique of the parallel event which potentializes the significance of the attente is also used in Dix heures et demie du soir en été and Moderato cantabile. As early as La Vie tranquille, Françou had perceived the latent power of a concomitant event which could precipitate a volitional incarnation of self, a rupture from the tranquil life; she is painfully conscious of the incompatibility between the human spirit and the human condition, as experienced in the nullity of the vie tranquille:

> Je suis une certaine forme dans laquelle on a coulé une certaine histoire qui n'est pas à moi. Je mets à la porter, ce sérieux et cette indifférence avec lesquels on se charge de ce qui ne vous appartient pas. Je pense bien cependant qu'il pourrait exister un événement qui serait le mien tellement que je l'habiterais tout entier. Alors, je me réclamerais de mes défaites, de mon insignifiance et même de cet instant. Mais avant, inutile d'essayer.[21]

The mother's refusal to sign the death certificate is symbolic; her ultimate capitulation to the authorities of conventionality coincides with Sara's renewed acceptance of the tranquil life implicit in her rejection of the amorous odyssey. The old woman's revolt against the injustice of the human condition excites the sympathy and admiration of the vacationers:

> Elle était devenue une énorme puissance de refus et d'incompréhension. Sans doute avait-elle décidé de ne plus comprendre, comme d'autres décident de comprendre. Il n'y avait pas de différence. Quand on la regardait on pensait à la mer.
>
> —Ça la repose plutôt, dit le vieil homme. Elle n'a pas envie de bouger. Si elle la signe, elle sera bien forcée de bouger, elle n'en a pas envie.
>
> Jacques la regardait fixement comme si elle avait été le spectacle même de la beauté. Ludi et l'homme aussi. (pp. 43-44)

A young priest, however, who was sent by the municipality to comfort and, above all, to coax the old couple into compliance with the regulations is insensitive to the symbolic beauty of the old woman's defiance. He elicits the scorn of Ludi and his companions. Since the appearance of a clergyman is most unusual in Duras' works, it is noteworthy that the young priest is an anathema to all. His inanities go unheeded, and the old mother remains uncomforted. On two occasions, she says, as though talking to herself, totally removed from the logical context of the ongoing conversation around her, the one word "Amour"

(pp. 39, 46). In a Freudian sense, Amour has the antithetical meaning of a primal word.[22] It suggests the affirmation of maternal love and the impotent refusal of death. It connotes the absolute ravishment of madness and mortality as well as the provisional absolution of Eros. Only the later heroes, the ambulatory schizophenics such as Lol V. Stein and the vice-consul, are to incarnate it completely. In fact, this same word, Amour, again employed without modifiers, is the title of Duras' later novel. Already with Les Petits Chevaux, the author's definitive themes are taking form. The old woman has uttered for the first time the primal word of the Durasian heroes' ultimate incarnation of the tragic sense of life.

With Les Petits Chevaux, the characters and their author seem to have attained an attitude of enlightened resignation, a sort of provisional sagesse. The novelistic scope has become more narrow and fragmented, but, at the same time, its thematic content and structural form have come together in a synthesis that is aesthetically and intellectually satisfactory. The heroes are as representational of certain themes as they were in the previous novels, but these protagonists are presented without benefit of any realistic commentary or explication by the author. The preferred setting of the sunsoaked, meridional beach is for the first time, but not the last, the unique decor of the entire novel. Without abandoning the verisimilitude of her protagonists and their situation, Duras has made the first step toward the contracting reality of the New Novelists.

Thematically, Les Petits Chevaux constitutes a renunciation of the compulsion to explore rationally and explain the human experience (Le

Marin). "On ne peut pas vivre toutes les vies ensemble" (pp. 146 and 176) is an aphorism that aptly recapitulates the situation of the protagonists. Literature is as much a fatality as is love; man's apparent freedom is an illusion--yet, for all that, and perhaps because of it, the anima's songs continue to be sung. The resignation and sagesse, which are typical of the heroes of Duras' second manner, connote, not an end, but a new beginning:

> —Qu'est-ce que c'est que la portée et la signification de l'amour? demande Sara.
> —Mais précisement, comment veux-tu que je le sache? dit Diana en riant. Elle ajouta: Au fond, tu vois, la littérature, c'est une fatalité comme une autre, on n'en sort pas.
> —C'est bien pratique, la fatalité, dit Sara.
> —Mais on peut parler quand même, dit Diana.
> L'homme était toujours loin, à s'occuper de son bateau. (pp. 71-72)

Structurally, Les Petits Chevaux centers around two events: one that does not take place, Sara's leaving Jacques for the man with the yacht; and secondly, the aftermath of an event that took place before the novel began, the death of the young man killed by the mine explosion. Thus the novel suggests that events of primoridal, formative importance are relatively rare in life; the tentative attente of one potential event and the interpretive reconstruction of another are more representative of reality than a dramatic series of momentous happenings. Therefore, starting with Les Petits Chevaux, there is a single event that intensifies and reflects the halting, obsessional preoccupations of the protagonists which constitute the fond of this novel and many of those which follow. J.-L. Seylaz recognizes the importance of this structural device and cogently demonstrates its significance:

> Le roman est par ailleurs un bon exemple du rôle joué par un événement insolite qui aimante toute la masse du récit et fait de celui-ci, par delà la crise d'un couple, une expérience collective. Il s'agit de la mort d'un ouvrier employé au déminage. . . .
>
> Nous avons là l'image grossie, simplifiée, d'un refus irraisonné de la vie (avec ses accidents et ses fatalités), d'une fatigue, d'une souffrance, d'une réprobation qui sont celles de Sara découvrant le vieillissement de l'amour qui l'unit à Jacques. Dès lors, le passage du refus au consentement, chez la vieille paysanne, accompagne ou éclaire le chemin qui fait, de façon plus consciente encore que peu explicite, le personnage de Sara. Il symbolise une sagesse élémentaire qui, si elle paraît trancher sur l'intellectualisme des héros, donne en réalité sa vraie signification au parti que ceux-ci finissent par prendre.[23]

These heroes and the unwonted event which dramatizes their attente create the atmosphere of the sempiternal inassouvissement which characterizes the middle novels by invoking a kind of perverted pleasure principle: "Marguerite Duras ne nous raconte qu'une crise, certains moments privilégiés d'abandon et de tension ou l'on espère, sans l'atteindre, un impossible assouvissement, ou l'on n'acquiert que «l'impression d'être comblé de connaissance»."[24] The heroine's tension in Les Petits Chevaux is never released; she is lulled to sleep in the novel's closing scene by a reprise of her metaphoric hope for a rain which would break the intolerable heat wave: "Elle espérait que cette nuit-là, la pluie arriverait, et elle s'endormit très tard, dans cet espoir" (p. 221). Indeed, a turning point has been reached in the protagonists' evolution; it can be seen through a contrast between the major metaphors of this work and those of the preceding one. Le Marin's heroes were called to sail the open sea, whereas the protagonists of Les Petits Chevaux wait on the shore, where they are worn down and weathered away by the hypnotizing interplay of sun, sand, and sea on the

author's symbolic beach. Duras' heroes have exchanged the virile rush toward assouvissement recorded in Le Marin for the soothing assoupissement of summer showers ardently longed for in Les Petits Chevaux. Duras' "Drunken Boat," like Rimbaud's, has no sequel; its virgin voyage is its last. "L'Europe aux anciens parapets,"[25] embodied in the equestrian tombs of Tarquinia, calls out to the vanquished, embittered lovers of Les Petits Chevaux.

Des Journées entières dans les arbres, published in 1954[26], is not one novel, but a collection of four long short stories or nouvelles. Le Boa, Mme Dodin, and Les Chantiers accompany the title work. The first three of these works are a nostalgic, retrospective re-creation of traditional characters typical of the early novels; the two protagonists that inhabit Les Chantiers reaffirm Duras' new manner of characterization, already exemplified in Les Petits Chevaux. The Des Journées collection is the author's last sally into the essentialistic, chronologically-ordered domain of traditional fiction before definitively embracing the existential, ongoing simultaneity of the New Novel's temporal techniques. The first three stories constitute a return to the impudent, larger than life prototypes of Les Impudents, Un Barrage, and Le Marin. Les Chantiers, the concluding story of the collection, reassumes the heritage of Francou's vie tranquille, a volitional capitulation, like Sara's renunciation in Les Petits Chevaux, before the imperatives of the temporal flow. In this second manner, the characters are not as completely drawn as in the past; they are there to give the reader a psychological point of view and the sensorial means to view, directly through the protagonist, the durée which the novel attempts to

incarnate. The hero is not a well-defined portrait, but a means of access, a psychological vehicle which permits the reader to perceive and enter into a state of being the representation of which has become the essence of many contemporary novels. The hero has ceased to be the center of the fictional universe. He is a psychic potentiality in the process of becoming. In the first three nouvelles of Des Journées, Duras has created for the last time characters with a full measure of verisimilitude, that is, with a rationally imposed biographical explication of their behavior. Des Journées, Le Boa, and Mme Dodin present character portraits that stand out from the text, and which can be remembered long after one has forgotten the circumstances that surrounded them. With Les Petits Chevaux, Les Chantiers, and the subsequent novels, the heroes cannot be lifted whole from or even envisaged, outside their situation; they have become an integral, immanent part of the novels' dynamics. They have no more verisimilitude than a real-life person, yet they have kept all their humanity intact. Duras' characters are depersonalized without being dehumanized. Des Journées (the collection) is unique in Duras' prose fiction in that it illustrates equally well her traditional and her avant-garde manner.

The first récit, which gives the collection its title, has three main characters: the mother, her son, Jacques, and his mistress Marcelle. After an absence of five years, the mother returns to Paris to visit her son. She spends only one day with Jacques and Marcelle and then decides to take the plane back home to the distant colony where, late in life, she has become the wealthy owner of a factory. During the short visit, they talk, eat, and drink; the mother accompanies Jacques and Marcelle to the small night club where they work. Jacques dances

with older, unaccompanied women, and Marcelle entertains the male customers in a similar fashion. Within the confines of this uncomplicated plot, Duras creates poignantly drawn, believable characters. Her penetrating psychological portraits are presented almost exclusively through dialogue; descriptive touches are strikingly apt, yet short and infrequent. The dramatic intensity of this short novel was transferred to the stage in a successful play version in 1966, under the direction of Jean-Louis Barrault.[27] From all points of view, Des Journées stands out as one of Duras' best accomplishments. Armand Hoog cogently expresses his admiration for the work in the following passage:

> Des Journées is not a philosophic demonstration. The breadth of concrete detail here accumulated is such that critics of the future will perhaps look on this as the "common denominator" of Madame Duras. I am thinking for instance of the relationship between mother and child, a familiar theme in her works and treated, in these pages, in a profound and unforgettable way. In a word, we do not depart from human feelings. These pages remain the pages of a novel. They never become exercises. Their credibility is more and more of a triumph as their technical novelty becomes progressively more marked. Madame Duras has written nothing better.[28]

Like the mother figures in Un Barrage and in the other coming-of-age novels, the nameless, septuagenarian mother who returns from the Colonies to visit her middle-aged son is a moving incarnation of contradictory emotions. Endowed with a voracious appetite and a boundless impudence, she vacillates between states of neurasthenic lassitude and compulsive exuberance:

> —Ah! les joies de la choucroute, s'écria la mère, on en parle aisément sans les connaître! Une bonne choucroute... à soizante-quinze ans passés... deux guerres... quand j'y pense... En plus de tout le reste... six maternités... je me demande encore comment j'y suis arrivée... comment je ne les ai pas tous tués... ah! la, la! quel malheur... une goute de beaujolais, s'il vous plaît. (p. 82)

The mother's exclusive love for her son is marked by the same ambivalence which characterizes the contradictions of her own nature. Jacques's sempiternal adolescence, his refusal or inability to marry, get a good job, and have a family simultaneously excites her admiration while it breaks her heart. At least Jacques is still her son, an old son to be sure, yet he prolongs the life of her maternal instincts which are older still. The mother's shameless preference for Jacques and her scornful allusion to the success of her other children constitute an ironic perversion of the Biblical story of the "Prodigal Son." In Duras' version, he never comes home; he remains precariously perched dans las arbres.

> —Sans doute, dit la mère, sans doute, je ne sais plus... Mais enfin, ils ont fait des études, eu des situations, fait des mariages, tout comme on avale des confitures. Des natures faciles qui n'ont jamais eu à lutter, jamais, contre la violence d'inclinations contradictoires... c'est curieux... et que voulez-vous, moi, ça ne m'intéresse pas. (p. 33)

The mother explains that she blames herself for having allowed Jacques to follow his indolent penchants during childhood. She recognizes in his engaging aversion to grown-up seriousness an extension of her own latent passivity. As she rationalizes his fate, her resignation assumes a philosophical pose: "Il faut bien qu'il y en ait comme lui, non? Il y en aura toujours... aucun régime, aucune morale n'arrivera jamais à extraire le jeu du coeur des hommes..." (p. 29).

As in Un Barrage, an aura of death surrounds the mother, and this intensifies the poignancy of what is probably her last voyage. She has come to try one last time to interest her son in taking over the family fortune represented by the factory in the Colonies, knowing quite well

that he will never accept. In addition, she has also come to Paris to buy a bed in which to die comfortably. Appropriately, neither mission is accomplished, and she must return home uncomforted. Her futile appetite, her sensitivity to the cold, and her physical decline recall the imminence of death. Images like the following announce the mortality of her indefatigable maternal spirit: "Couchée, elle était si peu épaisse que son corps disparaissait dans la mollesse du divan. Six enfants là-dedans, pensa le fils. Seule la tête émergea comme un vestige, couleur de ces murailles des villes abandonnées" (pp. 22-23). From a rational point of view, the mother recognizes death's proximity: "—Vous comprenez, mademoiselle, dit-elle, je ne dois pas penser. Si je me mets à penser, je meurs" (p. 27). Ironically, she is most lucid during her drunken spree at the nightclub where Jacques and Marcelle work, an unforgettable and masterful scene in which the mother's sublime impudence and frustrated maternity are realistically and powerfully evoked.

The mother's frustrated maternal instincts dominate the concluding paragraphs of Des Journées. Awaiting the return of Jacques, who has stolen two of her jewelry pieces in order to gamble them away, the mother confides her bitter disappointment to Marcelle:

> —Mais si. Ça ne ressemble à rien. D'avoir eu des enfants, ça ne ressemble à rien, ça ne signifie rien. Vous ne pouvez pas imaginer à quel point, à vous donner le vertige. Je ne dis pas de les avoir... mais de les avoir eus...
>
> Marcelle s'enfuit à la cuisine sous le poids de telles paroles.
>
> —A rien, continua la mère toute seule. Si je restais il ne pourrait que me tuer, le pauvre petit. Et moi, je ne pourrais que le comprendre. (p. 86)

Shortly, thereafter, upon Jacques's return, the mother, who like her son is a victim of the inclination contradictoire, comforts him by explaining her pride in him--a mother's pride that she alone can perceive. Her only regret in dying is the realization that her unique appreciation of Jacques will die with her. That is to say, it is only her maternity that makes her cling to life:

> —C'est une autre fierté que je suis seule à comprendre. Et c'est seulement de ça que je souffre, mon petit, c'est tout, d'être seule à la comprendre et de penser que je vais mourir et que personne, après moi, ne l'aura. (p. 96)

The mother's ambivalence, her love-hate relationship with her children, and in particular with Jacques, reflects Duras' own contradictory feelings about motherhood:

> Je crois qu'il y a une différence essentielle entre une femme qui a eu un enfant et une femme qui n'a pas eu d'enfant. L'accouchement, je le vois comme une culpabilité. Comme si on lâchait l'enfant, qu'on l'abandonne. Ce que j'ai vu de plus proche de l'assassinat, ce sont des accouchements. La sorties de l'enfant, qui dort. C'est la vie qui dort, complètement, dans une béatitude incroyable, et qui se réveille. . . . Le premier signe de vie, c'est le hurlement de douleur. Vous savez, quand l'air arrive dans les alvéoles pulmonaires de l'enfant, c'est une souffrance indicible, et, la première manifestation, de la vie, c'est la douleur. . . . C'est des cris d'égorgé, des cris de quelqu'un qu'on tue, qu'on assassine. Les cris de quelqu'un qui ne veut pas.[29]

Jacques is the reincarnation of the older brother in the early novels: Jacques, in Les Impudents; Jérôme/Nicolas in La Vie tranquille; and Joseph in Un Barrage. He is the sempiternal adolescent; like Don Juan, he is the graceful seductor incapable of strong attachments. A fringe figure, he is unable to find satisfaction in a normal career. When he was a child, his mother allowed him to miss school and spend

entire days perched in the trees, and figuratively, he has never come down. Intellectually, he realizes that his emotional growth is somehow stunted, arrested at the child's level where imagination and reality still coexist, never having separated one from the other. He remains unable to change before his mother's generous offer to come work for her in the Colonies:

> —Je ne pourrai jamais travailler.
> —Pourtant, mon fils—mais elle n'avait plus de conviction —pourtant c'est de l'or, de l'or à gagner.
> —Au bout de deux jours je partirai. Comme si j'étais en marge, d'une race pour rire. Je n'y arriverai jamais. Il me manque quelque chose.
> —N'y pense pas, mon petit, ne sois pas triste.
> —Je ne sais pas très bien quoi, mais qu'il me manque quelque chose, c'est sûr. (p. 61)

Jacques's progressive withdrawal from a normal range of psychological and social activities, his shallow and at times inappropriate affect, and his lack of self-understanding suggest a possible condition of latent schizophrenia. Indeed, from Françou's disturbing tranquility in the face of trauma to the psychotic episodes of Lol V. Stein and the vice-consul, there is a disquieting autism in many of Duras' characters. Moreover, there is in Jacques's nature a brooding violence just below the surface. After the embarrassment in the bar caused by his mother's drunkenness and refusal to pay the bill, Jacques ". . . n'éprouvait plus rien que de la colère, ne souhaitait plus rien que l'éclatement de l'ordre du monde" (p. 78). His ambivalence toward the mother, whom he truly loves, is even more alarming: "Il me restait encore ce témoin de ma vie si lâche, pensa-t-il, il faut qu'elle meure, il le faut" (p. 79). He also sees himself menaced by a fatal passivity: "Après ces nuits-là, après chacune d'entre elles il croyait avoir enfin atteint la fatigue

mortelle réservée aux héros de son genre" (p. 94). This fate does indeed await the heroes of the later novels. The last allusion to Jacques in the work is an evocation of his fear in a world without his mother's love and understanding: "J'ai peur, j'ai peur de moi, pensa-t-il" (p. 96).

Marcelle is more compassionate, more human in her emotional responses than Jacques or his mother. She is more empathic, more vulnerable to the pain of others. Despite her unfortunate background as an abandoned child who grew up to become a thief and a prostitute at an early age, she is more caring and unselfish than her two companions in the huis clos atmosphere of the drame à trois which constitutes Des Journées.

At this stage of their evolution, Duras' heroes and heroines are at the height of their psychological verisimilitude. Des Journées, with its classical economy of means and its dramatic tone due to a preponderance of realistic dialogue, is a moving testimony to the author's ability to create vivid, unforgettable portraits of the traditional stamp. This state of affairs is to be of short duration. Like Jacques, the Durasian protagonist has at last ". . . atteint la fatigue mortelle reservée aux héros de son genre" (p. 94); his delicate psychological balance is menaced by psychosis, and the literary conventions which incarnate him are approaching an imminent reevaluation by the author. With Des Journées entières dans les arbres, Marguerite Duras' heroes can say with Edouard Dujardin's Daniel Prince: "Nous n'irons plus au bois/ Les lauriers sont coupés."

Le Boa[30] recounts a woman's recollections of her two-year stay, between the ages of thirteen and fifteen, at Mlle Barbet's boarding school in a provincial city in the French Colonies. Every Sunday, while

the other girls are with their families, the young pensionnaire is made to witness a double spectacle that is to constitute her initiation into the duality of life's natural forces. Each week the impressionable, young protagonist is made to witness at the municipal zoo an enormous boa's feeding upon a live chicken; later the same day, the girl is required to contemplate Mlle Barbet's nudity as she undresses in front of her pupil. The contrasting scenes of the voluptuous, mindless vitality of the serpent and the calculated exhibitionism of a septuagenarian virgin influence the adolescent's perception of the antithetical tension between the forces of Eros and Thanatos. The two spectacles are united in the girl's psyche, magnified and distorted into a kind of primal scene. In page-quality evocations of remarkable sensuality, Duras depicts the virile boa and its luxuriant, tropical surrounding. The girl is fascinated by the boa's tranquil violence: "Cette paix après le meurtre. Ce crime impeccable, consommé dans la neige tiède de ces plumes qui ajoutaient à l'innocence du poulet une réalité fascinante" (p. 101). The boa's digestion excites the girl's imagination and suggests to her a "transubstantiation accomplie dans un calme sacré" (p. 101). In comparison to the serpent's incarnation of Eros, Mlle Barbet is an embodiment of Thanatos: "Je comprenais dès la première fois. Toute la maison sentait la mort. La virginité séculaire de Mlle Barbet" (p. 104). The juxtaposition of the two events makes an impression of almost hallucinatory proportions on the young protagonist's mind, which she refers to as an "enthousiasme négatif" (p. 106). As in several of the novels, one violent scene (the boa's erotically perceived annihilation of its prey) colors the slow, seemingly uneventful activities of everyday existence.

> Cela dura deux ans. Chaque dimanche. Pendant deux ans, une fois par semaine, il me fut donne d'être la spectatrice d'abord d'une dévoration violente, aux stades et aux contours éblouissants de précision, ensuite d'une autre dévoration, celle-là lente, informe, noire. (p. 108)

This experience marks the girl's apprehension of reality: she envisages the serpent's violence with a sense of wonder, while Mlle Barbet's melancholy innocence fills her with horror and repulsion. In her naivete, the girl assumes Mlle Barbet's ravaged flesh is a direct result of her virginity, of her refusal to give herself to a man. The protagonist ingenuously imagines that, if she cannot find a husband, she can become a prostitute in order to avoid Mlle Barbet's fate. She unrealistically conjectures that the bordello must be "une sorte de temple de la défloration . . ." (p. 112), where celibate women can show themselves to men and thereby remain eternally young. She envisages her adult life in the story's last sentence, a sinuous, serpentive metaphor:

> Et je voyais se lever le monde de l'avenir de ma vie, du seul avenir possible de la vie, je le voyais s'ouvrir avec la musicalité, la pureté d'un déroulement de serpent, et il me semblait que, lorsque je le connaîtrais, ce serait de cette façon qu'il m'apparaitrait, dans un développement d'une continuité majestueuse, où ma vie serait prise et reprise, et menée à son terme, dans des transports de terreur, de ravissement, sans repos, sans fatigue. (p. 115)

The first-person narration is traditional in form and convincingly realistic in the psychological portrait it presents. The parallel spectacles provide a Freudian explanation for the psychoses of such characters as Lol V. Stein and the vice-consul. Mlle Barbet's secular virginity, like that of the vice-consul, is symbolic of Thanatos. The boa, whose importance is reflected in the title, is an apt representation of the antithetical nature of human experience: Eros versus Thanatos,

activity versus passivity, and mortal violence versus innocent tranquillity. Moreover, the transubstantiation metaphor used to describe the boa's consumption of a live sacrifice gives the phenomenon a religious mystery in the young protagonist's mind. The amoral naïveté and the heroine's vulnerability to deleterious influences are magnified because of a prolonged separation from her beloved mother. No father figure is ever mentioned. Le Boa is then the primal scene of this and perhaps other Durasian heroes; it can be seen, from the point of view of Freudian determinism, as a causal factor in the "transports de terreur, de ravissement . . ." (p. 115) of such figures as Lol V. Stein. In the evolution of Duras' literary itinerary, this story, like Des Journées, is a temporary return to the traditionally realistic coming-of-age novels, in which characters are still explained, instead of being only the object of a relentless surveillance.

Madame Dodin[31] is unique among Duras' works; it alone has a title which is nothing more than the name of its protagonist. Like Des Journées and Le Boa, the nouvelle contains character portraits in a traditional, nineteenth-century manner. Mme Dodin is vividly depicted by the narrator of the story, an anonymous tenant in the apartment building where the heroine is the concierge. This heroine is not only described physically and psychologically; her eccentricities are in part explained, a method rarely used by Duras, explicitly by an account of her past experiences as well as by her present situation. Although Duras usually does not aim at a traditional psychological verisimilitude, especially in her mature phase, Mme Dodin, as the two preceding nouvelles of Des Journées, witnesses to the author's mastery of nineteenth-century Realism's manner of characterization. Of course, other characteristics

of Mme Dodin make it contemporary--its relative lack of plot, its amoral lack of message, its Theater-of-the-Absurd dialogues. Nonetheless, Mme Dodin is an unforgettable portrait, with all the three-dimensional verisimilitude of a Mme Vauquer. Mme Dodin is the paragon of impudence; she possesses a psychic force that mystifies and intimidates all who surround her, even, and especially, those who are socially and economically her superiors.

Mme Dodin is sixty years old and has been a concierge for the last ten years. Twice married to alcoholic husbands whom she left, she now lives alone. Her grown children, whom she rarely sees, disgust her, for they remind her of the years of sacrifice she underwent to support them. Her only close friend is a thirty-year-old street sweeper, Gaston, who regularly stops to talk with her as he makes his daily rounds. Mme Dodin's overwhelming impudence, her sempiternal state of revolt against the inequities of a socio-economic hierarchy which exploits her, and the aggressive hostility of her disposition strangely intimidate all the tenants, who never complain about the obscenities and even the petty thefts with which she poisons their existence. Mme Dodin's pet anathema, the trash cans which she must empty daily, is the most frequent pretext for her irreverent, iconoclastic tirades. Her profession, like that of Gaston, exists "en raison des déchets que les hommes laissent dans leur sillage . . . (p. 130). This explains their feeling of being dispossessed, exploited. Mme Dodin's resentment is limitless; neither God nor politics escape her heartfelt, blasphemous sense of humor:

> Mme Dodin a, sur la Providence, des idées bien arrêtées:
> --Le bon Dieu, c'est pas grand chose de bien reluisant, c'est moi qui vous le dis. Puis le Fils, c'est du pareil au même que le Père.

> Et sur le socialisme, des idées non moins arrêtées:
> —Les communistes, c'est du pareil au même que les curés, sauf qu'ils disent qui'ils sont pour les ouvriers. Ils répètent la même chose, qu'il faut être patients, alors, il y a pas moyen de leur parler.
> Néanmoins, Mme Dodin met en doute l'une des institutions les plus communément admises de la société bourgeoise, l'institution de la poubelle commune dans les immeubles des grandes villes.
> —Pourquoi que chacun il la viderait pas sa poubelle? Pourquoi faut-il qu'il y ait qu'une seule qui vide les chiures de cinquantes autres? (p. 131)

Mme Dodin's intransigence takes on an epic allure in the eyes of the tenants: "Mme Dodin est la réalité du monde. Notre poubelle trouve sa réalité lorsqu'elle arrive entre les mains de Mme Dodin. La réalité du monde est une dure réalité, que nous acceptons néanmoins" (p. 130). Her scathing irony shows no more indulgence for intellectuals and writers than it does for religion and politics. Speaking of her tenants, Mme Dodin and Gaston engage in the art of the astuce at the expense of the former. The spelling modifications that imitate the pronunciation variations of popular speech add to the impudence of the tone, especially in cri-vain for écrivains:

> —Ça pisse, donc ça boit, dit Mme Dodin.
> —Ça me rappelle, dit Gaston, quelque chose. Un philosophe a dit la même chose: "Je pense, donc je suis."
> —L'aurait mieux fait de se taire, dit Mme Dodin, s'il a rien trouvé de mieux.
> —Celui qui a trouvé ça, c'est Descartes, dit le balayeur.
> Mme Dodin se marre.
> —Des cartes de quoi? En fait des cartes, je connais que celles d'alimentation.
> —En attendant, dit Gaston, ça nous avance pas.
> —Pour ça dit Mme Dodin, je sais vraiment pas ce qui nous avancerait. Y a un crivain au troisième et ça ne m'avance pas. C'est lui le plus sale de toute la boutique. (p. 142)

The souffle épique of Mme Dodin again reaches serio-comic heights in the following evocation of the dump truck. The description of the truck as

an almost animate being of epic proportions is an amusing parody of Zola's inordinate amplification of the alambic in L'Assommoir or the mine in Germinal. Indeed this kind of hallucinatory, almost surrealistic materialism is equally reminiscent of Ionesco's Le Nouveau Locataire, in which the protagonist prepares an exorcism of the demonic in a world of objects gone mad:

> La benne me transporte dans le monde des poubelles de mon monde, de ces poubelles pleines d'épluchures et déchets de mes contemporains qui vivent, mangent, mangent, pour se conserver, durer, durer le plus qu'ils peuvent, et qui digèrent, assimilent, suivant un métabolisme qui nous est commun, avec une persévérence si grande, si grande vraiment, quand on y pense, qu'elle est aussi probante, plus probante, à elle seule, de notre commune espérence que les plus fameuses de nos cathédrales. Et cet énorme chant de l'humaine rumination chaque jour commencée, chaque jour repris à l'aurore, par la benne de sa rue, c'est le chant, qu'on le veuille ou non, de l'irréductible communauté organique des hommes de son temps. Ah! plus d'étranger ni d'ennemi qui tienne devant la benne! Tous pareil devant la gueule énorme et magnifique de la benne, tous estomacs devant l'éternel. Car pour la bonne grosse gueule de la benne, pas de différences. Et en fin de compte, o locataire du quatrième qui me veut tant de mal, de même que nos poussières, un jour, se mêleront, de même l'os de ma côtelette se mêle sans façon à celui de la tienne, dans le ventre original, dans le ventre dernier de la si bonne benne. (pp. 148-149)

Gaston, a thirty-year old bachelor and street sweeper, is Mme Dodin's one close friend. Two kindred spirits who are equally dispossessed, living on the fringe of normal society (dans les arbres), Gaston and Mme Dodin's complicity is complete; because of their difference in age, however, it is doubtful that they are lovers. The frustration of their "amour sans issue" (p. 176) has made them all the more inventive in the games they create in order to "emmerder le monde" (p. 176). Each day Gaston, singing the familiar air of the "Petit Vin blanc," stops by to see Mme Dodin as he makes his rounds, and they engage in their raucous

games and seditious dialogues. They compete with one another in the "art de déchoir" (p. 177). Gaston's incipient alcoholism has already had a deleterious effect on his behavior and appearance; moreover, he is obsessed by the idea of leaving Paris and going to live on France's meridional coast, the oasis of the Durasian heroes. Gaston gives the impression of just barely being able to repress a latent violence, which threatens at any moment to explode. His ardent desire to leave Paris and its dirty streets is tenuously held in check through the passion inspired by his mentor in impudence. The habitual violence that accompanies Duras' depiction of passion is present in the relationship of Gaston and Mme Dodin:

> Que deviendrait-elle sans lui? Elle sait qu'il le sait. Et pourtant ils finissent par rire ensemble de leur bonheur menacé, des risques qu'ils courent. On pourrait, à partir de là, imaginer comment ils pourraient en arriver à des scènes extrèmes, au fait-divers tragique, sans sortir de leur complicité plus forte que tout. (p. 175)

In addition to the narrator, there is a second witness to the relationship between Mme Dodin and Gaston. Mlle Mimi, the proprietress of a pension next door to Mme Dodin, is often a passive third party to the unlikely couple who meet in front of the concierge's lodge. She is at once fascinated and frightened by Mme Dodin's imperious iconoclasms and Gaston's swaggering, male presence; like the anonymous tenant in Mme Dodin's building who narrates the story, Mlle Mimi is the "témoin apeuré de leur complicité" (p. 165). For unknown reasons, she regularly sends Mme Dodin all her meals at no charge. Mlle Mimi, celibate, anemic, yet comparatively wealthy, is strangely apprehensive about the couple, who, from a socio-economic point of view, is her inferior. She and Mme

Dodin's sheepish tenants are like a society on the brink of disaster, terrified by its seditious malcontents.

