

SELF-PORTRAIT AND THE DISCOVERY OF THE FEMALE VOICE
IN THE WRITING OF MARGUERITE DURAS.

By

SUSAN MAE BRETT

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Department of French

The University of British Columbia
1956 Main Mall
Vancouver, Canada
V6T 1Y3

Date October 8, 1985.

ABSTRACT

Marguerite Duras' earlier works fit readily into the genre of the traditional novel and, like many early works of fiction, are often autobiographical in content. Un Barrage contre le Pacifique (1950), for example, tells the story of her difficult childhood in Indochina where she was raised by a widowed mother. However, with Moderato Cantabile (1958) her writing style changes markedly. The author associates this alteration in style with a crisis in her personal life whereby her writing becomes poetic and the narrative content increasingly abstruse. It is with the writer's experimentation in film during the sixties and seventies that a group of works, referred to in this paper as the "India Song" texts, appear. In this group of works, beginning with Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein (1964), and ending with Aurélia Steiner, Aurélia Steiner, Aurélia Steiner (1979), the same story is told and retold, yet the form of the language, the narration, and the dominant mode of perception alters remarkably from text to text. These texts together are proposed, in this study, to form a unique self-portrait of the author.

The thesis is divided into two parts. In Part I, the transition in writing style is considered as a movement away from an autobiographical mode into a self-portraiture mode. A comparison is made between the characteristics of her writing style in the texts following Moderato Cantabile and the characteristics of the self-portrait as outlined by Michel Beaujour in Miroirs d'encre. To elucidate the situation of the Durassian heroine prior to the self-portrait revealed in the "India Song" texts, the myth of Narcissus and Echo is utilized. This use of myth pro-

vides a background Gestalt against which the patterns within the fiction begin to appear.

Part II is a textual analysis of the "India Song" self-portrait works which include Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein, Le Vice-Consul, L'Amour, La Femme du Gange, India Song, and Aurélia Steiner, Aurélia Steiner, Aurélia Steiner. The ancient Summarian myth of female initiation, the myth of Inanna, when applied to these texts, discloses the transformation in perspective underlying the arcane surface patterns in which the same "story" reappears from text to text. From a one-dimensional world dominated by the masculine "regard", the reader is pulled, via the auditory, into a multidimensional kinesthetic feminine world of the "lower" senses that is referred to in the analysis as "l'écoute". It is this perspective that the female writing voice of Aurélia Steiner, culmination of this unusual self-portrait, offers to the reader.

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Table of Abbreviations

<u>Détruire.</u> ,	<u>Détruire,dit-elle</u>
<u>Le V.C.</u> ,	<u>Le Vice-Consul</u>
<u>L.V.S.</u> ,	<u>Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein</u>
<u>L'A.</u> ,	<u>L'Amour</u>
<u>I.S.</u> ,	<u>India Song</u>
<u>F.du G.</u> ,	<u>La Femme du Gange</u>
<u>A.S.</u> ,	<u>Aurélia Steiner, Aurélia Steiner, Aurélia Steiner</u>
<u>Les Lieux.</u> ,	<u>Les Lieux de Marguerite Duras</u>

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To my mother, my sister and
my son, Tristan.

JE ME DEMANDE COMMENT

Je me demande comment j'ai supporté tant de gentillesse, tant de sollicitude, d'affection profonde, de protection, tant et de conseils, comment je suis restée là, avec eux, sans jamais fuir. Comment je ne suis pas morte. Toutes les vacances avec eux, le même homme, les mêmes hommes, tous les étés, les soirées d'été, avec eux, le même, les mêmes, l'amour, les voyages, le sommeil, la musique, pendant des années enfermées avec le même, les mêmes. La douleur, les infidélités suppliciantes, sans lendemain, la surveillance, la douleur à hurler, silencieuse, et pourquoi? pourquoi? Emmenée à Venise, soignée, entourée, pour que j'oublie la séparation, à moitié morte emmenée de force, adorée, j'ai mille ans, je ne peux pas supporter la séparation, ils s'y mettent tous pour me dire qu'il faut. Pourquoi? Vie gâchée, avortée. Cette ligne droite de la vie de toutes les femmes, ce silence de l'histoire des femmes. Cet échec qui ferait croire à la réussite, cette réussite qui n'existe pas, qui est un désert.

Marguerite Duras
"Les Yeux verts"

Cahiers du Cinéma,
N.312/313 (juin) 1980, p.89.

Introduction

There is an essential altering of perspective within the Durassian text which first appears as the writer's conscious intent to subvert the world as we know it, and then later becomes a much less conscious process within the text itself, hence more difficult to define. The alteration in perspective begins as the result of a dramatic change in the writer's life. Following this change, her writing no longer readily fits within the confines of the novel. The organized, chronological story-telling of early autobiographically influenced works such as Un Barrage contre le Pacifique (1950) disappears, and the writing becomes poetic, without taking the form of the poem, and enters a freer, more abstruse phase.

Certain dominant elements found in the earlier works, the motif of "la mendiante," for example, do reappear in the later texts referred to in this thesis as the "India Song" texts² (1964-1979). However, in contrast to the autobiographically inspired earlier works, written within the accepted formulae of the traditional novel and revealing a concern with ordered time and involvement with the chronology of events, the writing in the later works reflects qualities of the less conventionally restricted language later defined as literary self-portraiture by Michel Beaujour in Miroirs d'encre.³ These qualities include, primarily, the predominance of space over time, and the presence of a quest, similar in dimension to that found in the myth of Isis, and involving the search of language for its own roots:

Le texte de l'autoportrait s'engendre en se
ressouvenant de lui-même. Il se ressouvient de
lui-même afin de thématiser son engendrement.

C'est ainsi qu'il rejoint à sa façon la croyance selon laquelle l'intériorité est l'antériorité, surtout si cette antériorité s'enfonce vertigineusement vers antiquité de l'individu et de sa culture, comme il se produit également dans l'anthropologie rhétorique de Giambattista Vico.⁴

The first of Marguerite Duras' works to move from familiar terrain to the unfamiliar and exploratory, is Moderato Cantabile (1958).⁵ It is a story of love and of death, written in poetic language and revealing a "mythic" dimension according to the meaning given to myth by Ernst Cassirer: "In myth man objectifies his own deepest emotions; he looks at them as if they had an outward existence."⁶ This mythic dimension is present throughout the texts and films of the self-portrait or "India Song" texts which form the subject of this thesis. For every film Marguerite Duras has made (her involvement with film began in the early sixties with the scenario and dialogues: Hiroshima mon amour)⁷, she has published a separate "text". Although both media will be discussed, the quotations and references will be from the textual versions unless otherwise indicated. Part I, then, will be dealing primarily with this transition in Marguerite Duras' writing spanning the years from 1958 to include the sixties and the first years of her experimentation in film in the late sixties and early seventies. It is during this period that Duras moves away from the reassuring ground of the novel and the autobiographical mode, into the exploratory realms of the "text" and the self-portrait.

Whereas the earlier autobiographically inspired fictional works reveal separate, coherent and cohesive "récits" of chronologically ordered events, the "India Song" self-portrait texts manifest a very different orientation. Beginning with Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein (1964)⁸, a bond of common

narrative content is sustained from text to text: the same story is told and retold. The same situations and motifs begin reappearing in familiar patterns, yet the language in which they reappear alters. As the narrative becomes more obscure and more obviously symbolic of something deeper unfolding within the psyche of the writer, an evolution is detected within the texts themselves. A transformation occurs. By approaching this transformation through myth, we are able to identify the step by step discovery of a new "voice", which is the culmination of the self-portrait in the "writing voice" of Aurélia Steiner, Aurélia Steiner, Aurélia Steiner (1979).⁹

Myth will be used in both Part I and Part II in order to elucidate the transformation in perspective occurring at the textual level. In Part I, we introduce the Narcissus and Echo myth in order to illustrate the situation in which the Durassian heroine is found when the self-portrait begins. It is within the context of woman's predicament, of subjugation and incarceration within a culture and a language dominated by man, that the writer's subversive intent is first felt and the beginning of a new perspective recognized. In Part II, an ancient Sumerian myth of female initiation, the myth of Inanna, will be used to show how woman begins to be seen and to see from the renewed point of view of her own autonomy and creativity.

The most important critical source utilized in this thesis is the author's own commentary on her writing found in numerous interviews. Another primary critical source is Miroirs d'encre by Michel Beaujour used in Part I where the transition from autobiography to self-portraiture is dealt with. In Part II, when dealing directly with the "India Song" texts and the transformation underlying the relationship between them we refer to Descent to the Goddess¹⁰ by Sylvia Perera, and The Moon and the

Virgin¹² by Nor Hall.

Subversion of the masculine perspective characterized by "le regard" results in the simultaneous rediscovery of a unique feminine perspective indicated by "l'écoute". In this kinesthetic universe where the female voice is heard, woman no longer depends for her existence on the objectifying look of man since his dominance no longer exists. This is the central aspect of the Durassian universe that will be explored.

Notes (Introduction)

1. Marguerite Duras, Un Barrage contre le Pacifique (Paris: Gallimard, 1950).
2. See beginning of preliminary, Part I.
3. Michel Beaujour, Miroirs d'encre (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1980).
4. Ibid., p.140. The literary self-portrait will be discussed at greater length in Part I, Section V.
5. Marguerite Duras, Moderato Cantabile (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1958).
6. Donald P. Verne (ed.) Symbol, Myth, and Culture: Essays, and Lectures of Ernst Cassirer, 1935-45 (New Haven CT.: Yale University Press, 1979), p.173.
7. Marguerite Duras, Hiroshima mon amour (Paris: Gallimard, 1960).
8. Marguerite Duras, Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein (Paris: Gallimard, 1964).
9. Marguerite Duras, Le Navire Night, Césarée, Les Mains négatives, Aurélia Steiner, Aurélia Steiner, Aurélia Steiner (Paris: Mercure de France, 1979).
10. Sylvia Brinton Perera, Descent to the Goddess (Toronto: Inner City Books, 1981).
11. Nor Hall, The Moon and the Virgin (New York: Harper and Row, 1980).

PART I

From Autobiography to Self-portrait

Preliminary

Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein, written in 1964, opens a significant chapter in the writing of Marguerite Duras, a chapter which continues through Le Vice-Consul (1966), L'Amour (1971), India Song and La Femme du Gange (1973), culminating finally in the Aurélia Steiner texts (1979).^I Lol V. Stein is the young girl of eighteen abandoned by her fiancé for a beautiful older woman the night of an end-of-summer ball. Everything begins from this point. Le Vice-Consul tells of the love story between the fiancé, Michael Richardson and the other woman, Anne-Marie Stretter, which takes place in India, where he has followed her. In the same way L'Amour becomes a retelling of the ball sequence in Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein, India Song and La Femme du Gange are reconstructions in film of events and characters in Le Vice-Consul. Strangely, however, events and characters from all texts intermingle, producing the effect of an intricate tapestry created by a coalescence of all the texts. In an almost hypnotic rhythm that continues from text to text, characters reappear and events repeat themselves, creating the mysterious effect of an obsessive dreamscape. The traces of former texts are detected beneath the transparent language of the present, the whole becoming like the rich palimpsest of memory, where the individual confronts not only her or his own past, but, because of the universal nature of language and symbol, the past of the culture as well. Gradually, the characters and places in the original narratives are transformed, reduced to a minimum of essential traits, and we have the impression of moving about in a fluid landscape. The following passage from La Femme du Gange illustrates this:

Jour.

Une place bordée d'arbres, et d'un grand bâtiment rectangulaire.

C'est une ville. Vide. Au loin, on dirait pourtant les rumeurs de la vie: cris, bruit de travail. Peut-être la ville n'est-elle pas vide au loin, ailleurs. Ici, là où passe le film, la ville a un nom: S. Thala. Un homme arrive dans le champ. En imperméable. Petite valise noire à la main. Son pas est lent, mesuré. Ce pas restera le même jusqu'à la fin du film.

C'est le voyageur.

Traverse la place.

Place traversée (F. du G., p.1).

There is an evolution within these texts which, paradoxically, traces a circular path. It may be more aptly described as a transformation, since it involves a return or descent toward childhood followed by an ascent toward a renewed present. It may also be seen as the gradual coming into being of an authentic voice, the female voice, for it is writing which reveals its own process of becoming, "self-conscious" writing. Marguerite Duras describes it in these words: "La véritable écriture, elle, renvoie à elle-même. Elle est autarcique."² There are two stages in the process which these texts reveal; the first is the return to childhood seen in the texts clustering about India Song, like infants about a mother; the second is the emergence from these fragments, like the phoenix from the ashes, of a renewed voice in the later Aurélia Steiner texts. It is both a quest for identity and the story of language, a unique self-portrait.

The unusual style of Marguerite Duras is characterized by a combination of powerfully evocative images, and an extreme simplicity of language, of plot, and eventually of narrative, following the destructive phase and the transformation leading to the Aurélia Steiner texts. It is a combination also found in mythopoetic language. A myth, for example, is

often a simple story told in imagistic language and revealing, upon close scrutiny, the inner mysteries of psychic life. However, whereas classical myths reflect a structure which involves an interplay of characters with an eventual outcome of either triumph or fall for the hero, the Durassian text maintains a certain tension which is never resolved but simply transforms itself perpetually, like the characters themselves. This can be seen most clearly in Aurélia Steiner, where the heroine changes city, history, most details in her life, in a kind of fabulous perpetual becoming in which she remains eternally the eighteen-year-old writer. If classical myth is at all applicable to this suite of Durassian texts, it would be so only in fragmentary form and by allusion, nevertheless, the metamorphic myth of Narcissus and Echo, as told by the poet Ovid, will be referred to in the analysis of the texts in Part I. Before explaining how it is to be used in connection with the quest for the female voice in these texts it may be resumed thus:

It so happens that the goddess Hera, during a jealous phase, suspects her husband Zeus of cavorting with one of the nymphs. Hearing Echo's cheerful babbling, she chooses this unsuspecting nymph as the object of her vengeance. She proclaims that Echo will always have the last word but will never be the first to speak. This is a cruel punishment indeed, for Echo, along with all the other nymphs, has fallen in love with the handsome youth Narcissus and can now only follow him without hope of ever speaking to him. One day, however, Narcissus, wandering about alone in the woods in search of his playmates calls out, "Is one of you here?" Echo, hiding close by, answers in delight, "Here! Here!", to which Narcissus responds: "Come here!", the words she has been craving to hear him say. She repeats

joyously, "Come here!", jumping out from her hiding spot. He turns away in disgust, as he has from all the nymphs before her, saying: "I'll die before I give you power over me." Echo can only repeat humbly: "I give you power over me", and wanders forlornly into a solitary grotto where she eventually pines away, only her voice remaining to haunt the caves and ravines of the forest. Narcissus continues along his cruel path, laughing at love until the fateful day when one of his victims prays to the gods that "he who loves no other be taken with love for himself." Nemesis, the goddess of righteous anger, takes it upon herself to carry out the wish; so it comes to pass that Narcissus, bending over a pool to drink, sees his own reflection and understands immediately why the others have suffered: "I now burn with love for myself, yet can neither approach the beauty I see in the water nor move away from it, surely death is the only thing that will liberate me!" And so Narcissus died beside the pool, Echo coming to his side to repeat his farewells to the fading image, the beautiful narcissus flower growing from the ground to mark the spot.³

The Narcissus and Echo myth is invoked here for several reasons. Myth, like fairytale which will also be referred to, often deals in fantasy containing hidden truths, according to the archetypal psychology of C.G. Jung. Fantasy, as purely imaginative expression of the hidden, is perhaps the best way to describe the mood of a Durassian text. To simplify greatly, the texts can be seen as the working-out of a woman's fantasy in the arena of male-dominated language. Behind the stories of Lol V. Stein, Anne-Marie Stretter and the beggar woman, is hidden the author's search in the male universe of words for her own writing voice. Since this writing can be seen in the context of the modern literary concept of "text", the word the author

herself uses when referring to her literary works, the first lines of Derrida's "La Pharmacie de Platon" will perhaps best elucidate this idea of the hidden and of process in the Durassian text: "Un texte n'est un texte que s'il cache au premier regard, au premier venu, la loi de sa composition et la règle de son jeu."⁴ The quest exists, therefore, both from the point of view of the writer and from that of the reader; it is a quest which can often render reading, especially in the earlier texts such as Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein, a disquieting experience.

Secondly, the myth of Narcissus and Echo deals in transformation, singly the most important underlying movement in the series of texts seen here as reflecting a self-portrait of the writer. The myth of Narcissus is perhaps the most pertinent metamorphic myth to be invoked when plunging into the complexities and paradoxes of the literary self-portrait, especially one obscured by the patterns of fiction. Self-portraiture does not reside, according to Michel Beaujour in Miroirs d'encre, in the narcissistic confines of autobiography or of the intimate journal; rather, it is characterised by the movement which joins the self-portraitist with the larger context of her or his cultural reservoir, that takes writing beyond the limits of the individual ego into a more universal consciousness: "L'autoportrait dépasse toujours, et pour cause, le narcissisme primaire."⁵ Or, in the words of Marguerite Duras appearing on the back cover of the Aurélia Steiner texts: "Ecrire c'est n'être personne."