> Car si Gaston bavarde chaque jour avec Mlle Mimi, il n'a jamais vu sa pension, comme il n'a jamais vu, mise à part la loge de Mme Dodin, aucun des intérieurs devant lesquels, chaque matin, il passe en balayant. Et la seule chance qu'il aura jamais de pénétrer par exemple chez Mlle Mimi, de violer enfin ce sanctuaire de la satisfaction, c'est qu'il y ait par exemple, un jour, un drame dans la pension de Mlle Mimi. . . . C'est sans doute pourquoi Mlle Mimi n'a jamais pu s'empêcher d'écouter les conversations de Mme Dodin et de Gaston le balayeur bien que leur insatisfaction sans bornes et l'expression qu'ils en donnent la fasse toujours trembler. (pp. 140-141)

Mme Dodin can then be seen as representative of a modern society on the brink of revolution, of anarchy. The characters themselves seem to be in a precarious psychological state. The psychological verisimilitude attained in the depiction of these characters is, however, a fine example of traditional realism. As the author is on the point of turning definitively to the manner of the New Novel and its shrinking hero, she illustrates one last time her mastery of the traditional manner of characterization. Like the precarious relationship of Mme Dodin and Gaston, Duras' view of her protagonist's literary role is engaged in an unpredictable, ongoing metamorphosis. The fateful "détruire, dit-elle" has not yet been uttered, but it is foreshadowed in Mme Dodin: "En somme leur jeu continue. Mais il tend à devenir un peu supérieur, dont ils n'ont plus tout à fait le contrôle, et dont ils ignorent encore quel est au juste l'enjeu" (p. 173).

In Les Chantiers,[32] Duras abandons once and for all the traditional protagonist and returns to a style in which the characters exist only in as much as they translate a temporal flow into human terms, like the

figures in Les Petits Chevaux. From the gripping realism of the heroes and heroines of the first three nouvelles of Des Journées, Les Chantiers plunges into the realm of the New Novel.[33] She and He, the anonymous duo whose rencontre constitutes the story's plot, are know to the reader only in as much as the narrator's surveillance permits. This shift from a biographical portrait to a phenomenological description within the Des Journées collection reflects the metamorphosis of the Durasian protagonists in the larger domain of their novelistic evolution.

The two main characters, a man and a young woman, are each vacationing in the same hotel, situated close to a construction site (les chantiers), which give the story its name. Although their purpose is never explicitly stated, the mysterious chantiers are probably being used to construct new walls for a cemetery which is being enlarged.[34] The man and woman meet by chance next to the chantiers; the latter is troubled by the construction site, and she considers leaving the hotel. But she remains, and for ten days the man observes the woman without reengaging her in conversation. Then they come across each other once again near the construction site. They comment on the progress made at the site, and four days later, as the work on the cemetery walls is completed, they follow each other into the nearby forest. Their passion, without benefit of verbal communication, has come of age.

The proximity of their first encounter to the cemetery construction site establishes the familiar Eros-Thanatos association. Indeed, it is the young woman's sensitivity to the presence of Thanatos which in part excites the ardor of the narrator. The antithetical symmetry of the style in which their first encounter is expressed accentuates and synthesizes the simultaneous presence of the story's dichotomous elements:

"Ils se trouvaient seuls, et ensemble, lui et elle, mais séparés l'un de l'autre, devant ce chantier" (p. 190). In the very next sentence, Duras alludes to the erotic ravishment (violeur), which lies dormant in the juxtaposition of these opposing elements, and which the time flow progressively potentializes: "Et qu'elle l'ignorât encore, qu'elle ignorât parfaitement la présence de ce voleur, de ce violeur, donna naturellement à l'homme le désir de se faire voir" (p. 190). The time flow, the very essence of the work, permits the slow evolution of the increasing desire between the man and the woman. Les Chantiers is an unspoken declaration of love; it is also the necessary waiting period for time to create a complicity between the strangers, a complicity that is required in order to tame the violence and fear of immolation inherent in requited passion. Just as a new wall must be built around the cemetery to quiet the anxiety of the hotel guests, so must the heroine overcome her fear of self-sacrifice, a necessary consequence of the erotic urge, in order to love the hero. The fact that she remains in the hotel, and does not leave as she had threatened upon discovering the chantiers, confirms the expectations the hero has centered on the heroine. The fatal shadow over the genesis of their passion has been dispelled:

> Et alors, déjà, il s'avoua que cette petite victoire sur elle-même avait du bon, que sans elle il n'aurait eu aucune occasion de la revoir. Il constata qu'il en était content. Et il en vint même à se dire que d'ailleurs si elle n'avait pas surmonté le trouble que provoquait en elle la vue des choses analogues à ce chantier, elle n'aurait probablement pas pu vivre jusqu'à leur rencontre. Il ne faisait aucun doute qu'à force de fuir toutes les choses de ce genre elle n'aurait pu trouver finalement d'autre refuge que la mort elle-même. (p. 196)

The tempo of the amorous attente which comprises the dynamics of Les Chantiers recalls a similar waiting period, equally silent, of the narrator in Le Marin; it was not until Tangiers that he was able to proclaim his love for Anna. The evolution of the narrator's growing passion in Les Chantiers is almost totally interior, in contrast to the blatant externalization of emotions in the earlier work. The slow conversion of the narrator's feminine ideal, in Les Chantiers, into the reality of this paricular woman is a variation of the Stendhalian theme of crystallization.[35] It explains in part the necessity for this waiting period in which the hero silently observes the heroine from a progressively diminishing psychological and physical distance. Les Chantiers is the inner, mental reconstruction which precedes, and in this case supercedes, the verbal stage of the amorous conquest. The story incarnates the silent recrystallization of the heroine's image by the narrator, the reluctant ravisher.

> Le fait qu'elle n'était pas tout à fait celle qu'il avait souhaitée dans la première journée qui avait suivi leur rencontre, ce léger défaut, la faisait plus singulière à ses yeux, plus proche parce que sans doute plus réelle. Et au fond, son existence n'en devenait que plus étonnante. Ainsi cette rencontre, insensiblement, cessait, pour l'homme, d'être un événement de son esprit et tendait à devenir un événement de sa vie. Il avait cessé de le voir en spectateur difficile, qui exige la perfection, quand on ne peut attendre pareille perfection que de l'art. (pp. 196-197)

The solitary man avidly watches the no less solitary woman during the meals served in the hotel dining room. This room, its large windows, and the view onto the tennis courts prefigure the dining room in the hotel-asylum of Détruire, dit-elle. During each meal, the man "s'abandonnait un instant au même ravissement" (p. 200), while contemplating

the vulnerability and the vitality which he simultaneously perceives in the young woman's behavior.

As the days pass, progress is made at the construction site, a progress which parallels the development of a latent passion between the couple to be. Just as the wall which is built around the cemetery conceals the stone monuments to death from the unsuspecting eye, so the diffident hero and heroine must construct a psychological wall around their fear of death before they can give themselves over to one another. The contradictory call of Thanatos and Eros ravishes the hero away from the world of his habitual preoccupations. The hero's personality is losing itself in a temporal flow the culmination of which will mark an end to the existence of the solitary figure he has been.

> Son avenir s'ouvrait sur une sorte de durée océanique. Il s'y présentait même délié de l'obligation d'espérer qui ne se défait d'ordinaire qu'au moment de la mort. Sans doute on n'a que faire d'espérer lorsqu'on a l'occasion de perdre sa vie dans la mort ou dans une autre. (p. 218)

There is a striking parallel between the loss of self in the hero ravished by passion and the psychological amaigrissement of the Durasian hero in the middle novels. The following description of the enamored protagonist of Les Chantiers could just as well constitute a depiction of the evolution of the author's heroes in general. The psychic aberrations and the preeminence of signs over substance are characteristic of the new protagonists' personality and significance. The following passage, a variation of Stendhalian crystallization, might just as aptly portray the evolution in Duras' manner of characterization as to depict the erotic ravishment of the protagonist:

> Ainsi, peu à peu, l'homme s'obscurcissait. Quittant le monde des idées claires, des significations claires, il s'enfonçait lentement, chaque jour plus avant dans les forêts rouges de l'illusion.
>
> Délivré d'une réalité qui, si elle n'avait concerné que lui seul, l'aurait soumis à elle, l'homme avait de plus en plus tendance à ne plus voir dans les choses que des signes. Tout devenait signe d'elle ou signe pour elle. Signe d'indifférence à son égard à elle ou de son indifférence à elle à l'égard des choses. Il lui semblait qu'elle lui filtrait, pour ainsi dire, ses jours et ses nuits, lesquels ne lui arrivaient plus que transformés par la manière qu'il imaginait qu'elle avait de les vivre. (pp. 209-210)

The work at the chantiers is at last finished. Two weeks after their first meeting, the time of waiting is over. Their complicity is total. After having exchanged only a bare minimum of banalities concerning the progress at the construction site, each is ready to abandon himself to the other. The aveu comes, not in the form of words, but in the exchange of a shameless, libidinal laugh. In a passage of great sensuality, which restates the Eros-Thanatos dichotomy, the man and woman walk toward each other, in complete silence, in the luxuriant countryside near the hotel. The formation of the new couple is at hand.

> Les fleurs jaunes répandaient autour d'elles une luminescence soufrée. Elles étaient à tiges rigides et, contrairement aux autres fleurs, ne remuaient pas sous la brise du lac comme si, douées d'une inquiétante lucidité, elles étaient soucieuses de ne jamais céder à la langueur dont elles étaient manacées, de cette eau douce de ce lac de douceur, de ce ventre d'eau d'où elles étaient nées. A côte d'elles, plus rares, souples, aux tiges veloutées et flexibles, les fleurs violettes se laissaient fléchir au moindre assaut de la brise et pliaient sous elle, femelles. Et pourtant, c'était en elles que se mourait la clarté des fleurs jaunes, dans leur splendeur extasiée, toujours prête à céder. (pp. 232-233)

Les Chantiers is then very different from the other stories in Des Journées. In contrast to the traditional plots and characters in Des Journées, Le Boa, and Mme Dodin, Les Chantiers exemplifies Duras' second

manner, already evidenced in Les Petits Chevaux. After Les Chantiers, the new heroes never return to the verisimilitude of the psychological portraits of their predecessors. The heroes of Duras' coming-of-age novels have been definitively transformed into an initial manifestation of the antihero. In fact, with Les Chantiers, the structure and thematics as well as the manner of characterization have reached their mature phase. The parallel incident, which is symbolic of the ongoing preparation toward an event which constitutes the story's principal interest, has become an integral part of Duras' fiction. Already in evidence in Les Petits Chevaux (the young man's death in the mine explosion) and in La Vie tranquille (the swimmer's drowning), this structure gigogne has come of age in Les Chantiers, where for the first time the work receives its title from the intercalated event. In a very real way, Les Chantiers is the miniature model, the literary chantiers or construction site, where the novelist's new manner is definitvely elaborated. J.-L. Seylaz recognizes this seminal role of Les Chantiers:

> Histoire d'une rencontre et de la lente approche de deux êtres, du mûrissement, silencieux et profond, d'une passion et de la mise à jour d'une vérité, à la faveur et dans l'éclairage d'un événement ou d'un spectacle insolite, voilà l'essentiel des *Chantiers*. *Comme nous allons le voir, ce sont* les thèmes qu'on retrouve dans plusieurs romans durasiens.[36]

Les Chantiers, as well as the entire collection Des Journées, constitutes a decisive point in the evolution of Duras' fiction. The characteristic merging of event and duration, "cet événement en cours" (p. 220), and the author's growing predilection of use of a revelatory silence that punctuates the dialogues of the heroes, "cette primauté de la chose la moins énoncée sur la chose énoncée" (p. 220), and the

previously quoted allusion to the obscuration of the heores are not only present in Les Chantiers, but they are explicitly announced by the author through the male protagonist's narration. Juxtaposed to this innovative work whose only antecedent is Les Petits Chevaux, Des Journées also brings back to life the traditional manner of Duras' characterization in the title work, and in Le Boa and Mme Dodin. Des Journées thus recpatures the verve and buoyant realism of the early novels, while Les Chantiers, along with Les Petits Chevaux, manifests Duras' modulation from the rationality of the pair to the inner tonalities of the impair, and prepares the way for the fugal structure of Moderato cantabile and Dix heures et demie du soir en été.

Le Square, published in 1955,[37] is, like Les Chantiers, the inactment of a rencontre. Although thematically consistent with the other novels of Duras' middle period, it is unique because of its stylistic techniques. For the first time in the novels, Le Square relies almost exclusively on dialogue; narration is reduced to a bare minimum. This narration is like cinematographic notations or like the stage directions in a play. Dialogue has, of course, been utilized effectively in several of the novels--Des Journées, Le Marin; but here, it is the very essence of the work. As one might expect, a successful adaptation to the stage was realized in 1960.[38] It is not, however, simply the preponderance of dialogue that causes Le Square to stand out from the other novels; it is the careful, ceremonious stylization of the language used by the two otherwise unpretentious protagonists, a maid and a street-vendor. Using almost to excess the polite titles of Monsieur and Mademoiselle, the two commoners articulate their views of themselves and of their reality with a poignant yet almost professorial pedantry. Their tentative formality

and the delicate circumspection of their circumlocutions are the very antithesis of the vigorous, rough realism of the usual conversation between Durasian protagonists.[39] Interestingly, the two characters are semantically united in the sameness of their speech--the same diffidence, the same formality, even the same repetition of certain expressions. Le Square is, then, what Seylaz calls a "cérémonie de langage."[40] In contrast to the silent communion of the taciturn figures in Les Chantiers, who mysteriously come to a profound understanding of each other almost without uttering a single word, the couple in Le Square engage in a celebration of the communicative art of language. Yet the efficacy of their dialogue remains problematic; it is not at all certain that they will come together to form a real couple. In this work, the animus and the anima figures converse and seem to reach an impasse, which will be ultimately circumvented only through the fugal flight from reality of the schizoid heroines in Moderato cantabile and Dix heures et demie du soir en été.

The plot of Le Square is almost nonexistent. It is solely composed of the conversation exchanged between a young maid, who is watching a child entrusted to her care, and a somewhat older itinerant vendor, whom chance has brought together on the benches of a public park during an afternoon in late spring, just before the onset of the summer heat, which so often serves as the amorous catalyst for Duras' heroes. The title indicates the novel's setting and, by extension, its theme, which is that of the rencontre. The paucity of action and plot development, the anonymity of the two protagonists, the absence of geographical and environmental description place this work on the frontier of the New Novel. However, the beautifully stylized language and the lucidly

conceived, albeit somewhat aberrational rationalizations it expresses give the work a classical tone. The nuanced psychology of the man and woman, the unity of action, place, and time, the preponderance of dialogue, and the universality of the setting and themes add to this impression. Pierre de Boisdeffre points out that Duras has succeeded in giving ". . . une tenue classique à des tendances littéraires qui, chez d'autres, demeurent noyées dans une esthétique de laboratoire."[41] As Duras definitively adopts the manner of the New Novel with Le Square, her heroes still hold on to their humanity. After the laconic characters of Les Petits Chevaux and Les Chantiers, the Durasian heroes speak out as never before in the poignant dialogues of Le Square. The novel thus provides a unique opportunity to interpret how these characters view themselves at this point in their evolution.

The itinerant vendor is a rather pale descendant of the sailor from Gibraltar; he is, in reality, a marin manqué. The continuous traveling required by his trade is an anemic reincarnation of the exotic wanderings of the virile sailor. Like the emotionally retarded gigolo of Des Journées, the salesman is dispossessed, solitary, living on the fringes of society. He takes a modest pleasure in living, but he has chosen an existence uncomplicated by the affective ties with which most persons cannot, or will not, survive. He has put off making decisions about his life until this very lack of volition has become his choice, his solution. He has thus postponed or evaded many of life's most common experiences. When asked if he picked cherries as a boy, he replies symbolically: "—Moi, très tard je les ai cueillies. . . . Le plus tard qu'il est possible dans une vie d'homme" (pp. 46-47). His is a vie tranquille, but unlike François, he finds his tranquillity in the

refusal to take roots or to marry and form a family. Like Sara of Les Petits Chevaux, his is a state of a sustained repression of the élan vital, a Thanatos figure who foreshadows the pathological introversion of the vice-consul in the Lol V. Stein cycle. As he admits to the maid, he is a victim of extreme cowardice; his adjustment to life is predominantly predicated on his abiding fear of the forces of Eros. When asked how he became this way, he answers that such stories (the coming-of-age novels) no longer interest him: "—Comment vous dire? Ces histoires-là sont longues, compliquées, et au fond je les trouve un peu hors de ma portée. Il faudrait sans doute remonter si loin que l'idée en fatigue à l'avance" (p. 17). The vendor's passivity seems to come from a sense of defeat before the contradictions of a reality which, once understood, one never gets over entirely: "On ne peut pas tout être à la fois, ni vouloir tout à la fois, comme vous dites, mais moi, de ces impossibilités-là, je ne m'en suis jamais remis, et je n'ai jamais pu me résoudre à chosir un métier" (p. 34). The man has experienced la nausée, yet he has neither the courage to revolt against the Absurd nor the volition to assume the existential pose. He has also known moments of Proustian bliss, where the spirit is arrested in an equilibrium of peace and joy,[42] where the senses are overcome by an extraordinary intuition of ultimate understanding; like the protagonist of Les Chantiers at the moment of the final encounter, he has been "comblé de connaissance."[43] This state was achieved only once while visiting a foreign city, walking through a zoological garden, perched on a hill overlooking the city and the sea. He recollects this spritiual adventure in vivid sensorial images, as he recounts it to the young woman. The maritime panorama is indeed a sort of primal scene for Duras' heroes and heroines, from the

hardy peasant girl Françou to the decadent sophisticate A.-M. Stretter and to the wraith-like figures of L'Amour. The vendor's experience is a modest equivalent to the Annunciation painting in Le Marin; unlike the narrator of the early novel, however, the hero of Le Square returns to his uninspired, previous manner of existence. He does not envisage hunting the koudou in the shadow of Kilimanjaro--not even an excursion to see the little horses of Tarquinia. The animus odyssey has been superseded by the reflective introversion of the anima syndrome in the Durasian hero.

If the passive vendor, who has suppressed his volitional impulses, is a Thanatos figure, the young maid and her indefatigable desire to be chosen, to be someone's wife, are expressions of Eros. Both characters are outcasts, "les derniers des derniers" (p. 89), but the young woman still has the "espoir de l'espoir" (p. 57), the certainty that her life will be meaningful once she has married and become like everyone else. She is embued with a truculent optimism, a kind of mindless courage, reminiscent of Jacqueline in Le Marin; like Françou after her sojourn by the sea, the maid could declare that she too will have la vie tranquille.

Unlike her older and more experienced interlocutor, she has not experienced existential nausea, nor has she attained the heights of Proustian bliss encounted by the vendor on his foreign voyage. Indeed, she is reluctant to experience anything pleasurable for fear that she may find her present situation tolerable and thereby lose her overwhelming desire to leave it completely behind. In the household where she is employed, the young woman is overworked and given the most disagreeable of tasks, such as caring for the old grandmother who has lost her mind and who can no longer control her bodily functions. The maid

makes no effort to ameliorate her situation, telling herself that to do so would reduce her chances of escaping it. Her hatred of her lot serves to maintain her ardent desire to be chosen, to be carried away. Each Saturday she goes to a public ball at la Croix-Nivert, where she hopes to find a husband. The maid is thus a poignant example of mauvaise foi, in that she refuses to believe that her life has begun: "Rien n'est commencé pour moi, à part que je suis en vie" (p. 42).

As one reads Le Square, one soon begins to wonder if the man and the young woman could eventually form a couple and thereby enter into life's mainstream. Certainly the hero and heroine ask themselves this question. Slowly, almost imperceptibly, they stop just recounting their lives and tentatively begin to try to help and understand each other. On several occasions the man warms the young woman about her refusal to accept the fact that her life has indeed begun:

> —Je ne voudrais pas vous contredire, Mademoiselle, encore une fois, mais, quoi que vous fassiez, ce temps que vous vivez maintenant comptera pour vous, plus tard. Et ce désert dont vous parlez vous vous en souviendrez et il se repeuplera de lui-même avec une précision éblouissante. Vous n'y échapperez pas. On croit que ce n'est pas commencé et c'est commencé. On croit qu'on ne fait rien et on fait quelque chose. On croit qu'on s'achemine vers une solution, on se retourne, et voilà qu'elle est derrière soi. (p. 49)

The young woman is surprised and touched by his empathic concern: "—Vous êtes gentil, Monsieur, de penser à la place des autres avec tant de compréhension. Moi, je ne pourrais pas" (p. 103). The man tries to convince the young woman that she should follow his example and travel, or, at least, do something which she can enjoy now, in her present situation. In vain, he discreetly suggests that she no longer postpone the recognition of the fact that her life has already begun. She, on

the other hand, asks him to come to the ball Saturday at la Croix-Nivert and dance with her. He obviously wants to say yes, but he has not the courage to commit himself. Indeed, their dialogue--like the dance so dear to the girl--is esthetically choreographed into a kind of psychological pas de deux, " . . . in terms of approach, retreat, pause, reengagement as the two partners reach within themselves, as each opens the way toward the other."[44] The understated poignancy of their solitude, of their vulnerability, and of their fear to break away from the inveterate inhibitions which prevent them from joining life's mainstream is rendered all the more moving by the dialogue's diffident decorum. The young woman best summarizes their reciprocal impotence: "C'est vrai, dit enfin la jeune fille--et sa voix aurait pu être celle du sommeil--qu'on fait ce que l'on peut, vous avec votre lâcheté, Monsieur, et moi, de mon côté, avec mon courage" (pp. 152-153). The novel closes with their shared hope of a second encounter next Saturday at the Croix-Nivert ball: "La jeune fille s'éloigna avec l'enfant, d'un pas rapide. L'homme la regarda partir, la regarda le plus qu'il put. Elle ne se retourna pas. El l'homme le prit comme un encouragement à aller à ce bal" (p. 156).

Le Square is then the dramatic dialogue of the rencontre, whereas Les Chantiers is a dreamlike, strangely silent sequence of a similar encounter, but one in which the dialogue is minimal, seemingly gratuitous, yet full of semiological significance. Le Square marks a partial return to the animus' compulsion to verbalize experience, while Les Chantiers is the very essence of the introversion of the anima syndrome. In Le Square, the dynamics of the Durasian couple are more completely articulated than in any of the novels. This work prepares

the way for the more daring couple (Anne and Chauvin) of Moderato cantabile. In both these works, there is a child in the background, an uninterested bystander to the birth of passion. In Le Square, the easily satisfied physical needs of the child--"J'ai faim" (p. 9) and "J'ai soif" (p. 81)--contrast with the unanswered spiritual needs of the adults. Moreover, the Eros-Thanatos association, which is central to Anne and Chauvin's relationship, is already timidly suggested and then hastily taken back by the cautious couple of Le Square. In this same exchange which closes Part I, there is an indirect allusion (une façon de parler) to the heroes' inordinate need to verbalize their feelings. The man is responding to the woman's bewilderment at his not having the expectation to be chosen, to be loved.

> —A votre place, Monsieur, je me ferais venir cette envie coûte que coûte, mais je ne resterais pas ainsi.
> —Mais, Mademoiselle, puisque je ne l'ai pas cette envie, elle ne pourrait me venir que... que du dehors. Comment faire autrement?
> —Ah! Monsieur. Vous me donneriez envie de mourir.
> —Moi particulièrement, ou est-ce une façon de parler?
> —C'est une façon de parler, Monsieur, sans doute, et de vous, et de moi.
> —Parce qu'il y a aussi que je n'aimerais pas tellement, Mademoiselle, avoir provoqué chez quelqu'un, ne serait-ce qu'une seule fois dans ma vie, une envie aussi violente de quelque chose. (p. 76)

This violent association of Eros and Thanatos, latent is Les Petits Chevaux, Le Boa, Mme Dodin, Les Chantiers, and Le Square, is to manifest itself blatantly in the rapt and ravishment of the heroine of Moderato cantabile. The peaceful and harmonious introversion of experience related in the "Interior Songs" is forever shattered by the mortal rapture of Anne Desbaresdes. The "Interior Songs" have incarnated the vie tranquille of the anima syndrome, after the animus odyssey of the

Durasian epic, Le Marin. The imminent rapt and ravishment of Duras' heroes and heroines is to take them to the brink of madness and ultimately lead them to the psychotic episodes of the most recent novels.

NOTES

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[3] Herbert Marcuse, Eros and Civilization, A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966), pp. 12-13.

[4] Brée's Introduction to Four Novels, p. xvi.

[5] Marguerite Duras, Les Petits Chevaux de Tarquinia (Paris: Gallimard, 1953), p. 71. Subsequent references to this work appear in the text.

[6] Pierre de Boisdeffre, Une Histoire vivante de la littérature d'aujourd'hui (Paris: Perrin, 1968), pp. 226-227.

[7] Armand Hoog, "The Itinerary of Marguerite Duras," Yale French Studies, 24(1959), 71.

[8] Jacques Guicharanud, "Woman's Fate: Marguerite Duras," Yale French Studies 24(1961), 109.

[9] Alfred Cismaru, Marguerite Duras (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1971), p. 56.

[10] Paul Claudel, "Parabole d'Animus et d'Anima: pour faire comprendre certaines poésies d'Arthur Rimbard," in Paul Claudel's Oeuvres en proses, Bibliothèque de la Pléïade, ed. J. Petit (Paris: Gallimard, 1965), p. 28.

[11] Marguerite Duras, La Vie tranquille (Paris: Gallimard, 1944), pp. 144-145.

[12] Boisdeffre, Une Histoire vivante, p. 227.

[13] Pierre de Bosdeffre, Dictionnaire de littérature contemporaine (Paris: Editions Universitaires, 1963), p. 288.

[14] Hoog, "The Itinerary," p. 72.

[15] Hoog, p. 71.

[16] Marguerite Duras and Michelle Porte, Les Lieux de Marguerite Duras (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1977), p. 12.

[17] Carl G. Jung, Man and his Symbols (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1964), p. 202.

[18] Duras, La Vie, p. 168.

[19] Duras, La Vie, p. 142.

[20] Jean-Luc Seylaz, Les Romans de Marguerite Duras: essai sur une thématique de la durée (Paris: Les Archives des lettres modernes, 1963), pp. 19-20.

[21] Duras, La Vie, p. 136.

[22] Sigmund Freud, "The Antithetical Meaning of Primal Words," in The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, ed. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1957), pp. 155-161.

[23] Jean-Luc Seylaz, pp. 19-20.

[24] Pierre de Boisdeffre, Dictionnaire, p. 289.

[25] Arthur Rimbaud, Oeuvres, ed. Suzanne Bernard (Paris: Garnier Freres, 1960), p. 131.

[26] Marguerite Duras, Des Journées entières dans les arbres (Paris: Gallimard, 1954). Subsequent references to this work appear in the text.

[27] Cismaru, p. 64.

[28] Hoog, "The Itinerary," p. 72.

[29] Duras, Les Lieux, p. 23.

[30] Marguerite Duras, "Le Boa," in Des Journées entières dans les arbres (Paris: Gallimard, 1954). Subsequent references to this work appear in the text.

[31] Marguerite Duras, "Mme Dodin," in Des Journées entières dans les arbres (Paris: Gallimard, 1954). Subsequent references to this work appear in the text.

[32] Marguerite Duras, "Les Chantiers," in Des Journées entières dans les arbres (Paris: Gallimard, 1954). Subsequent references to this work appear in the text.

[33] Cismaru, p. 78.

[34] Seylaz, p. 4.

[35] Seylaz, p. 6.

[36] Seylaz, p. 9.

[37] Marguerite Duras, Le Square (Paris: Gallimard, 1955). Subsequent references to this work appear in the text.

[38] Cismaru, p. 82.

[39] Seylaz, p. 30.

[40] Seylaz, p. 30

[41] Pierre de Boisdeffre, Dictionnaire, p. 291.

[42] Morris Bishop, A Survey of French Literature 2 (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1965), p. 270.

[43] Duras, "Les Chantiers," p. 233.

[44] Brée's Introduction to Four Novels, p. xi.

CHAPTER V

RAPT, RAPTURE, RAVISHMENT:

THE FUGUE OF THE DISINTEGRATING RATIONAL HERO

Moderato cantabile at once announces the Durasian hero's definitive break with the longanimity of the tranquil life and the onset of his fugal flight from the stifling inhibitions of the reality principle toward the intemperance and violence of an emancipating pleasure principle, viewed as an absolute. For the first time in the novels, the protagonist is ravished away from the tranquil durée of everyday existence by the converging emotional forces of the heretofore parallel event, which is as it was in the "Interior Songs," a dramatic synthesis of Eros and Thanatos. As the enraptured heroes consciously attempt to re-create the crime of passion that they have witnessed, they experience the disorienting fear precipitated by the centrifugal forces of folly. Dix heures et demie du soir en été also creates a situation in which the violent and erotic event, parallel in the novels of the preceding chapter, intersects the tranquil durée of the main character's life and irreparably transforms her. The delicately balanced tranquillity attained by Françou in La Vie tranquille and Sara in Les Petits Chevaux is forever shattered by the eruption of the symbolic event into the heroes' daily lives. This eruption precipitates the liberation of a long-dormant alienation

that the heroes can no longer repress. Moderato and Dix heures depict the tortured culmination of the heroes' alienation and their resultant fugue toward the irrational. L'Après-midi de Monsieur Andesmas recounts the serene agony that accompanies the approach of the hero's imminent death, a death that symbolically represents the demise of a long line of rational protagonists who, like Françou, have fought and compromised in their approach to reality in order to maintain their sanity. Monsieur Andesmas, the last of the rational heroes, is silently ravished by the anesthetizing onset of his imminent death. As the obese septuagenarian slowly sinks into a realm of total subjectivity, the secondary characters are simultaneously undergoing a ravishment of a quite different nature. Valerie Andesmas and Michel Arc are enraptured by the birth of their amorous passion, a passion that makes them oblivious to external reality. Mme Arc, now bereft of the conjugal security and modest happiness associated with the tranquil life, is the victim of an illuminating dementia, a psychic ravishment that clearly prefigures Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein. Through these secondary characters, the seed has been sown for a new generation of heroes, a generation characterized by madness and destruction.

Moderato cantabile, published in 1958,[1] is generally considered the author's masterpiece. It is the very essence of the "interior song;" the title is the musical signature of Mme Duras' compositions, the devise for her artistic representation of the human experience. Moderato cantabile constitutes a reprise of the revelatory antithesis conceived in the vie tranquille fourteen years earlier in the author's second work. Moreover, just as Le Marin brings to fruition the "Animus Odyssey"

and its rational, global approach to reality, Anima's strange and beautiful song attains an artistic and thematic plenitude in Moderato which cannot be surpassed, not without risking total destruction (Détruire, dit-elle), that is, a ravishment from the rational realm (Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein). Moderato is thus at once a culmination of Duras' second manner and an initiation to the psychotic protagonists of the most recent novels; it is midway between the geography of Le Marin and the pure space of L'Amour.[2] This dichotomy is reflected in the heroine and hero of Moderato, Anne and Chauvin. They are menaced by the centrifugal forces of madness. In them are fused the poignant yet impotent phraseology of Le Square and the oneiric psychology of Les Chantiers. From the real adventure of Le Marin to the surreal, psychic venture of Moderato, the novel of the vicarious alternative, Duras' beleagered heroes and heroines move closer to the brink of the schizophrenic abyss that appears in L'Après-midi de Monsieur Andesmas and which pervades the later novels. Music's role as a catalyst in the onset of this imminent madness in understandable in light of the author's feelings concerning the universal language of rhythm and melody: "Et la musique m'épouvante aussi. Je pense qu'il y a dans la musique un accomplissement, un temps que nous ne pouvons pas actuellement recevoir. Il y a une sorte d'annonciation dans la musique d'un temps à venir où on pourra l'entendre."[3] Moderato is the contrapuntal voice of the irrational fugue; it is the musical annunciation and first instance of the ravishment theme. Just as the Annunciation painting in Le Marin, also a pivotal work in the itinerary of Duras' protagonists, launches the epic of the rational hero, the "Animus Odyssey," so Moderato dramatizes the psychic rapt and rapture of the devastated Durasian hero.

The exterior action of the plot is minimal. Anne Desbaresdes, the young wife of a wealthy industrialist, accompanies her son each Friday to his piano lesson. During one of these lessons, she is profoundly moved by witnessing on the street below a man embracing the body of the woman he has just murdered. Every day for just over a week, she returns to the little cafe where the crime took place. There she meets Chauvin, a man who has been equally moved by the crime of passion, and with whom she talks and drinks wine. Gradually sinking into an alcoholic stupor, she and Chauvin mime the roles of the tragic couple until they are sated by the atmosphere of sadistic carnality which they have created.[4] Anne can no longer tolerate within herself the co-existence of the tranquil life and the mesmerizing vision of absolute passion. Her inebriation and subsequent vomiting after the formal dinner in her home signals the end of her acceptance of the vie tranquille. The novel ends with a symbolic kiss between Anne and Chauvin and the verbal consummation of a vicarious, interior adventure that they do not yet dare to experience directly: "Je voudrais que vous soyez morte, dit Chauvin. —C'est fait, dit Anne Desbaresdes" (p. 114). J.-L. Seylaz resumes this interior journey to the edge of folly in these dichotomous terms:

> Ce que nous venons de vivre, lorsque nous achevons ce récit où presque rien ne s'est passé (du moins extérieurement), c'est en fait un adultère idéal et silencieux, l'histoire d'une passion charnelle vécue intérieurement jusqu'à sa comsommation en un crime virtuel.[5]

The structure of Moderato recalls that of Les Petits Chevaux, Les Chantiers, and prefigures that of Dix heures et demie du soir en été in that the reality of the novel unfolds in the tension maintained between an exterior, symbolic event, the crime in Moderato, and the

evolution toward another, parallel event in the otherwise everyday life of Anne and Chauvin. Never before, however, has Duras so intimately brought together the symbolic event and the slowly unfolding reality of the protagonists. In Les Petits Chevaux, the death of the young man in the mine explosion creates a mood that permeates the viscous durée of the estivating heroes and reflects their preoccupations. Les Chantiers silently stand watch over the slow crystallization of an erotic encounter. In Moderato, however, the event actually occurs during the course of the piano lesson which occupies the novel's first chapter. This simultaneity of the parallel event with the durée that comprises the mainstream of the narration lends a dramatic intensity to Moderato which is absent from Les Petits Chevaux and the other works of the "Interior Songs." Anne and Chauvin consciously attempt to interiorize and incarnate this symbolic event precipitated by the violence of the tragic couple. The heretofore parallel event is indeed to be virtually intersected by the deviant introversion of the heroes' behavior. Eros almost unites with Thanatos before the unbearable tension is relinquished in the regurgitation scene after the dinner in Anne's home. The interior quest can go no further without the psychic or physical immolation of the heroes. Just as the amorous odyssey of Anna's unending search for the sailor from Gibraltar, the introverted quest of the anima syndrome has reached an impasse in Moderato. J.-L. Seylaz points to this duality (the rational verisimilitude of the animus odyssey and the irrational allure of this last stage of the anima syndrome) in his statement about the author's abandonment of the psychological approach in Moderato: "Jamais surtout n'avait été plus clair et plus motivé son refus de la psychologie: celle-ci se vante d'expliquer les êtres de

l'extérieur et prétend à une connaissance rationnelle, alors que Marguerite Duras se propose de nous faire épouser une aventure telle qu'elle est vécue: dans le secret de l'être."[6]

The antithetical nature of the reality incarnated in Moderato cantabile is implied in the novel's title. As John W. Kneller has pointed out, moderato cantabile are antithetical terms which are not normally used together for a musical composition. Moderato (moderate tempo) signifies the restraints imposed by the proprieties of civilized social intercourse, whereas cantabile (singable) suggests a lack of restraint, an invitation to ultimate freedom, passion, and violence.[7] This tension is basic throughout the author's novels. The same antithesis is found in the title of La Vie tranquille. Françou's vie (cantabile) tranquille (moderato) has been ressurected in the musical metaphor used in the title of the present work. The words moderato cantabile constitute a lyrical reprise of the existential impasse experienced by the coming-of-age protagonist, with the difference that, whereas Françou ultimately settles for the tranquil life before the very real threat of insanity and death, it is not at all certain that Anne will make the same choice. Like Anna and the crew of "The Drunken Boat" in Le Marin, the heroine of Moderato seems intent on a break with moderato and a willed exploration of the realm of cantabile--in the words of the poet Rimbaud, Anne consciously persues a dérèglement de tous les sens. The alcoholic colloquies of Anne and Chauvin seem bent on a spiritual voyage "Anywhere Out of the World," a systematic inebriation that will precipitate the onset of madness, in which nowhere is now here. The unresolved antithesis of Moderato cantabile sets the stage for the psychic ravishment that is imminent in the lives of Duras' heroes.

This same antithesis can be viewed in an analysis of the Freudian terms known as the reality principle and the pleasure principle.[8] The pleasure principle is the uncontrolled Eros, Duras' cantabile, which is potentially violent and deadly in that it demands immediate and total gratification as an end in itself. Civilization as the modern world knows it is only possible when there can be a sublimation and a postponement of this destructive kind of pleasure. Freud calls this calculated restraint necessary for the survival of human society the reality principle, Duras' moderato and vie tranquille. When the reality principle supersedes the pleasure principle, the security of an ongoing society becomes possible; man learns to give up momentary, uncertain, and destructive pleasure for a delayed, restrained, but assured pleasure. This was the resolution enacted by François in La Vie tranquille. Moderato, however, is a more revolutionary work. In this novel, the hero and heroine reject the reality principle and attempt to regress to the uncivilized anarchy of an unbridled pleasure principle. Moderato thus prefigures the social and political destruction portrayed in Abahn Sabana David as well as the psychological ravishment in Détruire, dit-elle and Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein.

Anne Desbaresdes is the novel's main character. The objective and omnipresent narrator records the events which comprise the work with the fidelity of a movie camera that follows the heroine's every word and gesture while showing the environmental phenomena most often from the latter's vantage point. During the piano lesson by which the novel begins, Anne's tranquility is forever shattered by the dying woman's screams, which Duras skillfully introduces into the teacher's apartment.

The simultaneity of this shrilly discordant intrusion of the Eros-Thanatos imperative into the child's rendition of the carefully controlled parallel harmonies of the structured sonatina form is accentuated and dramatized by the fragmented, progressive manner by which the scream insinuates itself into the room and into the consciousness of the heretofore passionless existence of the heroine. Like the autistic temperaments of François in La Vie tranquille and of Sara is Les Petits Chevaux, Anne possesses a similar emotional makeup and has passed through the emotions of being a wife and mother without awakening to the reality of pure passion: "Il y a des gens qui n'auraient jamais été amoureux, s'ils n'avaient jamais entendu parler de l'amour."[9] The scream awakens the heroine to a world of passion that she otherwise would have never known. Anne, already overwhelmed by the difficult realization of her own maternity, is in a state of wonder before the existence of her son. Now, she is equally bewildered by the crime of passion which she has witnessed. The face of the murderer, like the oceanographic charts in Le Marin, shows a world order turned upside down: "Il se tourna vers la foule, la regarda, et on vit ses yeux. Toute expression en avait disparu, exceptée celle, foudroyée, indélébile, inversée du monde, de son désir" (pp. 18-19). Anne is shaken and feels compelled to enlarge her affective horizons and to try to tap within herself an emotional intensity of which she has been totally unaware.

Through her five conversations with Chauvin at the small café where the crime took place, Anne and her interlocutor initiate themselves into the realm of uncontrollable passion through a systematic intoxication using both alcohol and auto-suggestion. Through a series of half-uttered hypotheses and suppositions, Anne and Chauvin re-create a history

for the tragic couple, and, in so doing, they attempt to incarnate, to live out the fatal passion which already obsesses both of them on the vicarious level. Their complicity is total; as they create for themselves a fatal destiny worthy of a modern Tristan and Iseult, their creative energies are put to the test. They repeatedly encourage each other to keep on talking, to keep on inventing (the imperative parlez-moi is repeated eight times in their first four conversations (pp. 41-80); just as in Le Marin, the animus equivalent of Moderato, Anna and the narrator entreat each other to create within themselves the mythology incarnated in the elusive sailor. Chauvin skillfully orchestrates the pace and content of their myth-making, conbining elements of their own lives with those of the tragic couple. Chauvin's erotic sequences intoxicate his vicarious mistress, already imbued with alcohol--Chauvin's very name suggests two of Duras' most frequently used sexual catalysts (le chaud and le vin):

> Tandis qu'elle riait encore mais que le flot de son rire commencait à baisser, Chauvin lui parla d'autre manière.
> —Vous étiez accoudée à ce grand piano. Entre vos seins nus sous votre robe, il y a cette fleur de magnolia.
> Anne Desbaresdes, très attentivement, écoute cette histoire,
> —Oui.
> —Quand vous vous penchez, cette fleur frôle le contour de vos seins. Vous l'avez négligemment épinglée, trop haut. C'est une fleur énorme, vous l'avez choisie au hasard, trop grande pour vous. Ses pétales sont encore dures, elle a justement atteint la nuit dernière sa pleine floraison. . . .
> Elle s'occupa à tenir le verre très fort, devint ralentie dans ses gestes et dans sa voix.
> —Comme j'aime le vin, je ne savais pas.
> —Maintenant, parlez-moi.
> —Ah, laissez-moi, supplia Anne Desbaresdes.
> —Nous avons sans doute si peu de temps que je ne peux pas. (pp. 79-80)

Ultimately, Chauvin and Anne lose their identity in that of the tragic couple, just as the Durasian protagonist in general is progressively shedding his recognizable masks of verisimilitude for the amorphous consciousness of the antihero. The two realities of the real couple and the ideal couple are still distinguishable by the use of the present tense for the former and the past for the latter. The epic, quasi-religious tone of Chauvin's speech is evidenced in the last sentence of the following passage:

> Anne Desbaresdes fixa cet homme inconnu sans le reconnaître, comme dans le guet, une bête.
> —Je vous en prie, supplia-t-elle.
> —Puis le temps est venu où quand il la regardait, parfois, il ne la voyait plus comme il l'avait jusque-là vue. Elle cessait d'être belle, laide, jeune, vieille, comparable à quiconque, même à elle-même. Il avait peur. C'était aux dernières vacances. L'hiver est venu. Vous allez rentrer boulevard de la Mer. Ça va être la huitième nuit. (p. 86)

Their dialogue is from time to time punctuated, reinforced by brief cinematographical descriptions of the play of the sunlight or the roar of the nearby ocean: "Le mur du fond de la salle s'illumina du soleil couchant. En son milieu, le trou noir de leurs ombres conjuguées se dessina" (p. 45). And again during their last conversation, the surrounding sounds and shadows reflect the erotic preoccupations of the protagonists in a kind of sensorial, cinematographically viewed pathetic fallacy:

> La sirène retentit, énorme, qui s'entendit allégrement de tous les coins de la ville et même de plus loin, des faubourgs, de certaines communes environnantes, portée par le vent de la mer. Le couchant se vautra, plus fauve encore sur les murs de la salle. (p. 112)

At one point in their third conversation, Anne betrays the imminence of her incipient folly in a schizophrenic outburst that frightens both interlocutors. The familiar themes of the sea and of death show Anne to be very much in the tradition of the Durasian heroines:

> —Dépêchez-vous de parler. Inventez.
> Elle fit un effort, parla presque haut dans le café encore désert.
> —Ce qu'il faudrait c'est habiter une ville sans arbres les arbres crient lorsqu'il y a du vent ici il y en a toujours toujours à l'exception de deux jours par an à votre place voyez-vous je m'en irai d'ici je n'y resterai pas tous les oiseaux ou presque sont des oiseaux de mer qu'on trouve crevés après les orages et quand l'orage cesse que les arbres ne crient plus on les entend crier eux sur la plage comme des égorgés ça empêche les enfants de dormir non moi je m'en irai. (p. 59)

The lack of punctuation and the run-on sentences reflect the confused thinking of the heroine and point to the latter's evolution toward the irrational pose of the antiheroes.

The novel reaches its climax during and just after the dinner scene in which Anne, inebriated to the point of an uncontrollable impudence by her fourth afternoon conversation and alcoholic drinking bout with Chauvin, tries in vain to don the mask of decorum before her husband and their elegant dinner guests. The scene is a masterpiece of objective irony and of the simultaneous evocation of two concurrent and juxtaposed realities, in the manner of Flaubert. It is as though the dinner were being narrated from the vantage point of the saumon glacé or the canard à l'orange; by adopting the point of view of the object, the author succeeds in casting an aura of alcoholic alienation, a phenomenological strangeness over an otherwise realistically conceived sequence of a familiar bourgeois ceremony--the formal dinner. Moreover, the author

insists on the ceremonial nature of the affair by the use of such terms as un rituel (p. 91), cérémonial (p. 92), rituellement parfaite (p. 94), and l'autre victime (p. 97). From the very beginning of the dinner, the reader is made aware of the erotic presence of Chauvin who is prowling just outside. The sensual gourmandise of the guests, Anne's volition violated, annihilated by alcohol, and the heavy odor of magnolia blossoms that serves as a sensorial link between the vicarious lovers are interwoven into a simultaneous narrative of unbearable tension. Near the beginning of the dinner, the essential elements are united in terms of the familiar Eros-Thanatos association:

> 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.
>
> Avec le ressac du vent qui va, vient, se cogne aux obstacles de la ville, et repart, le parfum atteint l'homme et le lâche, alternativement. (pp. 91-92)

Near the dinner's end, the same elements reunite and induce in the heroine a sort of vicarious climax, consecrated by wine, the Durasian philter.

> A la cuisine, on annonce qu'elle a refusé le canard à l'orange, qu'elle est malade, qu'il n'y a pas d'autre explication. Ici, on parle d'autre chose. Les formes vides des magnolias caressent les yeux de l'homme seul. Anne Desbaresdes prend une nouvelle fois son verre qu'on vient de remplir et boit. Le feu nourrit son ventre de sorcière contrairement aux autres. Ses seins si lourds de chaque côté de cette fleur si lourde se ressentent de sa maigreur nouvelle et lui font mal. Le vin coule dans sa bouche pleine d'un nom qu'elle ne prononce pas. Cet événement silencieux lui brise les reins. (p. 100)

As the dinner is about to end, Anne continues to smile vacuously at her guests, in a vain attempt to hide her lascivious drunkenness. The flower between her breasts has wilted. The author uses this traditional symbol to show the vicarious sexual ravishment that has transpired during the course of the dinner. What would have taken a summer full of waiting in the earlier novels has been symbolically consummated during the hour-long dinner: "Le magnolia entre ses seins se fane tout à fait. Il a parcouru l'été un une heure de temps" (p. 102).

Immediately after the dinner, Anne, lying on the floor in the bedroom where her child is sleeping, regurgitates ". . . la nourriture étrangère que ce soir elle fut forcée de prendre" (p. 103). Symbolically, it is possible that this scene represents Anne's rejection of moderato, her abandonment of the tranquil conventionality,[10] which was so ardently coveted by such divergent Durasian heroines as Françou in La Vie tranquille and the maid in Le Square. However, the fact that Anne and Chauvin's fatal passion is not lived out in reality, but only enacted on a vicarious and symbolic level, suggests to another critic that their experience of cantabile, of an absolutized love and violence (l'amour fou), is but an interlude, and that they ultimately surrender their erotic fable in favor of the less strenuous demands of conventional reality,[11] that is, the imperatives of the tranquil life.

Perhaps it is both moderato and cantabile that Anne has put behind her, at least their juxtaposition. With Moderato cantabile, has not the Durasian protagonist rejected the dichotomy of the tranquil life, the vie tranquille espoused by Duras' heroines since the early novel bearing that title? This antithesis was provisionally tamed in the "Animus

Odyssey" of Le Marin; it was poeticized, interiorized by Sara's capitulation in Les Petits Chevaux. But in this novel, the familiar antithesis, the dichototmous tension typical of Duras' reality, has been modulated into a minor key, a cacophonous one to the trained, civilized ear--that is, one that has been deafened to the aberrational flights of cantabile. Like the audacious couple in Le Marin, who progressively incarnate the ideal they are searching for, Anne and Chauvin, through their seemingly perfunctory and repetitious restructuring of the inspirational event--the lover's murder of his mistress, a symbolic embodiment of the Eros-Thanatos association as the underlying principle of the human experience--are creating a mythos of ravishment, their own epistemology of folly. Chauvin has become the epic poet of the vicarious alternative, of the irrational or surreal adventure. He is creating the ritual of Anne's initiation into an irrational response to the human condition. The matter regurgitated by Anne is not just the "nourriture étrangère" (p. 103) that moderato's decorum forced upon her, but it is, as the character states, the wine (cantabile) that made her sick and overcame her will (p. 108). In reality, it is the combination of the two that Anne's system rejects: the food and the wine, moderato and cantabile, the very vie tranquille that up to now has been the life force animating the heroes and heroines. Moderato cantabile is thus the prelude to ravishment, to the capitulation of the rational in favor of the irrational. Life's intrinsic tension is abandoned for the disintegration of death, destruction, and insanity. Versimilitude retreats before the pure symbol. Moderato cantabile is the final reprise of the vie tranquille, the joining and resultant splitting of irreconcilable

dichotomies--a vital incompatibility to be subsequently incarnated by the schizophrenic heroes. Exactly one week has elapsed between the fatal event and the regurgitation scene, just the traditional amount of time necessary for a genesis fable representing the birth of the estranged figures who animate the later novels.

During the course of their last conversation, two days after the fateful dinner, Anne and Chauvin vicariously enact the ritualistically fatal consummation of their adventure. Chauvin now must complete their epic poem to the intoxicating freedom of madness. Significantly, Anne is no longer accompanied by her son; he has been wrested from her care. Her last real link with moderato has been removed. The couple resumes its stylized colloquy. Their lips touch as they make their declaration of love-death, consistent with the reality à rebours which together they have conceived. This aveu is couched in imagery from the previous novels. The muted sounds of moderato's tedium are echoed all around the enchanted couple as was the case in the Tangier's traffic which surrounded the scene that constituted the declaration of love in Le Marin. Just as civilization was born out of primitive chaos, so now is the primitive chaos of a willed psychosis being born in the midst of civilization's resounding din. The weather, unusually beautiful, conjures up an aura of erotic complicity as the sun sets over the familiar lieu privilégié of the heroes, the café-bar. The siren, recalling the primordial scream of the lover's victim, announces the dénouement, the celebration of a sort of primal scene of the psychic rapt. The wording of the last two sentences reinforces the mythic, quasi-biblical tone of the passage:

> La sirène retentit, énorme, qui s'entendit allègrement de tous les coins de la ville et même de plus loin, des faubourgs, de certaines communes environnantes, portée par le vent de la mer. Le couchant se vautra, plus fauve encore sur les murs de la salle. Comme souvent au crépuscule, le ciel s'immobilisa, relativement, dans un calme gonflement de nuages, le soleil ne fut plus recouvert et brilla librement de ses derniers feux. La sirène, ce soir-là, fut interminable. Mais elle cessa cependant, comme les autres soirs.
>
> —J'ai peur, murmura Anne Desbaresdes.
>
> Chauvin s'approcha de la table, la rechercha, la recherchant, puis y renonca.
>
> —Je ne peux pas.
>
> Elle fit alors ce qu'il n'avait pas pu faire. Elle s'avança vers lui d'assez près pour que leurs lèvres puissent s'atteindre. 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. Ce fut fait. (pp. 112-113)

Shortly after the ceremonial kiss, the murder is verbally reenacted: "—Je voudrais que vous soyez morte, dit Chauvin. —C'est fait, dit Anne Desbaresdes" (p. 114). Chauvin reinforces the symbolic crime with an impotent gesture. Anne, without another word, exits from the café and walks alone into the setting sun. The spell of their vicarious game has apparently been broken. Neither the love affair nor the murder actually takes place in the verifiable world of exterior reality. But can they ever return to their previous moderato existence after having caught a glimpse of the intoxicating freedom of folly? The subsequent evolution of Duras' characters shows the answer to be no.

As in Les Petits Chevaux, all the secondary characters function as extensions of the one protagonist and have little if any autonomy of their own. Chauvin, Anne's male counterpart, her incarnated animus figure, puts into words the emotions that she experiences and inspires. His very name is the incarnation of the Durasian heroine's main erotic stimuli: the heat and the alcoholic philter. Her young son is the

embodiment of the dans les arbres syndrome, the uncivilized child, still sensitive to his hedonistic essence (cantabile), who revolts against the restraints imposed by adults, those who are blinded and desensitized to a reality that becomes incomprehensible under the repressive forces of moderato. The musical scales executed by the child are of particular significance to the author, as is the role of music in the evolution of her characters: "Et si vous voulez, ce chemin qu'il y a à parcourir, depuis les gammes de l'enfant, les gammes de l'enfance, ou l'enfance de l'homme, ou l'enfance de l'humanité, jusqu'à ce langage-là que nous ne pouvons pas décrypter, le langage de la musique, ce chemin me bouleverse."[12] Mademoiselle Giraud, the piano teacher, is the prime example of conventionality, a well-intentioned repressor of the creative élan she endeavors to transmit. The nameless, faceless forms, richly clad, who animate the dinner scene evoke the vacuous, self-satisfied reality that Anne has rejected. The austere patronne of the café who serves the ravished couple, initially hostile to the blatant impudence of their meetings, has somehow intuited the mythic grandeur of their adventure, and she has become its silent accomplice. Anne's husband, never named, never described, is nonetheless powerfully evoked as a disapproving presence by three isolated sentences in which he is personified each time by the use of only one noun (une ombre) and by two indefinite pronouns (l'un and on). Duras' dramatic usage of the litotes as a technique of characterization has reached a high point in Moderato. First, during the dinner, the presence of the indignant husband is signaled in the following understatement: "La soirée réussira. Les femmes sont au plus sûr de leur éclat. Les hommes les couvrirent de bijoux au prorata

de leurs bilans. L'un d'eux, ce soir, doute qu'il eut [sic] raison" (p. 95). And just after the regurgitation scene, the husband's presence is evoked in this manner:

> Une ombre apparaîtra dans l'encadrement de la porte restée ouverte sur le couloir, obscurcira plus avant la pénombre de la chambre. Anne Desbaresdes passera légèrement la main dans le désordre réel et blond de ses cheveux. Cette fois, elle prononcera une excuse.
> On ne lui répondra pas. (p. 103)

Moderato cantabile's place in the evolution of Duras' novels is unique. It marks the beginning of the end for the palatable antinovels of the middle period. It also introduces the more abstract antinovels to come. The heroes and heroines have abandoned the verisimilitude of the earlier works but have not as yet become the living-dead figures of the later manner. Moderato is the aboutissement of the interiorized, rational experience and the jumping-off place for the psychotic progeny of Anne Desbaresdes. Claude Roy recognizes the significance of Moderato in the author's novelistic evolution: "Mais tout ce qu'elle avait essayé, tenté, tâtonné, entrevu, dépassé et repris, esquissé et raté dans ses précédents romans, tous remarquables et jamais tout à fait achevés, s'accomplit dans Moderato cantabile."[13] Gaëtan Picon also views this work as the definitive modulation and reprise of the interior song which re-creates the entire drama of the human experience: "Mais, ici, ce n'est pas à la réalité et à la signification d'une histoire que nous renvoie la voix modérée et chantante; c'est à une expérience globale dont les autres romans nous livrent les signes, les symboles les plus agissants."[14] The impersonal, yet intensely subjective tone of the narrator produces an art form of understatement, pregnant with the

chillingly sterile intelligence of the autistic protagonist. Unable to feel life as average people seem to do, the Durasian hero has opted for a detached, altered state of being which permits a compensatory disponibilité toward the irrational vitality of an aberrational psychic life. The loss in the rational balance of the heroes is, moreover, reflected in the faltering rhetroic of the form. The articulate dialogue and semantic coherence of the couple in Le Square have been abandoned in favor of the dogmatically and earnestly pronounced non sequiturs typical of the Theater of the Absurd. Anne and Chauvin introduce cantabile into the form as well as into the content of Duras' novels, whose style heretofore would have been more accurately classified as moderato. Their voices, like two musical instruments, obsessively repeat the variations of the violent event. Like the abstract artist, they recreate reality in their own image, without regard to the uninitiated. At the novel's conclusion, when Anne declares herself dead, the statement is not altogether false. She has indeed extricated herself from the lives of her friends, her husband, and even her son. With Anne, the Durasian hero has passed beyond the compromise reached by Françou fourteen years earlier on a quiet beach in La Vie tranquille. The violent event which liberates Anne first appeared in Duras' works in a movie scene witnessed by Joseph in Un Barrage (quoted in Chapter II, page 44 of this study); the impact of this primal scene of the Durasian protagonist is fully explored in Moderato, and its influence on the characters' evolution continues up to the most recent works. The author herself points to the pivotal position occupied by Moderato in the evolution of an animus-anima regression toward psychological ravishment in an interview with Xavière Gauthier in Les Parleuses:

> Il y a toute une période où j'ai écrit des livres, jusqu'à Moderato cantabile, que je ne reconnais pas.
> X. G. — Est-ce que ce n'étaient pas des livres plus pleins, justement? Où il manquait cet endroit où il peut y avoir un trou ou un blanc. Je ne sais pas, je pense au Marin de Gibraltar, c'est cela que vous voulez dire, les premiers livres?
> M. D. — Le Marin de Gibraltar, oui, Le Barrage.
> X. G. — Je verrais ça comme des livres plus masculins.
> M. D. — Peut-être, oui, c'est ça.[15]

The next two novels, Dix heures et demie du soir en été and L'Après-midi de Monsieur Andesmas complete the break with the tranquil life announced in Moderato cantabile, the contemporary fable of l'amour fou. As in almost all the novels of the middle period, the structure of Dix heures et demie is binary: the unwonted event that parallels and illuminates the anguished attente of an autistic protagonist. This prototype, first identified in Les Petits Chevaux, has, however, considerably evolved; in Moderato and Dix heures et demie, the dramatic event and the uneventful durée of the heroine's waiting, heretofore parallel, are in the process of coinciding. In Moderato, the literal incorporation of cantabile into moderato is consciously realized by Chauvin's epic recounting and re-creation of an almost, but not quite liveable alternative to the uninspired sanity of the tranquil life; in Dix heures et demie, the heroine's waiting is, for the first time, fused with the dramatic aftermath of the violent event. The double structure has become one as the characters reject the dichotomy of the vie tranquille, on a virtual or symbolic level in Moderato, in actual fact in Dix heures et demie. This collapse of the vital antithesis is reflected in the strained psychological equilibrium of the heroes.

Dix heures et demie, published in 1960,[16] shows by its title the author's increasing sensitivity to the temporal dimension, here, the

exact instant when the reality of the event intercedes in the faltering reality of the inebriated heroine, ravished by the effects of alcohol and by the loss of her husband's love, which has been her link to the tranquil life. As Anne has abandoned the antithetical rationale of the vie tranquille and the conventional sanity it represents in Moderato, Maria experiences, or rather witnesses, with the psychological distance of the alcoholic, the death of her love and the enthralling birth of someone else's passion at ten-thirty on a summer evening. Both heroines are ravished, overwhelmed by passions they can neither tame nor comprehend; they are simultaneously on the brink of death and insanity--the only possible refuge from the unbearable tension of their imploding realities. Pierre de Boisdeffre points to the Durasian protagonists' dilemma by creating a kind of perverted pleasure pinciple: "Marguerite Duras ne nous raconte qu'une crise, certains moments privilégiés d'abandon et de tension ou l'on espère, sans l'atteindre, un impossible assouvissement, ou l'on n'acquiert que «l'impression d'être comblé de connaissance»."[17] From this untenable psychic pose, the fall of the hero, his vertiginous abandonment to madness is imminent.

Despite the innovative import of the novel, Dix heures et demie evokes a hauntingly similar situation for the reader of Duras' fiction. It is the holiday novel par excellence; these promotional paragraphs on the inside flap of the book jacket accurately reflect the obsessional reprise of themes which characterize this work:

> C'est encore une fois les vacances. Encore une fois les routes d'été. Encore une fois des églises à visiter. Encore une fois dix heures et demie du soir en été. Des Goya à voir. Des orages. Des nuits sans sommeil. Et la chaleur.

> Un crime a lieu cependant qui aurait pu, peut-être, changer le cours de ces vacances-là.
> Mais au fond qu'est-ce qui peut faire changer le cours des vacances?

And it is not merely a typical summer vacation of the middle class masses, but a sort of vacances de soi-même (La Vie, p. 168), an ontological holiday in which the heroes are tempted by the possibility of an escape from the repressive security of the tranquil life, an escape which was envisioned yet not undertaken by Sara in Les Petits Chevaux, and which Anne and Maria attempt in this novel and in the preceding one.

The plot of Dix heures et demie du soir en été is built, as in Moderato, around a murder unwitnessed by the main character, but intensely felt and vicariously relived by her in the course of the narrative. Maria is the young heroine, on vacation in Spain with her husband, Pierre, their little girl, Judith, and Claire, a friend of the couple. Because of severe cloudbursts and a threateningly inclement evening sky, the travelers have stopped in a little town, which is being turned inside out in search of a young local, Rodrigo Paestra, who has just murdered his adulterous wife and her lover whom he had discovered together. Maria, like other Durasian heroines, drinks. In the cultivated confusion and numbness of her tortured psyche, images of her husband, Pierre, making love to Claire mingle with those of the faithless village wife and her husband-assassin. During the long night, punctuated by the noise of police patrols and thunderstorms, Maria discovers Rodrigo hiding on a roof opposite her hotel balcony, and she helps him escape, just before the morning light, in a suspenseful drive in her black Rover. But her exploit has been in vain; Paestra kills himself, and the

tourists continue their way. At noon, they stop to rest at an inn, and here, the moment Maria has been masochistically awaiting--the consummation of the sexual attraction between Pierre and Claire--takes place. As Maria sinks into a drunken stupor, the two lovers abandon themselves to their frantic desire. That night, in Madrid, Maria at last has the courage to declare to her husband that their love story has ended. The heroine mourns the passing of her love for Pierre and the tranquility that has accompanied it, as she simultaneously envisages with a mortal fear the onset of madness.

Maria is, in reality, the only character; the other figures exist only in as much as they impinge upon the heroine's place in the world. The anonymous third person narration most often reports the events and scenes that comprise the novel from Maria's point of view; on at least three occasions (pages 48, 51, and 78), the normally objective and autonomous narrator, just for an instant, becomes Maria. The reader knows only Maria from the inside; the other characters are seen through her eyes. Pierre, the husband on the point of committing adultery, is torn between his love for Maria and his overwhelmingly strong sexual attraction for Claire. The latter is the very incarnation of feminine sensuality and sexual desire, the figure of the <u>femme fatale</u>, reminiscent of Lina in <u>Un Barrage</u> and Anna in <u>Le Marin</u>, and suggestive of Anne-Marie Stretter in <u>Le Ravissement</u> and <u>Le Vice-consul</u>. Claire is evoked in the following paragraphs, just prior to her amorous encounter with Pierre, as she gets up and walks away to their trysting place:

> C'est sûrement elle qui se leve la première et qui sort du box. Ce froissement de l'air, à peine sensible, ce crépitement de jupes dépliées, cette lenteur, cette langueur dans le

> redressement du corps, c'est une femme. Ces effluves résineux, sucrés d'un parfum muri par la peau, réajusté à elle, à sa respiration et à son salissement, à son echauffement dans la tanière de sa robe bleue, entre mille elle les reconnaîtrait.
>
> Le parfum cesse autour de Maria de même que tombe le vent. Il l'a suivie. Maria ouvre les yeux en toute certitude. Ils ne sont plus là. Enfin. (pp. 168-169)

Besides Pierre and Claire, two remaining characters hold Maria's attention: her daughter, Judith, and Rodrigo Paestra, the author of the crime of passion. The daughter serves, at times, to distract Maria from the growing sexual tension between Pierre and Claire, but, in the end, there is no evidence that the mother-child relationship is strong enough to compensate for or in any way prevent Maria's abandonment of the tranquil life, her affective exile. Indeed, the only palliative envisaged by the heroine seems to be a numbing alienation self-induced by a systematic inebriation. Rodrigo, the fiery Spaniard whom Maria sees as a romantic rebel, incarnates temporarily the heroine's hope for redemption through violent revolt. She hopes through him to ressurrect: "Des raisons communes d'exister, à la longue, à la fin, même après la disparition de ces raisons" (p. 78). But her illusions are shattered by the devastating reality of the peasant's dehumanizing terror, his "imbécillité animale de l'épouvante" (p. 77) and by his unwitnessed suicide, the unsung annihilation of her cherished "assassin de l'orage, sa merveille" (p. 147).