Since it is a question of female self-portraiture and of the quest for a female voice, equal emphasis will be given to the role of Echo in this myth. The fate of Echo is intriguing to examine in relationship to writing generally, and, more particularly, to female writing. Accused by

a jealous mother figure, trapped in the forest, condemned to the prison of her own repetition, Echo shows herself to be emblematic of what has been, and perhaps still is, the position of women writing within the corpus of male-defined culture.

Finally, within the myth is found the power struggle of love which is refused by Narcissus; love for his own image results, furthermore, in a dilemma leading to his death and return to the earth followed by a further transformation into a flower. Love, the failure or refusal of love, death; eros and thanatos, creation and destruction, this is the dialectical rhythm leading to the transformation through language that the Durassian texts reveal.

When viewed as an evolving group, these works inter-relate, weaving together through juxtaposition and metonymy the destinies of five female characters; Lol V. Stein, Anne-Marie Stretter, "la mendiante", Tatiana Karl, and finally Aurélia Steiner. It is in "Les Yeux verts,"⁶ an intriguing, autobiographically coloured collage of writings and photographs of the author's cinematographic works and their sources, that Aurélia Steiner is best seen in relationship to the other Durassian heroines and to the author herself. It is as though Aurélia Steiner is born from the ruins of that world which held the others, as presented, for example, in the film Son nom de Venise dans Calcutta désert;⁷ here, four mute, shadowy, female figures wander among ruins by a beach while the sound track from India Song is heard.

In the original works from which the later cinematographic works such as India Song and La Femme du Gange evolved, the "stories" were recounted by male narrators. The images before the camera, accompanied by

disembodied "voices", have replaced this narration in the later works. Since these "voices" are in the present, they are separated from the "story" which remains buried in images from the past. The retelling of that story intermingles with the invention of their own. This division of the voices (the present) from the images (the past) reflects the dialectic of memory and invention which, according to Michael Beaujour, forms one of the bases of self-portraiture:

Ce qui importe à l'autoportraitiste en tant qu'écrivain, c'est le processus de construction et de déconstruction des lieux, le classement, l'inventaire, l'embôitage et le désembôitage des images, beaucoup plus que les contenus spécifiques de la mémoire, qui deviennent de simples jalons de l'invention du texte.⁸

The memory of the ball where Lol loses her fiancé takes on the form of a space to be gradually decomposed in the subsequent texts. It meets in a mysterious way, the beach and the sea always present in the Durassian text, and which can be traced, in turn, to the sea of the author's childhood first written about in Un Barrage contre le Pacifique.⁹ However, the analysis only begins here, for beneath the diegetic or story level exists that powerful dimension of language itself which borders on a limitless zone of silence. It is here that the self-portrait and the female voice cross paths. Another voice, the voice of Aurélia Steiner — the obscure synthesis of the other heroines who have preceded her — comes from this opaque region of silence; from here her dialogue emerges and returns in a constant flow. It is this emergence and this eternal flow that define the female voice. Tracing its evolution in the Durassian text is the goal of the present study.

C'est curieux, cette apparence que prend le fleuve quelquefois dans l'éclairement de la nuit, d'aller vers la mer très vite pour tout entier s'y fondre...

Mais qui êtes-vous?

Qui?

Comment cela se ferait-il?

Comment cela se serait-il fait?

(...)

Moi, je ne sais plus (A.S., p.126-7).

Destruction as Preamble

The first novels of Marguerite Duras can be seen from the perspective of the traditional novel (1943-1958); the works beginning with Moderato Cantabile (1958), as will be seen in the present study, become the very antithesis of this tradition. Of the earlier works, several might be described as written in the autobiographical mode, for they have a strong narrative, chronologically ordered events, and are patterned after persons and events from the writer's childhood. For example, Un Barrage contre Le Pacifique, written in 1950, reflects the author's difficult and unusual childhood spent in Indochina with a widowed mother and brother.⁹

Towards the end of the fifties, her writing changes markedly and rather abruptly, taking a decided turn towards an intuitive, poetic mode. This transformation in the writing relates to a crisis in the author's life, a crisis which takes on the contours of the disquieting tale of love and death in the novel Moderato Cantabile. Marguerite Duras speaks of this

transition in the following terms, during an interview in 1971:

L'oeuvre la plus autobiographique, si l'on parle des événements ou des faits, est Barrage contre Le Pacifique; du point de vue de l'expérience intérieure, Moderato Cantabile. C'est pour cela que j'ai dû dissimuler les événements en les transformant sous une forme poétique, ce qu'est en réalité Moderato Cantabile. Ce n'est pas écrit comme un roman. Ça veut plutôt être un poème.¹⁰

Several years later, in the interviews with Xavière Gauthier published in book form under the title of Les Parleuses, Marguerite Duras speaks again, this time with more irony, about the direction her writing had taken:

On était tellement pauvres, on bouffait n'importe quoi, des oiseaux, des oiseaux de mer qui puaient le poisson. 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.¹¹

This irony foreshadows the other side of the creative process, the "thanatos" or destructive drive that her writing began to uncover during and following this transition. Détruire, dit-elle,¹² a novel and film written and produced in 1969, clearly states the radicalism of the writer's itinerary. If we are to create, we must first learn to destroy, to let go, to throw out what no longer works; with this house-cleaning, novel-writing in the traditional sense is swept out the door:

— Ecrire, peut-être, dit Thor. Car tout se passe ici comme si je comprenais qu'on puisse...
— il sourit les yeux fermés—chaque nuit,
depuis que je suis arrivé dans cet hôtel,

je suis sur le point de commencer...
je n'écris pas, je n'écirai jamais...
oui, chaque nuit change ce que j'écirais
si j'écirais (Détruire, p.39).

In the following passage, Thor is questioning Stein, the writer-to-be:

--Qu'est-ce que tu fais toute la journée?
--Rien.
--Tu ne lis pas?
--Non. Je fais semblant.
--Où en es-tu dans ce livre?
--Dans des préambules sans fin (Détruire, p.48).

Détruire, dit-elle is a constant play on the theme of reading and writing, in which Thor and Stein, of the Thor-Alissa-Stein trio, are would-be writers who do not write; Elizabeth Alione, the other guest in the hotel, whom the trio eventually draw into their sphere, is the reader who never reads; her book is always lying passively beside her, forgotten while she sleeps, then taken up unconsciously in a semi-hypnotic effort to fathom the same two pages. This abstruse text seems to be saying that reading and writing are bankrupt. "Détruire", says Alissa. "Alissa sait, dit Stein. Mais que sait-elle?" (Détruire, p.52). Alissa is violent, petulant and loving by turns; she is also eighteen, the age of Lol V. Stein and Aurélia Steiner, the central Durassian heroines in the quest for the female voice. It is also the age of Marguerite Duras when she left Indochina to study in France.

The other woman of the story, Elizabeth Alione, is older, has just lost a baby, has a teenage daughter with whom she does not presently get along, and spends all her time at the hotel sleeping. There is also a question about a dead doctor (her lover?) which remains in the ambiguity

surrounding the entire text:

--Cette crise, demande Alissa, ce docteur.

--Oui, dit Stein, cette mort du docteur.

--Il n'est pas mort, crie Bernard Alione (Détruire., p.115).

The three (Thors-Alissa-Stein) are followers of the theory of Rosenfeld.

Rosenfeld is a dead child, eight years old. The novel doubles back on itself, writing its story as it goes along. It is based on destruction:

"La destruction capitale en passera d'abord par les mains d'Alissa", dit Stein" (Détruire., p.59). Alissa is crazy: "Stein dit que vous êtes folle", dit Elizabeth (Détruire., p.103). The author has the following to say about her heroine:

M.D.- Elle s'amène sur la scène et elle cause; elle commence à poser des questions, Alissa, hein? Uniquement des questions. Elle est la destruction, uniquement, Alissa, la négation. Elle laisse le livre, Elizabeth Alione...dénudés. Détruire, c'est comme un préambule... (Les Parleuses, p.21).

The death of Elizabeth Alione's child is the "accident" which gives rise to the possibility of this destruction:

--Elle vous en a parlé sans doute... un accident idiot...

Aucun signe d'aucun.

--Au fond, c'était plus moral qu'autre chose chez Elizabeth...Une femme ressent ces choses-là comme des échecs. Nous ne pouvons pas tout à fait comprendre, nous, les hommes... (Détruire., p.113)

This "accident" symbolizes the bottom line of experience in the Durassian text, the experience that breaks up the usual paradigm, causing one to see the world differently. In Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein, the text which begins the self-portrait, it is represented by the absence of suffering by

Lol during the ball when her fiancé walks away, before her very eyes, with another woman. Marguerite Duras refers to this "accident" in Les Parleuses:

M.D. (...) La jalousie n'a pas été vécue, la douleur n'a pas été vécue. Le chaînon a sauté, ce qui fait que dans la chaîne tout ce qui suit est faux, c'est à un autre niveau.

X.G.--C'est ce niveau-là qui est intéressant, justement.

M.D.--Oui, mais il a fallu un accident.

X.G.--Oui. Comme dans Détruire, à ce moment-là, l'accident serait l'enfant mort, pour Elizabeth Allione?

M.D.--Pour Elizabeth Allione, c'est l'enfant mort (Les Parleuses, p.20-21).

Détruire, dit-elle, a preamble centering on destruction, ends on a prophetic note: "C'est la musique sur le nom de Stein", says Alissa. As the film ends a deafening symphony-like cacophany is heard coming from the forest, the place that frightens both of the women, the forbidden space of the text (as opposed to the security of the park and the hotel). To enter the forest would be to enter into the unknown: "La forêt de Détruire, c'est l'enfance" (Les Parleuses, p.135). Music, the dimension of sound, "l'écoute" as it will be referred to in the next chapter of this study, is the catalyst of transformation in the Durassian text. Through music, the cries and screams, and later the chant, we come to recognize the silence and refusal latent to the discourse of these texts. As Michèle Montrelay describes it in her psychoanalytical study of Le Ravisement de Lol V. Stein:

Les romans de Marguerite Duras déploient le même monde de stupeur et de silence. Ce silence, cette non-parole, on pourrait montrer qu'elle exhibe, toujours, la dimension fascinante du manque féminin que Duras veuille

le faire "parler" comme cri (Moderato Cantabile)
ou comme "musique."¹³

The name "Stein" to which this "music" is dedicated appears in Lol V. Stein and again later in Aurélia Steiner: there is a progression from Lol, "la folle", to Stein in the writer-to-be, and finally to Auréila Steiner, the writer. It is as though we must pass through the madness/fantasy, "le chaînon sauté" of Lol Stein, the confrontation with destruction, absence and death— the "rien" which is simultaneously object and nothing— before we reach Aurélia Steiner, the young writer of eighteen. The name is not Jewish by chance: the great trauma of the century, the holocaust, created a wound in the soul of the writer which the act of writing, a calling out to others who are also calling, assuaged:

C'est vrai que, historiquement, quand je serai morte et qu'on fera l'histoire de mes écrits, on verra que j'ai recommencé à écrire avec Aurélia. Comme si quelque chose était assouvi, une douleur très grande que je n'avais jamais exprimée. Parce que tout au long de ma vie, j'ai essayé d'éviter de penser aux Juifs, d'abord parce que des gens s'opposaient à moi quand je le faisais, et ensuite, parce que je me disais, bêtement, en suivant les modèles imposés, qu'il y avait quelque chose, là, de morbide, alors qu'il faut en parler. Absolument. L'histoire des Juifs, c'est mon histoire. Puisque je l'ai vécu dans cette horreur, je sais que c'est ma propre histoire. Alors j'ai osé écrire sur les Juifs.¹⁴

Traces of this trauma intermingle with the traumas of the writer's earlier childhood and come to join the larger river of the traumas of all oppressed groups — women, children, workers, the Jews — as the reader follows the paths of destruction, refusal, violence, passion, and finally of solitude that are woven into the fascinatingly transparent and arcane

tapestry of the Durassian text:

La femme d'Hiroshima est seule, elle a été rendue à la solitude par la mort du jeune Allemand. Elle reste seule même dans le mariage, la maternité. Anne-Marie Stretter est dans une solitude définitive. Et quand elle meurt, elle meurt seule. Lui ne fera aucun geste pour l'empêcher de se tuer. Il n'y a pas de solitude plus grande que celle d'Aurélia Steiner.¹⁵

Narcissus and Echo both remain alone at the end of the myth, he to die and be transformed into a flower, becoming pure image in a sense; she to become pure repetition, a voice haunting the lonely grottos of the forest. Solitude is the definitive mark of the writer, particularly the author of the self-portrait, in which both the writer and the reader witness, mirrored, the infinity of their own solitude in language and the individual's ceaseless desire in language to achieve communication:

Lorsque nous écrivons, lorsque nous appelons,
déjà nous sommes pareils. Essayez. Essayez alors
que vous êtes seul dans votre chambre, libre,
d'appeler ou de répondre au-dessus du gouffre.
De vous mélanger au vertige, à l'immense marée
des appels.

Ce premier mot, ce premier cri on ne sait pas
le crier. Autant appeler Dieu. C'est impossible.
Et cela se fait.

(A.S., back cover)

The Mute Refusal

Before the transformation announced by the screams of the murdered woman in Moderato Cantabile, and before the unsettling tale of Lola Valérie Stein, Durassian heroines exuded the apathy and inertia of life

lived-out in a vacuum. Like Sara in Les Petits Chevaux de Tarquinia (1953),¹⁶ they are trapped in the eternal repetitions that characterize a woman's life: the beach for the summer vacation, the children, the home, the husband. The possibility of adventure, of "love" in the form of a clandestine romance, alters this monotony only slightly, since the larger context of inertia surrounding that life merely reflects the impossibility of such an event effecting any change. Oppression (silent and non-expressed) hangs over Sara's existence, suggested by the exhausting heat in a summer resort with only the occasional brief respite -- a boat ride, a romantic encounter, the bitter camparis from morning to evening. It is also communicated by the repetitive language. Each of the four chapters begins and ends with the same alternation of fleeting hope and crushing reality; the phrases themselves often vary only by a word or even by just a letter:

Sara se leva tard. La chaleur était là, égale à elle-même (p.7).

La chaleur était si grande qu'on aurait pu croire qu'il allait pleuvoir sans tarder, peut-être dans l'après-midi. Elle s'endormait dans cet espoir (p.52).

Mais lorsqu'elle s'éveilla, le temps, encore une fois, s'était levé (p.53).

The second chapter ends on a slight variation of essentially the same theme of excruciating boredom:

--là ou ailleurs, dit Sara, il faut bien passer ses vacances quelque part, non?

--Sans doute, dit-il, mais-il hésite- je n'aime pas beaucoup cette façon de voir (p.114).

The third chapter takes up once again the leitmotif of suffocating heat and a hope for respite:

Le lendemain, la chaleur était toujours là, égale à elle-même (p.115).

La chaleur était si grande qu'on aurait pu croire qu'il allait pleuvoir sans tarder, dans l'après-midi. Elle s'endormait dans cet espoir (p.168).

The fourth begins with the same sentence as the second, this time with an extra letter only:

Mais lorsqu'elle se réveilla, le temps, encore une fois, s'était levé (p.169).

Again it ends with the night and the same small hope for the next day:

Elle espérait que cette nuit-là, la pluie arriverait, et elle s'endormait très tard, dans cet espoir (p.221).

That this life is stifling, intolerably boring and repetitive, is reflected again and again with the same rhythmic insistence that draws the reader away from the search for ideas toward the hypnotic pull of the words forming and reforming the same patterns, inevitably augmenting the same feeling of incarceration and suffocation. Echo is trapped alone in the grottos and caverns in her eternal repetition, throwing back answers as mirrored forms of the questions which are not hers to pose:

L'autre jour, je t'ai dit: qu'est-ce que tu as dû souffrir pour écrire ce que tu écris. Et tu as dit: oui, j'ai dû souffrir.

Mais je pense que c'est comme ça que le malheur s'inscrit. Toutes les femmes ont dû souffrir sans le savoir. Quand elles te disent: qu'est-ce que j'ai été heureuse en telle année, on est allé en vacances à Biarritz, les enfants étaient petits, etc. c'est pas vrai. Pas vrai. C'est l'homme qui dictait ce faux bonheur, qui dictait ça: comme on est bien, aujourd'hui, ma chérie, il fait beau... L'homme se reposait du travail. Nous, on n'avait pas besoin de ça, de rien de pareil, mais de partir au contraire, de faire éclater cette fausseté. On se reposait, forcée. Les plages rendaient folle d'ennui.¹⁷

The state of inertia and pervasive silence surrounding these women is their existential predicament, referred to by the author as a state of profound refusal:

Qui précède le refus, la séparation? Mais je ne sais pas, voilà, c'est ça qui est étrange. Je les trouve déjà installés. Quand j'ai commencé le film ou l'Amour, c'était déjà là. Alors, il faut croire qu'il y a eu un livre avant ça que je n'ai pas aperçu, ou bien qui m'intéresse pas. Un livre qui serait ça, cette séparation, la séparation d'avec la société, qui porterait sur le fait de la séparation. Et dans les livres que j'ai écrits, ils sont déjà séparés, depuis très, très longtemps (Les Parleuses, p.57).

The outlines of the Durassian woman begin to form. Hers is a mute history contained in her dwellings, circulating about freely in nature, or trapped in relationships. Her expression is truncated, caught up in mutism, indifference, repetition, apathy, or simply lies. She is finally led into madness and from there she eventually moves into freedom. At a deep level there exists an unspoken refusal to play the roles that the patriarchal world has assigned to her. Neither able to invent the rules, nor bring to the surface the dilemma, she is caught up in a fabric of lies, as is in the case of Suzanne Andler:

Suzanna: Je me suis enfermée ici pour me tuer je crois.

Suzanna, sourire déchirant: Et puis j'ai dormi.

Jean, voix sourde: Pourquoi mourir Suzanna?

Suzanna, temps: Oh...(sourire, plainte enfantine mêlés) Pour ne plus mentir peut-être.
(temps) Tu n'aurais pas été la seule raison (Suzanne Andler, p.58).

Lol V. Stein's fantasy life — and it is here that the movement toward self-portraiture begins — is ensconced in a web of lies protecting it from the outside world:

Quand elle parle, quand elle bouge, regarde ou se distrait, j'ai le sentiment d'avoir sous les yeux une façon personnelle et capitale de mentir, un champ immense mais aux limites d'acier, du mensonge. Pour nous, cette femme ment sur T. Beach, sur S. Thala, sur cette soirée, pour moi, pour nous, elle mentira tout à l'heure sur notre rencontre, je le prévois, elle ment sur elle aussi, pour nous elle ment parce que le divorce dans lequel nous sommes elle et nous, c'est elle seule qui l'a prononcé-mais en silence-dans un rêve si fort qu'il lui a échappé et qu'elle ignore l'avoir eu (L.V.S., p.106).

A parallel might be drawn in the author's life, since it is as a turning toward honesty that she describes the transition in her writing, leading eventually to the birth of a new voice in Aurélia Steiner:

Pendant très longtemps j'étais dans la société, je dînais chez les gens. Tout ça était un tout. J'allais dans les cock-tails, j'y voyais des gens... et je faisais ces livres-là (Les Petits Chevaux de Tarquinia, etc.) Voilà, et puis, une fois, j'ai eu une histoire d'amour et je pense que c'est là que ça a commencé(...) Une expérience érotique très très violente et — comment dire ça? — j'ai traversé une crise qui était... suicidaire, cette femme qui veut être tuée, je l'ai vécu...et à partir de là les livres ont changé... J'ai pensé à ça depuis deux ans, deux, trois ans, je pense que le tournant, le virage vers... vers la sincérité s'est produit là (Les Parleuses, p.59).

The movement toward honesty is a movement inward, a journey into the dark side of the self where the writer discovers and translates, invents with re-membered fragments; or is it that the invention is now left to the reader? Who is Lol V. Stein? Where has she come from? What does her wandering mean? What is this word that refuses to appear, the word that would have prevented the couple from retreating before her fascinated gaze?

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.
(L.V.S., p.48)

Is it the "absence" within language which creates longing for the incarnation of the object itself, instead of the forming of an infinite chain of signifieds — the world of representation and metaphor? Where is woman's language? Where is the key to the coffer which is the mystery that culture has buried her in?

Ça n'as pas de sens, Lol V. Stein, voyez,
ça n'a pas de signification. Lol V. Stein,
c'est ce que vous en faites, ça n'existe pas
autrement, je crois que je viens de dire
quelque chose là sur elle (Les Lieux, p.101).

The prison of Echo can also be seen in the sanctity of the home, the space in which a woman need not speak, a space she knows and feels intimately, as she knows her own body, through a language of ritual acts. She has been locked in: "Je crois que la maison de Natalie Granger, c'est une caverne, c'est une grotte" (Les Parleuses, p.78). Natalie Granger,¹⁹ a film and text produced and published in 1973 (appearing in the same volume as La Femme du Gange) is filmed in the writer's home, from where, later, in the small autobiographical volume, Les Lieux de Marguerite Duras,²⁰ she speaks with Michelle Porte of the significance of this home in her work:

Je vois Isabelle Granger comme prisonnière
de cette demeure-ci, prisonnière d'elle-même,
de sa vie, de cette espèce de circuit infernal
qui va de l'amour de ses enfants à ses devoirs
conjugaux, comme on dit, vous voyez, et que
c'est tout ça, tout ce contenu justement de sa
vie qui est enfermé ici. C'est comme quand elle
déambule là, dans la maison, c'est comme si elle
passait autour d'elle-même, comme si elle
contournait son propre corps. Isabelle Granger
m'apparaît comme habitant totalement la maison,

comme si elle en épousait même le contour,
comme si la maison elle-même avait forme de
femme (Les Lieux, p.20).

In the film, Isabelle Granger and her friend pass the day in taciturn, ritual-like activities, the most important being the unpacking of her daughter's clothes: she will no longer be going to school, having been expelled for her violence. Again there appears the "accident" which, disturbing the status quo, perturbs the reader's perspective, allowing another less stable world to be revealed to the senses. No longer merely a place of sanctimonious sequestration, the house opens up:

Tout le monde y entre. Elle est ouverte et
ce petit accident qui fait que la petite fille
n'ira plus à l'école, dont on ne sait plus du
tout ce qu'elle va devenir, qui fait que la
maison se casse. Dans la chaîne, ce chaînon
qui manque justement, la petite délogée du
social, ça fait casser le reste... Elle
s'ouvre (Les Parleuses, p. 113).

Isabelle Granger is preoccupied with the problem of her daughter's violence and of her refusal to play the piano, the only means, her mother believes, of curing the violence. The film revolves around the two women and their somnambulous and ritualistic presence in this house which seems to be organically part of them. They inhabit this space fully, seemingly to the exclusion of the outside intrusions which, first in the form of a radio announcement of a murder (a parallel to the daughter's violence), and later in the form of a door-to-door salesman, are experienced as violations and received in semi-mute disapprobation by the two women. The space is in some essential way unapproachable to the uninvited (uninitiated?) male, as the salesman uncomfortably experiences when his detailed "sales-pitch" for an automatic washer is continually met with large pervasive

blocks of silence from the two women:

L'Homme:

L'encombrement de la 008 est minimum: 46,
81, 60, (Arrêt) Qui dit mieux sur toute
la place de Paris? (Arrêt) Aucune machine
en Europe n'a un encombrement aussi peu
important... (Arrêt)

Sa voix s'est modifiée, il parle plus vite.
Il a presque crié pour se donner du courage.
Le regard des femmes le traverse.
Il continue dans une sorte de désespoir.²¹

The film ends with a short sequence in which the salesman crosses very quickly in front of the house, a dog close at his heels. He is peering furtively over his shoulder at the house as though he were being chased by a mythological beast. Immediately prior to this, another brief sequence paralleling the flight of the salesman is filmed at the back of the house where the two women are seen walking towards a bonfire they have apparently built in order to burn the branches that have fallen from the trees in a storm mentioned earlier in the film; a strong feeling of witchcraft pervades the scene:

M.P. Est-ce que ces femmes qu'on trouve dans vos films, dans vos livres, je pense à la femme de Natalie Granger, enfin, Isabelle Granger, à Elizabeth Allione (Détruire, dit-elle), à Vera Baxter, dans Les Plages de L'Atlantique, (premier titre du film Baxter, Vera Baxter), est-ce que, d'une certaine manière, ce ne sont pas encore des sorcières de Michelet?

M.D. On en est encore là, nous les femmes... on en est encore là...oui. On en est là. Ça n'a pas vraiment bougé. Moi, dans cette maison-ci, avec ce jardin, je suis

dans des rapports que les hommes n'auront
jamais avec un habitat, un lieu (Les Lieux., p.14).

During the middle ages while the men were off fighting wars, according to the study Les Sorcières²² by Michelet, the women, left to their own resources, began in their loneliness to talk with nature, and to each other in new ways. Feared by others for what appeared to the Christian mind as heresy, they were subsequently persecuted and burned at the stake. Modern women are again moving towards each other in an effort to regain the power and status in society that male-dominated culture has thus far denied them; from the perspective of the female writer, the goal is to experience what it is to think and write as a woman, — and to relate this experience to others — from the place of being a woman. This involves, according to Marguerite Duras in Les Parleuses and Béatrice Didier in L'écriture-femme,²³ fundamentally three central characteristics: the importance of space arising from an intimate connection with the body and with the home, a movement towards other women, especially the mother to whom a woman's identity is closely tied, and finally an experiencing of desire as a limitless passion refusing the confines of male-defined sexuality. At a textual level these traits become manifest in Marguerite Duras' work, for instance, in a writing which refuses traditional categories, moving away from the linearity of narration towards the circularity and simultaneity of images in space, as the present study will demonstrate. Interconnections, in the feminine text, like woven patterns in fabric, seem to depend more on juxtaposing, as in figures such as metonymy and synesthesia, than on metaphor and the traditional symbol. In other words, language appears in a more rudimentary state, with connections left for the reader to make.

The earth, for a woman, is not merely a womb to which one returns, nor is the female self-portraitist, like the male self-portraitist described by Michel Beaujour, merely a lonely knight errant who has been expelled from the mother's womb.²⁴ A woman too leaves the womb; but she also has the potential of becoming womb and eventually, a mother, who expels from her womb, the future knight errant. Herein lies the source of woman's guilt, according to Marguerite Duras:

L'accouchement, je le vois comme une culpabilité.
Comme si l'on lâchait l'enfant, qu'on l'abandonne.
(Les Lieux., p.23)

Her story is thus a different one from that of the male from whose language she is now trying to create her own image.

Natalie Granger depicts the more accessible world of the earlier works by the author, such as La Musica, Suzanna Andler, and its later version, Baxter, Véra Baxter; its accessibility resides in its similarity to the stable world we know, the world relating to the home and recognizable relationships. In contrast, La Femme du Gange forms a link to that other, floating, disconnected world which unfolds from the "accident" which is the absence of suffering and subsequent fantasy and wandering of Lol V. Stein. This other world has more to do with the powerful unconscious or archetypal world of the writer; it is a world by the sea (mer/mère) where the same characters circulate, gradually losing their identity — here is the terrain of permanent wandering from which the voice of Aurélia will eventually emerge:

Si vous me demandez où est la maison de
Natalie Granger, je dirai qu'elle est dans
les villas vides qu'on voit dans La Femme
du Gange. J'ai pas pu supporter de rester

sur ce film. J'ai fini Natalie Granger en septembre et je l'ai tourné en novembre. J'ai pas pu rester du tout sur le terrain de Natalie Granger, qui est quand même un terrain didactique, à mon avis(...) La Femme du Gange, c'est un bateau... qui est parti. C'est le contraire de la maison, ils ne rentrent plus nulle part.

(Les Parleuses p.79)

Mother and Daughter

Perhaps even more important to the present study of self-portraiture in the writing of Marguerite Duras than the relationship of love between man and woman (a central and deeply troubled sphere in the "India Song" texts) is that between daughter and mother. In the words of Béatrice Didier in L'Ecriture-femme:

L'écriture devient alors un moyen de reconstruire, de ressusciter le corps de la mère. Bien évidemment parce que le récit toujours revient à elle, mais aussi parce que l'acte d'écrire, en particulier un texte autobiographique (et tous ne le sont-ils pas plus ou moins) apparaît fondamental comme l'acte magique qui permet de faire surgir son propre visage au miroir de la morte.²⁵

In Natalie Granger, for example, one has the strong sense that the mother and daughter are locked together -- within themselves and within the house -- in a shared state of violent and mute refusal:

La pose de la mère la regardant rappelle celle de l'enfant. Toutes deux isolées dans une violence de même nature, sauvage: celle de l'amour, celle du refus (Natalie Granger, p.69).

Recalling the Narcissus and Echo myth, it was Hera, the too often thwarted wife of Zeus, who in a fit of jealous rage condemned the cheer-

fully babbling Echo to her life of repetition. Since the nymphs, being young and semi-divine creatures, fit easily into the role of children to the gods, it follows that a closer look at the story of Hera could prove insightful in relationship to the mother/daughter motif so prevalent in the Durassian text. The Hera archetype, according to an article in Spring (1976),²⁶ has three cycles: Pais (girl or virgin), Teleia (perfect one or fulfilled one) and Chera (widow). Her perfection, potentially to be brought about by her marriage to Zeus, is thwarted since Zeus will not be married to her in more than a token way, nor allow her to be deeply married to him. It is this that makes a Chera (widow) of Hera and constitutes her infernal destructiveness.

A powerfully ambivalent role is played by the mother figure in Marguerite Duras' writing, tantamount — though often at a less conscious or developed level — to that played by erotic love. The relationship, for instance, between the two Durassian heroines central to the self-portrait, Lol V. Stein and Anne-Marie Stretter, has strong mother/daughter intonations. Anne-Marie Stretter is the mother of two daughters and is portrayed as old enough to be the mother of eighteen-year-old Lol. At the end of the ball scene recounted at the beginning of Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein (the moment which best signifies the beginning of the movement into the identity quest that the self-portrait reveals), as Anne-Marie Stretter glides from the room on the arm of Lol's fiancé, Lol's mother rushes into the room to comfort her daughter who is hiding behind the plants in a stupor, her friend Tatiana Karl sitting across from her.

The story of the beggar woman, "la mendiante," which begins in Le Vice-Consul and from which fragments will be seen in subsequent texts, to

parallel and intertwine with the decomposing story of the famous ball from Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein, reveals a powerful tale, mythological in dimension, of a mother/daughter relationship. The jealous mother chases from the house the daughter of seventeen who has "fallen" pregnant by the father; this reality is turned into metaphor in the following passage as the beggar woman loses step by step, in her fabulous wandering, first her memory, then her fertility, and finally her sanity:

Sauf par anicroches quand elle se blesse le
pied sur un éclat de marbre, par exemple, elle
a tendance à oublier l'origine, qu'elle a été
chassée parce qu'elle est tombée enceinte,
d'un arbre, très haut, sans se faire de mal,
tombée enciente (p.20).

The cruel mother who has chased the daughter from the home, a home and mother the daughter only ceases longing for once she is firmly cut off in her own madness, falls into the category of the Chera, a pathogenically vindictive and jealous mother. This, according to an interesting study cited in the above mentioned article, is Hera within the context of a reigning patriarchy: gone is the "generous, co-equal Hera Teleia of the previous epoch, the shrew is centre stage":

With acid irony Philip E. Slater titled his indictment of classical Greek society The Glory of Hera. Misogyny, he argues, was the worm at the core of that society, and the long list of the pathological characteristics rampant in the males of 5th century Athens — narcissism, homosexuality, over-weaning pride (hubris), competitiveness, even schizophrenia! — is laid flatly at the door of this woman and wife degrading attitude. In Slater's view, the angry, conflicted, and humiliated women who had to play wife and mother to these wretched specimens of the male sex are the proximate cause of this sick state of affairs; the ultimate cause is the attitude of the patriarchal society toward women. Thus Hera,

as the image of this persecuted woman, is both victim and victimizer, and in her victimization of her children she is fighting against the victimization dealt her.²⁷

The most powerful example of the victimized woman in Marguerite Duras' work is to be found in the autobiographical novel Un Barrage contre Le Pacifique. Widowed with two children to raise, the woman, the author's mother, has the great misfortune to be sold, unsuspectingly, a piece of worthless land at the mouth of the Mekong river which was inundated regularly by the sea. The bitterness and gradual senility brought on by a hopeless battle against corrupt administrators who, by selling her the land, had perpetrated her endless hardships, is the ground from which the later writing of the daughter will originate. Perhaps the mother saw her daughter as doomed to suffer by the system, as she had, for, as the early autobiographical works reflect, it was toward the elder son that she directed her hope and her love. In a short essay entitled Mothers,²⁸ Marguerite Duras reveals the exclusion she felt before the incredible love her mother demonstrated for that other, older brother schooled in France. This fabulous love between mother and son was the subject of another semi-autobiographical work Des Journées entières dans les arbres (1954).²⁹ Beginning with an oblique reference to this work, the writer describes her mother's death with an acutely painful insight into her own non-existence in the face of that overpoweringly exclusive love of mother for son:

Non, elle n'est pas morte au retour de cette dernière visite à son fils, de ce dernier voyage en Europe. Elle est morte beaucoup plus tard, chassée par la guerre, loin de cette Indochine qui était devenue sa patrie. Seule, à quatre-vingts ans. Elle n'a réclamé qu'une seule présence, celle de ce fils. J'étais dans la chambre,

je les ai vus s'embrasser en pleurant,
désespérés de se séparer. Ils ne m'ont
pas vue.³⁰

There is a childhood event linking Marguerite Duras very strongly to her mother which reverberates throughout the self-portrait. It is the incredible story of the beggar woman and her starving baby which she forces upon the white woman and her daughter:

La femme qui avait un pied malade avait mis huit jours pour venir de Ram; tout le long de la route elle avait essayé de donner son enfant. Dans les villages où elle s'était arrêtée on lui avait dit: "Allez jusqu'à Banté, il y a une femme blanche qui s'intéresse aux enfants." La femme avait réussi à arriver jusqu'à la concession. Elle expliqua à la mère que son enfant la gênait pour retourner dans le Nord et qu'elle ne pourrait jamais la porter jusque là. Une plaie terrible lui avait dévoré le pied à partir du talon(...)
(Un Barrage contre Le Pacifique, p.119-20).