In reading Dix heures et demie and in considering the heroine's personality, it is clear that a considerable evolution has taken place since the torrid days and nights of the estivating couples in Les Petits Chevaux. Sara's repeated wish for rain, for relief from the unending heat, everywhere the same (a translation of Duras' often used descriptive

phrase, égale à elle-même), is answered in the opening scene of Dix heures et demie by the thundershowers which strand the traveling threesome on their way to Madrid. The symbolic drought of Les Petits Chevaux has become "Cette masse océanique, bleu sombre, de l'après midi . . ." (p. 14) which is inundating the village: "Voici l'averse. L'Océan est déversé sur la ville" (p. 14). In the earlier novel, the ubiquitously even heat, "égale à elle-même" (Les Petits Chevaux, pp. 7, 115), constitutes a sensorial representation of the unending attente; therefore, the natural release of the stormy downpours which dramatically begin this novel put to an end the tension of waiting borne by the earlier vacationers. In both works, there is a ménage à trois, but the lusty indifference of the previous threesome is to change dramatically for Maria, Pierre, and Claire during the course of a Spanish summer evening.

Even when compared with its immediate predecessor, Moderato, one can see in Dix heures et demie, through the characters and situations it presents, a continuing evolution. Anne Desbaresdes is a neophyte drinker, whereas Maria is already an inveterate alcoholic. Duras poetizes the pathological symptoms of her alcoholic heroines; supressing the urge to regurgitate because of alcoholic excess is expressed in these euphemistic terms: "Elle évite de respirer trop profondément pour ne pas vomir. La dernière gorgée de cognac prise à l'aurore, sans doute, qui remonte dans la gorge comme un sanglot qu'il faut sans cesse retenir" (p. 110). The initial scene in the latter novel shows Maria, in a café-bar, speaking with a man, whom she does not know, about the double murder which has just taken place--a scene strikingly reminiscent of the alcoholic colloquies of Anne and Chauvin. The din of the resounding thunder in the

distance and the confused clamor of the police with their shrieking whistles and pounding footsteps on the wet pavement create a setting not unlike the noisy cafe in Moderato, or even the congested traffic jam in Tangiers at the moment of the aveu in Le Marin. Like Anna in Le Marin, but unlike Anne in Moderato, Maria is to realize the latter's dream and meet face to face the murderer whose violence fascinates her. The temporal specificity of the title is indicative of the final consummation of the attente which takes place in Dix heures et demie. Precisely at ten-thirty on that summer night (pp. 48-49), three vigils come together:[18] Maria, waiting and watching from the perspective of her hotel balcony, perceives simultaneously Pierre and Claire embracing in a crowded hallway, anxiously awaiting the opportunity to abandon themselves to their growing passion, and Rodrigo Paestra, precariously perched on the rooftop opposite the hotel, waiting for the dawn, and with it, his inevitable capture and death. When Maria finally elicits a response from the silent and motionless figure hiding on the rooftop, that one vigil, an attente, comes to an end. "L'attente éclate enfin, délivrée" (p. 79). This is a rare, if not unique occurrence in the author's novels up to this point--the consummation of an attente. Her works normally present a tranche de durée, leading up to or following an event which does not occur within the limits of the novel itself. Sara contemplates a rupture which does not occur; Anne Desbaresdes acts out vicariously, on a symbolic level only, a crime of passion that is not reproduced in a verifiable, exterior reality. Maria, however, reaches out and actually makes contact with Rodrigo, the hero of the parallel event. For the first time since the "Animus Odyssey," the life of the

protagonist intersects that of the dispossessed pariah, the murderer in mourning for his victim. While surreptitiously driving Rodrigo outside the village, Maria looks with awe upon this privileged figure of romantic revolt, another sailor from Gibraltar. Through him the heroine hopes to escape the disintegration of her own affective state: "Maria le dévore du regard, dévore du regard le prodige tangible, cette fleur noire poussée cette nuit dans les désordres de l'amour" (p. 103). Rodrigo's ultimate suicide is to wrest away from the heroine her chance for an adventure which could existentially transcend her de trop status.

Maria, like Anne Desbaresdes, is thus brought to the point of a break with the tranquil life. Totally dispossessed and alienated, both heroines are in an initial stage of the psychic ravishment which devastates the protagonists of Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein and Détruire, dit-elle. The Durasian heroine is no longer permitted the option of the tranquil life, as was Sara in Les Petits Chevaux. As the double structure (the symbolic event which parallels the dreary durée of the heroes' lives) merges into one and the same reality, the protagonists are unable to come to terms with that reality. Anne Desbaresdes ultimately fails not only as a wife and mother, but as a neophyte myth-maker in her daily colloquies with Chauvin. Maria loses her husband to Claire and Rodrigo to death.

Maria's character, however, does more than advance the evolution of past heroines from Françou to Anne Desbaresdes; she already manifests certain traits and symptoms associated with the deranged heroes who inhabit the bars and beaches of the most recent novels. A syndrome is taking shape for the behavior of the Durasian protagonist. Maria's

alcoholism has progressed to the pathological point where it has permanently affected her manner of perceiving reality. Francou's blunted affect has reached almost schizophrenic proportions with Maria and the heroes who follow her. Indeed, Maria's lack of jealousy is not normal; she seems to view her amorous dispossession with more curiosity than anguish. Somehow Paestra's mortal rage has exorcised Maria's jealousy.[19] Both Rodrigo Paestra and Maria are guilty of no longer being loved; the former acts out his consequent fit of violent anger, whereas the latter abandons herself to a neurasthenic, alcoholic alienation, in which her affect and her intellect are abnormally separated and compartmentalized. The heroine views herself with the psychological distance normally reserved for individuals other than the self. Another significant trait is Maria's voyeurism, a pattern of sexual behavior already hinted at in Un Barrage; it reappears in Dix heures with Maria's explicit desire to view Claire's nudity and to witness the latter's sexual encounter with Pierre, the "conjugaison de leur amour" (p. 169):

> Elle voudrait voir se faire les choses entre eux afin d'être éclairée à son tour d'une même lumière qu'eux et entrer dans cette communauté qu'elle leur lègue, en somme depuis le jour où, elle, elle l'inventa, à Vérone, une certaine nuit. (p. 169)

These thoughts penetrate Maria's somnolent, faltering consciousness at the very moment when Pierre and Claire's attente amoureuse becomes entente amoureuse. The couple's sexual rapture is paralleled by the alcoholic ravishment of the heroine. Curious but without a trace of jealously, Maria waits for the end of the adulterous interlude. The sexual imagery is explicitly stated in passages like the following:

"l'alcool fait battre le coeur plus que de raison. Quelle durée avant le soir. Maria entrouvre ses cuisses ou bat son coeur, un poignard" (p. 170). The heroine vacillates between the lucidity of wakefulness and the peaceful annhilation of consciousness brought about by intermittent, drunken slumber. Her erotic state of mind conjures up images of Rodrigo's cadavre, pointing to the habitual Eros-Thanatos association. Her double vigil has come to an end. Maria is totally dispossessed; she, like Anne Desbaresdes, has lost the security of the tranquil life and also any possibility for a transcending adventure.

Alfred Cismaru creates a sensitively drawn portrait of the heroine's situation in the classically restrained romanticism of Dix heures et demie, the novel of "l'accomplissement de l'insatisfaction même" (p. 53):

> For a while, however, for an instant poetized and romanticized by the storm and brutal primitive surroundings, the Spaniard's crime demonstrated to the French heroine that mutiny was not a mere illusion, that it was a possibility, a very real door that the unafraid and the proud could push open in a moment of liberating madness. But the self-annihilation of Paestra slams shut that door, and Maria once more becomes convinced, this time permanently, of the futility of effort, of opposition, of rebellion.[28]

As in Moderato, the protagonist of the durée is unable to penetrate and make real for herself, except vicariously or imperfectly, the domain of the privileged event, charged with emotions that transcend the heroine's affective threshold. But the bland philters of the tranquil life are no longer palatable; the Durasian hero has once and for all broken with resignation, Frangou and Sara's alternative to madness. The transcending adventures of Anne Desbaresdes and Maria have, however, also

aborted. In Dix heures et demie, the fulfillment of the attente results in a definitive deception, and rupture is imminent. Cismaru once again captures the poignant allure of the heroes on the brink of the descent into madness: "The short-lived infatuation with life of Marguerite Duras' characters glows with a catharsis that lingers, for the reader, long after hero and heroine, fatigued, resigned, and humble, abort and give up."[21]

The Durasian protagonist, incarnated in Maria, has, in the heroine's own words, "accepté d'être défaite, à jamais" (p. 119). The breaking point has been attained with the coming together of Maria and Rodrigo's parallel stories, which gives Dix heures et demie its high degree of gripping suspense. In no other of the author's novels is this suspense of the durée so intense, and in no other work does it so completely reach its climax and relax its tension. As Maria's kindred spirit in Moderato declared concerning her own climactic death to the tranquil life: "c'est fait." The dispossession, abdication, and alienation of the heroes are total; they are on the brink of madness. Maria "accepts with resignation those fatal laws of time and human passion' to which the lucid always ultimately succumb."[22] Françou's determined perseverance and Anna's epic adventure in Le Marin have both aborted in the ultimate defeat of Anne Desbaresdes and Maria. Pierre is helpless to attenuate the agony of Maria's spiritual death:

> Il vient à Pierre le goût pressant d'amours défuntes. Quand il entre dans la chambre de Maria, il est en cet endeuillement de son amour pour Maria. Ce qu'il ignorait c'était l'enchantement poignant de la solitude de Maria par lui provoquée, de ce deuil de lui-même porté par elle ce soir-là. (p. 183)

The novel's final scene reinforces the atmosphere of death--the death of Maria's love for Pierre and the mortal fear she experiences before the vertiginous abyss of madness. Enthralled by the phenomenon of her own affective dispossession and by the sensuality of Claire, Maria prefigures Mme Arc's apparent infatuation with her rival, Valérie Andesmas. Maria, Pierre, and Claire watch the figure of the solitary nightclub dancer, who resembles an incarnation of Thanatos and perhaps suggests a pictorial image of Maria's psychic ravisher. The chalky laugh and the drunken, orgastic grimace painted on his face cast a spell over the emotionally drained spectators:

> Un homme danse sur l'estrade une danse solitaire. . . . Quand l'homme cesse de danser l'orchestre joue des paso-doble et l'homme les chante dans un micro. Il a, plaqué sur le visage, tantôt un rire de craie, tantôt le masque d'une ivresse amoureuse, langoureuse et nauséeuse qui fait illusion sur les gens. (p. 185)

In Dix heures et demie and Moderato, the familiar combination of an attente illuminated by a symbolic event evolves to a point where both durée and event fuse and come to their fruition. In L'Après-midi de Monsieur Andesmas (1962),[23] the substance of the récit has been reduced to a degree where all that remains is an unresolved period of waiting which is paralled by the imminence of an event of passion, which, however, has not been consummated by the story's end. Even in Les Petits Chevaux, characterized by its paucity of exterior action, there is at least an event which does not take place: Sara does not leave her husband for Jean and his shining yacht. The thematic dissolution witnessed in L'Après-midi is embodied in the lustless, sedentary figure of its protagonist, who, like a disenfranchised Moses, solitary and dying,

contemplates from atop a high hill the Mediterranean panorama, the "promised land" of the Durasian heroes. After Anne and Maria's abortive confrontations with manifestations of absolute passion and violent death, the intensity of their erotic rapture and subsequent psychological ravishment creates a dramatic contrast with the acquiescing and impotent corpulence of Monsieur Andesmas. After the baroque eroticism of Dix heures et demie and Moderato, L'Après-midi is a classically sober thanatopsis of the unravished heroes, the ones, who, like Françou, have opted for the vie tranquille whenever they have been confronted with the vertiginous alternatives of madness or death. Thus l'Après-midi portrays the demise of the rational protagonist and simultaneously introduces the cast of characters who are to act out the psychotic episodes of Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein and Le Vice-consul: Madame Arc and her daughter prefigure the quiet lunacy of Lol; Valérie Andesmas, the captivating Anne-Marie Stretter.

The story is told by an impersonal, more or less omniscient narrator who, most often, recounts the afternoon of Monsieur Andesmas from the protagonist's sensorial perspective, that is, from his field of vision, within his range of hearing. From time to time, however, the camera-like vision of the narrator adopts a point of view other than that of the hero. The subjective content yet impersonal tone of the narration is made to seem appropriate because of the senile introversion and egocentrism of Monsieur Andesmas; this same autistic alienation in the narrative tone of Dix heures et demie was given verisimilitude by the heroine's alcohol-laden senses.[24] As Henri Hell points out, the characters from these middle novels ". . . agissent. Même pas, ils font

des gestes et l'auteur nous les décrit de l'extérieur."[25] This impersonal exposition of intensely subjective emotions gives the prose itself the allure of alienation. The mechanized impression created by a camera-like interpreter of the heroes' reality is disquieting; Madeleine Alleins has captured the reason behind the strangely autistic tone of Duras' prose in these novels:

> Ici le langage garde toute sa beauté, toute sa magie aussi, mais il est dépouillé de ce qu'on lui accorde si volontiers, la confiance en ses pouvoirs de saisie. Il lui est ôté cette facilité qui consiste, en nommant les choses, à les faire disparaître derrière un écran de familiarité. La quiétude est troquée contre l'inquiétude, l'étonnement, l'émotion presque religieuse où doit nous plonger une réalité rétablie dans sa distance par rapport à nous.[26]

During M. Andesmas' afternoon, surprisingly little actually occurs. Perched atop a hill in front of a house he has recently bought for his daughter, Valérie, M. Andesmas gazes at the Mediterranean coast and the village where he has retired, at the age of seventy-eight, after a long and successful career in business. He is waiting for Michel Arc, the local architect, with whom he has an appointment concerning the construction of a terrace for Valérie's new home. The durée is regularly measured out by the ineluctable declination of the setting sun,[27] as its rays reflect on the sea and while the shadows progressively engulf all that the sun abandons. Below, on the village green, one can hear and partially see the celebration of an open-air ball. This gaiety contrasts sharply with the sedentary brooding of the bored protagonist. Only three encounters break the monotony of the septuagenarian's waiting on the solitary hilltop: the passage of a dog; the arrival of a child, Michel Arc's daughter; and then the arrival of Mme Arc, the child's

mother and the absent architect's wife. The story ends when, with the coming of twilight's darkness, one hears a laughter connoting the imminent birth of an amorous complicity coming from Valérie Andesmas and Michel Arc who are tardily approaching the hilltop where the doting father and the psychologically ravaged wife helplessly wait.

Monsieur Andesmas, during the slow hours of his solitary afternoon, ". . . passes into the realm of extreme old age and in part, lives his own removal from a duration inwardly apprehended; he in fact lives a form of his own death."[28] Like the dying protagonist of Hemingway's "Snows of Kilimanjaro," Monsieur Andesmas inhabits a twilight zone in which the boundary between life and death becomes increasingly problematical; he is at once the victim of Thanatos and of his exclusive paternal passion for his daughter Valérie. Like a contemporary Père Goriot, whose paternal love lives on after his rational forces have expired, Monsieur Andesmas envisages his own death with the "immense poids de l'amour de Valérie" (p. 117) on his heart. With Monsieur Andesmas, the Durasian protagonist grows old and moribund. In the summer heat of this particular Mediterranean afternoon, this venerable vestige of Duras' rational heroes is to experience the intimate proximity of "les affres de la mort" (p. 35). Under the intense rays of the meridional sun, the reader can almost visualize the shrinking reality and evaporating vigor of the last and oldest living representative of the vie tranquille. Once again, as with Hemingway's hero, death is an oneiric presence with the power to induce physical sensations which are terrifyingly real:

> Une lourdeur insinuante envahit peu à peu M. Andesmas, elle s'installe dans ses membres, dans son corps tout entier et gagne peu à peu son esprit. . . . La lourdeur insinuante le gagne toujours plus avant, plus profond, toujours plus décourageante, plus inconnue. M. Andesmas essaie de l'endiguer, d'en arrêter l'intrusion en lui, mais elle règne sur lui constamment davantage.
>
> La voici instaurée sur sa vie tout entière, refugiée là, pour le moment, rôdeuse endormie sur sa victoire. (p. 37)

And yet, M. Andesmas faces death without apparent fear. He is resigned. His own life has already all but dissipated, and his vicarious apprehension of reality through Valérie is more real to him than what he directly experiences. He is already too "disengaged to experience fully the poignancy of the human condition. . . ."[29]

The first of M. Andesmas' three encounters during the long afternoon is the passage of a dog. This brief encounter sets the tone of the récit; the impersonal narrator momentarily takes the vantage point of the dog. The reader thus first sees the sedentary figure of the old man through the anthropomorphic gaze of the stray, an experience which tends to cast an aura of alienation over the immobile protagonist. M. Andesmas does not respond to the friendly overtures of the canine. When the dog returns for a last look before entering the forest, however, the man does at last make a gesture of friendship which the departing animal completely ignores. M. Andesmas thus misses his first chance to communicate with another living being, be it only a dog.

The passage of the dog also serves to make the reader aware of the forest, which partially encircles M. Andesmas' position on the hilltop, and of the precipice which overlooks the sea. The forest has a symbolic force for the author, who is to reintroduce it in subsequent works. Indeed, there are recurring references to the forest throughout this

novel. One example early on points to its significance through the stylistic repetition of the word: "—J'ai acheté cette maison, avait expliqué M. Andesmas à Michel Arc, surtout parce qu'elle est unique dans son genre. Autour d'elle, voyez, le forêt, rien que la forêt. Partout, la forêt" (p. 16). For the author, the forest is a place of mystery, disquieting because it dates back to prehistoric times. It is also a breeding ground for madness: "Donc, la forêt est aux fous. . . ."[30] For M. Andesmas, the forest isolates him as does his exclusive passion for Valérie: "Il est enfermé dans la forêt par Valérie--son enfant" (p. 60). Besides the forest, the wandering eye of the dog also centers for an instant on the "espace vide illuminé" (p. 10) which identifies the precipice overlooking the sea and the village from M. Andesmas' hill. Together, the forest and the yawning chasm completely surround the protagonist. The abyss of light, like the forest, is a recurring symbol; it is evoked throughout the work (pages 10, 28, 29, 34, 42, 50, 51, 61, 77, 88, 91, 92, 96, 111, 120, 128). Usually referred to as the gouffre de lumière, it, too, seems a symbol for the vertiginous vortex of madness or the complete self-abandonment found only in death. At times the forest and the abyss are joined together by the receding illumination caused by the sun's setting, to invoke the measured, inexorable time flow: "La forêt s'ensoleille. Toutes ses ombres se noient dans le gouffre de lumière, trop longues maintenant pour que la colline les contienne" (p. 91). The abyss of light also is used to conjure up pictorial images of death or madness:

> L'ombre du hêtre et celle de la maison, elles, étaient tout entières basculées dans le gouffre.

> La vallée, le village, la mer, les champs sont encore dans la lumière.
> Des bandes d'oiseaux de plus en plus nombreuses, s'échappent de la colline et tournent, folles, dans le soleil du vide. (p. 96)

The second encounter that interrupts M. Andesmas' waiting is the arrival of Michel Arc's daughter, who has come up from the village to assure the old gentleman that her father still intends to keep his appointment. M. Andesmas forces himself to be affable toward the young girl; yet he finds that he is strangely unable to like the child. The more he tries to open his heart to this young girl before him, the more he is obsessed, blinded by the ravishing, universal blondness of his own Valérie. And it is at this precise moment that he becomes aware of death as a living presence, which immodestly violates the physical integrity of its victim. Like Anne Desbaresdes in Moderato at the moment Chauvin wishes her dead, M. Andesmas, at the very instant he realizes that Valérie henceforth is to be his unique passion, excluding all others, utters Anne's very words: "C'est fait" (p. 39). When M. Andesmas consents to "ne plus connaître d'autre aventure que celle de l'amour de Valérie" (p. 40), he realizes that, like Anne, his shrinking affective capacity is symptomatic of the imminence of his own death. As the girl leaves him to return to the village, the echo of her parting voice fades and insidiously dissipates itself into the air much as the élan vital of M. Andesmas now begins to silently slip away; the hero's death is evoked by girl's blithesome passage:

> L'écho de la voix enfantine flotte longtemps, insoluble, autour de M. Andesmas, puis aucun des sens éventuels qu'il aurait pu avoir n'étant retenu, il s'éloigne, s'efface, rejoint les miroitements divers, des milliers, suspendus dans le

> gouffre de lumière, devient l'un d'eux. Il disparaît. (p. 51)

The young girl, however, represents something more than the annunciation of the protagonist's imminent, immanent death. Mlle Arc is not like the other children: "—La fille aînée de Michel Arc n'est pas comme les autres" (p. 48). She suffers spells of flagrant memory lapses, and her behavior shows a generalized emotional retardation. She appears absorbed by an inner reality that imbues her. She projects an aura, a psychological distance that surrounds her, which sets her apart. Although fifteen or sixteen years old, the young woman has retained the psychological age of a child. She often loses, finds, and loses again the same object within a period of several hours, like the coin given to her by M. Andesmas. Mme Arc poignantly expresses her daughter's mental deficiencies as she searches for the lost coin: "Tandis qu'elle cherche, dit-elle, elle n'est pas malheureuse. C'est lorsqu'elle trouve qu'elle s'inquiète, lorsqu'elle trouve ce qu'elle cherche, qu'elle se souvient tout à fait d'avoir oublié" (pp. 110-111). The girl's form of madness anticipates the autistic, schizophrenic behavior of Lol V. Stein. M. Andesmas finds himself as bereft and frightened before the girl's madness as he is overwhelmed before Valérie's ravishing beauty, as if madness and physical beauty were absolute manifestations of a kind of life whose intensity is the very antithesis of the tranquil life, and, like the recurring, vertiginous gouffre de lumière, cannot be contemplated without risking death: "Il savait qu'il ne pourrait envisager ni la blondeur de Valérie ni la folie de l'autre enfant trahie sans s'épouvanter pareillement" (p. 54). This direct confrontation between madness

and rapture leads to death, and as Anne Desbaresdes announced in Moderato, the illusions of the tranquil life and of the vicarious alternatives to the dilemma of existence are forever shattered. Mlle Arc is the first Durasian character whose very essence is a pathological derangement which is explicitly stated as such by the author, but she is not the last. She prefigures the protagonists of Le Ravissement, Le Vice-consul, and Détruire, dit-elle. It is somehow appropriate that the harbinger of the rational protagonist's death be a young girl already afflicted with the incipient signs of the madness which permits the later characters to transcend the tranquil life.

The third and last encounter of M. Andesmas on the hot, June afternoon is precipitated by the unexpected arrival of Mme Arc, the wife of the tardy architect and the mother of the adolescent child. The eruption of this feminine presence, sensual and intensely alive, temporarily distracts the somnolent septuagenarian from his refuge of inner detachment, his gradual absorption into a domain of impregnable subjectivity.[31] Mme Arc's presence precipitates the convergence of the imminent erotic event and the arid durée, a duality which has characterized almost all of the novels of the middle period:

> Un événement était en cours, il le savait bien, M. Andesmas--qu'il nomma leur rencontre, bien plus tard. Cet événement prenait très durement racine dans l'aride durée présente, mais il fallait néanmoins que ce fût fait, que ce temps-là aussi passât. (p. 71)

The use of ce fût fait recalls the epic tone of Moderato. There is also an ambiguity in the antecedent of the possessive adjective in leur rencontre, which probably refers to the amorous encounter of Michel Arc and

Valérie Andesmas at the village ball, but which can also point to the meeting of Mme Arc and M. Andesmas on the solitary hilltop. In either case, the simultaneity of the event (in the village) and the attente (on the hilltop) is dramatically emphasized. Indeed, this ambiguity tends to fuse the event and the attente into one reality. The adverbial phrase, bien plus tard, shows that M. Andesmas does not die that particular afternoon but lives on for at least a short while. M. Andesmas' experiences that afternoon "are recounted as though he had told them to the narrator and had died since."[32] M. Andesmas and Mme Arc, perched on the abyss (le gouffre de lumière) of imminent death for the one and of incipient madness for the other, live together, in a sort of suspended animation, the final moment of waiting while Valérie and Michel Arc, blissfully unaware, come ever closer to the discovery and enactment of their desire for one another. Their absence throughout the entire work teases the reader as well as the father and the wife who are anxiously awaiting them, so that the couple is very much in mind despite and perhaps becuase of the unfulfilled awaiting of its sempiternally imminent arrival.

Mme Arc and M. Andesmas are the characters of the durée, of the attente; they witness the inexorable birth of desire, impotent to alter its rapt of their loved ones. The lengthening shadow of Thanatos has progressively covered the sedentary form of M. Andesmas, but Mme Arc, closer to the gouffre de lumière, is still exposed to the declining rays of the summer sun. Mme Arc, the victim of Eros, tries in vain to retain the attention and good will of her partner in waiting, the victim of Thanatos. Valérie and Michel Arc, the heroine and hero of the event,

the manifestation of the imminent erotic ravishment, make their absent presence felt through the muted sounds and songs emanating from the village ball and the natural setting. This rumeur, that often accompanies the privileged moments of Duras' novels, breaks, from time to time, the symphony of silence that engulfs the vigil of the isolated Durasian protagonists in a kind of complicitous pathetic fallacy, in which the images of madness--the forest and the music--mingle in a contrapuntal evocation of sweet agony, expressed in the concluding antithesis (douceur égorgée) of the following passage:

> L'impossibilité totale dans laquelle se trouve M. Andesmas de trouver quoi faire ou dire pour atténuer ne fût-ce qu'une seconde la cruauté de ce délire d'écoute, cette impossibilité même l'enchaîne à elle.
>
> Il écoute comme elle, et pour elle, tout signe d'approche de la plate-forme. Il écoute tout, les remuements des branches les plus proches, leurs froissements entre elles, leur bousculades, parfois, lorsque le vent augmente, les sourdes torsions des troncs des grands arbres, les sursauts de silence qui paralysent la forêt tout entière, les cris des chiens et des volailles au loin, les rires et les paroles à cette distance confondus tous dans un seul discours, et les chants, et les chants.
>
> Quand les lilas
> ... mon amour
> Quand notre espoir...
>
> Dans une perspective unique, ils écoutent tous deux. Ils écoutent aussi la douceur égorgée de ce chant. (pp. 100-101)

As Maria before her, Mme Arc envisages little hope that her husband, the center of her emotional life, will remain with her. Both heroines, in effect, live out their affective dispossession. Both heroines witness the rapt and rapture of their husbands and the ravishing seductiveness of their rival. Maria was able to put a certain distance between herself and her feelings through her alcoholic excesses.

Mme Arc remains sober, and she is more visible shaken by her loss. However, she speaks in an emotionless, monotone voice, almost mechanically, with the autistic distance of an antinovel narrator:

> Au lieu de s'en aller, au contraire, elle reste là et parle toujours de cette voix égale, et ses paroles sont divulguées d'un long discours intérieur, elle les laisse échapper parfois et qui veut bien les entendre les entend. (p. 76)

Mme Arc shares with other Durasian heroines (Anne Desbaresdes, Maria, and Lol V. Stein) a common experience and its shattering psychological effects: the vertiginous vision of an incarnation of absolute passion. For Mme Arc, this incarnation has taken the form of Valerie Andesmas. At her very first glimpse of Valérie, a year before the present situation involving her husband's interest in the young woman, Mme Arc was deeply moved by "la splendeur de sa démarche" (p. 87). Like Anna in Le Marin and Anne-Marie Stretter of Le Ravissement, the seductive allure of the feminine gait, instinctively yet artistically choreographed, is an integral part of the beauty of both Valérie Andesmas and also of Mme Arc herself. Like Maria in Dix heures et demie, Mme Arc is sensitive to the charms of her rival. The latter's voice takes on sensual undertones as she describes Valérie's beauty and captivating gait to the father, equally enthralled by the verbal evocation of his daughter's charms: "Sa voix s'effémina subitement, elle sortit d'un puits de douceur" (p. 81). Mme Arc, dispossessed by Valérie's beauty, is living a "calme désastre" (p. 98), as did Maria in Dix heures et demie and Anne in Moderato. Valerie's beauty, her "blondeur universelle" (p. 40), like the crimes of passion in the preceding novels, is the catalyst that precipitates the destruction of the heroine's vie tranquille. For

Mme Arc, Valérie is the incarnation of Eros which has wrought disorder in the tranquil life and has thus created the psychological anarchy (désordre contagieux) of an impending derangement:

> —Valérie me fait beaucoup souffrir, dit-elle.
> Elle a parlé sur le même ton des inconvénients de la maison de telle façon qu'on peut croire que le monde entier souffre à ses yeux d'un désordre contagieux, mais seulement de cela.
> La douceur d'un passage récent qui contient pêle-mêle le passage de Valérie Andesmas sur la place du village et ce qui s'en est suivi, sa souffrance aussi, sont à egalité des aspects de ce désordre. (p. 97)

In the novel's closing scene, one can hear the laughter of Michel Arc and Valérie Andesmas as they approach the hilltop, walking through the forest. Theirs is a new laughter, born of their impending sexual complicity. But the reader never sees them, for the novel ends just short of their arrival. The protagonists of the event do not participate directly in the novel; the reader knows them only vicariously, through the laments of their victims and the joyful sound emanating from the village. In contrast to Dix heures et demie, the characters of the event and the characters of the durée do not cross paths during the course of the novel. The celebration of the life force incarnated in Michel and Valérie remains peripheral; the central scene is the hilltop, under the lengthening shadow of Thanatos, where M. Andesmas and Mme Arc helplessly wait. This waiting, however, achieves a dramatic intensity in the last moments of the novel that is all but equal to the suspenseful events of Dix heures et demie, but in this work there is no release of the mounting tension. As the shadows reach the sea, M. Andesmas, initially captivated by the sensuality and the suffering of Mme Arc, now progressively returns to his inner reality and its unique preoccupation,

his fatal, mindless love of Valérie. His exclusion of Mme Arc is symbolic of his disassociation from life: "M. Andesnas prétendit que ce fut à partir de ce moment-là qu'il se lassa, qu'il commença à se détacher d'elle, même d'elle, de cette femme, la dernière qui se serait approchée de lui" (p. 118).