In an article entitled "L'Histoire de la mendiante indienne", Madeleine Borgomano traces the origin of this "primitive" scene in the writing and life of Marguerite Duras:

L'histoire de l'apparition explicite dans l'oeuvre durassienne de la mendiante est significative. "Casée" dans un recoin écarté du roman de l'enfance, roman des origines en 1950, elle se trouve ensuite "occultée" (note: le terme est de Marguerite Duras dans Les Parleuses) pendant seize ans jusqu'au roman Le Vice-Consul dans lequel elle resurgit, avec l'Indochine et l'enfance.³¹

She then quotes from a recorded interview made by the author during the writing of Le Vice-Consul, disclosing the authenticity and poignancy of the memory in the writer's life:

Ma mère, une fois, est revenue du marché
ayant acheté un enfant... une petite fille

de six mois... qu'elle n'a gardée que quelques jours et qui est morte. C'est un souvenir très violent... toujours très vivant, et que j'ai essayé de caser déjà dans un livre, un de mes premiers livres: Le Barrage contre Le Pacifique (...) Je revois ma mère traversant le jardin avec cette femme qui la suivait, cette femme qui avait dans les bras un enfant. Ma mère pleurait... elle était toujours très en colère, comme ça... contre la misère... Je me souviens de cet entêtement, de cette volonté fantastique de donner son enfant.³²

The link which carries this event from a childhood memory, recounted during the autobiographical phase of her writing, forward into the mature phase of her writing referred to here as self-portraiture, is in the mother and "femme fatale" figure, Anne-Marie Stretter, since it is supposedly from a story told by her that the creator of the tale of the beggar woman in Le Vice-Consul, Peter Morgan, invents his story:

La vente d'une enfant a été racontée à Peter Morgan par Anne-Marie Stretter. Anne-Marie Stretter a assisté à cette vente il y a dix-sept ans, vers Savannakhet. Les dates ne coïncident pas. La mendicante est trop jeune pour être celle qu'a vue Anne-Marie Stretter. Cependant Peter Morgan a fait du récit d'Anne-Marie Stretter un épisode de la vie de la mendicante (Le Vice-Consul, p.72).

Here is an example of the constant play between memory and imagination, forgetting and inventing, at work in these texts, creating the contradictions which in turn cause the reader to set aside rational linear thinking for total immersion in the rhythmic flow of the sensorial images forming this universe of emerging childhood. The chant "Savannakhet", the doleful plaint of the beggar woman that settles over the heavy violet atmosphere of the summer monsoon at the beginning of the film

India Song, evokes a powerful connection with the past, for this is what Anne-Marie Stretter recognizes, Savannakhet having been her home before Calcutta:

On Dit: A Calcutta on ne sait pas encore
aujourd'hui si elle était reléguée
au fond de la honte ou de la douleur
à Savannakhet lorsqu'il l'a trouvée
(Le Vice-Consul, p.99).

To go back to Savannakhet ("Ca va à quête", as it has been translated)³³, one discovers in these texts, is synonymous with the writer's return to childhood and to the mother's misery which was its essence:

La présence de la mère prend inévitablement pour les femmes un autre sens que pour les hommes, puisque leur mère est leur exacte matrice, leur préfiguration. D'autant plus sensible que l'âge de l'autobiographie est souvent celui de la maturité, et du moment où elles saisissent la ressemblance avec leur mère, ayant alors l'âge qu'elle avait lors de leur enfance. Le retour à la mère est un fascinant retour au même, ou plutôt à la même.³⁴

Ann-Marie Stretter is like a surrogate mother in the writer's imagination, for she also is an authentic figure from her childhood; her real name was Elizabeth Striedler:³⁵

C'est un des personnages dominants de mon enfance. Je l'ai vraiment connue; j'ai connu ses filles aussi. Elle était la femme de l'administrateur général du poste de Vinh-Long sur le Mékong, et je l'ai vue souvent, j'avais huit ans, j'en souviens bien. Je ne me suis pas trompée d'ailleurs. Elle était vraiment ce que j'ai dit: elle était rousse, elle avait les yeux clairs, elle avait beaucoup d'amants. Un de ses amants s'est suicidé. Tout était juste. Les enfants voient bien... ³⁶

At that very impressionable age the image of a beautiful and mysterious woman enters the imagination of the future writer; around her, as around the incident of the beggar woman and the child, will weave the fascinating threads of the author's childhood in that foreign land. From this same matrix there will eventually emanate Aurélia Steiner, an identity associated with a different voice, an altered way of seeing.

The Crisis and the Beginning of an Identity Quest

In his study of the rhetoric of the self-portrait, Miroirs d'encre, Michel Beaujour poses the question: "Un roman peut-il être autoportrait?"³⁷ However, his reply, referring to Philippe Lejeune's study of autobiography, Le Pacte Autobiographique (1973) leaves the problem untouched: "En l'absence d'un 'pacte autobiographique', la question doit rester irresolue."³⁸ The definition of "autobiography" given by Phillipe Lejeune in Le Pacte autobiographique is: "Récit rétrospectif en prose qu'une personne réelle fait de sa propre existence, lorsqu'elle met l'accent sur sa vie individuelle, en particulier sur l'histoire de sa personnalité."³⁹ Lejeune, however, has considerably broadened his defining criteria when, in a recent article, he quotes the following from Vapereau's Dictionnaire universel des littératures (1879):

Autobiographie(...), oeuvre littéraire, roman, poème, traité philosophique etc., dont l'auteur a eu l'intention, secrète ou avouée, de raconter sa vie, d'exposer ses pensées ou de peindre ses sentiments.⁴⁰

He now focuses his attention on the possibility of a "secret" intention, obfuscating the once clear question of an autobiographical pact:

Qui décidera de l'intention de l'auteur, si elle est secrète? Le lecteur, bien sûr. Ce second sens du mot reflète donc, autant qu'un nouveau type d'écriture, l'émergence d'une nouvelle manière de lire.⁴⁰

The interest of Beaujour's study, in relationship to the present examination of the identity quest in the writing of Marguerite Duras, is precisely his contrasting of the relatively newer genre of the literary self-portrait with the more traditional genre of the autobiography: it is against the formal matrix of autobiography that he develops his thesis of a rhetoric of self-portraiture. In a similar way, the later works of Marguerite Duras can be seen as an amorphous, achronological outpouring and reaction against the organized story-telling of her earlier writings, as though she were following then, formulae she now refuses. Since there is no "autobiographical pact" in her works being considered here, the self-portrait is expressed through the language itself, with the events camouflaged in the fiction. Seeing these texts as self-portraiture is thus an interpretation, a thesis requiring justification and defence. The adoption of this perspective was initially inspired by certain characteristics of this type of writing as outlined by Beaujour, namely: the dominance of space over time, the idea of writing as an adventure into the domain of pure language, the dimension of the quest, and the cryptic or hermetic quality resulting, which relates this genre to the concept of "text" or "production of the text":

"Le texte est une productivité. Cela ne veut pas dire qu'il est le produit d'un travail (tel que pouvaient l'exiger la narration et la maîtrise du style), mais le théâtre même d'une production où se rejoignent le producteur du texte et son lecteur: le texte 'travaille', à chaque

moment de quelque côté qu'on le prenne;
même écrit (fixé), il n'arrête pas de
travailler, d'entretenir un processus
de production."⁴¹

The role of the reader takes on a new importance as "co-producer" in the text. This aspect becomes increasingly apparent in the "India Song" texts of Marguerite Duras.

A literary self-portrait, as opposed to the more rigorously organized autobiography, is first of all, according to Beaujour's study, "un montage": a more loosely and intuitively organized rendering of selected events in a person's life, answering the question "who am I?" rather than the more prosaic underlying question in autobiography; "what have I done?"⁴² It is, consequently, an assemblage of images connecting more directly to feeling than to a rational process of recording certain chronologically ordered events. To generalize, in such writing time will depend upon space instead of the converse, the situation in the traditional novel. This transformation from the temporal to the atemporal is seen equally in the modern concept of the "text" here described by Genette in Figures II:

Depuis Mallarmé nous avons appris à reconnaître
(à re-connaître) les ressources dites visuelles de
la graphie et de la mise en page et l'existence du
livre comme une sorte d'objet total, et ce change-
ment de perspective nous a rendus plus attentifs à la
spatialité de l'écriture, à la disposition atempo-
relle et réversible des signes, des mots, des
phrases, du discours dans la simultanéité de ce qu'on
nomme un texte.⁴³

"Who am I" is destined to remain an open question, transformed ultimately into a permanent quest, since the goal of knowing, no less than that of stating, "who am I", is an impossible one to attain. In other words the autobiographer knows certain time limits: birth and death; whereas the self-portraitist is plunged deeply into the metaphysical

dimension of an endless present which the act of writing makes manifest.

This is where the etymological connection between "text" and "tissu" is perceived, as observed by Genette:

(...) texte, c'est-à-dire (comme un) tissu de figures où le temps (ou, comme on dit, la vie) de l'écrivain écrivant et celui (celle) du lecteur lisant se nouent ensemble et se retordent dans le milieu paradoxal de la page et du volume.⁴⁴

It will be in the second part of this study, when the fictional journal of Aurélia Steiner is discussed, that the significance of an "endless present of the text" will be most strongly felt.

Following the transition brought about by the crisis in her life recounted in fictionalized form in Moderato Cantabile, the writing of Marguerite Duras becomes increasingly hermetic, at once poetic and "pared" down: adjectives and eventually pronouns become sparse, disappear, verbs and phrases are repeated like echos, substantives and superlatives abound, and, most important, the image prevails. The passage from La Femme du Gange cited earlier (p.8) illustrates the transparent effect created by this style. It is as though the distance created between the reader and the text, in the act of telling which dominates the narrative, had been reduced to a minimum: we move about, carried by the rhythm of the sentences — like the short chopping strokes of waves — in a world where words are autonomous. As Dominique Noguez expresses it:

(...) l'écriture de Marguerite Duras — ces bribes calcinées, quelques verbes répétés, substantifs sans chairs (sans le gras des adjectifs, des pronoms) — son écriture non seulement littéraire, mais aussi cinématographique, est en adéquation, en équivalence parfaite avec ce qu'elle signifie. Genette, reprenant

Hjelmslev (la grande critique aidée de la grande linguistique) dirait: l'expression et le contenu ont la même forme.⁴⁵

Her writing, however, did not start at this point of "adéquation" but attained it through an evolutionary process involved primarily with the destruction of what we have traditionally come to know as reading and writing.

For instance, while writing in the autobiographical mode, Marguerite Duras would tell stories, permitting herself to paint the inner thoughts of her characters, thus giving them a contrived depth and autonomy. Suzanne, in Un Barrage contre le Pacifique, for example has sentiments which she expresses as would any young girl feeling the advent of womanhood:

Suzanne s'asseyait contre la croisée. Le bruit du tram arrivait assourdi jusque dans la chambre. Mais tout ce que Suzanne voyait de la ville, d'ici, c'était son grand fleuve à moitié recouvert par des nuées de grandes jonques qui venaient du Pacifique et par les remorqueurs du port. Carmen avait tort de s'inquiéter pour elle. Déjà, à force de voir tant de films, tant de gens s'aimer, tant de départs, tant d'enlacements, tant d'embrassements définitifs, tant de solutions, tant et tant, tant de prédestinations, tant de délaissements cruels, certes, mais inévitables, fatals, déjà ce que Suzanne aurait voulu c'était quitter la mère (Un Barrage contre le Pacifique, p.203).

In this autobiographical novel the mother, in her pathetic battle against the sea, forms a center around which the world revolves, and, against which it finally reacts, as this passage reveals; in the later "India Song" texts, it is the sea itself that plays this central role, but instead of the unifying effect experienced previously, the latter creates

a dispersing or disseminating effect. In L'Amour, La Femme du Gange and Son Nom de Venise dans Calcutta désert, the characters wander homeless, as though cut off from a center and stranded on the sandy beach where the sea predominates. The fluid language of the text here imitates the liquid landscape it is painting, a seascape that has attained the same mysterious autonomy as the characters:

Quelque part sur la plage, à droite de celui
qui regarde, un mouvement lumineux: une flaque
se vide, une source, des fleuves, sans répit,
alimentent le gouffre de sel (L'Amour, p.8).

This fluidity of language in turn reflects the attentive listening by the author to the flow of words combining image and feeling, memories, perhaps from childhood where heart and feelings formed a house open and exposed to the violences offered by life:

M.D. (...) ces livres sont douloureux, à
écrire, à lire et que cette douleur
devrait nous mener vers un champ...,
ils sont douloureux, c'est douloureux,
parce que c'est un travail qui porte
sur une région... non encore creusée,
peut-être.

X.G. Non encore mise à jour.

M.D. C'est ce blanc de la chaîne dont vous
parliez. Je ne veux pas dire psychanalyse... ce féminin, si vous voulez.
Non? (Les Parleuses, p.18).

A very different outward expression of a unique inner landscape now influences the writing, for the characters arrive on the page as though unfinished. Nameless and wandering in somnolent fashion, they retrace an event of which they have little or no memory — they exhibit a set of primitive-like reactions relating always to something which has already taken place. Like Echo in the transformative myth of Narcissus, they seem

somehow condemned to repeat in strange hallucinatory movements and hauntingly repetitive language, the events which have gone before them: reflecting and repeating, repeating and reflecting. The narration is thus reduced to a sort of panoramic view of the exterior of the characters with gestures/ absence of gestures, movements/ absence of movements, looks/ absence of looks, sounds/ silences taking on new significance, leaving the question of identity open to pure speculation — the invention of the reader. The following description of "la femme" in L'Amour, in comparison with the above description of Suzanne, is completely exteriorized: a woman as pure object is here painted in the attitude of refusal, the insignia of the Durassian heroine:

La femme est regardée.
Elle se tient les jambes allongées. Elle
est dans la lumière obscure, encastrée
dans le mur. Yeux fermés.
Ne ressent pas être vue. Ne sait pas être
regardée.
Elle tient face à la mer. Visage blanc.
Mains à moitié enfouies dans le sable,
immobiles comme le corps. Force arrêtée,
déplacée vers l'absence. Arrêtée
dans son mouvement de fuite.
L'ignorant, s'ignorant.
(L'Amour, p.10)

When reading L'Amour one exists, in a strangely vulnerable sense, inside language, at one, or so it seems, with the emotions that appear to cling to the broken phrases, falling away and returning like the cycle of day and night upon the beach. One becomes immersed, through the unusual staccatto-like rhythm of the language, in the same emotion — or absence of emotion — that compels the words, like the characters, to dissemble and reassemble continuously with hypnotic fluidity on the otherwise empty beach. The "absence" (of Lol's suffering the night of the ball? "le

chaînon sauté", the "accident") is curiously always present in this group of texts originating from the same source, the famous end of a summer ball at T-Beach first recounted at the beginning of Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein. Michèle Montrelay describes this absence (which she sees as haunting all women's writing) in these terms:

En écrivant, un homme se sépare de L'Autre avec les mots, avec leur substance féminine dont il s'assure simultanément qu'un reste demeure sur le papier. Avec les mots, les femmes ont une autre relation. Ils sont le prolongement d'elles-mêmes. Si, comme le dit Hélène Cixous dans La Jeune Née, elles risquent dans l'angoisse tout leur être quand il leur faut "prendre la parole", c'est qu'elles savent que l'espace où les mots vont résonner, souvent dénature et refuse.⁴⁶

Language considered in its "feminine" substance, as "other", the "mother tongue", is language considered from the male perspective, the perspective from which it has been developed. Within such a male-defined corpus, woman can only experience language in its "productive" state in the text — the relationship of the writer to language in the self-portrait — as a return to self or the same, and in so doing it, forms a contiguity from which she necessarily has difficulty separating herself.