Mme Arc, nevertheless, continues to try to retain the attention of the fading septuagenarian. Like Rodrigo Paestra in Dix heures et demie, she is the victim of an animal-like terror when confronted with the solitary estrangement of her ravishment from the realm of the affect: "La femme les écouta puis elle se rapprocha de M. Andesmas, dans un élan animal, d'épouvante" (p. 125). She cruelly reminds the doting father of the enamored young woman that he too shares her fate of affective estrangement from the unique object of his all-encompassing paternal passion: "—Il faut que votre amour de Valérie s'habitue à être loin de son bonheur. Que notre éloignement à tous les deux soit parfait, incomparable. Vous entendez monsieur Andesmas?" (p. 124). M. Andesmas, whose face has been distorted, paralyzed by an involuntary grimace, a senile smile that he struggles in vain to remove, continues calmly to withdraw within himself, abandoning his agitated interlocutor. His spastically contorted face recalls the death mask of the dancer in the final scene of Dix heures et demie. Mme Arc, on the brink of hysteria, continues talking to the vacuous, bemused septuagenarian, as they await ". . . the dazzling appearance of the others, in front of the chasm [gouffre] filled with an evenly faded light."[33]

L'Après-midi presents the death of the rational protagonist in the novels of Marguerite Duras. M. Andesmas is the last hero of the vie

tranquille. The psychic ravishment of Mme Arc prepares the way for Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein and the psychotic episodes that this heroine endures. Mme Arc's daughter, the one who is not like other children, manifests autistic symptoms which suggest the schizophrenic protagonists of the later novels. Valérie's blinding beauty is subsequently incarnated in the figure of the Durasian femme fatale par excellence, Anne-Marie Stretter. Even the style of L'Après-midi prepares the reader for the full-fledged antinovels of the third manner: the absence of exterior conflict, of character development, and of a reassuring dénouement and conclusion. Un Barrage portrayed the coming of age of a brother and sister and the death of their mother from the point of view of the adolescent protagonist. L'Après-midi also recounts a young woman's coming of age, that of Valérie, but it is seen from the perspective of the moribund parent. Thus a generation has run its course. The Durasian protagonist of the tranquil life has grown old and is dying, and yet a disquieting progeny (Mlle Arc) is already alive and thriving—those who will remain sempiternally dans les arbres.

Since the adventuresome couple of Le Marin, who extended and enriched the potential for direct human experience in the animus odyssey of "The Drunken Boat," the heroes, and especially the heroines, have turned inward in their apprehension of the human experience; they have internalized and poeticized the drama of existence that Anna and her male companions extrovertedly enacted. The anima syndrome has been the "étrange et merveilleuse chanson" of Claudel's Anima in his delightful parable; expressed in another poetic metaphor, the "Interior Songs" have been Verlaine's creation of a moderato cantabile after Rimbaud's defection

from his drunken boat, now an empty derelict adrift at sea. The characters of the second manner have lived out "vicariously events which they both relive and retell in another key; someone else's story, always relived in different modes, yet always the same. . . . Each story suggests a mode of being 'in love,' and culminates in a recognition of the nature of human bonds."[34] Like the powerful image contained in the title of Un Barrage contre le Pacifique, the life force rushes in and, with a tragic fatality, destroys its most heroic incarnations. From the old mother of Un Barrage to the old father in L'Après-midi, the Durasian characters have lived out "the entire drama of human existence,"[35] with the exception of the psychotic adventure. From François of La Vie Tranquille to Sara of Les Petits Chevaux and beyond, the Durasian protagonists have embraced the reality principle, a Freudian term that represents the repression of the id, in order to transform their hysterical misery into the everyday unhappiness which is the usual lot of mankind.[36] They have lived the tranquil life. They have attained the outer and inner limits of "normal" experience. With the erotic rapt of Anne and Chauvin in Moderato, the therapeutic resignation of the heroes is shattered. The compromise (Eros) between the pleasure principle (cantabile) and the reality principle (moderato) has disintegrated (Thanatos) before the vision of absolute passion and has traumatized the hero and heroine. The stage has been set for the emergence of the psychologically ravished protagonists of Duras' third manner--one of both pathological alienation and social destruction. "Repression and unhappiness must be if civilization is to prevail. . . . In the long run, the question is only how much resignation the individual can bear without breaking up."[37] This

psychological threshold has been reached, and out of this ontological impasse the time has come for the illuminating (gouffre de lumière) rebellion of madness in the itinerary of Duras' heroes.

NOTES

[1] Marguerite Duras, Moderato cantabile (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1958). Subsequent references to this work appear in the text. A critical appendix on Duras' novels follows the text of Moderato in this edition.

[2] Armand Hoog, "The Itinerary of Marguerite Duras," Yale French Studies, 24 (1961), 73.

[3] Marguerite Duras and Michelle Porte, Les Lieux de Marguerite Duras (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1977), p. 29.

[4] Laurent LeSage, The French New Novel (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1962), p. 86.

[5] Jean-Luc Seylaz, Les Romans de Marguerite Duras: essai sur une thématique de la durée (Paris: Les Archives des lettres modernes, 1963), pp. 33-34.

[6] Seylaz, p. 36.

[7] John W. Kneller, "Elective Empathies and Musical Affinities," Yale French Studies, 27 (1961), 114.

[8] Herbert Marcuse, Eros and Civilization, A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966), pp. 11-13.

[9] François duc de La Rochefoucauld, The Maxims of François duc de La Rochefoucauld, trans. F. G. Stevens (London: Oxford University Press, 1940), p. 44. This books gives the original French version as well as an English translation.

[10] Kneller, p. 118.

[11] Alfred Cismaru, Marguerite Duras (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1971), p. 91.

[12] Duras, Les Lieux, p. 30.

[13] Claude Roy, "Madame Bovary récrite par Bela Bartok," in the critical appendix on Duras' novels in the edition of Moderato cantabile already cited in note 1 of this chapter, p. 150.

[14] Gaëtan Picon, "Moderato Cantabile dans l'oeuvre de Marguerite Duras," in the critical appendix of the same edition of Moderato cantabile, p. 173.

[15] Marguerite Duras and Xavière Gauthier, Les Parleuses (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1974), p. 13.

[16] Marguerite Duras, Dix heures et demie du soir en été (Paris: Gallimard, 1960). Subsequent references to ths work are in the text.

[17] Pierre de Boisdeffre, Dictionnaire de littérature contemporaine (Paris: Editions universitaires, 1963), p. 289.

[18] Germaine Brée, introd., Four Novels by Marguerite Duras (New York: Grove Press, 1965), p. xiv.

[19] Gérard d'Houville, "Lectures romanesques," La Revue des deux mondes, 15 Aug. 1960, p. 734.

[20] Cismaru, pp. 98-99.

[21] Cismaru, p. 100.

[22] Cismaru, p. 99. Cismaru is quoting the article by G. d'Houville, note 19.

[23] Marguerite Duras, L'Après-midi de Monsieur Andesmas (Paris: Gallimard, 1962). Subsequent references to this novel are in the text.

[24] Germaine Brée's Introduction to Four Novels, p. xiv.

[25] Henri Hell, "L'Univers romanesque de Marguerite Duras," in the critical appendix of Moderato cantabile, p. 131.

[26] Madeleine Alleins, "Un Langage qui récuse la quiétude du savoir," in the critical appendix of Moderato cantabile, pp. 158-159.

[27] Seylaz, p. 26.

[28] Germaine Brée's Introduction to Four Novels, p. xvi.

[29] Cismaru, p. 101.

[30] Duras, Les Lieux, p. 27.

[31] John K. Simon, "L'Après-midi de Monsieur Andesmas" Books Abroad (Autumn 1962), pp. 390-391.

[32] Simon, p. 391.

[33] Marguerite Duras, The Afternoon of Mr. Andesmas, trans. Anne Borchardt, in Four Novels of Marguerite Duras, with an Introduction by Germaine Brée, p. 303.

[34] Germaine Brée's Introduction to Four Novels, p. xvi.

[35] Lesage, The French New Novel, p. 85.

[36] Marcuse, pp. 246-247.

[37] Marcuse, p. 246.

CHAPTER VI

THE PSYCHOTIC EPISODES OF THE IRRATIONAL HEROES: AN EPISTEMOLOGY OF FOLLY

The psychotic episodes of the Durasian heroes reflect another phase in the evolution of the author's approach to reality. When Françou and her descendents embraced the tranquil life, they capitulated to the exigencies of a philosophical stance based on rationalism. The break with this tranquil life, announced by Anne Desbaresdes in Moderato and fulfilled by Lol V. Stein in Le Ravissement, by the mad diplomat in Le Vice consul, and by Claire Lannes in L'Amante anglaise, opens new perspectives, not only in Marguerite Duras' manner of characterization, but also in her own world view as a creative artist. In the following excerpt from an interview, Madame Duras traces the evolution of her novels in terms of her affective reaction to them:

> M.-D. —Oui. Mais il est de fait que j'étais avec les autres livres — c'est quand même important, intéressant à dire, je crois —, j'étais dans un labeur quotidien. J'écrivais comme on va au bureau, chaque jour, tranquillement; je mettais quelques mois à faire un livre et puis, tout à coup, ça a viré. Avec Moderato c'était moins calme. Et puis, après mai 68, avec Détruire, alors c'était plus du tout ça; c'est-à-dire que le livre s'écrivait en quelques jours et c'est la première fois que j'ai abordé la peur avec cela. Si, enfin, ça avait commencé avec Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein. Là, alors, je ne sais pas si cette peur--j'y ai pensé souvent, je n'ai jamais réussi à élucider ça--, cette peur que j'ai connue en l'écrivant n'était pas aussi l'autre peur de se retrouver

> sans alcool; si ce n'était pas une sequelle de la désintoxication, je ne sais pas.
>
> X.-G. —Enfin, peut-être que ça a joué mais ce n'était pas seulement ça.
>
> M.-D. —La peur a commencé avec Lol V. Stein, un peu avec Moderato, je dois dire. Elle a été très grande pour Détruire, dangereuse un peu.[1]

The fear described by the author coincides with the psychological ravishment of her protagonists, such as Anne Desbaresdes, and increases in intensity with the emergence of the first truly psychotic heroine, Lol V. Stein. Duras' rejection of the rational epistemology that underlies the works of the "Animus Odyssey" and of the "Interior Songs" results in a regression to an oneiric reality in which rational thought processes and memory images revert to a pre-rational revival of perception.[2] Duras states her affinity for the irrational heroes and her abandonment of their rational ancestors in the following paragraph:

> Ce n'est pas en réfléchissant, voyez-vous. Oui, elle est incapable de réfléchir, Lol V. Stein; elle s'est arrêtée de vivre avant la réflexion. C'est peut-être ça qui fait qu'elle m'est tellement chère, enfin, tellement proche, je ne sais pas... La réflexion est un temps que je trouve... douteux, qui m'ennuie. Et si vous prenez mes personnages, ils sont tous, ils précèdent tous ce temps-là, enfin les personnages que j'aime profondément.[3]

Indeed, Duras rejects those works which precede the novels of psychological ravishment and the protagonists' fugue toward an approach to reality based on madness: "Il y a toute une période où j'ai écrit des livres, jusqu'au Moderato cantabile, que je ne reconnais plus."[4]

This break with rationalism and the concomitant rejection of psychological verisimilitude in the protagonist have sociological and political ramifications which transcend the purely aesthetic and philosophical

preoccupations of artistic creation. The psychotic heroes, in Freudian terms, make a break with the sublimated and delayed pleasures of the reality principle (Eros, preservation instincts, the tranquil life) and regress to the anarchy of an uncontrolled pleasure principle (Thanatos, death instinct, the irrational fugue).[5] In the following interview with Alain Vircondelet, Duras speaks of madness as a sociological reality, in addition to its use as a literary symbol:

> A. V.: Vous avez dit un jour: Je me réjouis du nombre des fous qui augmente chaque jour. . . .
> M. D.: C'est vrai. La folie augmente partout. Aux USA, en Europe. A New York en particulier. Ça veut dire qu'il y a une réaction très sensible, très intelligente. Ça veut dire que la sensibilité grandit. Les gens deviennent fous pour ne pas subir. C'est en cela que je me réjouis...
> Je crois qu'il y a infiniment plus de fous qu'on ne le dit. Si on savait la véritable proportions des gens détraqués, détruits (parce que pour moi, ça équivaut à une destruction, mais survie d'une reconstruction, originale cette fois, non pas dictée par la société), si on savait les vrais chiffres, ce serait dans l'épouvante.
> A. V.: Un univers de schizophrènes. On l'est tous.
> M. D.: On l'est tous. Mais je veux dire que les gens qui se tiennent sur la corde raide, à qui il faudrait un petit traumatisme pour sombrer dans l'asile, ce serait effrayant. Rien que dans une rue, dans un immeuble, ou un village. On le voit.[6]

Lol V. Stein of Le Ravissement, the vice-consul of the work that bears his name, and Claire Lannes of L'Amante anglaise are the full-blown psychotic heroes announced in the alcoholic colloquies of Anne and Chauvin in Moderato. Lol V. Stein, like Michel Arc's demented daughter in L'Apres-midi, has lost the facility to use memory as an an organizing principle of the chaotic swarm of sensorial impulses that create one's sense of reality.[7] Without this organization, an interiorization of experience results, and the afflicted person loses access to that consensus

of what is real shared by reasonable people. An ever-shrinking circle of autism restricts the normal expression of emotions. Lol's inappropriate affect when faced with the traumatic loss of her fiancé by which the novel begins sets her apart in a schizoid state in which she is totally alone. In Lol, it is the absence of jealousy upon the rapt of her fiancé that is symptomatic of her subsequent psychotic episodes. This strange lack of jealousy has already appeared in two past heroines: Maria of Dix heures et demie and Madame Arc in L'Après-midi. The author characterizes this cause of Lol's alienation in the following remarks:

> Mais, elle, pour Lol V. Stein, la chose était facilitée parce que, au départ, l'omission de la douleur, enfin, si vous voulez, cette espèce d'échec dans la tentative qu'elle a faite pour rejoindre l'amour du couple de Anne-Marie Stretter et de Richardson, elle a totalement échoué, c'est-à-dire que là aussi il y a un chaînon qui a manqué. La jalousie n'a pas été vécue. Le chaînon a sauté, ce qui fait que tout ce qui suit est faux, c'est à un autre nivau.[8]

In Le Vice-consul, the heroes take on a symbolic, mythic dimension. The novel presents a converging of realities that seems to signal the end of an age. The heretofore separate, parallel manifestations of Eros (the monotonous durée of the narration) and of Thanatos (the isolated event of destruction or death) of the middle novels come together quite literally in a dance of death in the persons of Anne-Marie Stretter and the vice-consul at an Embassy ball. Their apocalyptic union, however, is abortive, and the novel comes to an uneasy conclusion. Duras comments on the antithetical figures of Anne-Marie Stretter as an incarnation of Eros and of the vice-consul as that of Thanatos in this interview. The author's choice of images in evoking these opposing yet complementary figures recalls the animus-anima dichotomy used earlier in this study:

> M. D. —Oui, c'est-à-dire qu'il y a une équivalence, plus qu'une identification, il y a une équivalence dans la douleur d'Anne-Marie Stretter et dans la colère du vice-consul de France. Ça coule en elle. Tu vois, c'est comme un fleuve qui l'a traversée, comme traversée par ce fleuve de douleur, si tu veux, et lui au contraire... comme un engin de..., de mort, quoi, il est plein de feu, d'explosifs, enfin..., il faut que ça sorte, que ça éclate, que ça s'exprime à l'extérieur, que ce soit public, bruyant, tandis que l'insertion de..., d'Anne-Marie Stretter dans l'Inde est..., est charnelle. Elle est interne.[9]

The intersection of these opposing forces is at last consummated in the homicidal madness of Claire Lannes in L'Amante anglaise (written l'amante en glaise by the heroine). Claire is the only heroine of the durée (Eros, reality principle) who is at the same time the heroine of the violent parallel event (Thanatos, pleasure principle, destruction). Claire is at once Lol V. Stein, Anne-Marie Stretter, and the vice-consul. She is also the last protagonist to possess a vestige of that veneer of verisimilitude essential to traditional characterization. This homicidal maniac marks an end to the long line of heroes and heroines who are descendents of Françou's compromise to the tranquil life. The two heroines are not that far apart; Françou possessed already a blunted and inapporpriate affect typical of latent schizophrenia. This seminal heroine impassively witnessed two deaths for which she was in part responsible, that of Jérôme and that of the solitary swimmer at the beach; Claire, however, makes the irreconcilable leap into pathological behavior in her gratuitous butchering of her innocuous cousin. The vital antithetical tension maintained in Françou's vie tranquille is now abandoned to the lifeless clay of the equally antithetical title l'amante en glaise.

Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein, published in 1964,[10] is at once a culmination of the ravishment theme and an introduction to the archetypal characters who prefigure the antiheroes of Duras' definitive novelistic manner. Lol V. Stein's ravishment is the antithesis of Françou's vie tranquille. As Le Marin and Les Petits Chevaux introduced the animus and anima syndromes respectively, Le Ravissement is the reader's initiation into the subjective reality of the mad protagonist. With the creation of Lol V. Stein, whose importance, like that of the last of the rational heroes, M. Andesmas, is displayed in the novel's title, the autistic, schizoid heroines, such as Anne Desbaresdes, Maria, and Mme Arc, have been transformed into a full-blown schizophrenic. The psychotic episode of Lol V. Stein is to inspire a cycle of reworkings and amplifications, subsequent novels and film scenarios, such as Le Vice-consul, L'Amour, India Song, and La Femme du Gange, which re-create variations of the same traumatizing event that forever alienates the Durasian hero from the modest contentment found in the tranquil life. Whereas Moderato, Dix heures et demie, and L'Après-midi show the devastating effects of coinciding, yet incompatible realities, Le Ravissement is the actual irruption of the symbolic, heretofore parallel event of death and destruction found in the middle novels into the durée vécue of the protagonist. Le Ravissement relates the aftermath of the traumatic rapt and rapture with which Moderato concludes. Le Ravissement follows the heroine after her psychotic break with the tranquil life.

The novel is the story of Lola Valérie Stein's madness: its dramatic onset during a summer ball at T. Beach, a ten-year period of apparent remission, and then the insidious re-emergence and reconquest of its

gentle, acquiescing victim. Lola, a nineteen-year-old woman, unusually reticent and withdrawn, has nevertheless fallen in love with and become engaged to Michael Richardson during a summer vacation at T. Beach, a seaside resort not far from S. Tahla. During the night of the grand ball at the Casino Municipal, Lola, and her childhood friend, Tatiana Karl, witness the arrival of an ineffably beautiful stranger, Anne-Marie Stretter, whose magnetic presence enraptures Michael Richardson and ravishes him away from his fiancée forever. The newly formed couple leave S. Tahla together, without a word of explanation to Lola, who has been traumatized, psychologically ravished to use Duras' term, by this vision of an absolute passion which transcends the young heroine's pathologically narrow range of emotional responses. While still convalescing from the nervous breakdown precipitated by her amorous abandonment and exile, Lol V. Stein meets and mindlessly marries Jean Bedford, a businessman and a musician, who is intrigued by the young woman's bemused indifference. The couple moves to U. Bridge, they have three children, and ten years pass; then, suddenly, the family returns to S. Tahla, where Jean Bedford is offered a better position. Lol, once again in her native city, slowly begins to awaken from a long, psychasthenic hibernation. Taking long daily walks through S. Tahla, Lol rediscovers her childhood friend, Tatiana Karl, now married to Pierre Beugner, and this friend's lover Jacques Hold, whose manner and expression recall those of Michael Richardson. Lol, fascinated by the adulterous couple, follows them through the streets and spies on them through an open window from a field of rye as they make love. Lol openly renews her friendship with Tatiana and covertly seduces Jacques Hold through the

passive charms of her demented presence. Lol and Jacques make a pilgrimage to the Casino at T. Beach, the site of the autistic young woman's introduction of a revelation of the overwhelming potential of human passion. Lol has successfully insinuated herself, both directly and vicariously, into a triangular affective relationship with the present couple (Tatiana Karl and Jacques Hold), and through this couple she has ressurected the past couple (Michael Richardson and Anne-Marie Stretter), whose encounter had initiated her into a realm of absolute passion only to leave her abandoned immediately thereafter. Lol has ultimately succeeded in re-creating a veil of madness over the uninspired longanimity of the tranquil life by ressurecting the couple who had precipitated her breakdown.

Le Ravissement, like Les Petits Chevaux and Le Marin before it, introduces a new prototype of the Durasian hero and presents at the same time a modified approach to the representation of reality incarnated by the new protagonist. The heroine, Lola Valérie Stein, has been, as the title indicates, ravished--that is to say, she has been violently wrested away from the tranqil life by the traumatic irruption of Eros into the domain of her already autistically shallow and inappropriate affect. This dramatic violation of her psychic life brings on the pathological state which is to characterize Lol and the subsequent protagonists of the irrational. There is a symbolic self-mutilation implied by the heroine's reduction of her euphoniously feminine given names, Lola Valérie to a neuter, abbreviated form, Lol V., after the onset of her madness. "Elle prononçait son nom avec colère: Lol V. Stein--c'était ainsi qu'elle se désignait" (p. 23). The cosmopolitan names of the

other characters (Jacques Hold, Tatiana Karl, Pierre Beugner, Jean Bedford, Michael Richardson, Anne-Marie Stretter) give a supranational origin to the cast of characters. Compared to the geographical and nationalistic specificity of Le Marin and Les Petits Chevaux, Le Ravissement presents a vague locale, a maritime topography of the North Atlantic[11] which introduces a mythic dimension to the setting. The apparently pseudonymous and abbreviated English place names--S. Tahla (also S. Thala in L'Amour and La Femme du Gange), U. Bridge, and T. Beach--reinforce this sense of mythic universality. At no time in the novel is there a specific indication of the country in which the story takes place. Both T. Beach and S. Tahla remind the reader of the seaside city of T..., the unspecified site somewhere on the French Atlantic where Françou vacationed after the death of Nicolas in La Vie tranquille. In a published interview with Michelle Porte, Duras recognizes that S. Thala is an inadvertent variant of thalassa,[12] the Greek word for the sea, thus recalling the Mediterranean setting of the holiday novels. Le Ravissement, however, the literary epic of the psychotic protagonist, takes place in a maritime no man's land, an unspecified clime of the North Sea,[13] whose chilling landscapes better suggest Lol's repressed and taciturn nature than the open expanses of the south, basking under a meridional sun. There has indeed been a progressive evolution toward universality in the Durasian hero, beginning with La Vie's Françou, a French provincial, followed by Le Marin's Anna, the worldly traveler, and finally culminating in Le Ravissement's Lol V. Stein, an estranged and mysterious figure sempiternally waiting on a symbolic beach. Thus Lol V. Stein, this "Eve marine" (p. 15) in the genesis story of the mad

heroine, emancipated from the tranquilizing coherence of the vie tranquille, inhabits S. Tahla (Thala), a thalassic strand whose ambiguous name and stark sterility reflect the hermetically closed reality of the heroine. "Pourtant la plage était vide autant que si elle n'avait pas été finie par Dieu" (p. 199).

The novel is recounted by Jacques Hold, the lover of the heroine. The reader thus views Lol through the sympathetic, admiring eyes of a participant in the events which take place. This same structure was employed in Le Marin, in which the narrator was Anna's lover and companion in the search for the mysterious sailor. It is a format in which a male narrator (animus figure) attempts to record and to make sense out of a heroine's irrational intuition of reality (the role of the anima). This method is especially appropriate in Le Ravissement. Lol's quiet lunacy remains pure, inexplicable. The reader remains outside Lol's inner reality; he must observe her, like Jacques Hold, from the outside. Lol's mystery is not contaminated by any externally imposed explanation or logical description of the heroine's pristine, pre-rational mental state. Lol's autistic world is not violated, and the reader is obliged to follow the sympathetic and sensitive conjecturing of the enamored narrator: ". . . le divorce dans lequel nous sommes elle et nous . . ." (p. 124) is never clarified nor made whole.

It is significant that, in this first work of the psychotic protagonist, there is a rigorous attention on Duras' part to establish logically the credibility of Jacques Hold's narrative. On numerous occasions, when scenes or states of mind are presented which the narrator could not realistically have known or witnessed, even with the help of

Tatiana Karl's testimony, the author carefully inserts explanatory introductory phrases such as: "J'invente, . . ." (p. 63), "Ce que je crois: . . ." (p. 50), "J'aime à croire, . . ." (p. 54), "Je crois voir ce qu'a dû voir Lol V. Stein: . . ." (p. 69), "J'invente: . . ." (p. 178), etc. This care to infuse an air of verisimilitude shows that Duras has not as yet abandoned certain criteria of traditional narration. In reality, the logical format and the relative rational equilibrium of the characters who surround Lol intensify the aura of estrangement that enshrouds the psychic life of the heroine. In subsequent works (Détruire, dit-elle, Abahn Sabana David, L'Amour), the oneiric content is directly reflected in the disjointed and fragmentary form of the narration. At this point in the evolution of the Durasian protagonist, however, the irrationality of the heroine is still observed from the confines of a rational approach to reality.

Lol's personality is a culmination of the old-son syndrome most memorably represented by Jacques of Des Journées entières dans les arbres, but the protagonist of an arrested emotional development goes back as far as the Jacques of Les Impudents and as uncle Jérôme of La Vie tranquille. Early in the exposition of Le Ravissement, Tatiana Karl describes Lol in this manner: "Au collège, dit-elle, et elle n'était pas la seule à le penser, il manquait déjà quelque chose à Lol pour être—elle dit: là" (p. 11). In Des Journées, Jacques uses the same expression in describing his emotional makeup: "Il me manque quelque chose" (p. 61). In another place in Le Ravissement, the same phrase pointing to Lol's emotional deficiency returns: "Au collège, dit-elle, il manquait quelque chose à Lol, déjà elle était étrangement incomplète, elle avait vécu sa

jeunesse comme dans une sollicitation de ce qu'elle serait mais qu'elle n'arrivait pas à devenir" (p. 93). Tatiana completes Lol's psychological portrait in these terms:

> Elle donnait l'impression d'endurer dans un ennui tranquille une personne qu'elle se devait de paraître mais dont elle perdait la mémoire à la moindre occasion. Gloire de douceur mais aussi d'indifférence, découvrait-on très vite, jamais elle n'avait paru souffrir ou être peinée, jamais on ne lui avait vu une larme de jeune fille. . . . Etait-ce le coeur qui n'était pas là? Tatiana aurait tendance à croire que c'était peut-être en effet le coeur de Lol V. Stein qui n'était pas--elle dit: là--il allait venir sans doute, mais elle, elle ne l'avait pas connu. Oui, il semblait que c'était cette région du sentiment qui, chez Lol, n'était pas pareille. (p. 11)

Duras poetically evokes Lol's pathologically arrested affect when she calls her an "emigrée centenaire de sa jeunesse" (p. 115). In the narrator's opinion, Lol has remained "maladivement jeune" (p. 30). Despite Lol's apparent acceptance of the tranquil life represented by her marriage and three maternities, the heroine's psychic life is centered around the traumatizing scenes of the fatefull ball at T. Beach in which Michael Richardson is ravished away by the ineffable attraction of Anne-Marie Stretter; the reader does not even know the names of Lol's three daughters, but he knows every detail of the ball. The blatant manifestation of the heroine's inappropriate affect--her ecstacy in the place of grief or suffering while witnessing her fiancé's rapture in the arms of Anne-Marie Stretter--recalls Françou's disquieting lack of empathy or compassion. But Lol does not share Françou's tenacious desire for the tranqil life. On the contrary, her obsessional wish to re-create the amorous triangle perceived that summer night at T. Beach is reminiscent of Anne Desbaresdes's compulsive re-creation of the

erotic murder scene in Moderato and of Maria's complicitous voyeurism in Dix heures et demie.

Moreover, Lol's compulsive behavior in the abnormally strict regimentation of her household recalls the indefatigable, meticulous maid in Le Square: "Elle réussit à y introduire le même ordre glacé, à la faire marcher au même rythme horaire" (p. 39). Lol's meandering attention, her absent expression, and her faltering memory make one think of the demented daughter in L'Après-midi.

Lol's physical appearance recalls another Valérie of an ineffable blondness, the ravishing daughter of M. Andesmas. Jean Bedford's appreciation of his wife is expressed in the following portrait of subdued sensuality:

> Il aimait cette femme-là, Lola Valérie, cette calme présence à ses côtés, cette dormeuse sans une plainte jamais, cette dormeuse debout, cette effacement continuel qui le faisait aller et venir entre l'oubli et les retrouvailles de sa blondeur, de ce corps de soie que le réveil jamais ne changeait, de cette virtualité constante et silencieuse qu'il nommait sa douceur, la douceur de sa femme. (pp. 36-37)

Lol has a sad beauty and that fragile delicacy of the Romantic heroine that borders on the pathological; it seems a sterile, wasted beauty, because Lol remains oblivious to her grace. This olfactory evocation of Lol's charms as an untapped source of sensuality is reminiscent of the sexual fantasies of the young pensioner of Le Boa:

> Ses cheveux avaient la même odeur que sa main, d'objet inutilisé. Elle était belle mais elle avait, de la tristesse, de la lenteur du sang à remonter sa pente, la grise pâleur. . . . Même quand je l'ai connue à mon tour, elle était restée maladivement jeune. (p. 30)

Lol's voice "inexpressive, récitative" (p. 114) is the auditory expression of her somnolent self-effacement. The vice-consul and Claire Lannes who appear respectivelly in the next two novels will share Lol's revelatory lack of intonation. The heroine's abnormally prolonged adolescence--the eternal postponement of the realization that one's life has indeed begun--is visibly incorporated in her posture, her gestures, and her gait: "Elle a un corps long et beau, très droit, raidi par l'observation d'un effacement constant, d'un alignement sur un certain mode appris dans l'enfance, un corps de pensionnaire grandie" (p. 132). The latter phrase is reprised when Lol's manner of dress is described; she projects that ". . . sage raideur de pensionnaire grandie" (p. 170).

If Lol's character is a refinement or a distillation of certain traits of past heroines, she represents, nevertheless, a new incarnation of the Durasian protagonist. For the first time, this protagonist is explicitly characterized as mad by the author. In a very real way, Le Ravissement gives a sequel to the story of the psychologically ravished heroines: Maria, in Dix heures et demie; Anne Desbaresdes, in Moderato; and Mme Arc, in L'Après-midi. Lol's quiet tenacity in the re-creation of a vicarious or surrogate couple to replace Michael Richardson and Anne-Marie Stretter from the enchanted ball, which gave to the autistic heroine a glimpse of an undreamed of rapture, by the lovers at hand, Jacques Hold and Tatiana Karl, is an adventure of epic proportions in exploring the reality of the irrational, unadulterated by the necessary disappointment of any réalité vecue. Lol's re-creation of the event which precipitated her madness is the novel's central preoccupation. Duras shows little interest in the ten-year period during which there was a remission of overt psychotic symptoms.

Lol goes about her project with a singleness of purpose one usually associates with rational behavior. She spies on the couple at their trysting place; she silently seduces Jacques with the allure and mystery that emanate from her estranged presence. She makes him her accomplice in the triangular relationship of which Tatiana remains ignorant, despite her suspicions. Finally, during a pilgrimage to T. Beach, Lol temporarily abandons her vicarious pose and physically consummates her union with Jacques Hold, her enraptured accomplice and the mediator to the rational forces of the tranquil life. Lol has achieved a dominion of the irrational over the rational, a temporary victory over the tranquil life of a scope only half-imagined by her predecessor Ann Desbaresdes in Moderato.

The onset of Lol's relapse is accompanied by themes, situations, and preoccupations which have accompanied the earlier heroes and heroines. Lol rediscovers Tatiana Karl, and with her, finds Jacques Hold, whose avid gaze recalls that of Michael Richardson. She discovers the couple during her long, daily walks in the summer heat, just as the peak holiday season is approaching. The timing of this encounter thus recaptures the torrid background of the "holiday novels;" the theme of the promenade goes all the way back to Duras' first novel, Les Impudents, in which Maud walks compulsively all day long after denouncing her beloved older brother to the police, thus breaking her familial ties. Françou's tenacious self-declaration for the tranqil life is reached as she doggedly trudges home from the train station through the rain in the concluding pages of La Vie tranquille. Suzanne's daily walks through the provincial capital city bring her to a new self-awareness in Un Barrage.