Although for the most part the analysis of Beaujour is restricted to carefully chosen works (all written by males!) in which the autobiographical pact is present, he also alludes frequently to the proximity of the self-portrait, whose language often appears in the larval ("néotomie") stage, to other modern, unique, literary adventures:

Ce phénomène de néotomie et d'inachèvement est analogue à ce qu'on appelait naguère en France la signifiante, la production du texte, le travail du signifiant et, plus récemment, l'écriture dite mineure ou féminine. Il s'agit

dans les deux cas d'une espèce de prématuration,
le texte étant livré au public en un moment de
sa genèse, au stade du brouillon.⁴⁷

Marguerite Duras refers to her works quite simply as "texts", describing the language in an analogous manner:

Moi quand je dis mes textes, je les laisse
à l'état de décomposition, leurs éléments
gramaticaux épars. Je ne m'occupe jamais de
rejoindre un sens. C'est à vous de le faire.
Je la laisse dans un état pantelant, la
phrase. Et c'est pour ça que ça peut
s'écouter.⁴⁸

Discovering the sense and making the connections becomes a search which is based upon questioning every limb we reach out to grasp for support — so we learn to float and fall, much like Alice down the rabbit's hole to wonderland. The very antithesis of writing with a reassuring plot and secure narrative, the Durassian text which follows Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein is instead a "recherche qui aboutit à en savoir de moins en moins, mais à comprendre que cette descente vers le néant est la seule connaissance."⁴⁹ Lol V. Stein represents a progressive loss of identity, the unconscious living out of that refusal latent to the Durassian female consciousness, becoming aware of itself in a society from which female consciousness of self has been excluded:

Ce fut là ma première découverte à son
propos: ne rien savoir de Lol était la
connaître déjà. On pouvait, me paraît-il,
en savoir moins encore, de moins en
moins sur Lol V. Stein.
(L.V.S., p.81)

The loss of identity defining the identity quest in this group of texts is indeed ironically ambiguous. Female identity restricted to the role of mother and mate to man, an identity reinforced by men in defense of

their patriarchal power and stereotyped by a long list of qualities: passive, inferior, giving, receptive etc., is an identity which the Durassian heroines such as Lol, Anne-Marie Stretter, the beggar woman, and their later surrogate "La Femme", are mere shadows of — or reaction against. From this ground of repression and silence arise the rich resources of potential power that belong to modern woman. Thus the ambiguity. This female power is associated with a primeval "force" and is very different from male power, associated with aggression and domination. The contrast between these two modes of being will become clearer when the texts are considered more closely in their movement from "le regard" to "l'écoute", the subject of Part II.

This identity search (paradoxically qualified by a progressive loss of identity) is first recognized in the name "Lol V. Stein". During her illness following the ball, Lola Valérie Stein rejects her name, in anger:

Elle prononçait son nom avec colère:
Lol V. Stein — c'était ainsi qu'elle
se désignait (L.V.S., p.23).

Lol: two "l's" like the "deux ailes" of the casino at T-Beach limiting the emptiness of the center following the ball, in turn a reflection of the emptiness of the young woman projected into the scene before her eyes:

"o"- nothing, "rien", neutered thing:

Au centre de T-Beach, d'une blancheur
de lait, immense oiseau posé, ses deux
ailes régulières bordées de balustrades,
sa terrasse surplombante, ses coupoles
vertes, ses rodomontades, ses fleurs,
ses anges, ses guirlandes, ses ors, sa
blancheur toujours de lait, de neige,
de sucre, le casino municipal.
(L.V.S., p.176)

As witnessed by the text L'Amour, Lol becomes that space containing the ball, and by extension, the S. Thala (the spelling has changed) which is

the town of her childhood. The "V" of Lol V. Stein is like a clean cut in the middle: the feminine sex or the slice dividing the nothingness of the "o" flanked by the two graceful "l's" from the petrified identity of the father: Stein from the greek petros-"pierre". As Jacques Lacan playfully analyses it:

Lol V. Stein: ailes de papier, V, ciseau,
Stein, la pierre, au jeu de la mourre tu te
perds.⁵⁰

Or, in the more psychoanalytically charged terms of Michèle Montrelay:

Lol n'a pas été détachée de l'infini de la douleur. Personne n'a jamais pu trancher, la séparer d'aucun objet(...) Le fractionnement initial de l'être, ou Bejahung, n'a pas eu lieu. Dans sa misère, Lol ne perd rien. Horreur d'être Lol V. Stein, intacte et toute sans répit. Tout ange ou toute bête. Tout entière ravie dans l'amour, tout entière déchue comme chose. Toute Lol répandue ou toute Stein pétrifiée.⁵¹

Is it the horror of an identity which exists only in relationship with the opposite sex, a tenuous identity subject at any moment to rejection?

Lol is eventually lost, the name disappearing, with only the space of the ball remaining. The name Stein, however, continues like a tradition, a solid stone structure — or perhaps the materiality of language? Stein - stone might then be likened to the Sphinx which represents, according to the analysis of Beaujour, the buried other half of our psyche, symbolized by the hieroglyph which has been subsumed by our phonetic writing. He quotes Derrida's L'Ecriture et La différence in support of this concept:

Le mot de l'énigme, écrit Derrida, la parole d'Oedipe, le discours de la conscience, l'homme détruit, dissipe ou précipite le pétroglyphe. A la stature du Sphinx, animalité de l'esprit endormi dans le signe pierreux, médiation entre

la matière et l'homme, duplicité de
l'intermédiaire, correspond la figure
de Thoth, dieu de l'écriture.⁵²

We learn in Derrida's essay "La Pharmacie de Platon"⁵³ that the god of writing, Thoth, is also closely associated with death and the soul, in other words the repressed "feminine" side of consciousness. Tracing the unravelling of the ball scene from text to text reveals a portrait of the woman as writer and of writing and language itself from a renewed "feminine" perspective. Lol V. Stein is the young woman of eighteen who is left "ravished", both "rapt" (her soul carried off like Persephone from the field of narcissi into the underworld) by the shock of seeing her fiancé with another woman, and "enraptured", for she, like the others, falls under the powerful spell of the beautiful, older woman, Anne-Marie Stretter. Eighteen - ill-fated and charmed age of the onset of womanhood? It is with this age that Marguerite Duras later in L'Amant (1984) associates her "visage détruit": "Non, il est arrivé quelque chose lorsque j'ai eu dix-huit ans qui a fait que ce visage a eu lieu," (L'Amant, p.18). The central "daughter" heroines are all of this same age: Alissa of Détruire, dit-elle, and the Lol V. Stein of the beginning of Le Ravisement de Lol V. Stein and of L'Amour:

— Dix-huit ans — il ajoute
— C'était votre âge (L'Amour, p.III).

as well as in La Femme du Gange where she remains only a mute image on the screen:

Voix 2

Où s'étaient-ils rencontrés?
J'ai oublié.

Voix I

Un matin. Au tennis. Ici à S. Thala.

Elle avait dix-huit ans. Il était le fils
de grands propriétaires terriens.
Il ne faisait rien. Le mariage devait avoir
lieu à l'automne (F. du G., p.113),

Aurélia (aural, perceived/perceiving by the ear) Steiner (the stone
of the hieroglyph, the materiality of language), whose name appears to
unit, mysteriously, the two sides of language, is the first Durassian
heroine to attain the status of writer. She too is eighteen years old:

Je m'appelle Aurélia Steiner.

J'habite Vancouver où mes parents sont
professeurs.

J'ai dix-huit ans.

J'écris.

(A.S., p.166)

This was also the age of Marguerite Duras when she left that foreign
land of Indochina, her home, in order to study in France. It is as a
return to this land of suffering, of want, and, at the same time, of a
fabulous freedom, that we experience the "India Song" texts, all power-
fully imagined works coming from a common source: the repressed child-
hood that resurges from the unconscious mind or "memoria" at mid-life,
often precipitated by a crisis. It is this experience which reveals to us
what we are underneath what we have become:

M.D. — Tu sais, ma mère s'est ruinée avec le
barrage. Je l'ai raconté. J'avais dix-
huit ans quand je suis partie pour passer
ma philo ici, la deuxième partie, et faire
l'université, et je n'ai plus pensé à
l'enfance. C'avait été trop douloureux.
J'ai complètement occulté. Et je me
trimbalais dans la vie en disant: Moi,
je n'ai pas de pays natal; je reconnais
rien ici autour de moi, mais le pays
où j'ai vécu, c'est l'horreur(...)
— Et je pense que c'est une revanche

de ça. Le pays natal s'est vengé.
(Les Parleuses, p.136)

The resurgence of the foreign land and the repressed childhood parallels a breaking apart, a refusal, and finally a destruction of what had separated the writer from that childhood and the mother around whom it was centered: when a young girl attains womanhood she gives up her freedom in order to enter the adult realm, in which her power has been, (until recently), reduced to the role of wife and mother — what she is for others and not what she might be for herself. To be a woman writer is to find an identity in language, an integration of self not possible in these separate roles.

The moment of violence, of refusal, of crisis, the moment when a "no" is articulated, has marked the Durassian text. We see it in Lol's refusal of her name, in the screams of the murdered woman in Moderato Cantabile and in the anguished cries of the vice-consul from Lahore. These cries and screams mingle with the chant of the beggar woman and reverberate throughout the self-portrait until their disappearance (resolution?) in the Aurélia Steiner texts. Writing appears to begin from this point, and its message corroborates that of Beaujour: from a realization of loss which so often brings a crisis, one begins to move toward self-portraiture. The paradigm Beaujour uses originates with Montaigne: with the death of his good friend, La Boétie, an absence was created in his life, an absence which he filled with his Essais, his self-portrait. The Essais in turn function as a mirror, reflecting the writer, the culture, and finally, the reader who will find there his own portrait. It is a disquieting portrait revealed in Marguerite Duras' writing, one qualified by a loss of identity, suffering,

absence, and culminating, paradoxically, in total freedom. It is the portrait of woman in writing. There is common ground, however, for the male self-portraits analyzed by Beaujour join the Durassian self-portrait in that fascinating dimension of quest, where writing is pulled into the limitless excursion of the text, the journey becoming an obscure search for an origin and a history. In the words of Beaujour, here referring specifically to Fugue by Roger Laporte:

Acte de naissance d'un nouveau genre,
Fugue souligne ce qui sépare l'auto-
portrait des constructions narcissiques
(autobiographie, journal, mémoires etc.)
où l'on a voulu déchiffrer l'aboutisse-
ment de l'humanisme, alors que celui-ci
se définissait obscurément dès la pre-
mière Renaissance, celle de Pétrarque,
du fait de son rapport au manque et son
travail herméneutique comme une quête
d'Isis.⁵⁴

Death as a Beginning

Je commence à écrire, en fait, du
milieu du livre. Et la quête elle-même fait
partie du livre. Je ne sais jamais ce qui
va arriver — jamais. La quête elle-même
suscite d'autres quêtes, ce qui devient
partie intégrante du livre. Le livre
donc s'écrit de lui-même — vous lisez
vraiment un travail de recherche.⁵⁵

The instant recalled at the beginning of Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein in which Lol, realizing that she is not going to be able to retain the departing couple, collapses, is the seed which will eventually grow, transforming all future time into the space of the ball. Just as this initiatory text is essentially a remembering of the ball, L'Amour, a sort of reduction and synthesis of its prototype, is centered around the

remembering of that second in which the retreating couple brought the ball to an end. A telescoping occurs in which we move gradually deeper and deeper within the structure of the writer's imagination where images and memories form one mysterious continuum, and where beginning and end are merely arbitrary terms:

Une brume arrive, très t  nue, des embouchures.
Elle danse devant les yeux elle tombe, la mer la d  chiquette, mais d'autres rangs de brume arrivent, dansant. Il dit:

— Voyez — il sourit

Toujours la plainte col  reuse de l'enfant.

On distingue d  j   moins le mouvement des eaux.
L'engouffrement du sel perd de sa force.
Le voyageur d  signe le perron. Il demande:

— Dites-moi quelque chose de
l'histoire.

Il ne se retourne pas, ne voit rien que
devant lui, il r  pond:

— A mon avis, l'  le est sortie en
premier — il montre la mer — de
l  . S. Thala est arriv  e apr  s,
avec la poussi  re — il ajoute —
vous savez? le temps...

(L'A., p.49)

The pain that Lol should have suffered but instead allowed to transfix her, "le cha  non saut  ", appears to be paralleled by an equally devastating fascination with the other woman, a fascination — perhaps for the mysterious and fabulous "force" of the silence emanating from a millennium of repression — shared by both author and heroine:

Anne-Marie Stretter, elle a v  cu mille ans.
Souverainet   de la femme,   a vient de l  . Les
hommes l'atteignent rarement. Parce qu'il y
a deux fois le silence en elle, il y a le
silence de la femme, et il y a le silence qui
vient de sa vie,    elle, de sa personne.

C'est ce double, c'est la conjugaison de ces deux silences, peut-être, Anne-Marie Stretter, sans doute même; je me demande si les autres femmes de mes livres ne l'ont pas masquée longtemps, si derrière Lol V. Stein il n'y avait pas Anne-Marie Stretter, parce qu'il n'y a pas de raison, cette fascination dure toujours, je ne m'en sors pas, c'est une véritable histoire d'amour (Les Lieux, p.69).

It is as an announcement of death that Anne-Marie Stretter arrives at the ball at T-Beach, the source from which the other texts flow. Appearing late at night, dressed in black, all the signs of death surround her:

Lol, frappée d'immobilité, avait regardé s'avancer, comme lui, cette grâce abandonnée, ployante, d'oiseau mort (L.V.S., p.15).

Her entry into the "story" gives it its meaning, permeates the rest with the awe-inspiring beauty of the fatality she seems to represent. She embodies death seemingly with the same grace and facility that she has brought forth life. She is mother as well as beautiful adultress, but with the emphasis on the latter, for it is she who reduces the men around her to objects of her own desire, so multi-faceted and diffuse is the passion surrounding her:

Voix I

L'autre homme qui dort?

Voix 2

De passage. Un ami des Stretter.
Elle est à qui veut d'elle.
La donne, à qui la prend.

Voix I (temps, doulure)

Prostitution de Calcutta.

Voix 2

Oui.
Chrétienne sans Dieu.
Splendeur.

Voix I (très bas)

Amour.

Voix 2 (à peine)

Oui...

(I.S., p. 45-6)

The tale of the fabulous Anne-Marie Stretter, which originates with an authentic childhood memory, becomes intertwined with the equally fabulous tale of the beggar woman. Both stories lead us back from the text to the author's childhood of poverty and isolation, to the mother's struggle and suffering in a foreign land:

Et cette extraordinaire, cette excessive injustice qui avait été faite à ma mère est sans doute l'expérience la plus traumatisante que j'aie connue. Avoir vu ma mère pleurer, devenir folle, la voir méprisée par tout le monde, poursuivie par les créanciers, avoir à vendre jusqu'au dernier objet... En fait à l'heure de la sieste, ma mère m'envoyait chez le bijoutier chinois du coin pour vendre quelques briocoles qui lui restaient. Avec cet argent nous achetions un peu de viande pour notre repas du soir. Or — cela constitue une richesse.⁵⁶

The ground of Marguerite Duras' writing in general and of her "self-portrait" in particular, is to be found in this wealth (of imagination, of possibilities), combined with this very real poverty; it is as though by her imaginative search through writing she has uncovered limitless riches within the word itself. This process of impoverishment in the Durassian text which brings us gradually to the essence of language, the word-image (closing the distance between signifier and signified) is described in the following way by Hélène Cixous in an interview with Michel Foucault:

Ce que Marguerite Duras invente, c'est
ce que j'appellerai: l'art de la pauvreté.

Petit à petit il y a un tel travail d'abandon des richesses, des monuments, au fur et à mesure qu'on avance dans son oeuvre, et je crois qu'elle en est consciente, c'est-à-dire qu'elle dépouille de plus en plus, elle met de moins en moins de décor, d'ameublement, d'objets, et alors c'est tellement pauvre qu'à la fin quelque chose s'inscrit, reste, et puis ramasse, rassemble tout ce qui ne veut pas mourir. C'est comme si tous nos désirs se réinvestissaient sur quelque chose de tout petit qui devient aussi grand que l'amour. (...) Et cet amour c'est ce rien qui est tout.⁵⁷

The death evoked in the "India Song" texts by the figures of Anne-Marie Stretter and the beggar woman, is not death as the unavoidable end to life, for Anne-Marie Stretter takes her own life while still in her prime, and the baby of the beggar woman dies before really ever beginning to live. Death is rather that inexplicable contradiction that none the less infuses life with its most precious meaning. It is for this reason that writing begins here, and the screams of the murdered woman in Moderato Cantabile, the cry of Lol at the end of the ball and the anguished screams of the vice-consul of Lahore reverberate throughout the self-portrait, reminding us constantly of the source from which all flows and to which all will inevitably return. According to Heidegger's thought, which touches closely the meaning intuited from these texts, death is "the shrine of nothingness" which surrounds and holds everything in unity:

Death as "the possibility of the impossibility of existence" or as "shrine of nothingness" is not nothing-at-all, a pure, complete nihil absolutum, but precisely that which constitutes the background and reality of existence.⁵⁸

The "images" which predominate here can no longer be restricted to the merely perceptual, but are those manifestations of imagination which

follow the curves of one's desires: "not what I see but the way in which I see".⁵⁹ In the domain of imagination, therefore, sensations dominate over perceptions. What we experience when we read a Durassian text is the intensity of the desire infusing the language: passion, violence, disorder, overwhelming erotic desire, and the unknown. How does woman, "le continent noir" of Freud, experience erotic desire? A woman writes, a text such as India Song would seem to say, from a place of pure passion, in particular, the passion of erotic desire. As we listen to the "voices" retelling the love story behind the faded images on the screen, while at the same time inventing their own, all with the same absolute, devastating passion, the presence of the other face of life, which is precisely death, is felt:

Voix 2

JE VOUS AIME JUSQU'A NE PLUS VOIR
NE PLUS ENTENDRE
MOURIR... (I.S., p.21)

Voix 2 (très lent)

QUELLE NUIT
QUELLE CHALEUR
ENTIERE MORTELLE

Silence

Voix nette, implacable, terrifiante:

Voix 2

JE VOUS AIME D'UN DÉSIR ABSOLU.

Pas de réponse.

Silence. (I.S., pp.38-9)

The "story" which is told and retold contains always as its common denominator this same "passion", of impossible love, of absolutes and opposites joined, whether it is the S. Thala of Lol V. Stein, the Calcutta

of Anne-Marie Stretter, or the "Lahore" ("Là hors" as Marcelle Marini translates it)⁶⁰ of the vice-consul, Jean-Marc de H.: always this same, continuously transforming, erotic fantasy of pure desire. As Dominique Noguez expressively describes it:

C'est toujours, à telle où telle étape de son déroulement, la même histoire, à la fois connue et surprenante, simple et perverse — archi-histoire, en vérité, tant elle paraît transcender les acteurs qui l'incarnent provisoirement. Certes, la parole durassienne n'est pas désincarnée (si elle tend constamment, nous le verrons, comme par une secrète incandescence, à l'abstraction la plus pure): elle passe — avec quelle vibration pathétique! par des noms, des couleurs, des odeurs (toute la moiture de L'Inde aussi, et cette chaleur terrible qui pèse sur India Song)... Mais ces visages, ces lieux, ces couleurs sont des péripéties — les modes d'une substance. Cette substance est la passion.⁶¹

Michel Beaujour also describes self-portraiture in terms of "passion", but specifically the "Passion" of Christ; his analysis is as mentioned earlier, restricted to male works. He sees in self-portraiture the presence of an "intratextual memory" which goes beyond the individual, revealing his cultural roots:

...du moins est-ce un type de mémoire à la fois très archaïque et très moderne par quoi des événements d'une vie individuelle sont éclipsés par la remémoration de toute une culture, apportant ainsi un paradoxal oubli de soi.⁶²

Our cultural roots are haunted, according to his analysis, by two culminating points: the Passion of Christ and Plato's Phaedo. But rather than these culminating points which brand patriarchy, the writing of women reveals a pre-historic time when mythos was not dominated by logos:

Depuis que les femmes écrivent sans entrave, quelque chose a changé: la conception de l'écrit et de la littérature n'est plus la même. Le chant strident des Bacchantes retentit sur lyre d'Orphée.⁶³

It is the model of male sexuality which permeates male writing — one need only think of the build-up of suspense, climax, and dénouement which pattern the rythm of the traditional novel: "l'excitation, l'assouvissement et ça finit et ça recommence", as Xavière Gauthier describes it in Les Parleuses (p.40); by contrast, the writing of Marguerite Duras, especially in the "India Song" texts, is involved with a passion that continues at the same intensity, never satisfied, never climaxing, never ending. The world of the earlier texts, the waiting without hope of tomorrows, is intensified into a world of passion and of ceaseless wandering. It is a world without history, since it is a feminine world — undefined and undefinable — at least in masculine terms, in masculine language. It is a world revealing a sustained struggle, with neither victors nor losers, opening up, according to Marcelle Marini, vast new possibilities:

Marguerite Duras fait du langage et de l'écriture l'objet et le territoire privilégiés où laisser-(faire) s'affronter Eros et Thanatos: elle y détruit — s'y détruit, y construit — s'y construit, y produit des figurations qui nous font rénover, dans le plaisir, avec des vérités de cette langue perdue qui est la nôtre.⁶⁴

The self-portrait of woman exposed in the "India Song" texts makes manifest the voices of witches, of the mad, chants from foreign cultures, the screams of the Jews from the furnaces, the voices of the oppressed — and when one goes deeper still to where the Durassian text inevitably leads, silence is attained: the non-history which is the veritable history of

woman:

Silence

Immobilité
Sanglots lointains du Vice-Consul.
Silence de nouveau.
Dans le jardin la lumière s'obscurcit encore
une fois, se plombe.
Aucun vent dans le jardin désert.

Voix 2 (peur, très bas)

Le bruit de votre coeur me fait peur...

Silence

Encore un mouvement dans la masse immobile
des trois corps endormis: c'est la main de
Michael Richardson qui va vers le corps de
la femme, le caresse, et reste là, posée.
Michael Richardson ne dormait pas.
La lumière s'obscurcit encore.
Desir, épouvante de la "voix" 2

Voix 2

Votre coeur, si jeune, d'enfant...

Pas de réponse.
Silence.

Voix 2

Où êtes-vous?

Pas de réponse.
Silence.

(I.S., p.49)

The Fabulous Wandering of the Durassian Woman.

The first stage of the self-portrait, to simplify the analysis of Beaujour, is "une déambulation imaginaire au long d'un système de lieux, dépositaire d'image-souvenirs."⁶⁵ Rhetoric used this system of homology between actual physical moving through space — be it a city, a house, or a cathedral — and memory, in order to develop the "art of memory", much

needed before books were printed. The essential quality of the system (and here the modern genre of the literary self-portrait is like a return to former times) is the importance of space: "Ce primat de l'espace sur la durée."⁶⁶ Self-portraiture and autobiography part ways here:

L'urgence du désir de temporalité, d'intelligibilité diachronique et d'évolution est peut-être, en dernière analyse, l'obstacle majeur à l'étude de l'autoportrait tandis que l'autobiographie, dont le fil narratif rassure, offre une mimésis vraisemblable de la vie envisagée comme progrès transcendant les contingences spatiales.⁶⁷

With the arrival of Lol V. Stein, the Durassian self-portrait begins, since with Lol a movement is initiated: a repetitive movement which is the wandering of Lol through S. Thala, her hometown, her childhood, and the place connecting her with the event that ended childhood definitively: the fateful ball. Her journey is both a return to the past and a journey into an unknown future, for her fantasy disconnects her step by step from outside reality:

Le bal tremblait au loin, ancien, seule épave d'un océan maintenant tranquille, dans la pluie, à S. Thala. 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 (L.V.S., p.45).

A transformation has occurred, since a person's life is now being considered in terms of "spatial contingencies", rather than as a "progress transcending them", terms in which Beaujour has described autobiography. The Durassian characters, by their repetitive movement through familiar places, gradually become the embodiment of that space — or the space becomes a projection of their emotions, or lack of emotions. Thus the

identity of Lol joins that of the S. Thala of L'Amour which is in turn an amplification of her absence of inner space — the nothingness left after her total projection into the memory of the ball (her descent to the underworld, for all the characters in L'Amour are either dead or in a state of limbo, a modern purgatory); only her obsessive fantasy to re-enact, to re-invent the same scenario, remains:

Elle a un geste ouvert d'une tendresse
désespérée, elle dit, elle murmure:
— S. Thala, mon S. Thala.
(L'A., p.139)

The paradox of the Durassian text is that the characters lose their inner space in order to become the shadowy figures that are emanations from the unconscious of the writer; the psychic scenario is, in other words, the mystery of imagination from the unique perspective of the woman writer, Marguerite Duras. The paradox of the self-portrait is that we are seeing here a mirror image of our own unconscious where eros and thanatos do battle.

Anne-Marie Stretter is another solitary wanderer, whose walks by the deserted tennis courts (against which leans her bicycle, abandoned in the still heavy heat of the summer monsoons) haunt India Song. Still desired yet beyond further desiring, her indifference blends mysteriously with the space which others experience as her embodiment:

Je pense qu'Anne-Marie Stretter a dépassé
tous les préjugés à propos de l'intelligence
ou de la connaissance, de la théorie. C'est
un désespoir, il s'agit là d'un désespoir
universel, qui rejoint au plus près d'un
désespoir politique profond, et qui est
vécu comme tel, avec calme. J'ai dit qu'
elle était Calcutta, je la vois comme
Calcutta. Elle devient Calcutta, il y a
un double glissement, Calcutta vers la
forme d'Anne-Marie Stretter et elle va vers

la forme de Calcutta. Et pour moi à la
fin du film elles ne font qu'un
(Les Lieux, p.73).

The wandering of the beggar woman pulls the quest onto a universal level, where the trail of deterioration and disorientation clearly signals the search in language, through language, for a deeper origin, one stripped, freed of all cultural fetters. She chants, she babbles in a language foreign to the ears around her, she loses direction, she gradually sinks into her own movement, her own chant. Her "story" (does it mean anything to her?) is invented by Peter Morgan,⁶⁸ a young diplomat and writer in the entourage of the beautiful Anne-Marie Stretter at the French embassy in Calcutta, and begins the novel Le Vice-Consul: "Elle marche" he writes, and with the second sentence is uncovered the contradictory dictate ruling her existence:

Comment ne pas revenir?
Il faut se perdre (Le Vice-Consul, p.1).

How can she not return to that cruel mother who has chased her away, for it is for her she longs? How does woman separate herself from that body which is so like her own body, how can she leave the mother? How can she do otherwise than follow in the steps of her, the one who is her model and her exact form? But she has been chased away, therefore: "Il faut se perdre." Under the double and contradictory command, "la mendiante" loses herself step by step in the madness arising from the impossibility of meeting her body's demands for food, for contact, for comfort:

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

enfantin de Battambang (Le Vice-Consul, p.28).

Peter Morgan invents a fantastic journey for this waif of humanity which lasts ten years, beginning at "Savannakhet" and ending at Calcutta. Her story, when Peter Morgan talks about his book with the others near the end of Le Vice-Consul, clearly becomes a "mise en abîme" for the language which is gradually emerging within the larger context of the novel:

Elle marcherait, dit-il, j'insisterai
surtout sur cela. Elle, ce serait une
marche très longue, fragmentée en des
centaines d'autres marches toutes animées
du même balancement — celui de son pas —
elle marcherait, et la phrase avec elle,...
(Le Vice-Consul, p.179)

From her imaginary origin she traces and weaves in the parallels and hidden mirror images of metonymy, the fate of woman in masculine language. The circle she describes reflects, through an autobiographical link with the author's life, the deeper quest for the female voice which these texts together reveal. This quest involves primarily repetition, the fate of Echo. The following explanation is offered by Nancy Miller in an article on women's writing:

To play with mimesis is... for a woman to try to recover the place of her exploitation by language, without allowing herself to be simply reduced to it. It is to re-submit herself... to ideas — notably about her — elaborated in and through a masculine logic, but to "bring out" by an effect of playful repetition what was to remain hidden: the recovery of a possible operation of the feminine in language. It is also to unveil the fact that if women mime so well they are not simply reabsorbed in this function. They also remain elsewhere.⁶⁹

It is precisely this "elsewhere" that is intriguing in the Durassian text: the silence, the absence, "le rien". At times it appears as the

unsettling image of the vacant tennis court — a steel-wire barrier enclosing nothing. This absence haunts us, from Détruire, dit-elle, where the occasional tennis ball is heard but the game never seen, to Le Vice-Consul and India Song where the court remains empty, its vacant presence joining other images of abandonment and emptiness such as the park and the deserted bicycle of Anne-Marie Stretter:

Contre le grillage qui entourne les tennis
déserts il y a une bicyclette de femme qui
appartient à Anne-Marie Stretter.

(I.S., p.36)

La bicyclette contre le grillage est
recouverte de la fine poussière grise de
l'allée. Elle est abandonnée, sans emploi,
effrayante (I.S., p.49).

This "elsewhere" is associated with certain characters more specifically than with others. For instance, the vice-consul, a virgin at thirty-five, considered mad by the others for the irrational act of shooting at the lepers in the garden at Lahore, marked by an emotionally unstable childhood flawed by the death of his father, reflects a more "feminine" than "masculine" personality:

--Cela signifie quelque chose, dit le
vice-consul, les tennis étaient en effet
déserts.

--Cela fait-il une si grande différence?
Le directeur rit.

--Une grande différence en effet, reprend
le vice-consul.

--Laquelle?

--Celle d'un sentiment peut-être?
Pourquoi pas?

(Le V.C., p.79)

The footsteps of this virgin from Lahore ("Là hors") trace those of Anne-Marie Stretter on her solitary walks; these steps are in turn joined by those of the beggar woman, for we learn at the end of Le Vice-Consul that Peter Morgan intends to include Anne-Marie Stretter in his book. The echoes grow, converge, merge, as the texts become more reduced, more abstract (in the sense of refining the "substance" rather than converting the substance into theory). The wandering continues in L'Amour and La Femme du Gange, like ripples caused by a skipping stone on a still lake. It is a wandering which intertwines pasts: Lol V. Stein, her friend Tatiana Karl, Anne-Marie Stretter, the beggar woman... all converge and blend in the woman of L'Amour, though her dominant identity is that of the young girl of eighteen "ravished" by the spectacle of her fiancé's desiring eyes upon the other woman — destroyed in an instant, swept into a land of the dead — "hypertrophiée, c'est ça, le trauma initial de toute femme" (Les Parleuses, p.159).

The self-portrait leads us towards a time before the trauma of womanhood, with its loss of freedom, into the forest of childhood and the traumas buried below adult rationalizations, to the sea, to which the wandering inevitably leads:

Les différents lieux de Lol V. Stein sont tous des lieux maritimes, c'est toujours au bord de la mer qu'elle est, et très longtemps j'ai vu des villes très blanches, comme ça, blanchies par le sel, un peu comme si du sel était dessus, sur les routes et les lieux où se déplace Lola Valérie Stein. Et c'est après coup que j'ai compris que c'étaient des lieux, non seulement marins mais relevant d'une mer de mon enfance aussi, des mers... illimitées (Les Lieux, p.84).

To reach a place where an authentic voice is heard — where "I" speak from my own needs and not from those imposed by social dictates (what I imagine the other to expect me to need) is a meeting of the mature adult with the child held within, in memories. To "re-member" is to create an integrated present with fragments from the past when for women, according to Béatrice Didier, a freedom suiting their creativity existed:

Leur enfance, pourquoi y reviennent-elles toujours? ... Epoque heureuse où elles se figurent un désir diffus, sans loi et sans entrave... Elles évoluent dans le Paradis terrestre, en bonne entente avec l'Ange qui paradoxalement semble plus libéral pour la petite Eve que pour le jeune Adam. Peut-être parce que le désir d'Eve est partout, incontrôlable, insaisissable, moins pressé que celui d'Adam de se concrétiser dans un acte qui, en l'accomplissant, le limiterait.⁷⁰

Aurélia Steiner, the fabulous world wanderer, embodies the movement and constant change that characterizes the female voice: always on the edge of adulthood, saved from its roles and fragmentation through the act of writing, she is a new species of Durassian heroine:

Le marin à chevaux noirs était allongé sur le sol de ma chambre. Il me regardait.

Je me suis rendormie. J'ai entendu qu'il disait que ses yeux le brûlaient d'avoir regardé la beauté d'Aurélia Steiner. Que son bateau partait à midi mais qu'il ne serait pas à bord, que le bateau partirait sans lui, qu'il désirait rester avec elle, Aurélia Steiner, quoi qu'il advienne de lui.

J'ai dit que je n'appartenais à personne de défini. Que je n'étais pas libre de moi-même.

(A.S., p.165)

How can she belong to him, when she belongs first to herself, which is the universe of the blank page?