It is somehow appropriate that, as the coming-of-age heroines reach their maturity during certain privileged moments associated with a compulsive yet aimless walking, so too does Lol reawaken her dormant sensitivity to an illuminating madness in her semi-conscious meandering through the streets of S. Thala:

> Une fois sortie de chez elle, dès qu'elle atteignait la rue, dès qu'elle se mettait en marche, la promenade la captivait complètement, la délivrait de vouloir être ou faire plus encore que jusque là l'immobilité du songe. Les rues portèrent Lol V. Stein durant ses promenades, je le sais. (p. 43)

The theme of the promenade is also intimately associated with Lol's ressurection of the fateful ball. Her gait is the catalyst which stirs her illusive memories of that privileged moment: "On dirait que c'est le déplacement machinal de son corps qui les fait se lever toutes ensemble dans un mouvement désordonné, confus, généreux" (p. 50). The ball itself is a recurring theme in Duras' works. It has been the meeting place for Duras' couples in several novels: Le Marin, Les Petits Chevaux, Le Square, and L'Après-midi. The following passage reunites these two themes of the promenade and the ball with the familiar metaphors of the sea (Un Barrage, Le Marin, etc.) and of the rain as a resolution of a period of waiting, the tranquility that accompanies a release of tension (Les Petits Chevaux and Dix heures et demie). In the third paragraph, Lol's maternal instincts are evoked in a metaphor of the gestation and rebirth of madness:

> Le bal tremblait au loin, ancien, seul épave d'un océan maintenant tranquille, dans la pluie, à S. Tahla. Tatiana, plus tard, quand je le lui ai dit, a partagé mon avis.
> —Ainsi c'était pour ça qu'elle se promenait, pour mieux penser au bal.

> Le bal reprend un peu de vie, frémit, s'accroche à Lol. Elle le réchauffe, le protège, le nourrit, il grandit, sort de ses plis, s'étire, un jour il est prêt.
> Elle y entre.
> Elle y entre chaque jour. (p. 51)

The theme of the amorous encounter is a recurring one in Duras' novels. In Le Ravissement, the silent complicity of a mutual attraction takes shape between Lol and Jacques during an informal reception in the former's home. Because of the heroine's psychological infirmity, the narrator must possess a special sensitivity in order to recognize Lol's covert advances. The creation of a certain mental space in which to receive the other recalls the oneiric union recounted in Les Chantiers:

> L'approche de Lol n'existe pas. On ne peut pas se rapprocher ou s'éloigner d'elle. Il faut attendre qu'elle vienne vous chercher, qu'elle veuille. Elle veut, je le comprends clairement, être rencontrée par moi et vue par moi dans un certain espace qu'elle aménage en ce moment. Lequel? Est-il peuplé des fantômes de T. Beach, de la seule survivante Tatiana, piégé de faux-semblants, de vingt femmes aux noms de Lol? Est-il autrement? Tout à l'heure aura lieu ma présentation à Lol, par Lol. Comment m'amènera-t-elle près d'elle? (pp. 122-123)

In the background at the reception in Lol's home, Jean Bedford can be heard playing exercises on the violin. Through a counterpoint established between the hesitating words being exchanged by the lovers to be and the musical accompaniment played by Lol's husband as it insinuates itself into the conversation, an ironic intensity of emotion is created which is reminiscent of the dinner scene in Moderato: "J'écoute. Entre les mots le violon s'insinue toujours, s'acharne sur certains traits, reprend" (p. 133). Moreover, the sound of Jean Bedford's piercing musical exercises is characterized as a "frénésie monotone" (p. 104), an

antithesis which restates both Françou's vie tranquille and its musical counterpart, moderato cantabile. The encounter of Lol and Jacques Hold is thus couched in the familiar, antithetical approach to reality which characterizes all of Duras' novels.

The theme of the couple à trois comes to fruition in Le Ravissement. Already in Les Impudents, La Vie tranquille and Un Barrage, the young heroine transfers her amorous fascination for the older brother to a convenient sosie of the fraternal figure: Georges Durieux in Les Impudents, Tiène in La Vie tranquille, and Agosti in Un Barrage. In Le Marin, the theme is refined on a metaphoric level--Anna lives out with the narrator a love for the mythic sailor, a love that thus remains preserved from the contamination of the daily durée, the tranquil life. In Les Petits Chevaux, there are two such couples of three--Jacques, Sara, and Jean and Sara, Jacques, and Diana. In the same work, there are also two Durasian aphorisms which help to explain Duras' repeated use of the love-for-three relationship: "Aucun amour au monde ne peut tenir lieu de l'amour, il n'y a rien à faire" (p. 168); and "—Tout amour vécu est une dégradation de l'amour . . ." (p. 88). The Durasian protagonist often has two lovers: one rooted in the imperfection of the tranquil life and the other preserved on a symbolic level. Maria passively, vicariously experiences an idealized passion through Paestra's violent jealousy and through Claire and Pierre's sexual union, which marks her own exile and affective dispossession in Dix Heures et demie. In L'Après-midi, Mme Arc is equally enthralled by the nascent passion between her husband and Valérie, the authors of her estrangement from the tranquil life. Anne and Chauvin attempt to ressurect the fatal passion of another couple in Moderato, which is a similar situation to

Lol's in Le Ravissement. Lol's disquieting lack of suffering upon losing Michael Richardson is explained by this confidence ten years after the ball: "—Je n'ai plus aimé mon fiancé dès que la femme est entrée" (p. 159). Lol's loss of center was thus not occasioned by grief for her stolen fiancé but by her abandonment when she cannot follow the couple and witness their union (p. 121). Lol prefers to contemplate vicariously an enactment of idealized passion without contaminating its purity by directly experiencing it. The enchanted couple of Michael Richardson and Anne-Marie Stretter has acquired a force of religious or mythic proportions in Lol's vision of it. She confuses herself with Tatiana in making love to Jacques (p. 219). The narrator on several occasions wonders who or what he is in Lol's eyes: "Je ne comprends pas qui est à ma place" (p. 160). When Lol and Jacques are together, the mythic couple is ressurected, not only in Lol's mind, but also in the consciousness of the sympathetic narrator:

> Au moment où mes mains se posent sur Lol le souvenir d'un mort inconnu me revient: il va servir l'éternel Richardson, l'homme de T. Beach, on se mélangera à lui, pêle-mêle tout ça ne va faire qu'un, on ne va plus reconnaître qui de qui, ni avant, ni après, ni pendant, on va se perdre de vue, de nom, mourir ainsi d'avoir oublié morceau par morceau, temps par temps, nom par nom, la mort. Des chemins s'ouvrent. Sa bouche s'ouvre sur la mienne. (pp. 131-132)

The heroine has recaptured her moment of rapture and, in so doing, has once again sacrificed her sanity. Lol's vicarious, triangular perception of the Eros-Thanatos dichotomy has attained a plenitude in Le Ravissement, a culmination of a love-for-three syndrome which has its origins in the sexual preferences of Duras' first heroines.

The secondary characters exist only in as much as they have a role in the exposition of Lol's obsessions. Jacques Hold's sensitive perception and interpretation of Lol's lunacy are essential to the novel, but, apart from the structural necessity of the narrator's role, Jacques does not stand out as an automonous protagonist who is of interest when not occupied as the heroine's mediator to the rational world. The perfect complicity between Jacques and Lol is exemplified in the following passage in which the narrator eavesdrops on Lol and Tatiana's conversation in the subdued clamor of a summer evening:

> Tatiana ne s'aperçoit de rien. Elle fait quelques pas vers Tatiana, elle revient, elle l'enlace légèrement et, insensiblement, elle l'amène à la porte-fenêtre qui donne sur le parc. Elle l'ouvre. J'ai compris. J'avance le long du mur. Voilà. Je me tiens à l'angle de la maison. Ainsi je les entends. Tout à coup, voici leurs voix entrelacés, tendres, dans la dilution nocturne, d'une féminité rejointe en moi: Je les entends. C'est ce que Lol désirait. (p. 107)

This relationship between a narrator and the heroine is not limited to Le Ravissement. Jacques Hold is to Lol what the narrator of Le Marin was to Anna. Moreover, although he was not the narrator of Moderato, Chauvin occupies a similar role in Anne Desbaresdes's changing view of reality to that of Jacques Hold in Lol's psychological adventure. Jean Bedford, Lol's husband and link to the tranquil life, is peripheral to the narrative; his exercises on the violin, however, give Le Ravissement a musical metaphor (frénésie monotone) which ties this work to both Moderato cantabile and La Vie tranquille.

The striking figures of Michael Richardson and especially that of Anne-Marie Stretter have only a symbolic interest in Le Ravissement, like that of the sailor in Le Marin. As protagonists, they are developed in the sequel to the present work, Le Vice-consul. Anne-Marie

Stretter, the figure of the femme fatale, embodies the Eros-Thanatos dichotomy. Her presence is signaled by an unusual metaphor similar to the one used to evoke Nicolas's cadavre in La Vie tranquille (p. 112): "Lol, frappée d'immobilité, avait regardé s'avancer, comme lui, cette grace abondonnée, ployante, d'oiseau mort" (p. 14).

Tatiana Karl, the narrator's other lover and Lol's childhood friend, retains the reader's interest as an independent character more than the other secondary figures. She, like Lol, witnessed the fateful ball. The erotic rapt of Michael Richardson has also touched her life. Although she has kept her sanity, she is marked by the same vision of an all-consuming passion. Fearful of any overwhelming or transcending love, she has tried to limit herself to purely sensual relationships. Differing in temperament from her childhood friend, Tatiana's voluptuous, expansive nature marks a sharp contrast to Lol's self-effacement. Tatiana, whose name recalls Anna of Le Marin, possesses, like the latter heroine, an erotic presence that is especially striking in her graceful gait and in the undisciplined flow of her long hair:

> Dès qu'elle se dirige vers lui, dans ce déhanchement circulaire, très lent, très doux, qui la fait à tout moment de sa marche l'objet d'une flatterie caressante, secrète, et sans fin, d'elle-même à elle-même, aussitôt vue la masse noire de cette chevelure vaporeuse et sèche sous laquelle le très petit visage triangulaire, blanc, est envahi par des yeux immenses, très clairs, d'une gravité désolée par le remords ineffable d'être porteuse de ce corps adultère, Lol s'avoue avoir reconnu Tatiana Karl. (p. 67)

Again in the following passage Tatiana's flagrant sexuality is flaunted in her every gesture. In the absence of Anne-Marie Stretter, it is easy to understand Lol's choice of Tatiana as the substitute for the femme fatale of T. Beach:

> Qu'elle se déplace, se relève, ajuste sa coiffure, s'asseye, son mouvement est charnel. Son corps de fille, sa plaie, sa calamité bienheureuse, il crie, il appelle le paradis perdu de son unité, il appelle sans cesse, désormais qu'on le console, il n'est entier que dans un lit d'hôtel. (p. 19)

Le Ravissement is, as the narrator indicates, "le soliloque d'une passion absolue dont le sens échappait" (p. 37). Lol's hermetic soliloquy, translated by the empathic narrator, evokes the pathological effects of an absolute passion in the manner of Andre Breton's L'Amour fou.[14] This poetic incarnation of madness subtly draws the reader into the intricate, neo-Proustian byways intimately explored by an alienated, feminine psyche.[15] Lol V. Stein evokes a contradictory reality, at once familiar and estranged. Her interior thoughts remain a mystery. Even for the enamored and complicitous Jacques Hold, Lol is as much an unknowable abyss as she is a kindred, fraternal spirit:

> Et durant le voyage toute la journée cette situation est restée inchangée, elle a été à côté de moi séparée de moi, gouffre et soeur. Puisque je sais—ai-je jamais su à ce point quelque chose?—qu'elle m'est inconnaissable, on ne peut pas être plus près d'un être humain que je le suis d'elle, plus près d'elle qu'elle-même si constamment envolée de sa vie vivante. (p. 192)

Lol's psychotic estrangement is poetically evoked in the familiar metaphors of the forest and the meridonal rays of the sun (the encroachment of madness in L'Après-midi): "la bête séparée de la forêt dort, elle rêve de l'équateur de la naissance, dans un frémissement, son rêve solaire pleure" (p. 136).

The impotence of words to express Lol's transcendent reality is echoed in the following description by the narrator of the heroine's

metaphoric rhetoric. In order to express the redemptive intervention of madness into the tranquil life, a cultivated agraphia, reminiscent of Mallarmé's "page blanche," begins to break apart Duras' syntax:[16]

> L'intensité de la phrase augmente tout à coup, l'air a claqué autour d'elle, la phrase éclate, elle crève le sens. Je l'entends avec une force assourdissante et je ne la comprends pas, je ne comprends même plus qu'elle ne veut rien dire. (p. 135)

Other stylistic devices already reflect the shift in the form to that of the true antinovels to come, such as Détruire, dit-elle, Abahn Sabana David, and L'Amour. The use of the ellipsis without any accompanying punctuation gives a graphic, visual manifestation of the confusion and discontinuity of the heroine's speech: "—Tu écoutes toujours?/ —Presque toujours. Surtout quand je" (p. 109). This same practice is repeated throughout the novel (pages 109, 182, 196, 197, 203, 215). Lol's ineffable attraction to the mystery of the consuming passion associated with the symbolic couple is equated with the absence of any conventional vocable to express it. Once again Duras is approaching the linguistic impasse of certain Symbolist poets such as Rimbaud and Mallarmé:

> Lol ne va pas plus loin dans l'inconnu sur lequel s'ouvre cet instant. . . . Mais ce qu'elle croit, c'est qu'elle devait y pénétrer, que c'était ce qu'il lui fallait faire, pour sa tête et pour son corps, leur plus grande douleur et leur plus grande joie confondues jusque dans leur définition devenue unique mais innommable faute d'un mot. J'aime à croire, comme je l'aime, que si Lol est silencieuse dans la vie c'est qu'elle a cru, l'espace d'un éclair, que ce mot pouvait exister. Faute de son existence, elle se tait. C'aurait été un mot absence, un mot-trou, creusé en son centre d'un trou, de ce trou ou tous les autres mots auraient été enterrés. On n'aurait pas pu le dire mais on aurait pu le faire résonner. Immense, sans fin, un gong vide, il aurait retenu ceux qui voulaient partir, il les aurait convaincus de l'impossible, il les

> aurait assourdis à tout autre vocable que lui-même, en une fois il les aurait nommés, eux, l'avenir et l'instant. Manquant, ce mot, il gâche tous les autres, les contamine, c'est aussi le chien mort de la plage en plein midi, ce trou de chair. (pp. 53-54)

The schizophrenic dissolution of personality is reflected stylistically in the abrupt change from first to third person by the narrator, lost in an onanistic anticipation of the simultaneous presence of his two mistresses, Lol and Tatiana. This same stylistic device was first employed in La Vie tranquille by Françou at the seaside hotel at T... (p. 121), a scene written just over twenty years before that of Lol's pilgrimage to T. Beach.

> Je ne sais que faire. Je vais à la fenêtre, oui, elle dort. Elle vient là pour dormir. Dors. Je repars, je m'allonge encore. Je me caresse. Il parle à Lol V. Stein perdue pour toujours, il la console d'un malheur inexistant et qu'elle ignore. Il passe ainsi le temps. L'oubli vient. Il appelle Tatiana, lui demande de l'aider. (p. 187)

Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein is thus the culmination of the breaks with Françou's tranquil life portrayed in the ravishment novels (Moderato, Dix heures et demie, L'Après-midi). It is also the work which introduces the psychotic protagonist. Lol V. Stein, as well as Anne-Marie Stretter, appears in subsequent works: Le Vice-consul, L'Amour, La Femme du Gange, India Song, Son Nom de Venise dans Calcutta désert. The two heroines are the product of a long evolution beginning with La Vie tranquille and Un Barrage. Both characters can be seen as the embodiment of an all-consuming passion. Jacques Hold on one occasion describes Lol in this manner: "Je vois tout. Je vois l'amour même" (p. 123). Le Ravissement constitutes a kind of psychological striptease; it portrays an erotic dimension in which the ultimate folds of the heroine's

psyche remain veiled in mystery. Lol's vision is only partially shared with the narrator and his readers; the heroine's unique view of reality is unspoiled by either the normal community of experience or by the myopia of rational, nosologic explanations:

> La folie donc, chez Duras, détruit cette vaniteuse confiance de l'homme, assuré par sa pensée d'habiter le seul monde possible.
>
> Son éloge de la folie . . . remet en question l'homme lui-même. La folie tend le miroir de son image dérisoire. Elle est le point d'aboutissement, rêve de Duras.[17]

The poetized lure of Lol's demented charms excites both fear and fascination in the rational observer. The diminished yet intensified role acted out by the Durasian hero is captured in the following definition of Lol's identity: "Elle n'est pas Dieu, elle n'est personne" (p. 53).

Le Vice-consul, published in 1966,[18] is, in a pure, restrictive sense, the last novel of Marguerite Duras to date. The subsequent works that can still be considered novels are in the main either adaptations of the author's plays or, especially, fictional, prose versions of her increasingly exclusive activity in making films. Le Vice-consul itself evantually serves as a source for the two films India Song (1973) and Son Nom de Venise dans Calcutta desert (1976), just as Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein (1964) and L'Amour (1971) are cimeamatographically reprised and modified in the 1973 film La Femme du Gange.

The protagonists of Le Vice-consul embody the same alienation and irrational response to the human experience as the heroine of Le Ravissement; they connote, however, an increasingly symbolic significance. The presence of Anne-Marie Stretter in both novels signals a continuity between the two works. Le Vice-consul is an essential link

in the evolution of Duras' heroes. The original capitulation to the life force represented by Françou in La Vie tranquille, subsequently rejected by the mad rapture of Anne Desbaresdes in Moderato and by Lol V. Stein in the preceding novel, is once more put into question in the present work, which constitutes a re-examination of the Eros-Thanatos dichotomy that characterizes the author's approach to reality in all the novels. The reconciliation of the incompatible compromises that constitute Freud's reality principle and Duras' tranquil life (Eros) is abortive, and the stage is set for a destructive regression to a primordial psychological and social chaos (Thanatos and the pleasure principle). Anne-Marie Stretter and the vice-consul symbolically prepare the way for the destructive madness of Détruire, dit-elle.

From the point of view of characterization, the heroine and hero of Le Vice-consul, although shadowy and veiled figures typical of the new-wave novel,[19] retain enough of their human identity and verisimilitude to maintain a close relationship with their more traditionally-drawn predecessors. But the emergence of the full-blown antiheroes of Détruire, dit-elle and L'Amour have come closer.

The plot of Le Vice-consul occupies only three or four days in and around the French Embassy at Calcutta just prior to the summer monsoon season sometime during the nineteen thirties. Through a third-person narrator and through the novel's many dialogues, the reader becomes relatively well-acquainted with the lives of the three principal figures: an insane, bald beggar-woman from Cambodia; Anne-Marie Stretter, the beautiful wife of the French Ambassador; and the vice-consul from Lahore, who gives the novel its name. The story of the Cambodian girl,

expelled from her home because she was pregnant and because there was no food for her or the unborn child, is inserted into the main story in the form of chapters from a novel that Peter Morgan, one of the young Englishmen who form an entourage around the ambassadress, is writing. These chapters explain the presence in Calcutta of the unnerving figure whose native song reveals her distant origins. According to Peter Morgan's narrative, the mad beggar-woman has suffered from famine and the elements during ten years of wandering on foot across thousands of kilometers before arriving in Calcutta. Anne-Marie Stretter is the social head of the wealthy Europeans living in Calcutta. Outwardly, an exemplary wife and mother of two lovely daughters, the ambassadress has mysteriously surrounded herself by a select group of intimates, English admirers who are perhaps also her lovers: George Crawn, Peter Morgan, Michael Richard, and the newcomer, Charles Rossett, who has only recently arrived in Calcutta and from whose viewpoint much of the action takes place. The French vice-consul, Jean-Marc de H., has recently been relieved of his post at Lahore for having shot a gun in the direction of the Shalimar gardens, inhabited by lepers and wild dogs. He has been temporarily assigned to Calcutta where the mystery of his apparently gratuitous, murderous gesture is being investigated. He is an estranged figure, a laconic loner, reputed to be a virgin. During a ball given by Mme Stretter at the Embassy, which constitutes the novel's principal episode, the vice-consul, enamored of the ambassadress and emboldened by his inebriated state, entreats his hostess to admit him into her circle of intimates. She rejects the vice-consul, who becomes hysterically enraged and must be forcibly removed from the ball. The next day, Mme Stretter and the English gentlemen go on a weekend excursion to an

island of the Delta, where they reflect on the vice-consul's apparent madness.

Le Vice-consul reunites many of the themes of the past novels in a unique synthesis that refines the latent symbolism inherent in Duras' characterizations and fictional situations from the very beginning. The Asian setting recalls Un Barrage and Le Boa. The ball, the meeting-place of the Durasian heroes and heroines in many of the novels (Le Marin, Le Square, Les Petits Chevaux, Le Ravissement) is the longest and most significant scene in the novel. Although this theme was important in past works, essential in Le Ravissement, it has never before occupied such a lengthy, pivotal place in the development of a novel. As in Moderato and Dix heures et demie, the action takes place in the aftermath of an aberrational manifestation of violence. The devastating heat of the Indian summer recalls the torrid, meridional beaches of the holiday novels. The primordial importance of a delta in the author's symbolism, first elucidated in Le Marin and reprised in the setting of Les Petits Chevaux, is the cadre for the final scene of Le Vice-consul. The attention to a musical structure and to a specific musical theme is reminiscent of Moderato (the sonatina of Diabelli). In fact, musical compositions have often hauntingly accompanied certain characters, like "Ramona" for the brother and sister of Un Barrage and "Blue Moon" for the vacationers in Les Petits Chevaux. In Le Vice-consul, each protagonist is associated with a musical composition: the beggar-woman, her native chant; the vice-consul, "Indiana's Song"; and Anne-Marie Stretter, the musical phrase from Schubert. Each musical theme is harmoniously interwoven into the narrative, often announcing the presence of the protagonist it accompanies. The author's interest in the habitat of her

protagonists is shown in the description of the vice-consul's abandoned home in Neuilly; Duras' preference for hotels, encountered in Les Petits Chevaux and in Les Chantiers, is reflected in the presence of the grandiose Prince of Wales, the hotel near the delta where Anne-Marie and her soupirants go on holiday.

The three main characters of the novel re-create and combine characteristics of past heroes and heroines through sensitively-drawn impressionistic portraits.[20] Anne-Marie Stretter imbues with her erotic presence all that surrounds her. She is at once an incarnation of Eros and the life force and of the malific temptress, the femme fatale. Her fictional ancestors include Lina in Un Barrage and Anna in Le Marin. The psychologically ravished vice-consul is an embodiment of the irrational hero, a male counterpart to Lol V. Stein in Le Ravissement. More than that, he is made to symbolize destruction and death. The mad beggar-woman complements the spiritual dispossession and death of the vice-consul in her disfigured, terrifyingly repulsive physical appearance. Together they announce the imminent destruction of the social order that created them.

By virtue of the novel's title, the vice-consul is the character worthy of primary consideration. His portrait is at once that of a character of flesh and blood and that of a symbolic harbinger of death and destruction. Tall and thin, the vice-consul's awkward gait and unsociable manner attest to his de trop status. His hissing, high-pitched voice gives his speech an impersonal, mechanical tone that connotes an air of irreality and inhumanity as does his forced laughter, which Duras compares to the out-of-sync laughter in a badly dubbed film (p. 113). He is an only child now orphaned; he recounts his father's

death with an unnatural lack of emotion (p. 87). Jean-Marc de H. is a schizoid loner and a self-proclaimed virgin in his mid-thirties. His only living relative is an aged aunt who writes him from Paris. As the schizophrenic protagonist of the previous novel, the vice-consul is living the aftermath of a psychotic episode, his indiscriminate firing on the lepers of Lahore. Like Lol, the vice-consul's behavior is the object of an indiscreet surveillance which vainly attempts to give a reason which could explain his madness. He, also like the heroine of the preceding novel, is the victim of an inappropriate affect; both characters nurture a repressed passion whose expression is meticulously postponed:

> Le vice-consul a par instants l'air d'être très heureux. Il est comme s'il était fou de bonheur, par instants. On ne peut pas ce soir éviter sa compagnie; est-ce pour cela? Comme c'est étrange cet air qu'il a ce soir. De quelle pâleur est-il... comme s'il était sous le coup d'une émotion intense mais dont l'expression serait toujours différée, pourquoi? (p. 99)

The narrator's questions that often appear in the text show the increased psychological distance between the author and her heroines, a technique which also reduces the empathy and understanding between the character and the reader. The vice-consul preserves sufficient verisimilitude as a hero to seem real, but his act and its motivation remain clouded. Yet so do people and situations which are perceived in everyday life. Certainly the satisfying explanations of the traditional novel have disappeared. The shrinking hero is, however, still visible; the true antiheroes of Détruire, dit-elle and L'Amour do not appear in Le Vice-consul. Jean Marc de H. has just enough substance to retain the reader's interest in him as a human being, yet he remains sufficiently

shrouded in mystery to form a stylized silhouette of symbolic import. During the ball, under the vice-consul's disquieting gaze, Charles Rossett asks Anne-Marie Stretter how one can communicate with the estranged diplomat, and she answers that one cannot decipher his essence in human, psychological terms, nor should one try:

> —Vous lui avez parlé, ça a dû lui faire du bien. Moi, c'est terrible, je ne peux pas le supporter du tout...
> —Ce n'est pas la peine d'essayer, je crois.
> Du buffet, il les regarde. Il est seul.
> —Ce ne servirait à rien que nous en parlions, reprend-elle, c'est très difficile, c'est impossible aussi. . . .
> —Il est la catastrophe?
> —Oui. C'est une image classique sans doute mais sûre. Il n'est pas nécessaire de chercher davantage. (p. 129)

The symbolic import of the hero is intimately linked to the geographical setting, to the evolution of the past heroes, and to the complementary roles of the other figures in the novel. The vice-consul's two habitats--his absence from the empty, abandoned family home in Neuilly and his unwanted presence in the steamy, oppressive hotel room in Calcutta--engulf the very antipodes of human and physical geography. Calcutta is contradictory according to Charles Rossett (p. 43), the European freshly arrived in India with whom the reader tends to identify; it is a privileged place in that it represents geographically the author's antithetical view of reality. The oppressive heat and humidity give rise to an atmospheric opacity reminiscent of the holiday novels; it is vividly captured in the metaphor of the following passage. Moreover, the delta, whose significance for Duras as a symbol of sexuality was first expressed in such early novels as Le Marin and Les Petits Chevaux, reappears in this work which may signal an end to civilized society:

> La chaleur suffoque déjà. Vers la delta le ciel est si épais que des coups de canons dedans en feraient jaillir de l'huile, pas de vent, les orages privent Calcutta du bonheur que serait ce matin un souffle d'air. Et voici les pèlerins au loin, déjà et encore, les lépreux qui surgissent de la lèpre, hilares, dans leur sempiternelle agonie. (p. 167)

The setting of Le Vice-consul, like that of L'Après-midi de M. Andesmas, is bathed in an aura of crepuscular waiting, evoked in the melodic, three-part image that concludes the description of the vice-consul's view of Calcutta from his hotel balcony: "Le vice-consul à Lahore regarde Calcutta . . . . ceci qui est Calcutta ou Lahore, palmes, lèpre et lumière crépusculaire" (p. 32).

As with the psychotic episodes of Lol V. Stein, there exist no words to explain the vice-consul's violent fugue in Lahore. The following exchange takes place during the ball between the diplomat and his hostess, Anne-Marie Stretter, who asks:

> —Pourquoi me parlez-vous de la lèpre?
> —Parce que j'ai l'impression que si j'essayais de vous dire ce que j'aimerais arriver à vous dire, tout s'en irait en poussière...—il tremble—, les mots pour vous dire, à vous, les mots... de moi... pour vous dire à vous, ils n'existent pas. (p. 125)

And the vice-consul, unlike Lol V. Stein, whose alienation was lovingly communicated and comtemplated by Jacques Hold, has no sympathetic link or mediator to the rational mode of perceiving reality. The uncomprehending, alcoholic director of the social club for Europeans is openly helping the authorities investigate the psychological state of the diplomat. Through their many evening conversations, the director is the vice-consul's only willing interlocutor. In one of these conversations, the vice-consul speaks of the one phenomenon that fascinates all of Duras' protagonists, love:

> —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.
>
> —On prend quelque chose, poursuit le vice-consul, on le pose en principe devant soi et on lui donne son amour. Une femme serait la chose la plus simple. . . .
>
> —Une femme serait la chose la plus simple, reprend le vice-consul. C'est une chose que je viens de découvrir. Je n'ai jamais éprouve d'amour, vous ai-je raconté?. . . .
>
> —Je suis vierge, poursuit le vice-consul.
>
> Le directeur sort de l'assoupissement alcoolique et regarde le vice-consul.
>
> —Je me suis efforcé d'aimer à plusieurs reprises des personnes différentes, mais je ne suis jamais parvenu au bout de mon effort. . . .
>
> —Je suis sorti de cet effort, poursuit le vice-consul. Depuis quelques semaines. (pp. 76-77)

This break with the hope of love has thus coincided with the vice-consul's violent, destructive interlude. The impotence of the blunted affect to potentialize an ideal object of love has tortured the Durasian hero from Françou to Lol V. Stein and the vice-consul. This realization was first clearly articulated in Les Petits Chevaux: "Aucun amour au monde ne peut tenir lieu de l'amour . . ." (p. 168); it precipitated the psychological ravishment of such heroines as Anne Desbaresdes and Lol V. Stein, who both opted for a vicarious alternative to the active compromises inherent in living out the tranquil life by interiorizing and personalizing their affective associations to a degree that can only be categorized as psychotic, at least in the case of the latter heroine. The vice-consul, the masculine counterpart to the psychologically ravished heroines, typically expresses his alienation in a violent explosion, as opposed to the equally devastating psychic implosion of the psychotic heroine. The vice-consul's symbolic virginity connotes the same destruction as did the virginity of Mlle Barbet in Le Boa, except that the violence of the male virgin reaches out instead of turning

inward. In both the vice-consul and Mlle Barbet, the ominous figure of Thanatos is incarnated: "Il est un peu mort, le vice-consul de Lahore... vous ne trouvez pas qu'il est un peu mort?" (p. 100). And with Le Vice-consul, the rejection of the tranquil life (Eros and the reality principle) begins to take on the proportions of a destruction myth (Détruire, dit-elle), an inevitable disintegration of social as well as psychological reality, an end to a civilization based on Freud's reality principle (Eros), in which the rational man postpones the immediate gratification demanded by the pleasure principle (Thanatos) for a restrained, but assured, safe pleasure (the reality principle).[21] It is clear that the vice-consul's madness has more than a psychological or even philosophical significance; the act that symbolizes his break with the reality principle suggests a disintegration of civilization itself. The aberrational event at Lahore takes on the proportions of a secular apocalypse, whose aftermath is described in works such as the ironically entitled L'Amour and Abahn Sabana David:

> On songe: Il appelait seulement la mort sur Lahore mais aucune autre malédiction d'aucune sorte qui eût témoigne que Lahore, à ses yeux, eût pu être créée donc défaite par quelque autre puissance que la mort. Et parfois, la mort lui paraissait sans doute trop, une croyance abjecte, une erreur encore, alors, il appelait sur Lahore le feu, la mer, des calamités matérielles, logiques, d'un monde exploré. (pp. 138-139)

The Embassy ball given by Anne-Marie Stretter and her husband the French Ambassador occupies the focal point of the narrative, as the ball at T. Beach is central to Le Ravissement. In the earlier novel, however, the ball's importance is viewed in retrospect. In Le Vice-consul, the reader actually witnesses the ball in progress, as it happens. The repeated use of such introductory, narrative phrases as "on dit," "on

demande," "on voit," allows the reader to experience the ball from the point of view of one of the many anonymous guests, who are also watching every move of the principal players. One sees the vice-consul's vain attempts to ingratiate himself with his hostess, whom he views as a redemptive figure, capable of offering a state of grace to those whom love has not touched. He sees her as a sort of secularized Virgin Mary. Within the framework of both Le Ravissement and Le Vice-consul, Anne-Marie Stretter has a double role; she is the malific femme fatale of T. Beach and at the same time the benevolent benefactress of Calcutta. She embodies both the destructive and creative aspect of the anima figure. The vice-consul evokes the ambassadress in the following remark to Charles Rossett, upon learning of the latter's invitation to remain with Mme Stretter and her intimates after the ball, an invitation that will be denied to the ex-diplomat from Lahore:

> —Vous verrez, dit le vice-consul à Charles Rossett, ici, l'ivresse est toujours pareille.
> Ils boivent. . . .
> —Mme Stretter donne envie de vivre, vous ne trouvez pas? demande le vice-consul. —Charles Rossett ne bronche pas, ne répond pas. —Vous serez reçu et sauvé du crime, inutile de nier, ajoute le vice-consul, j'ai tout entendu. (p. 138)

The complementary, symbolic roles acted out by the vice-consul and Anne-Marie Stretter contrast with the psychological reality of both protagonists in a dialogue that takes place as the extraordinary couple dances. Anne-Marie rejects totally and without compassion the person who is the vice-consul: "--Vous croyez qu'il y a quelque chose que nous pouvons faire pour moi tous les deux? Alors elle est très sûre. --Non, il n'y a rien. Vous n'avez besoin de rien" (p. 128). Yet she demonstrates a tender complicity for the vice-consul as a symbolic figure:

—Je sais qui vous êtes, dit-elle. Nous n'avons pas besoin de nous connaître davantage. Ne vous trompez pas.
—Je ne me trompe pas. . . .
C'est elle qui recommence à parler.
—C'est vrai.
—Vous êtes avec moi.
—Oui.
—En ce moment--il implore--, soyez avec moi. Qu'avez-vous dit?
—N'importe quoi.
—Nous allons nous quitter.
—Je suis avec vous.
—Oui.
—Je suis avec vous ici complètement comme avec personne d'autre, ici ce soir, aux Indes. (pp. 143-144)

At the end of the ball, the vice-consul breaks down and hysterically implores Anne-Marie Stretter to include him among her intimates and allow him to remain. The vice-consul temporarily loses his self-composure and cannot act out his solitary role as the incarnation of a myth of destruction. He falters, and like a secularized Christ-figure at his Gethsemane, he momentarily loses self-control. Drunk and weeping, the ex-diplomat must be forcibly removed from the embassy. The vice-consul has been denied the redemptive intercession of the ambassadress. Dionys Mascolo, writing about the symbolic import of India Song, the film version of Le Vice-consul, defines the complementary roles of the disenfranchized diplomat and the impassive temptress of Calcutta in this manner:

> Le vice-consul (Michel Lonsdale) est Thanatos; un appelant irrésistible. Le désir qu'il calme est celui de la jouissance absolue, inconsolable en son fond de se savoir condamné aux limites. A.-M. Stretter est la Reine, entourée de mannequins, ses amants, dont l'un, son complice, est le pivot d'un manège de désirs. . . .
> L'annonciation se fait en un dialogue d'une densité suffocante, ou chaque mot . . . détruit une dimension, en ouvre une autre. En quelques phrases l'ancien monde, celui ou l'on vivait, a sauté. Ce qu'il nous est donné de voir en ce moment, ce sont les noces mystiques de l'homme vierge de Lahore et de la reine, . . . Eros et Thanatos unis.[22]

Anne-Marie Stretter is the fictional culmination of earlier heroines--Lina in Un Barrage, Anna in Le Marin, Anne Desbaresdes in Moderato. According to Marguerite Duras, the striking figure of Madame Stretter is inspired by an actual personnage encountered by the author as a child in Southeast Asia--the wife of a colonial administrator and the mother of two daughters, yet at the same time a woman for whose love a young man has just commited suicide: "C'est cette femme qui m'a amennée à pénétrer dans le double sens des choses. A tous les points de vue. Elle m'a amennée à l'écrit peut-être. Peut-être, c'est cette femme-là."[23] Duras equates the influence of this woman with the Freudian parental model and primitive scene.[24] Anne-Marie Stretter incarnates the novelist's dichotomous approach to reality, the tranquil life which nonetheless harbors a latent violence and madness whose emergence was described in the ravishment cycle--Moderato cantabile and Le Ravissement:

> Si vous voulez, elle a incarné pour moi longtemps une sorte de double pouvoir, un pouvoir de mort et un pouvoir quotidien. Elle élevait des enfants, elle était la femme de l'administrateur général, elle jouait au tennis, elle recevait, elle se promenait, etc. Et puis elle recélait en elle ce pouvoir de mort, de prodiguer la mort, de la provoquer. Quelquefois je me dis que j'ai écrit à cause d'elle.[25]

The heroine of Le Vice-consul resembles its hero in that together they incarnate the contradictory nature of reality--the precariousness of the tranquil life and the impending danger of a destructive, psychological fugue. Their ultimate incompatibility signals a breakdown of life's necessary tensions and an imminent collapse of social as well as philosophical proportions. According to Dionys Mascolo, this destruction prepares the way for ". . . une humanité néolithique, ramenée à la vérité de ses origines, avant l'illusion, avant que ne commence le grand

errement de civilisation qui conduira à la recherche des raisons de vivre."[26] This devolution of the Durasian hero, from the rational resignation of Francou to the irrational fugue of Lol V. Stein is culminated in the symbolic figures of the vice-consul and Anne-Marie Stretter. Their irreconcilable imcompatibility announces the full-fledged anti-heroes of Détruire, dit-elle and L'Amour, in which the heroes have been purged of that part of their humanity predicated on the illusions of a rational epistemology. The hero and heroine of Le Vice-consul announce the return to the pristine state of an irrational interpretation of the human experience.

Anne-Marie Stretter is then the very essence of the Durasian hero. She vacations on an island in an Asian delta. She embodies both the tranquil life of Francou and the madness of Lol V. Stein. She is a pianist, she likes to take walks, and she plays tennis--recurring activities associated with the Durasian protagonists. Madame Stretter is a femme fatale; her erotic presence, her aristocratically fine features, her sensuously choreographed gestures and poses all recall the irresistible temptress, Anna, of Le Marin, who entices the narrator of that novel from the tranquil life, just as Anne-Marie ravished Michael Richardson from the ball at T. Beach in Le Ravissement. Moreover, Mme Stretter embodies the benevolent side of the anima figure; she represents for the estranged vice-consul a mediator to the mystery of the life force, a possibility for redemption through love. In short, this personage is Duras' "modele feminin."[27] The vice-consul puts it this way:

> Charles Rossett se trouve nez à nez avec le vice-consul qui lui dit en riant:

> —Certaines femmes rendent fou d'espoir, vous ne trouvez pas? —Il regarde vers Anne-Marie Stretter qui, une coupe de champagne à la main, écoute distraitement quelqu'un. —Celles qui ont l'air de dormir dans les eaux de la bonté sans discrimination... celles vers qui vont toutes les vagues de toutes les douleurs, ces femmes accueillantes. (p. 120)

The presence of alcohol in the vice-consul's portrait of the ambassadress is a familiar accessory. The sleepy look of the heroine, the watery metaphor through which she is perceived, and the defensive laughter of the diplomat are familiar details associated with many of the heroes. The antithetical nature of Anne-Marie Stretter's erotic role and its perverted counterpart in the person of the vice-consul are pointed out in the following commentary by a guest at the ball:

> —Je la vois passer presque tous les matins quand elle va au tennis; c'est beau les jambes de femme, ici, plantées dans cette horreur. Vous ne trouvez pas? Ne pensez plus à cet homme, le vice-consul de Lahore. (p. 101)

Both Charles Rossett and the vice-consul have the same erotic fantasy of an idealized feminacy. The former dreams near the beginning of the novel: "Nous avons rêvé d'une femme rose, rose liseuse rose, qui lirait Proust dans le vent acide d'une Manche lointaine" (p. 47). At the novel's conclusion, the vice-consul shares with his alcoholic companion at the club for Europeans his ideal woman: "—Elle lirait pendant ses couches, rose liseuse aux joues roses, Proust" (p. 211). This idealized woman can only be Anne-Marie Stretter, the literary figure whose prototype had such a profound influence on the author.

The vice-consul is not the only character who symbolizes death and insanity. The mad beggar-woman from Cambodia presents a visible, physical manifestation of the vice-consul's distorted psyche. As the protagonist

of Peter Morgan's book, it is her story which begins the novel. The alienating presence of the two outcasts are interwoven like parallel themes in a musical composition. At the moment of the vice-consul's expulsion from the embassy ball, the reader learns that the woman is lurking just outside, waiting for the leftovers habitually distributed to the poor on the instructions of Anne-Marie Stretter:

> Sous le lampadaire, grattant sa tête chauve, elle, maigreur de Calcutta pendant cette nuit grasse, elle est assise entre les fous, elle est là, la tête vide, la coeur mort, elle attend toujours la nourriture. Elle parle, raconte quelque chose que personne ne comprendrait. (p. 149)

The beggar-woman, who lives with the lepers, constitutes a striking contrast with the material opulence that surrounds the members of the diplomatic corps. There is no cosmetic veil, no social amenities, to conceal the repulsive horror of the beggar-woman's physical and mental degredation. The cultivated ugliness of certain naturalistic details supplied by Peter Morgan covering the ten years of wandering on foot from Cambodia to Calcutta recall those of sections in Un Barrage--specifically the story of the native girl who, like this Cambodian, sold her infant, who was dying of starvation, to a white woman, the mother of Suzanne and Joseph (pp. 103-105 in Un Barrage). The other physical and mental hardships endured by the wandering native girl have led to her eventual madness. Her demented presence, epitomized in her native song, pervades the entire work. She is present near the delta hotel where Anne-Marie Stretter is resting at the end of the novel. She is swimming in the river, catching and devouring live fish like a wild animal. It is her civilized counterpart, the vice-consul, who best describes her: "—La mort dans une vie en cours, dit enfin le vice-consul . . ." (p. 174).

The symbolic characters of Le Vice-consul prepare the way for the antiheroes of the most recent works. The aborted union of the vice-consul (Thanatos) and the withheld grace of the ambassadress (Eros) result in the definitive shattering of the Freudian reality principle, a secular apocalypse in which humanity is reduced to the vacuous lunacy of the beggar-woman. In the novel, the reader last sees Anne-Marie Stretter in a passive pose by the sea. In India Song, the ambassadress disappears in the sea, the victim of an apparent suicide. In both works, the resignation of the figure who represents the life force leaves behind only two survivors: the dehumanized, mindless beggar-woman and the mad harbinger of death and destruction. Duras' fictional reality has been almost reduced to the devasted beaches of S. Thala and its wraith-like figures, without substance, without the illusion of meaning that comforts the protagonists of the tranquil life, described in L'Amour. Dionys Mascolo interprets the cultivated regression and destruction announced in Le Vice-consul in this commentary on India Song, the film version of the novel:

> A l'effacement de l'individu dans le cosmos survit seul l'espèce humaine à la tête vide, celle qui «chasse dans les eaux tièdes du Delta» l'idiote chantante . . . . Mutation. Le «mystère antique» qu'est India Song, dans ce qu'il a de renversant (disant l'antiquité du moment de modernité où nous sommes), contient cet évidement, cet appel.[28]

L'Amant anglaise, published in 1967, is a novelistic version of the author's play intitled Les Viaducs de la Seine-et-Oise (1960).[29] The novel's title is significant in that the work has nothing to do with an English lover; the title is a misunderstanding, an incorrect transcription of la menthe anglaise, an example of the confused thinking of

the work's schizophrenic heroine. This misunderstanding is symptomatic of the pathologically distorted perception of the psychotic protagonists. L'Amante anglaise is the investigation of a crime through which the archetypes of the Durasian heroes are cross-examined by an investigative writer who is preparing a book about the fiendish and apparently gratuitous homicide executed by Claire Lannes, the novel's heroine. At last the parallel and often symbolic violent event that dramatized and transformed the monotonous temporal flow of the tranquil life in previous works has become the very essence of the novel. Claire Lanne's homicidal escapade is not peripheral to the durée vécue of L'Amante anglaise, as was the murder in Moderato or the vice-consul's shooting spree in that work. Claire's murderous act is the novel's one subject; the heretofore double structure composed of a tedious durée that is reflected by a dramatic manifestation of violence has become one indivisible reality.

In L'Amante anglaise, the irrationality of the psychotic protagonist is viewed from a rational vantage point for the last time. Through the anonymous interrogator, Duras questions her mad heroine from a rational point of view. In Détruire, dit-elle and other subsequent works, the author abandons this intermediary pose of a sane interpretor of insane figures, a transition in which Duras exchanges a complicity with most of her readers for an increasingly personal and subjective rapport with her characters. After L'Amante anglaise, the irrationality of the content is reflected to a greater degree in a progressively incoherent style. In this critical phase, Duras' novels become antinovels, her heroes antiheroes. After L'Amante anglaise, the break with the tranquil life, announced in Moderato and Le Vice-consul, is definitively

realized, and Duras acquiesces to an epistemology of madness, which has been dormant, gestating, since Françou's provisional compromise to an outer reality incompatible with her inner nature.

L'Amante anglaise takes the form of three interviews conducted by an unnamed author with the principals involved in the investigation of a heinous crime: Robert Lamy, proprietor of the local bar, Pierre Lannes, and Claire Lannes. The interviews take place several weeks after the crime and the subsequent arrest of Claire. Pierre and Claire are a middle-class married couple in their fifties who have lived in Viorne for the last twenty-eight years. Marie-Thérèse, Claire's deaf-mute, unmarried cousin, has lived with them for over twenty years as a housekeeper and cook. Alfonso is an Italian farm laborer, a bachelor, who is a friend of the Lannes. At the beginning of the novel, during the interview with Robert Lamy, the reader learns that Claire has murdered her cousin, Marie-Thérèse. In order to keep her crime a secret from everyone, including her husband Pierre, Claire has cut Marie-Thérèse's body into pieces each night in the basement of the house and has discarded these remains from atop a neighboring viaduct onto different trains as they passed in the night. A cross-checking of train routes has enabled the police to determine that Viorne is the site of intersection from which the dismembered corpse originated. Claire's explanation of her cousin's absence (a trip to Cahors, their hometown) has been disproven. These separate interviews conducted after the event in question are an effort to understand Claire's motivation in the apparently gratuitous and brutal homicide of Marie-Thérèse.

L'Amante anglaise is the last novel with heroes who have sufficient depth and identity to be considered by a reader as fellow human beings,

be they sane or insane. After this work, fragmented antiheroes and mythic figures veiled in a dehumanizing oneirism replace the already diminished, semi-stylized portraits of the psychotic protagonists. As Robert Lamy recounts Claire's confession in his bar, the interviewer-author plays for him a tape recorded by an undercover detective during the evening in question. The barman is to comment as the tape is played. In the following dialogue between the interviewer and Robert Lamy, the increasing demands made on the reader's creativity as novels shrink into antinovels are explicitly stated. For the first time in Duras' novels, the reader is directly called upon to help in the making of the book as Robert Lamy is asked to perform the life-giving _trucage_ executed by the author in traditional novels:

> —Il y a le double de la bande enregistré à votre insu au Balto pendant la soirée du 13 avril. Cette bande rapporte fidèlement tous les propos tenus au Balto pendant cette soirée mais elle est aveugle et on ne voit rien à travers ce qu'elle dit. C'est donc vous qui devez mettre le livre en marche. Quand la soirée du 13 avril aura pris, grâce à votre récit, son volume, son espace propres, on pourra laisser la bande réciter sa mémoire et le lecteur vous remplacera dans sa lecture.
>
> —La différence entre ce que je sais et ce que je dirai, qu'en faites-vous?
>
> —Elle représente la part du livre à faire par le lecteur. Elle existe toujours. (pp. 9-10)

L'Amante anglaise reassembles for a last encounter the familiar characters whose complementary roles have re-enacted throughout the novels the entire drama of the human experience. The novel's unusual format permits a unique situation in the evolution of Duras' heroes—an opportunity to witness an interrogation of three protagonists, who together incarnate both the tranquil life and its psychotic alternative. The reader receives for the first time a direct account of the heretofore

hermetically closed realities of the psychotic hero. Claire speaks for herself, about herself, in a direct manner which was not provided for the protagonists of Le Ravissement and Le Vice-consul. In Claire, both the dormant phase (Lol V. Stein) and the violent explosion (the vice-consul) of the psychotic protagonist are explored. L'Amante anglaise constitutes the final reunion of the Durasian heroes before they are completely stripped of verisimilitude to reappear as the anitheroes of the oneiric narratives which follow.

The heroes of L'Amante anglaise constitute a final synthesis of the obsessions and situations already lived out in the previous novels. As in Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein and Le Vice-consul, all the characters are centered around and serve to highlight the deranged protagonist. Claire is this terminal heroine, the ultimate descendent of the irreconcilable contradictions first embodied in Françou and La Vie tranquille. Like Anna of Le Marin, Claire's life has been indelibly marked by an early love affair that was too intense. Like Lol V. Stein, Claire's psychosis lies dormant for many years. Like Mme Dodin and the mother in Des Journées, Claire detests those who have sucessfully adjusted to the demands of society. Pierre, Claire's husband, is somehow fascinated by the girlish eccentricities and the inappropriate affect of his wife, as Jean Bedford was drawn to Lol's quiet lunacy in Le Ravissement. Claire's early lover, the policeman from Cahors, bears an uncanny resemblance to the sailor from Gibraltar. Cahors, Claire's native city, phonétically and symbolically echoes Lahore, the city of the vice-consul's break with the reality principle, epitomized in his indiscriminate firing on the lepers. Alfonso, Claire's admirer and kindred spirit in Viorne, is a bachelor reminiscent of Lol's enamored accomplice, Jacques Hold. Alfonso

also inherits characteristics from the street sweeper in Mme Dodin, the old son of Des Journées, the itinerant salesman in Le Square, and the brother figures of the coming-of-age novels. Marie-Thérèse, a deaf-mute, is an envious onlooker of those who have attained the tranquil life. She wants nothing more than to belong to the self-satisfied bourgeoisie. By her industriousness and her taste for normalcy, she recalls Jacqueline of Le Marin and the maid in Le Square. By her sexual promiscuity, she suggests the impudent maid in Les Petits Chevaux. This lover of the unexamined life and of the triumph of bourgeois values is ideally suited to the tranquil life; she is also Claire's victim. Robert Lamy, the friend of all the characters in the novel, quite appropriately is the proprietor of a local bar, that priviliged place of Duras' novels, the oasis for all the alcoholic heroes and heroines.

Claire's characterization deserves special attention as she is the last heroine of the last novel. The fragmented antiheroes who follow no longer provide the illusions of a commonly shared reality between reader and author. Claire is therefore the last Durasian heroine to possess an integrated, recognizable personality. Characterization based on a rationally conceived presentation of attitudes and actions, sane or insane, no longer exists after L'Amante anglaise.

Claire shares with many of the past heroines a taste for taking long walks and for going to the cinema. Like Lol V. Stein, she is driven by a compulsion to keep her personal possessions in perfect order. Claire also shares with the girl from T. Beach a love for her garden, where she spends much of her time in a deep contemplation of her own distorted reality, a psychic life which she can share with no one.

In the following response to the interviewer's question, Claire describes her ontologically convoluted thoughts in the garden:

> —Ces pensées avaient trait à quoi? à votre vie?
> —A ma vie, elles n'auraient fait se retourner personne. Non, elles avaient trait à bien d'autres choses que moi et mon entourage. Les autres auraient pu les avoir et s'en servir. J'ai eu des pensées sur le bonheur, sur les plantes en hiver, certaines plantes, certaines choses, la nourriture, la politique, l'eau, sur l'eau, les lacs froids, les fonds des lacs, les lacs du fond des lacs, sur l'eau qui boit qui prend qui se ferme, sur cette chose-là, l'eau, beaucoup, sur les bêtes qui se traînent sans répit, sans mains, sur ce qui va et vient, beaucoup aussi, sur la pensée de Cahors quand j'y pense, et quand je n'y pense pas, sur la télévision qui se mélange avec le reste, une histoire montée sur une autre montée sur une autre, sur le grouillement, beaucoup, grouillement sur grouillement, résultat: grouillement et cetera, ... (pp. 161-162)

Claire explains poignantly this alienated psychic life to which she is prey:

> —Vous auriez aimé que les autres connaissent les pensées que vous aviez dans le jardin?
> —Oui.
> J'aurais désiré prévenir les autres, qu'ils le sachent que j'avais des réponses pour eux. Mais comment? Je n'étais pas assez intelligente pour l'intelligence que j'avais et dire cette intelligence que j'avais, je n'aurais pas pu. (pp. 162-163)

Claire's manner of perceiving her surroundings is distorted. She finds Marie-Thérèse too fat for the house: "Elle était très grosse et les pièces sont petites. Je trouvais qu'elle était trop grosse pour la maison" (p. 150). Pierre fares no better in his wife's eyes, for the house is also the criterion from which she measures her husband's proportions: "Mon mari est comme un échalas et lui, moi, je le trouvais trop grand, trop haut pour la maison et quelquefois j'allais dans le jardin pour ne pas le voir, lui se balader sous les plafonds" (p. 150). Claire

also imagines violent events that occur in Vierne which are to become scenes in Abahn Sabana David and L'Amour:

> Si je sortais dans Vierne la nuit c'est que je croyais qu'il se passait des choses et que je devais aller les vérifier.
>
> Je croyais qu'on battait des gens à mort dans des caves. Une nuit il y a eu des commencements d'incendie partout, heureusement la pluie est venue et les a éteints.
>
> —Qui battait qui?
>
> —La police battaient des étrangers dans les caves de Vierne, ou d'autres gens. Ils repartirent au petit jour.
>
> —Vous les avez vus?
>
> —Non. Dès que je venais, ça cessait. (p. 182)

To Claire, people who have mindlessly embraced the human condition are an anathema. The physical and psychological well-being of Marie-Thérèse, despite her infirmity, is particularly offensive to Claire: "Je dis que j'ai un caractère à ne pas supporter que les gens mangent et dorment bien. C'est tout. C'aurait été une autre qui aurait dormi ou mangé comme elle je ne l'aurais pas supporté mieux" (p. 148). The indefatigable maid in Le Square is the perfect example of one who tenaciously aspires to the bourgeois values that Claire despises. Claire's attitude recalls the narrator's repulsion before Jacqueline's vitality and mindless joie de vivre in Le Marin--but the narrator only deserts his mistress; he does not kill her.

Nonetheless, Claire is unable to give a reason for the murder of Maire-Thérèse. She tells the interviewer that for her to find the answer it is necessary that he find the right question. They agree that whatever the real motivation may be, it is Claire's insanity that will be blamed for her homicidal act. Claire classfies all those who live the tranquil life without difficulty and who fit in naturally with middle-class values as being de l'autre côté. Claire describes her deaf and dumb victim as being a potential queen of the other side:

—Marie-Thérèse Bousquet était-elle "de l'autre côté"?
—A cause de son infirmité, non, elle n'y était pas, mais si elle avait été normale c'aurait été elle la reine de l'autre côté. Retenez bien ce que je viens de vous dire: la reine. Elle les dévorait des yeux quand ils passaient sur les trottoirs pour aller à la messe. Ils lui souriaient à elle, donc voyez. A moi, jamais personne ne m'a souri, ils s'en sont toujours gardés.
Elle était sourde et muette, c'était une énorme masse de viande sourde mais quelquefois des cris sortaient de son corps, ils ne venaient pas de sa gorge mais de sa poitrine. (p. 177)

If Claire murdered Marie-Thérèse in part because the latter incarnated so aptly the repulsiveness of normalcy, there is still another reason that could have played a part in bringing Claire's latent violence to the surface. Alfonso, Claire's one real friend, had sexual relations from time to time with Marie-Thérèse. Typically, Durasian heroines are devoid of jealousy, yet it seems that this emotion is present in Claire's description of the night of the crime:

Ecoutez-moi: la nuit du crime elle poussait ses cris et je croyais qu'elle m'empêchait de dormir. Je me suis demandé si Alfonso n'était pas dans les parages à lui faire plaisir. Vous comprenez, Alfonso, il lui faut encore des femmes. La différence d'age elle a toujours existé entre nous. Jamais elle n'a diminué. Alors je me suis demandé s'il n'était pas rabattu sur Maire-Thérèse Bousquet. Elle est ma cousine, elle est de mon sang. Le nom final etait le même, Cahors derrière, et on mangeait les mêmes aliments sous le même toit, et elle était sourde et muette.
Je suis descendue. Alfonso n'était pas là.
Maintenant je me tais là-dessus. (pp. 185-186)

Of course, nothing completely explains Claire's act in rational terms. Like the murderous shots fired by the vice-consul, Claire's act defies any sane justification. Thus the irrational act of defiance remains inviolate, unadulterated by rational explanations. It would seem that <u>la folie a ses raisons que la raison ne connaît point.</u>

Claire considers Alfonso the one person who, like her, is not on the other side (de l'autre côté). He is an outsider, like the vendor in Le Square or the aging gigolo in Des Journées--a descendent of the brothers in the coming-of-age novels. He reminds her of the perfect love she knew in Cahors. When asked if she thought often about Alfonso, she answers with a portrait worthy of a mother's love: "—Oui, beaucoup, beaucoup parce qu'il est sans limites le coeur ouvert, les mains ouvertes, la cabine vide, la valise vide et personne pour voir qu'il est ideal" (p. 162). Moreover, Alfonso lives in the forest, the mysterious, primordial site of madness,[30] of a prehistory in which man had not yet conceived the illusions created by imposing a rational point of view on his perceptions.

Claire is no longer close to Pierre, if indeed she ever was, nor is he to her although he had at one time been totally enamored of the girl from Cahors. Pierre's attraction to Claire's disarray after her abandonment by the ideal lover is reminiscent of Jean Bedford's infatuation with Lol after the events at T. Beach. Like Lol, Claire's mental illness bestowed upon her the appearance of a prolonged youth, an eteranl adolescence.

According to Pierre, Claire must have lived out her love for the policeman in Cahors: "—Seule, de son côté, comme le reste, comme ce qu'elle a eu pour moi" (p. 118). For Claire, nothing in her existence has counted except this traumatizing experience of an overpowering love affair: "Je n'ai jamais été séparée du bonheur de Cahors, il a débordé sur toute ma vie" (p. 159), and "Je ne sais pas à quoi j'ai passé ma vie jusqu'ici. J'ai aimé l'agent de Calors. C'est tout" (p. 152). The apprehension of an absolute love that is too intense to be lived out in

day-to-day existence and yet for which one must remain in a state of perpetual disponibilité, the emotions unattached, in order to be free should the occasion ever arise again to be ravished away from the tranquil life constitutes a pattern of schizoid behavior that is characterized by Claire's blunted affect, dereistic thinking, and an introversion of schizophrenic proportions.

Past heroines have manifested similar, affective disorders: Françou and Suzanne's exclusive love for their violent, asocial brothers in La Vie and Un Barrage; Anna's all-encompassing passion for the sailor in Le Marin; Anne Desbaresdes and Maria's illuminating perception and timid emulation of a crime of passion in Moderato and Dix heures et demie; the daughter's sexual awakening that renders her oblivious to her father's approaching death in L'Après-midi; Lol V. Stein's breakdown after witnessing and vicariously experiencing the erotic rapt of her fiancé by Anne-Marie Stretter in Le Ravissement. In Le Vice-consul, there is an abortive reconciliation betweeen these opposing forces of Eros (Anne-Marie Stretter) and Thanatos (the vice-consul). Only in L'Amante anglaise are the two antithetical themes united in one character. In Claire, the enraptured heroine has become the sanguinary assassin. The Eros-Thanatos association seen throughout the novels and the madness and destruction announced in Le Vice-consul are realized in the homicidal heroine of L'Amante anglaise. Claire's break with the tranquil life is irreconcilable, irreparable. In the subsequent antinovels (Détruire, dit-elle and Abahn Sabana David), there remains no trace of the tranquil life, no trace of the compromises that make individual sanity and social order possible. Claire's manner of writing out the name of her favorite plant, la menthe anglaise, is l'amante en glaise (p. 124), that is, the

buried lover. Claire is the last in the line of Françou's many descendants. She is the last of Duras' heroes to possess any trace of the traditional stamp. There remain the antiheroes of destruction and the anteheroes of myth.

NOTES

[1] Marguerite Duras and Xavière Gauthier, Les Parleuses (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1974), pp. 14-15.

[2] Paul Ricoeur, Freud and Philosophy, an Essay on Interpretation, trans. Denis Savage (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), p. 95.

[3] Marguerite Duras and Michelle Porte, Les Lieux de Marguerite Duras (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1977), p. 98.

[4] Duras, Les Parleuses, p. 13.

[5] Herbert Marcuse, Eros and Civilization, a Philosophical Inquiry into Freud (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966), p. 12.

[6] Alain Vircondelet, Marguerite Duras (Paris: Editions Seghers, 1972), pp. 164-165.

[7] Duras, Les Lieux, p. 98.

[8] Duras, Les Parleuses, p. 20.

[9] Duras, Les Parleuses, p. 175.

[10] Marguerite Duras, Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein (Paris: Gallimard, 1964). Subsequent references to this work are in the text.

[11] Marguerite Duras, Nathalie Granger suivie de La Femme du Gange (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), p. 146.

[12] Duras, Les Lieux, p. 85.

[13] Duras, Les Lieux, p. 85.

[14] Vircondelet, p. 18.

[15] Kenneth S. White, "Marguerite Duras' Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein," Books Abroad (Winter 1965), p. 42.

[16] Vircondelet, p. 121.

[17] Vircondelet, p. 77.

[18] Marguerite Duras, Le Vice-consul (Paris: Gallimard, 1966). Subsequent references to this work appear in the text.

[19] Bettina L. Knapp, "Marguerite Duras. Le Vice-consul," Books Abroad (Autumn 1966), p. 424.

[20] Knapp, p. 424.

[21] Marcuse, p. 13.

[22] Marguerite Duras et al., Marguerite Duras (Paris: Editions Albatros, 1975), p. 116.

[23] Duras et al., Marguerite Duras, p. 84.

[24] Duras, Les Lieux, p. 65.

[25] Duras, Les Lieux, p. 65.

[26] Duras et al., Marguerite Duras, p. 117.

[27] Duras, Les Lieux, p. 65.

[28] Duras et al., Marguerite Duras, p. 117.

[29] Marguerite Duras, L'Amante anglaise (Paris: Gallimard, 1967). Subsequent references to this work are in the text.

[30] Duras, Les Lieux, p. 27.

CHAPTER VII

ANTIHEROES OF DESTRUCTION AND OF MYTH: THEIR TRANSITION FROM NOVEL TO FILM

Having, in effect, ended the civilized world in her last three books (Le Ravissement, Le Vice-consul, L'Amante anglaise), Duras has now gone back to the origins of man's ways of perceiving reality. In the works which follow, there is a willed regression to a pre-rational revival of perception. Freud's reality principle has been shattered. An unbridled pleasure principle is the apparent prime mover of behavior; it overwhelms and destroys the psychological autonomy of those of Duras' characters who have inherited the remains of modern civilization.

The Durasian hero's evolution reflects this progressive abandonment of a rational conception of reality. As evidenced in Le Vice-consul, there is a concomitant increase in the symbolic import of the protagonist as his verisimilitude, his rationally perceived traits and features fade and become blurred. Ultimately this simultaneous and antithetical process reaches a point of impasse and breaks apart. This destruction (rupture in Duras' vocabulary) is first clearly manifested in Détruire, dit-elle (1969). This devolution in the importance of the heroes' role has a certain irony; as the characters lose their reason, their role in a rational symbolism increases, until there comes a point at which both

the personality of the hero and the rational symbol he represents are shattered. This ". . . rupture dans la chaine symbolique"[1] occurs first in Détruire, dit-elle, and variations of this theme characterize most of the subsequent works.