NOTES (Part I)

1. Duras, Marguerite, Le Vice-Consul (Paris: Gallimard, 1966).
-----, L'Amour (Paris: Gallimard, 1971).
-----, India Song (film, texte, théâtre) (Paris: Gallimard, 1973).
-----, Natalie Granger suivi de La Femme du Gange (Paris: Gallimard, 1973).
-----, La Femme du Gange (film, jamais distribué 1973).
-----, Le Navire Night, Les Mains négatives, Césarée, Aurélia Steiner, Aurélia Steiner, Aurélia Steiner (Paris: Mercure de France, 1979).
-----, Aurélia Steiner, dit Aurélia Melbourne (1979, film, Films Paris - Audiovisuel).
-----, Aurélia Steiner, dit Aurélia Vancouver (1979, film, Films du Losange).
2. Suzanne Lamy et André Roy, Marguerite Duras à Montréal (Montréal: Conférence de Presse, 1981), p.63.
3. Edith Hamilton, La Mythologie (Verviers: Marabout, 1978), pp.97-8.
4. Jacques Derrida, "La Pharmacie de Platon," La Dissémination (Paris: Edition du Seuil, 1972), p.63.
5. Miroirs d'encre, p.12.
6. Marguerite Duras, "Les Yeux verts," Cahier du Cinéma, numéro 312-313, Paris, juin 1980, p.48.
7. Marguerite Duras, Son Nom de Venise dans Calcutta désert, film (Distributed by Cinema 9, 1976).
8. Miroirs d'encre, p.207.
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29. Marguerite Duras, Des Journées entières dans les arbres (Paris: Gallimard, 1954).
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62. Miroirs d'encre, p.26.
63. L'Ecriture-femme, p.39.
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Part II

From "le regard" to "l'écoute": Voyage out of the Desert.

Preliminary

We move about the world guided primarily by our senses of sight and sound, with the former, the more aggressive of the two, dominating. The predominance of the visual perspective leads to the priority of one view over another, that is, to a hierarchical structure within which only that is seen which is willed or wished to be seen. It is a world which breeds oppressors. For instance, according to the writing of Marguerite Duras, the oppressors of women are no different from the oppressors of Jews, children, the insane, or any minority. Oppression has much to do with the one-dimensional way of viewing the world resulting from this overwhelming dominance of the visual over the other senses. The tyranny of masculine principles over the feminine is an analogous way of considering this imbalance leading to the either/or dichotomizing that has polarized the thinking of modern man. Gilbert Durand expresses it succinctly:

L'Occident voit tout du même oeil, comme les fameux cyclopes. Et au malaise de la conscience déchirée succède la maladie de l'unidimensionnel. C'est cette dernière qui a conduit la science sans conscience de L'Occident à la foudre d'Hiroshima comme à la lueur des crématoires.¹

The man in the film Le Camion (1977) is typical of the oppressors populating this world in his inability to "see" the "femme d'un certain âge" who hitches a ride in his truck:

Je sais en tout cas que les Juifs et les femmes ont un ennemi commun, c'est cet homme du camion, ce décrèteur; il décrète, il parle comme un homme de pouvoir et au nom du marxisme.²

He is totally incapable of hearing her statement: "Que le monde aille à sa perte, c'est la seule politique."³ The author's comment on this

statement in the interview with Michèle Porte following the text is enlightening:

Mais elle le vit gaiement, puisque, elle
le vit en inventant des solutions personnelles
à l'intolérable du monde, par exemple le fait
de faire du stop tous les soirs en inventant
sa vie.⁴

Ironically, it is Marguerite Duras who plays this role while sitting in her front room at a round table facing Gérard Despardieu in the role of truck driver. On the screen a blue truck is seen rolling across the industrial outskirts of Paris; the inside of the truck where the conversation is supposed to be taking place is never seen. The "movement" of this woman, away from all the oppressions of the world, is what the author names love. The quest for an alternative way of seeing and experiencing inherent to her writing — the simultaneous refusal of, and movement away from, all the "isms" — is a similar movement of love, political in its essence:

La perte du monde qui est vécue par tout
le monde tout le monde au monde, maintenant,
c'est à mon avis la seule démocratie possible.
Il faut s'aligner sur cette notion-là. C'est
la vraie Internationale. Toutes les autres
propositions, en particulier celles du
communisme, sont des propositions pourries.⁵

In the group of texts presented here as self-portraiture, there is a gradual moving away from the male-dominated world of "le regard" toward a much softer, less easily defined world of "l'écoute". The movement involves a subtle process of bringing our awareness to the undersurface of things, as though visual reality in its domination had neglected what exists below the surface, in the spaces between the contours of form, as in the photographic negative. Intuition escapes, in a similar way, the

theoretical dimension of rational thought and abstract constructions. The subtle dialectic of these texts, rooted in physical "reality" and forming, dissolving and reforming continuously, in an alternation carrying us from the literal surface of things to an obscure interior, reveals the search for a new rhetoric referred to by the author in an interview in Signs.⁶

From Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein to L'Amour, La Femme du Gange, and India Song, we witness the gradual transformation of time, in the sense of linear narrative development, into space. The physical dominance of the space of the ball, which becomes synonymous in the latter three works with "la fin du monde" (Les Lieux. p.77), symbolizes an end to a certain order of things. I have been treating this order summarily as the male-dominated, visually defined, hierarchized world as we have known it. It might also be described in terms borrowed from Norman O. Brown's study of Freud, Life Against Death, in which western civilization, beginning with Plato, is seen as the upward oriented movement of sublimation toward greater and greater abstraction, "a flight from death".⁷ What we see in the Durassian text is a reversal of this movement. It is a downward movement toward the unconscious, the underworld of myth, and the inner more material senses of sound, touch, and smell: the sirens on the beach of S. Thala in L'Amour, the odour of smoke mixed with the salt sea air, the somnambulant wanderings of its occupants, "la femme de S. Thala", her hands black from the soot of ashes, the rotting dog in the middle of the beach — all are signs of a concrete world of flesh, and of death. "S. Thala" is thalassa (Gr. sea, "mer/mère") and thanatos (Gr. death). It represents both origin and end, concerns which have been either suppressed or sublimated.

The Durassian text is a journey back and downward into the repressed, into the body and into the libido where passion and desire arise: the arena of eros and thanatos. A distance is closed, a distance maintained by the dominance of the audiovisual over the other "lower" inner senses:

Abstraction, as a mode of keeping life at a distance, is supported by that negation of the "lower" infantile sexual organizations which effects a general displacement from the below upwards of organ eroticism to the head, especially to the eyes.⁸

The once active, aggressive "regard" becomes strangely passive in the Durassian world, while the once passive "écoute" plays an increasingly active role: the women seem to know where they are going, while the men appear to be lost. Durassian women, up until the new voice born with Aurélia Steiner, appear as knowing sacrifices to the system — Anne-Marie Stretter dying by suicide and Lol V. Stein and "la mendicante" wandering in fantasy and starvation leading to madness. Their movement, as pointed out earlier, parallels that of language itself, whose discourse on its own process is continuously present at the meta-textual level. The process involves a stripping away of the ratiocinations of traditional narrative and the complete disorientation of syntax until the prose arrives in poetic form, rational language having been thoroughly subverted by the magical power of poetry and its close connection to myth. "As for poetry", writes Brown, "are not those basic poetic devices emphasized by recent criticism — paradox, ambiguity, irony, tension — devices whereby the poetic imagination subverts the 'reasonableness' of language, the chains it imposes?"⁹

As in Part I, myth will be used as a background Gestalt against which the recurrent patterns within the texts can be seen more clearly.

This time the choice is an ancient Summarian myth; the reasons for this choice will be given following a summary of the myth itself. It is the myth of the descent of Inanna, queen of heaven and earth.¹⁰

In the myth Inanna, (precursor of the later Greek love goddess, Aphrodite), descends to the underworld to witness the funeral of Gugalanna, the husband of Ereshkigal, queen of the "great below". She is stripped bare at each of the seven gates on her journey, and finally arriving in the underworld, is killed by the furious Ereshkigal and hung to rot on a peg. After Inanna fails to return in three days, her faithful servant Ninshubur, whom she had instructed before her descent to act on her behalf, sets in motion orders to 'rouse the people and gods with dirge drum and lamenting'. The first gods she appeals to refuse to meddle in the affairs of the underworld. However, Enki, god of waters and wisdom, hears her appeals and fashions, from the dirt under his fingernails, two mourners whom he sends into the underworld equipped with food and the water of life. Through their commiseration with the suffering of Ereshkigal, they gain the release of the corpse of their queen, Inanna. One of the conditions for her release is that she send a replacement. She does not choose any of those who have faithfully mourned for her, but selects instead her favourite consort, Dumuzi, who seems to have been enjoying himself, oblivious to her plight. At first he is turned into a snake by those eager to help him sneak away, but then, faced by the inevitable, he visits his sister, Geshtinanna who has had a dream portending both of their deaths. She decides to sacrifice herself for him and go in his stead to the underworld. Inanna, hearing of Geshtinanna's generous offer, decrees that they are to share the penalty, each descending for half of the year.

There is a reason for choosing the Inannamyth, rather than another Greek myth, as a basis for the analysis of the texts involving Lol V. Stein, Anne-Marie Stretter, the "mendiante", and finally Aurélia Steiner: it deals directly with female transformation, and dates from a time before the feminine had lost its power and undergone suppression into the unconscious by the patriarchate. The myth of Narcissus and Echo has more to say about feminine self-portraiture as it reflects the plight of the feminine in masculine language. However, it has little relevance to the female transformation which is at the core of the relationship between Lol V. Stein and Aurélia Steiner and is reflected in the evolution of common themes within the "India Song" texts; this transformation relates to the writer's own descent into childhood and the re-membering of the mother/daughter body which underlies all feminine writing, according to the study of Béatrice Didier.

At the textual level, the transformation involves the destruction of, and movement away from, the prison of "le regard". New spaces, comprising the limitlessness of sound in space which is the receptive, kinesthetic space of "l'écoute", open before us. Step by step we experience the emergence of a world where visual reality is guided and tempered by the other less dominant senses, and in which the voice of Aurélia Steiner emerges from the ashes of Lol V. Stein:

Aurélia. Enfant. Mon enfant. Le Bal de
S. Thala est de nouveau béant. C'est Aurélia
qui le regarde. Aurélia est sortie du corps
massacré de Lol V. Stein. Aurélia m'a
remplacée. Remplacée. C'est fait. Les
sables de S. Thala, ceux de la déambulation
des fous, la mer aussi, tout est désert.
Le grand balcon du casino de S. Thala,

face au couchant, est vide. On entend le
bruissement très doux de la mer d'hiver.
Parfois passe Aurélia. Elle regarde les
sables et la mer. Oui, ses yeux sont bleus.
Et avec le soir, ils deviennent obscurité
limpide et sans fond. Ses cheveux sont
noirs. Elle chante, c'est elle qui mainte-
nant chante les airs du bal de S. Thala,
elle le chante comme chants juifs. Oui,
elle passe sur la plage les jours d'orage,
elle écoute le vent, l'égarement fantasti-
que de la mer, tout entière tournée vers
le gouffre vide de la terre. Instruite
de la douleur, Aurélia, et de la joie.
Regarde.¹¹

Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein: Disorientation of the Visual Universe.

Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein, essentially a remembering of the famous end of summer ball at S. Thala, is a world composed of vacillating visual perspectives from which an elusive narrator has difficulty putting together a coherent picture. The similarities between this world and the disquieting world of Natalie Sarrautes' Le Planétarium, are evident: both worlds heighten the reader's receptivity to the rich world of sensation and perception which forms the murky substratum of our organized world of accepted formula and theoretical frameworks. Below the surface roles exists the vast, pulsating universe of the organism, where existence is a raw fabric woven of emotion, sensation, perception, and mystery, deeper and as yet undisclosed. "I think", states Marguerite Duras in an interview in Signs (1975)", the future belongs to women. Men have been completely de-throned. Their rhetoric is stale, used up. We must move on to the rhetoric of women, one that is anchored in the organism, in the body."¹²

To return to the text, the narrator attempts to reconstruct the

story of Lol's abandonment that famous night, according to what he has heard from others, in particular, from her best friend then, Tatiana Karl. What he manages to construct, however, is a collage of contradictory fragments accentuated by the "rien" which is Lol's hallmark:

Lol était drôle, moqueuse impénitente et très fine bien qu'une part d'elle-même eût été toujours en allée loin de vous et de l'instant. Où? Dans le rêve adolescent? Non, répond Tatiana, non, on aurait dit dans rien encore, justement, rien (L.V.S., p.13).

We are drawn into the story as one is drawn into a mystery novel, by looking for identifying clues that might reveal the identity of the narrator. At the end of the first section, a missing "e" at the end of the past participle gives us our first clue: it must be a "he":

Je ne crois plus à rien de ce que dit
Tatiana, je ne suis convaincu de rien.
(L.V.S., p.14)

He then tells us what his itinerary as narrator will be, establishing us firmly in the consciousness of fiction as invention, destroying in one sentence any lingering attachment to the romantic fallacy:

Voici, tout au long, mêlés, à la fois,
ce faux semblant que raconte Tatiana Karl
et ce que j'invente sur la nuit du casino
de T. Beach. A partir de quoi je raconterai
mon histoire de Lol V. Stein (L.V.S., p.14).

Why male narrators? Le Vice-Consul is narrated also from the point of view of a male, Peter Morgan, the young novelist. Woman has been defined within the context of male dominated culture, where her roles have been restricted, until recent times, to that of wife and mother (or spinster-virgin): to be "seen" and owned (or exempted) by the "superior" power of the male. The veiled women in Middle Eastern cultures — to be

seen only by the male who "owns" them — is a modern example of the power of the look in patriarchal culture: "Le regard est donc au principe de la puissance. Voir, c'est déjà conquérir, affirmer une possession magique de l'objet."¹³ How many love affairs date from the moment of the first "look"? The love story between Michael Richardson and Anne-Marie Stretter, the fateful night of the ball which initiates Lol's descent into madness, begins this way, as visibly "love at first sight":

Il était devenu différent. Tout le monde pouvait le voir. Voir qu'il n'était plus celui qu'on croyait. Lol le regardait, le regardait changer.

Les yeux de Michael Richardson s'étaient éclaircis. Son visage s'était resserré dans la plénitude de la maturité. De la douleur s'y lisait, mais vieille, du premier âge.

Aussitôt qu'on le revoyait ainsi, on comprenait que rien, aucun mot, aucune violence au monde n'aurait eu raison du changement de Michael Richardson. Qu'il lui faudrait maintenant être vécu jusqu'au bout. Elle commençait déjà la nouvelle histoire de Michael Richardson, à se faire.

(L.V.S., p.17)

A world dominated by the "look" is surfacing with the ball, symbol, or so it seems, of the myth of romantic love. The narrator now reveals to us that his "story" is to be told from one point of view only: "Je connais Lol V. Stein de la seule façon que je puisse, d'amour." (L.V.S., p.46) "Stories" would seem to begin with the setting up of an erotic conjunction between "seeing" and "possessing", a mechanism by which woman, desired "object" of a masculine "subject/object" loving, is held captive. Lol somehow trips the switch of this mechanism and, instead of "suffering", is drawn into her own fantasy of the third person excluded:

Cette vision et cette certitude ne parurent pas s'accompagner chez Lol de souffrance.

Tatiana la trouve elle-même changée. Elle guettait l'événement, couvait son immensité, sa précision d'horlogerie. Si elle avait été l'agent même non seulement de sa venue mais de son succès, Lol n'aurait pas été plus fascinée (L.V.S., pp.17-8).

As though hypnotized, Lol moves implacably toward the re-creation of the same "ball" scenario, in which she, as the third person, excluded, would witness the disrobing of the other woman by her fiancé:

L'homme de T. Beach n'a plus qu'une tâche à accomplir, toujours la même dans l'univers de Lol: Michael Richardson, chaque après-midi, commence à dévêtir une autre femme que Lol et lorsque d'autres seins apparaissent, blancs, sous le fourreau noir, il en reste là; ébloui, un Dieu lassé par cette mise à nu, sa tâche unique, et Lol attend vainement qu'il la reprenne, de son corps infirme de l'autre elle crie, elle attend en vain, elle crie en vain.

Puis un jour ce corps infirme remue dans le ventre de Dieu (L.V.S., pp.50-1).

The repetition of the same scenarios and the theme of voyeurism are closely related in the Durassian text. We find the two intertwined at the core of Lol's particular brand of fantasy/obsession or madness, although both motifs had become familiar in the work of the writer before the appearance of Lol V. Stein. Perhaps it is in Moderato Cantabile that their presence is first noticed; with the screams of the murdered woman, an equilibrium is disturbed and a search begins. An event has occurred which is heard but not seen, and whose meaning escapes understanding — at least at the rational level. The experience of hearing the screams and being left to imagine the causes and circumstances, has a profound impact on the young heroine, Anne Desbaresdes. She keeps returning to the small working

class café where she first met Chauvin, following the "incident" heard from her child's piano lesson close by. The world of "moderato" and "cantabile", a world held harmoniously together by a large house, a child, a husband and social engagements, begins to fissure and crumble under the pressure of this strange exterior event. The wealthy woman repeatedly returns to drink wine with the factory worker whom she induces to invent possible reasons for the mysterious murder, if only in order to avoid questioning why she keeps returning to meet him as she does, and by what influence, by what "transference" her emotions are undergoing the bizzare changes leading both of them implacably towards a mock re-enactment of the same scenario:

Vous savez, dit-il, j'imagine aussi qu'il l'aurait fait de lui-même un jour, même sans ses instances à elle. Qu'elle n'était pas seule à avoir découvert ce qu'elle désirait de lui.