The destruction explicit in the title Détruire, dit-elle is equally appropriate to the fond as well as to the forme of the novels and films which follow this pivotal and seminal work. The characters lose verisimilitude and psychological autonomy at the same time as the novel itself loses its identity as a viable, independent genre. The traditional heroes shrink into antiheroes as the novel loses the cohesive structure that makes it an autonomous literary form. The designation "texte, théâtre, film" that accompanies the title India Song is also applicable to the three immediately preceding works: Détruire, dit-elle, Abahn Sabana David, and L'Amour. The works which follow these four transitional antinovels or novel-films are either outright film scenarios or prose texts conceived as a complement to a film, which has become Duras' definitive medium in the last decade. These works can no longer be considered novels--one critic has aptly called them "ciné-romans,"[2] a term coined by Robbe-Grillet. From Détruire, dit-elle to the present moment, film-making has progressively replaced the novel as Duras' preferred medium of expression. This transition from the novel to film is substantially achieved in five works: Détruire, dit-elle (1969), Abahn Sabana David (1970), L'Amour (1971), India Song (1973), and La Femme du Gange (1973). The ciné-romans and films which follow belong to the domain of the cinema. Duras' thrity-year preoccupation with the novel that begin with Les Impudents in 1943 has apparently ended.

In retrospect, Duras' novels, despite their unmistakeable originality, have reflected very well the trends in French literature through the generations since the Second World War.[3] Therefore, her novels and their protagonists provide the critic with a unique opportunity to view the general evolution of the French novel and its heroes within the particular vision of one author's fictional world. From the early novels of the traditional stamp to the antinovels and films, the reader can witness the progressive dissolution of personality and the rejection of pyschological verisimilitude that have characterized her heroes. As the protagonist loses his identity and psychological autonomy in the transformation from hero into antihero, the novel itself is brought into question as a viable, independent genre by the author. Duras' antinovels aptly elucidate Henri Peyre's definition of the antinovel: "The anti-novel preserves the outline and appearance of a novel. But, at the very moment when its author appears to be erecting a work of fiction, he destroys it and uses the fictional form to question fiction itself."[4]

Moreover, Duras is especially representative of contemporary fiction in its three major genres: "Roman, théâtre, cinéma: cette oeuvre qui ne se plie à aucun genre mais qui les plie tous à son propros est vouée tout entière au double thème de l'amour et de la mort, de la possession et de la dépossession."[5] Ultimately, Duras appears to have taken the novel to its degré zéro, and from this apparent intellectual and artistic impasse, to have transferred the expression of an increasingly subjective, personalized mythology from the written word of the novel to the visual and auditive images of the cinema. In this transition, the antiheroes of the last novels become the shadowy, mythic

figures seen in the cinematographic versions of these and subsequent works. For example, in these prefatory remarks to India Song, Duras comments on the nature of the protagonists' transition from novel to film:

> Les personnages évoqués dans cette histoire ont été délogés du livre intitulé Le Vice-consul et projetés dans de nouvelles régions narratives. Il n'est donc plus possible de les faire revenir au livre et de lire, avec India Song, une adaptation cinématographique ou théâtrale du Vice-consul. Même si un épisode de ce livre est ici repris dans sa quasi-totalité, son enchaînement au nouveau récit en change la lecture, la vision.[6]

The significance of the novel-film transition is further elucidated in the strikingly apt commentary by Dionys Mascolo:

> Marguerite Duras n'est pas un écrivain qui d'autre part fait des films. Elle n'est pas non plus un écrivain qui adapte ses livres pour les réduire en films. En une démarche tout à fait singulière, elle a commencé par récrire en quelque sorte certains de ses livres par les moyens du film. Mais en les re-écrivant ainsi, elle s'engageait dans une opération qui, bien moins qu'à les parfaire, revenait à les mettre à la question: à tenter de les épuiser, comme si elle exigeait d'eux un impossible achèvement, et dans une autre dimension. Conduite avec rigueur, l'opération effectue la destruction du livre.
>
> Travail cruel, horrible, pour parler comme Rimbaud. Car il ne s'agissait pas d'en faire dire plus au livre, mais bien d'en tirer ce que, comme livre, il ne pouvait pas dire. Rien de moins donc que ceci: par les moyens du film, de dépasser les limites du livre.[7]

Détruire, dit-elle, the novel and the film which bears the same name, appeared in 1969.[8] Their subject is a familiar one--the amorous encounter. The hotel-asylum which serves as the novel's locale is strikingly similar in appearance and arrangement (the dining room that looks out onto the tennis courts, the nearby forest, etc.) to the hotel that witnessed the birth of passion and the inevitable union of the

strangely diffident and laconic couple in Les Chantiers. In both Détruire, Dit-elle and Les Chantiers, the protagonists are subordinate to the intensely erotic tension generated by their growing passion and their imminent union. Yet there is an important distinction between the two works. In Les Chantiers, the erotic encounter is personified by the traditional heterosexual couple. In Détruire, dit-elle, the couple has been replaced by the couple à trois (Max Thor, Alissa Thor, Stein) who are overwhelmingly drawn to another guest-patient (Elizabeth Alione). The heroes are subjugated to a collective eroticism which is the essence of the work. Lol V. Stein's obsession to join as an integral part the ideal erotic couple is realized in the amorous understanding between Max, Alissa, and Stein. But in Le Ravissement, Lol's ideal was admittedly pathological. In Détruire, dit-elle, Lol's psychotic reality has become reality itself. Madeleine Chapsal has grasped the essence of this work in the following review which is printed on the inside cover flap of the novel.

> Tout au long, ce qui est donné, ce ne sont jamais les choses, mais l'émotion qu'elles font éprouver à quelqu'un, ou même l'émotion qu'éprouve un personnage à imaginer l'émotion d'un autre. Ce livre serait-il un livre entier sur le désir? ... A moins qu'il ne s'agisse d'un livre sur le regard?... Un livre sur la folie? Mais qui est fou? Ceux qui acceptent le système ou ceux qui veulent faire sauter les barrières, toutes les barrières?
>
> La notion du couple est brisée: on ne s'aime plus à deux, on s'aime ensemble. Thor, Stein, Alissa, qui voudraient également aimer Elizabeth, et même le mari, Bernard Alione, tentent de vivre un même amour. Cela donne des scènes exceptionnelles de ton et de forme où les personnages déclarent ou rêvent un amour à plusieurs. Personnages qui sont tous présents et en même temps--ce qui se passe, ce qui est écrit, l'est à chaque instant non plus du point de vue d'un seul, comme dans le roman traditionnel, mais de celui de tous. Détruire, dit-elle réussit le tour de force de rendre littéralement la simultanéité des consciences...

The members of the erotic couple for three have little autonomy as individual characters. Max Thor is a history professor whose area of specialization is the future. He claims to have forgotten all knowledge, and, therefore, he is silent in his classes. His students sleep. Alissa, Max's wife, was one of these students. Stein is perhaps a writer because of his ". . . acharnement à poser des questions. Pour arriver nulle part" (p. 20). These three figures have attained the erotic complicity dreamed of by Lol V. Stein. Alissa Thor tells Stein:

> —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.
> —Oui.
> Sur la bouche dure de Stein, Alissa a posé sa bouche d'enfant. (pp. 52-53)

The three characters seem to share one consciousness, dominated by sexual desire for each other and for the beautiful Elizabeth Alione. They have regressed to a childlike state, though they remain sexually mature:

> Silence. Stein et Alissa se tiennent les mains. Max Thor les désigne.
> —Eux, dit-il, regardez-les, eux, ce sont déjà des enfants.
> —Tout est possible, dit Bernard Alione.
> —Alissa et Stein n'écoutent pas, en proie, semble-t-il, à une idée commune.
> Elizabeth les désigne aussi dans l'émerveillement.
> —Elle s'appelle Alissa, dit-elle. Ces deux-là sont ses amants. (p. 124)

Elizabeth, whose name is sometimes shortened to Eliza, is then like a phonetically distorted echo of Alissa. The abortive seduction of Elizabeth by Alissa-Max-Stein is the one vestige of plot that stands

out. In one scene, Alissa entreats Eliza to join in the passion she shares with Max and Stein:

> Alissa prend les cheveux d'Elizabeth Alione dans ses mains, met son visage dans la direction qu'elle veut. Contre le sien.
> —Nous nous ressemblons tellement..., dit Alissa. . . .
> Alissa regarde le corps habillé d'Elizabeth Alione dans la glace.
> —Je vous aime et je vous désire, dit Alissa.
> Elizabeth Alione ne bouge pas. Elle ferme les yeux.
> —Vous êtes folle, murmure-t-elle.
> —C'est dommage, dit Alissa.
> Elizabeth Alione s'éloigne tout à coup. Alissa va près des haies. (pp. 101-102)

Elizabeth Alione is reminiscent of the imposing figure Anne-Marie Stretter. The heroine of Détruire, dit-elle dresses in black. She possesses an eroticism capable of producing death; a young doctor attempted suicide when faced with losing her love. Yet Elizabeth is a wife and mother. The heroines from both Détruire, dit-elle and Le Vice-consul thus incarnate simultaneously the tranquil life and the destructive forces of an overwhelming passion. However, the fact the Elizabeth has recently given birth to a dead child and her subsequent nervous breakdown indicate the precarious nature of her link to the tranquil life.

Max Thor's reaction to Elizabeth's erotic presence recalls the infatuation of the hero in Les Chantiers: "Madame, il y a dix jours que je 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). In the end, however, Elizabeth rejects the overtures of Alissa-Max-Stein and leaves the hotel-asylum with her husband. They are going to the Mediterranean city of Leucate on vacation; Max Thor and Stein plan to

follow them. This prospect of vacationing on a meridional beach recalls the holiday novels, especially Les Petits Chevaux. The short novel ends, however, at the moment of Elizabeth's departure. The final scene in which Max and Stein contemplate Alissa as she sleeps is interrupted by music mysteriously emanating from the forest near the hotel, thus uniting Duras' two recurring symbols for madness. The musical composition is appropriately entitled Bach's "Art of the Fugue" (p. 139).

Détruire, dit-elle is Duras' first full-fledged antinovel. It can also be considered the first of the ciné-romans. Although many of Duras' previous novels have inspired subsequent films, Détruire, dit-elle is rather a prose text written for and because of the film that bears the same name. Like the designation that accompanies the title of India Song (texte théâtre film), Détruire, dit-elle is neither a novel, nor a play, nor a scenario for a film, but it shares elements of all three genres. Whereas Le Ravissement, Le Vice-consul, and L'Amante anglaise still bear the designation roman on their respective covers, Détruire, dit-elle has only the word rupture in place of a genre indication on the book's cover. Détruire, dit-elle is then Duras' first novel which no longer makes any claim to be so classified. It is an antinovel which accompanies a film, un film en prose, so to speak. Thus as Duras' novels shrink into antinovels, the film emerges as the author's dominant medium.

Moreover, the title of this work possesses symbolic significance. On the one occasion that the title is incorporated into the text, it takes on an unexpected meaning in its context. Détruire, dit-elle is an invitation to make love. Max says to Alissa:

—Je suis profondément heureux que tu sois là. Elle se retourne. Son regard revient. Lentement.
—Détruire, dit-elle.
Il lui sourit.
—Oui. Nous allons monter dans la chambre avant d'aller dans le parc.
—Oui. (p. 34)

Thus Détruire, dit-elle seems to mean its opposite; it is an antithetical term that embodies the Eros-Thanatos dichotomy. L'Amour, published two years after Détruire, dit-elle can be viewed as an opposite and therefore synonymous title. These two titles evoke the same antithesis contained in the titles La Vie tranquille and Moderato cantabile. Both Détruire, dit-elle and L'Amour treat the same subject--an eroticism collectively shared by fragmentary, psychologically reduced characters. With regard to antithetical expressions, those which designate at once one phenomenon and its exact opposite, Freud has pointed to the work done by Karl Abel on the antithetical meaning of some primal words.[9] In certain ancient languages it has been found that there are a number of words with two meanings, one of which is the exact opposite of the other. Thus there is linguistic evidence that early man was so sensitive to the antithetical nature of his reality that many of his words had contrary meanings: "Man was not in fact able to acquire his oldest and simplest concepts except as contraries to their contraries, and only learnt by degrees to separate the two sides of an antithesis and think of one without conscious comparison with the other."[10] It seems appropriate, given Duras' antithetical approach to reality, that as the heroes regress to a sort of prehistoric no man's land, they revive that perceived antithesis through the creation of certain primal words. In the previous novel, Claire's schizophrenia is evidenced in the cultivated

agraphia of the title L'Amante anglaise, the heroine's manner of writing la menthe anglaise. With Détruire, dit-elle, the title is equally representative. It is used to evoke its opposite, the act of making love, thereby unifying the Eros-Thanatos dichotomy. This title thus becomes a kind of primal proclamation of destruction-rebirth in the creation of a mythic, secular apocalypse, previously signaled by the confrontation of the vice-consul and Anne-Marie Stretter in Le Vice-consul. The parallel structure of the early and middle novels, in which erotic longing was accompanied by a violent, often fatal event (alternatingly expressed in such dichotomies as moderato cantabile, the tranquil life threatened by an illuminating madness, the reality principle and the pleasure principle, and the Eros-Thanatos association), is now unified in the very titles of Détruire, dit-elle and L'Amour. This linguistic regression and reduction reflect the psychological disintegration that characterizes the dehumanized antiheroes of Detruire, dit-elle, Abahn Sabana David, and L'Amour.

Abahn Sabana David, published in 1970,[11] is the novelistic companion piece to Duras' film Jaune le soleil (1971). The progressive fragmentation of personality encountered in Détruire, dit-elle is intensified in this narrative which takes place in a strange no man's land, a sort of resurrected necropolis of a future age. During one night, David and Sabana, sent by their political boss, Gringo, guard Abahn, a Jew who has been condemned to death for treason. Early on, they are joined by another Jew, who resembles Abahn and who, in fact, is also named Abahn. During the course of the cold winter night in the Jew's secluded house, David and Sabana talk with Abahn and Abahn. By morning,

the young couple has decided to betray Gringo. They refuse to hand over Abahn for execution; they have decided to join the revolutionary madness represented by the two Jewish outcasts.

The heroes of Abahn Sabana David live in a world gone mad, an age of future primitivism, perhaps after an atomic holocaust. They live in a totalitarian state governed by a corrupted form of communism. They are a shattered people who have lost memory and rationality as organizing factors of human experience. As in Détruire, dit-elle, the characters are fragmented; individual personality no longer exists as an autonomous phenomenon. Emotions are collectively perceived and experienced; identites are shared. The old Jew and his double have the same name. They speak indiscriminately, the one for the other, as do Sabana and David. The concept of the couple, completely destroyed in Détruire, dit-elle, no longer exists in Abahn Sabana David. The couple à trois envisaged by Lol V. Stein is now a reality. David has two wives, Sabana and Jeanne, the latter also being a wife of Gringo. The work's very title, a sort of secularized trilogy, indicates the collective, fragmentary form of the Durasian antihero. These characters suffer from periodic blindness, deafness, and muteness. Their atrophying senses are paralleled by a faltering consciousness of self and a rampant forgetfullness which are reflected in the vacuous gaze of Sabana's blue eyes and in the protagonists' expressionless, deliberate speech: "Le regard est toujours absent, la voix, ralentie" (p. 22).

With the generalization of individual personality, the concepts of time and place have become equally universalized, shown in the stylistic contrast of adverbs in the following passage. Sabana, who, like David,

suffers episodes of total amnesia, is told by Abahn that she comes from a city named Auschstaadt. The characters are at once now here and nowhere:

> —De la Judée allemande, dit le juif. De la ville d'Auschstaadt.
> David s'arrête. Il répète:
> —Auschstaadt.
> Sa hâte a disparu. La peur se lit dans ses yeux.
> —Tu es de la ville d'Auschstaadt?
> —Ils la regardent. Elle est immobile assise contre le mur, dans la lumière. Les yeux de chair bleue sont fixes: Ils cherchent Auschstaadt.
> —Auschstaadt, répète Sabana.
> —Oui, dit le juif.
> —Où est Auschstaadt? demande David.
> —Ici, dit le juif.
> —Partout, dit Abahn, comme Gringo. Comme le juif. Comme David.
> —Ici, partout, dit le juif.
> Sabana cherche encore Auschstaadt.
> —C'était quand? demande David.
> —Toujours, dit le juif. Maintenant.
> —Nous sommes tous de la ville d'Auschstaadt, dit Abahn. (pp. 101-102)

The Jewish characters represent the destructive, antithetical force that Duras proclaimed in Détruire, dit-elle: "—Ils aiment tout. . . . —Ils veulent la fin du monde" (p. 148). They advocate the freedom of an illuminating madness: "—Nous avons cru à l'attente rationnelle, interminable. Maintenant nous croyons qu'elle est inutile, dit Abahn" (p. 95). Their seditious message is that of Duras herself in her break with the reality principle. This revolutionary mission has made them the object of persecution by the powers of the status quo represented by Gringo. The following paragraph shows Abahn's crime:

> C'est ce soir-là, au café, que le juif a parlé de la liberté. Il a dit: Tes mains pleines de plaies ce sont tes mains, David.

> David fait signe que oui. Abahn cherche l'air. Il parle vite.
>
> —Le juif a dit: Pour ce qui est de la souffrance, de la joie, de la folie, de l'amour, de la liberté, tes mains ne sont pas d'autres mains que les mains de David--il s'arrête --c'est parce qu'il a dit ces choses que le juif va être tué. (pp. 131-132)

The conversion of Gringo's model workers to the anarchic madness embodied in the forms of Abahn and his double is once again the victory of cantabile over moderato, the definitive defeat of Françou's tranquil life. The moment of their conversion is dramatized by a contagious burst of laughter, reminiscent of the indiscreet, libidinous laugh exchanged by the couple in Les Chantiers upon the birth of their amorous complicity and of Alissa's "rire absolu" (p. 137 in Détruire) at that novel's conclusion. It also recalls the cackling of the mad beggarwoman in Le Vice-consul. Duras' description of the laugh shows its significance. It is insane, childlike. Its association with the dogs envied by David evokes the forest and the eternal adolescence of the dans-les-arbres syndrome. With its light, the symbol of madness in L'Après-midi, the laugh contorts and distorts the syntax of normal speech:

> Le rire repart, fou, il est irrépressible, enfantin, il se mêle aux hurlements des chiens, il frappe le discours, l'ordre, le sens, de sa lumière. Il est un rire de joie. (p. 144)

L'Amour, published in 1971,[12] is Duras' last novel or antinovel. The novelistic works which follow, whether they be designated as texte théâtre, film or as ciné-romans, are no longer manifestations of an independent genre; they accompany a film, which has become Duras' principal medium during the last ten years. Like Détruire, dit-elle, L'Amour is a title which incorporates an antithetical meaning, similar to that

found in Freud's discussion of primal words.[13] L'Amour is the definitive fusion of the erotic longing and of the violent event which constituted the binary structure of most of the author's novels. In a very real sense, Détruire and L'Amour are synonymous titles. As Duras' protagonists regress psychologically, they no longer reflect the rational dissection and reorganization of experience; they have grasped the indivisible dualities which constitute a psychic reality uncontaminated by rational analysis. Duras has commented that "Seuls les fous écrivent complètement."[14] This evolution in Duras' fiction toward a fusion of opposites through madness is singularly Freudian:

> As Freud found the psyche to be dual in nature, so he found all symbols in which the psyche interpreted experience. No image has one meaning alone. Always the image carries with it an obverse, and in the unconscious as revealed in dreams, as well as in the phenomenon of insanity, the opposite is often the clue to the posit. Not only duality but also fusion is observed in symbols--that is, two apparently unrelated things are put together to form one image with peculiar significance. The unriddling of fused images, both in dream work and in aesthetic projections such as myth, poetry, and ritual, and indeed in all forms of art, is one of Freud's signal achievements, and one that the student of literature can ill afford to neglect.[15]

L'Amour takes place in an oneiric representation of Duras' preferred setting--a beach close to the point where a river flows into the sea. The sexuality suggested by the image of a river's encounter with the sea is primary in the author's symbolism. The delta occupied an eminent place in Le Vice-consul. This fertile crescent of the Durasian protagonist was first found in Le Marin and in Les Petits Chevaux. Specifically, this beach is the one encountered in Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein: S. Thala. Indeed, L'Amour is a reenactment of Le Ravissement.

But here, the story is no longer viewed from Jacques Hold's external, rational viewpoint. L'Amour is Lol's personal vision, as it must have been viewed by the mad heroine herself.

There are three main antiheroes in the work; together they reform the familiar triangle of the couple à trois. An anonymous traveler (le voyageur) who has returned to S. Thala and stays in a nearby hotel finds on the semi-deserted beach two strange figures: a compulsive walker (le fou) and an unnamed young woman whose catatonic poses alternate with moments of a semi-conscious lucidity. This young woman is clearly Lol V. Stein. Lol's story is evoked in the few happenings which comprise the meager plot of the work. Lol and the traveler, who simultaneously represents Jacques Hold and Michael Richardson, visit the Casino where the fateful ball took place. In L'Amour, the figure of Lol V. Stein also incarnates the erotic presence of Anne-Marie Stretter: ". . . —objet de désir, elle est à qui veut d'elle, elle le porte et l'embarque, objet de l'absolu désir" (pp. 50-51). Moreover, the woman has experienced innumerable maternities. She thus represents, as does Anne-Marie Stretter, the double nature of reality, the power of life and death. The third character, known only as le fou, is the young woman's mentor and protector. His compulsive walking on the beach recalls the theme of the promenade noted throughout the novels, starting with Les Impudents. The blue gaze of his eyes recalls that of Sabana in Abahn Sabana David. The illuminating intensity of the light that surrounds him recalls the use of light as a symbol for madness in L'Après-midi:

> Il arrive. Il s'arrête face à celui qui se tient contre le mur, le voyageur. Ses yeux sont bleus, d'une transparence frappante. L'absence de son regard est absolue. . . . Ils regardent tout autour d'eux la lumière arrêtée, illuminante. (pp. 16-17)

Although very little actually happens to the three wraith-like figures as they move about on the beach at S. Thala, the recurring themes of Duras are nonetheless in evidence. Early on, an overpowering scream is heard from somewhere on the beach, the kind of scream that announced Anne Desbaresdes's intiation into the caressing throes of mortal passion. The song of S. Thala recalls the musical themes contained in most of the novels. Moreover, there is an ominous, undefinable clamor that makes itself heard from time to time; it is reminsicent of the stifled, subdued yet generalized discord that accompanied the declaration of love in several early novels. It is as though the irrational forces that surround mankind are aroused in a sort of sympathetic echo of the irruption of an annhilating passion into the longanimity of the tranquil life. The fire that threatens S. Thala brings to mind the fire on the mountain in Les Petits Chevaux. The episode in which the traveler sends away his wife and children, who have come to take him home, shows once more Duras' definitive break with the tranquil life. It was on a similar beach that Françou escaped madness by embracing the modest contentment of the reality principle over the vertiginous pull of an unbridled pleasure principle in Duras' second novel. L'Amour is a poetic repudiation of that choice.

In L'Amour, the characters are no longer heroes, nor are they even antiheroes, although the latter term is obviously more appropriate than the former. Xavière Gauthier says in Les Parleuses that Duras' protagonists are neither heroes nor antiheroes, but an annhilation of that very concept.[16] The three figures of L'Amour participate in the evocation of a myth in which life is perceived as an annhilating passion. These

estranged forms have lost all autonomy as individuals; they have no will. They recall the "saurians - sauriens" announced in the barroom absurdities exchanged by Anna and her drunken companions nearly twenty years ago in Le Marin. The traveler, the woman, and the madman of S. Thala are Lol V. Stein's cantabile, they are l'amour.

In 1973, Marguerite Duras published India Song and La Femme du Gange. With these two works, Duras' adventure with the novel appears to have come to an end, just thirty years after it began with Les Impudents in 1943. India Song, the film version of Le Vice-consul, bears the designation "texte théâtre film" on its title page.[17] Its form is no longer that of the novel. La Femme du Gange is a film scenario that recounts the story of Lol V. Stein's passion. Referring to the latter work, the author says in an interview with Benoît Jacquot that the film has usurped the place of the novel as her preferred literary medium:

> Le livre n'est pas assouvissant, ne clôt rien. Pour détruire ce qui est écrit et donc ne finit pas, il me faut faire du livre un film: le film est comme un point d'arrêt. Dans La Femme du Gange, trois livres sont embarqués... massacrés. C'est-à-dire que l'écriture a cessé.[18]

La Femme du Gange is the cinematographic representation of the novel Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein and of the antinovel L'Amour. In an interview with Michelle Porte, Duras explains this progression, or regression, from novel to antinovel, and from antinovel to film:

> J'ai l'impression quelquefois que j'ai commencé à écrire avec ça, avec Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein, avec L'Amour et La Femme du Gange. Mais que l'écriture, l'amplitude de l'écriture a été atteinte avec le film, que Lol V. Stein, c'était un moment de l'écrit, L'Amour aussi, mais qu'avec La Femme du Gange tout a été mélangé, comme si j'avais remonté le temps, que j'étais arrivée dans ce périmètre d'avant les livres. J'étais

> folle quand j'ai monté La Femme du Gange. Quand j'ai trouvé les voix de La Femme du Gange, j'étais folle d'angoisse. Mais c'est un lieu de l'angoisse ici, c'est peut-être mon lieu.[19]

Duras concludes this section of the interview by extending her comments on La Femme du Gange to the whole question of film as an alternative medium to that of the novel:

> En somme, oui, ça pose la question du cinéma, là, de l'image. On est toujours débordé par l'écrit, par le langage, quand on traduit en écrit, n'est-ce pas; ce n'est pas possible de tout rendre, de rendre compte du tout. Alors que dans l'image vous écrivez tout à fait, tout l'espace filmé est écrit, c'est au centuple l'espace du livre. Mais je n'ai découvert ça qu'avec La Femme du Gange, pas avec les autres films.[20]

For Marguerite Duras, life is not only, to use the Sartrian expression, a useless passion, but an annhilating passion, that is most appropriately expressed by an irrational apprehension of reality. There is a progressive feminacy in Duras' characters, be they men or women. The early novels, harmonious and cerebrally conceived, show a masculine, ordered interpretation of reality ("The Animus Odyssey"). With the middle and more recent works, wordy theorizing is replaced by a progressively muted, poetic apprehension of reality ("The Anima Syndrome"). Duras prefers women and children as heroes, for they are closer to a mysterious, pre-historic intuition of reality; in them, there lies an availability and a sensitivity toward experience which takes precedence over the rational approach to reality which Duras has called " . . . l'oppression de la classe phallique."[21] With the emergence of the psychotic heroes and antiheroes, Duras revolts against man's inherent tendency to put ". . . une main théorique et rapide sur les balbutiements."[22] She returns to a personalized, mythic representation of the vital antitheses that make up human experience.

This shift from the explanatory to the intuitive is realized through a progressive psychological regression in the makeup of the Durasian hero. After Moderato, this regression becomes aberrational. This evolution is paralleled by the shrinking of the novel's form and of its protagonists into the antinovel and the antiheroes. Duras' subsequent abandonment of the printed word and its metaphors in favor of the pictorial and auditory images of film is the inevitable consequence of her destructive itinerary. A destruction of the novel which permits a renewed creation in the cinema reflects stylistically the antithetical nature of the human experience as Duras perceives it. There is then a marriage of forme and fond. This paradoxical evolution is reflected in the author's comments on her respective roles as a novelist and as a film-maker (as an animus "en plein" or as an anima "en creux" figure):

> Parce que faire un film, c'est passer à un acte de destruction du créateur du livre, justement, de l'écrivain. C'est annuler celui-ci.
>
> Qu'il soit l'auteur d'un livre «en creux» ou d'un livre «en plein», en effet, l'écrivain sera détruit par le film. L'écrivain qui est dans chaque cinéaste, et l'écrivain tout court. Et il sera quand même exprimé. La ruine qu'il sera devenu sera le film. Son «dit» sera cette matière lisse, le chemin d'images.[23]

There is, therefore, an observable evolution in Duras' novels that leads the reader from the parallel structure of La Vie tranquille and Moderato cantabile to the fusion of these opposing elements in the madness and destruction of Détruire, dit-elle, L'Amour, and the works which follow. This evolution manifests an interiorization of experience which eventually reaches schizophrenic proportions. This progressive introversion ultimately leads to the simultaneous destruction of the

novel and of its heroes. This fusion marks the collapse of the life-supporting tension maintained, in general, in the Eros-Thanatos dichotomy and, in particular, in Freud's reality principle which Duras translates artistically by the tranquil life. Madness, death, and destruction are the natural consequences of this collapse. Stylistically, this evolution is reflected in the novel's devolution, first into antinovels, then into films. Duras' heroes survive the secular apocalypse of the final novels. They are reborn, at least in essence, in the pictorial medium of the cinema, which is better able to capture the personalized yet universal myth of the human condition that has regressed beyond and thereby transcended the limitations of a purely verbal, hence theoretical medium. Through some thirty years and twenty novels, however, Duras' shrinking protagonist has recorded this gradual creation of a modern myth which is the culmination of the author's literary itinerary.

As Laurent LeSage has aptly pointed out, Marguerite Duras' novels re-create the entire drama of human existence.[24] The author continues up to the present moment to express her world vision through the medium of the cinema.[25] It appears, however, that she has, for the time being, repudiated the novel, the genre which she so sensitively mastered in both its traditional and avant-garde manifestations. The evolution of Duras' heroes and heroines serves as a microcosm of the experimentation in serious fiction that has occurred during the literary generations since the Second World War. Along with the plays and the films, Duras' novels project a uniquely comprehensive embodiment of the evolving paradoxes which constitute man's conception of what he is. The itinerary of the Durasian protagonist has dramatically portrayed Duras' vision of the vital antitheses which make up lived experience.

NOTES

[1] Marguerite Duras and Xavière Gauthier, Les Parleuses (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1974), p. 12.

[2] Maurice Bruézière, Histoire descriptive de la littérature contemporaine (Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1975), I, p. 434.

[3] Laurent LeSage, The French New Novel (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1962), p. 85.

[4] Henri Peyre, French Novelists of Today (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 363.

[5] Jacques Bersani et al., La Littérature en France depuis 1945 (Paris: Bordas, 1970), p. 574.

[6] Marguerite Duras, India Song (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), p. 9.

[7] Marguerite Duras et al., Marguerite Duras (Paris: Editions Albatros, 1975), pp. 110-111.

[8] Marguerite Duras, Détruire, dit-elle (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1969). Subsequent references to this work are in the text.

[9] Sigmund Freud, The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, trans. James Strachey, Vol. XI (London: The Hogarth Press, 1957), p. 158.

[10] Sigmund Freud, The Standard Edition, p. 158.

[11] Marguerite Duras, Abahn Sabana David (Paris: Gallimard, 1970). Subsequent references to this work appear in the text.

[12] Marguerite Duras, L'Amour (Paris: Gallimard, 1971). Subsequent references to this work appear in the text.

[13] Sigmund Freud, The Standard Edition, pp. 155-161.

[14] Duras, Les Parleuses, p. 50.

[15] Roy P. Basler, Sex, Symbolism and Psychology in Literature (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1948), pp. 17-18.

[16] Duras, Les Parleuses, p. 226.

[17] Marguerite Duras, India Song (Paris: Gallimard, 1973).

[18] Marguerite Duras, Nathalie Granger, suivie de La Femme du Gange (Paris: Gallimard, 1973). Quoted from inside cover flap.

[19] Duras, Les Lieux, p. 90.

[20] Duras, Les Lieux, p. 91.

[21] Duras, Les Parleuses, p. 153.

[22] Duras, Les Parleuses, p. 49.

[23] Marguerite Duras, "Du livre au film," Images et son, n. 283, (April 1974), p. 59.

[24] LeSage, The French New Novel, p. 85.

[25] "Biblio-filmographie de Marguerite Duras," L'Avant-Scène, Cinéma no. 225 (April 1979), p. 13.

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