Elle revient de loin à ses questions, harcelante, méthodiquement.

- Je voudrais que vous me disiez le commencement même, comment ils ont commencé à se parler. C'est dans un café, disiez-vous... (Moderato Cantabile, p.32).

One possible response is that women are inevitably caught up in the same scenarios, the same love stories, in a male dominated society, as in a literature dominated by masculine perspectives. (One need only bring to mind the similarity in predicaments of three of the greatest nineteenth-century heroines: Anna Karinina, Madame Bovary, and Madame de Rênal). How would the world appear, perceived from a feminine perspective (and this is not simply a "woman's point of view", since women in a male-dominated culture too often "see" from a masculinized perspective)?

The unusual passivity of the Durassian world, composed of a constant interaction of "regarder" and "voir", seems to emanate from the two heroines, the mother and daughter figures of Lol V. Stein and Anne-Marie Stretter. The one in her obsession, the other in her indifference, both begin to impose another world of enigma, of silence, and of "non-regard":

Avait-elle regardé Michael Richardson en passant? L'avait-elle balayé de ce non-regard qu'elle promenait sur le bal? C'était impossible de le savoir, c'est impossible de savoir quand, par conséquence, commence mon histoire de Lol V. Stein: le regard chez elle — de près on comprenait que ce défaut venait d'une décoloration presque pénible de la pupille — logeait dans toute la surface des yeux, il était difficile à capter (L.V.S., p.16).

J.P. Sartre also created a fictive world dominated by the "look". However, in the sequestered Sartrian world of Huis Clos, for instance, the characters are forced to face their predicament, searching for freedom through the imprisoning "look" of the other. There, we are squarely in the center of the masculine universe dominated by visual "reality". The Durassian universe, in contrast, reveals a search which leads beyond (or, more aptly, below) this prison through a transformation in both perspective, and the language informing our world. Instead of the outer, visible elements (form, order, linear thought) prevailing over the hidden inner ones (darkness, silence and mystery) the latter disorders the former. Through a constant questioning and disorienting of so-called outer "reality", a new perspective begins to appear. In the words of the author, translated in Signs:

That's it: reverse everything, including analysis and criticism... Reverse everything. Make women the point of departure in judging,

make darkness the point of departure in
judging what men call light, make ob-
scurity the point of departure in judging
what men call clarity.¹⁴

In Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein, this reversal in perspectives revolves around the disorientation and victimization of the male narrator by the subject of his narration: Lol Stein.

Following the death of her parents Lol returns to her home town, a ten-year period having elapsed since the ball and her subsequent illness. She keeps her life in implacable order, as she did during the ten years lived away with her husband and children at U-Bridge. The unflawed harmony of her ordered life is disturbed only by a new added activity: each afternoon is spent wandering the streets of her home town. Parallel to this somewhat mysterious new penchant of Lol, there is an increasing perturbation of the narration. The "realistic fallacy" underlying the traditional novel is being taunted by the narrator's increasingly neurotic proclivity for indicating what he is doing at any given moment:

Je vois ceci:

La chaleur d'un été qu'elle a distraite-
ment subie jusqu'à ce jour éclate et se
répand. Lol en est submergée.

...

Je vois ceci:

Prudente, calculieuse, elle marche assez
loin derrière lui.

...

J'invente, je vois:

Elle ne ressent l'étouffement de l'été
que lorsqu'il fait un geste supplémentaire
à cette marche, quand il se passe la main
dans les cheveux, quand il allume une ciga-
rette, et surtout quand il regarde passer une
femme.

J'invente:
A cette distance il ne peut même pas
entendre son pas sur le trottoir.
(L.V.S., pp.53-6)

The increasing tension around, and fragmentation of, the narrative "point of view", culminates at the moment when the present irrupts into the text, disclosing the narrator's identity:

Enlacées elles montent les marches du
perron. Tatiana présente à Lol Pierre
Beugner, son mari, et Jacques Hold, un de
leurs amis, la distance est couverte, moi.
(L.V.S., p.74)

What we witness from this point on is the augmenting confusion of the narrator as he and the others become Lol's victims:

Nous sommes dans ses mains? Pourquoi?
comment? Je ne sais rien (L.V.S., p.90).

It seems that the harder he works at controlling the story — what he sees, what he invents — the more surely he is led into temporal contradictions and eventual emotional chaos. He continues to play (in Genette's terms) the role of "extradiegetic" narrator, the third person with an external view of things, while at the same time becoming a "homodiegetic" narrator, a protagonist in the drama unfolding before us. Contradictions and illogical juxtapositions result. If we try to identify with the narrative "point of view", we find ourselves uncomfortably amidst scenes, and fragments of scenes, narrated simultaneously in the past and present tenses:

Elle embrasse ma bouche. Je ne lui
donne rien. J'ai eu trop peur. Je ne peux
pas encore. Elle trouve cette impossibilité
attendue. Je suis dans la nuit de T. Beach.
C'est fait. Là, on ne donne rien à Lol V.
Stein. Elle prend (L.V.S., p.112).

Lol leads the other characters, as the writing itself, the "text", leads

the narration, into an abyss, somehow removed from the ordinary world — dark, murky, mysterious, and very unsettling:

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? (L.V.S., p.105)

The narration fragments further, cracking, slipping apart, opening into the fabulous space of Lol's wandering, the zone of her strange "absence", existing somewhere outside of the narrator's grasp, and taking on the outward appearance of a strange negative, in the sense of photographic negative. An unusual "voyeuse", she assumes her waif-like vigil in the rye field opposite the hotel window behind which Jacques Hold and Tatiana Karl make love. The disorientation of the narration reaches the point where first and third person perspectives alternate rapidly, the "I" of Jacques Hold appearing in relationship to Lol, and the "he" in relationship to Tatiana. What is occurring is that Lol's madness appears to be forcing him to play two contradictory roles simultaneously:

Je suis retourné à la fenêtre, elle était toujours là, là dans ce champ, seule dans ce champ d'une manière dont elle ne pouvait témoigner devant personne. J'ai su cela d'elle en même temps que j'ai su mon amour, sa suffisance inviolable, géante aux mains d'enfant.

Il regagna le lit, s'allongea le long de Tatiana Karl. Ils s'enlacèrent dans la fraîcheur du soir naissant. Par la fenêtre ouverte entra le parfum du seigle. Il le dit à Tatiana (L.V.S., p.125).

It is as though Lol is forcing him to love her vicariously through his erotic love for Tatiana Karl, her former friend. Thus Lol's erotic love

can be seen as a movement toward the female body, first toward the body of Anne-Marie Stretter, and now, by substitution, toward the voluptuous body of Tatiana. But this movement is achieved only through the desiring eyes of the male. According to Else Voigtlander, an early psycho-analyst quoted by Murray Stein in an article entitled "Narcissus":

Feminine activity has not the same clear relationship to an object as does masculine activity; it is lived out in quite another way, in itself, exhausting its course in itself, in its own interior, and therein the woman lives and moves, swimming as it were, in her proper element.¹⁵

Swimming in the feminine element is an apt description for what we are beginning to experience in Marguerite Duras' story of Lol V. Stein. However, the reversal bringing us to the feminine perspective is only in its incipient stages and remains, therefore, a disorienting and fragmenting experience. As Lol pulls Jacques Hold into her voyeuristic game — her very personal erotic fantasy — his disorientation reaches hallucinatory heights:

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 in-existant et qu'elle ignore. Il passe ainsi le temps. L'oubli vient. Il appelle Tatiana, lui demande de l'aider.
(L.V.S., p.162)

At the end of the novel, Lol is ensconced, asleep in the rye field in front of the hotel window. She cannot actually "see" anything so it is to be assumed that her own imagination is the source from which she nourishes her fantasy. This is not common voyeurism, or even the

basically voyeuristic mood of our world so centered around the visual image; something different is occurring. It would appear that the open window through which one actually sees the activity of others is changing function, becoming instead the window of imagination, and, in this instance, of the female unconscious.

In an article entitled "Voir. Etre vue", Viviane Forrester mentions the frequent appearance of the open window by which one may "spy" on the other, in the Durassian text. There is the window in Moderato Cantabile through which Chauvin spies on Anne occupied with her "toilette"; or the one in Détruire, dit-elle, through which Stein watches the couple Alissa/Thor making love. She does not mention, however, the later texts such as Le Navire Night, and particularly Aurélia Steiner where the roles are reversed: here it is the young women who watch and describe the world from the other side, from imagination and the unconscious.

Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein does not end with the last page of the novel; as the baffled narrator expresses it:

Je nie la fin qui va venir probablement nous
séparer, sa facilité, sa simplicité désolante,
car du moment que je la nie, celle-là, j'accepte
l'autre, celle qui est à inventer, que je ne
connais pas, que personne encore n'a inventée:
la fin sans fin, le commencement sans fin de Lol
V. Stein (L.V.S., p.184).

Lol has begun a journey into transformation which leads us eventually to the writing voice of Aurélia Steiner. It may be seen as the germination of a new rhetoric; it is a uniquely different perception of the world. The world of the "look", a world of representation and theoretical concepts — removed, objectified — is breaking down, seemingly under the pressure of the released force of the silence and mystery so long hidden

below the surface.

From her place of madness, "la nuit de S. Thala", Lol infuses the world with her passivity; like Narcissus before the beautiful image in the pool, she cannot tear herself away from her erotic connection with the flesh of the other woman. First because she is part of that flesh in her female body — as she is the same as the mother from whom she was born — and therefore contiguous, not neatly separated; secondly because her erotic desire has left her a victim of rejection: romantic/erotic love is exclusive to the couple for whom she is the third, forever excluded, separated. Thus: "Lol V. Stein: tout Lol répandue et tout Stein pétrifié."¹⁶

Lol's wandering continues in L'Amour, a world of sand, sea, and of ruins. Hypnos and Thanatos, the brothers of sleep and of death, rule in this mythic underworld where collective archetypal patterns from the world of memoria, the world of unconscious memory, begin appearing. The movements of "la Femme" — Lol in the process of transformation — take on the contours of the ancient myth of female initiation, "the descent of Inanna" recounted in the preliminary. "Seeing" from the perspective of this archetypal paradigm leads to a fascinating unfolding of the hidden in the Durassian text.

L'Amour: A World in Limbo.

The ordered world of "le regard" is in fragments. In L'Amour, a sort of "palimpsest" of the novels Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein and Le Vice-Consul, the narrators have disappeared. The characters, now "dead", continue their repetition in a world stripped bare and overwhelmed

by the sea and sandy beach. "La Femme" (the former Lol V. Stein) follows first "le fou", and then "le voyageur", along the otherwise deserted beach: "Elle a été vraiment détruite pendant la nuit de S. Thala" (Les Parleuses, p.125). It is as though the madness of the Lol of Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein is now personified in the character of "le fou". Now it is he who represents the third person excluded. His regular footsteps, like those of "la mendiante" in Le Vice-Consul, parallel the flow of the writing itself — the rhythm of the words and phrases forming, falling apart, and reforming constantly on the page:

Elle se tient, la visage vers le sable. Lui
regarde vers la digue celui qui s'éloigne.

— qui c'est?

Elle répond avec un léger retard:

— Il nous garde — elle re
prend — il nous garde, il nous
ramène.

Il le regarde longtemps.

— Ce parcours toujours
égal... Ce pas si régulier... on
dirait...

Elle fait signe: non.

— Non, c'est le pas d'ici
— elle reprend — c'est le pas
ici, à S. Thala.

(L'A., p.24-5)

The third person represented by the fool/madman is, according to the author, always present, either covertly or overtly, in her texts. She refers to this "third" as the writing itself: "Et vous croyez que ce

troisième personnage, ce n'est pas l'écriture?" (Les Parleuses, p.48).

"Le fou" (later "les fous" in La Femme du Gange) becomes a symbol for the openness, and for the essence of discovery, increasingly associated with the writing voice emerging in the "India Song" texts:

Il est poreux, le Fou. Il n'est rien,
donc les choses le traversent complètement.
Donc l'histoire de S. Thala le traverse.
L'histoire de Lol V. Stein, qui est l'histoire
de S. Thala, c'est une seule et même chose.
(Les Lieux., p.96)

L'Amour is a title "en reaction" states the author, "Il est venu après, quand le livre a été fini. C'est un titre en réaction contre les titres similaires" (Les Parleuses, p.67). "Love", the Durassian texts beginning with Moderato Cantabile and Hiroshima mon amour seem to say, is woman's only possibility and, at the same time, an impossibility — unless perhaps it is accepted with violence, antagonism and inevitable suffering. L'Amour presents us with a provocative "negative" image, as though we are seeing the drama from a reversed perspective, and in black and white, the usual contents being somehow belied by a far deeper truth yet to unfold:

Elle dort.
Il prend du sable, il le verse sur son corps.
Elle respire, le sable bouge, il s'écoule d'elle.
Il en reprend, il recommence. Le sable s'écoule
encore. Il en reprend encore, le verse encore.
Il s'arrête.

— Amour.

Les yeux s'ouvrent, ils regardent sans voir,
sans reconnaître rien, puis ils se referment, ils
retournent au noir.

(L'A., p.124)

The amplification and projection of Lol's madness into the oceanic expanse of sand and waves is like a limitlessness held in suspension by the

repetitive footsteps of the prisoner, "le fou". Time is a prison, this world of sand — symbol of time — seems to be saying. This space of S. Thala is the memory "guarded" by "le fou": "il garde la mémoire, oui. Il est sans mémoire et il garde la mémoire, oui. Il est fou" (Les Lieux., p.96). It is as though, like the subject of self-portraiture, he has transcended the confines of the personal ego, attaining the collective unconscious of the culture. The world of L'Amour, held together by the madman/fool, is a world caught in limbo — as the self-portrait is suspended between memory and invention — between a re-membering and a for-getting, a letting go:

L'homme qui regardait est passé. Son pas
s'entend de moins en moins. On le voit, il va
vers une digue qui est aussi éloignée de la
femme que l'est d'elle le marcheur de la plage.
Au-delà de la digue, une autre ville, bleue,
qui commence à se piquer de lumières électriques.
Puis d'autres villes, d'autres encore: La
même (L'A., p.11).

Being reduced always to the same, what man is, or is not, an identity which is in essence a non-identity, has been the fate of woman in man's language, as in his world. Perhaps this can also be seen as the fate of language itself in the novel as it has grown increasingly "self-conscious", during the twentieth century particularly. In her study, Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox, Linda Hutcheon uses the myth of Narcissus and Echo to illustrate this predicament:

In the myth, Narcissus' fate is interestingly prefigured — with significant variations — by that of "resonabilis Echo" who cannot remain silent, cannot be ignored, and yet cannot be a creative, autonomous force on her own. Her destiny is not unlike that of novelistic language.¹⁷

It would appear that the novel is suffering a similar fate to that of woman in "man's" language. The domain of the novel, symbolized by the "organizing" efforts of the narrator, has been left behind in the poetic text of L'Amour. Here the language is composed of images reflecting an organic-like connectedness to the things they name; it is a language which refers constantly back to itself and to its own cyclic movement which is so different from the linear progression qualifying the ordinary world of cause and effect relationship:

Trois jours.
Trois jours au cours desquels il y a un
dimanche.
Le bruit croît, S. Thala chancelle, puis le
bruit décroît.
Il fait orage qui demonte la mer.
Trois nuits.
Au matin, des mouettes sont mortes sur
la plage.
Du côté de la digue, un chien. Le chien
mort est face aux piliers d'un casino
bombardé. Au-dessus, le ciel est très
sombre, au-dessus du chien mort.

...

Les voici revenus. Ils arrivent de la
rivière, ils traversent, ils longent S. Thala,
ils le courent. Ils sortent des trois jours
d'obscurité, de nouveau on les voit dans la
lumière solaire d'un S. Thala désert.

(L'A., pp.32-3)

"Le chien mort de la plage" which first appears in Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein (p.48) in the section describing Lol's illness, has re-appeared in association with the cycle of three days, a period of time significant to several "ressurrection" myths. Inanna descends to the underworld called Kur, meaning desert, where her dark sister Ereshkigal rules. There she is killed and hung on a peg to rot for three days. She

is then rescued through the efforts of her faithful maid-servant, Nimshubur. Christ's resurrection occurred following three days in the tomb. The analogy is not such a surprising one to make since the myth of the descent of Inanna pre-dates the resurrection of Christ by approximately three thousand years, going back to a time when cults to the great goddess flourished, and the patriarchy had not come into full rule.

Lol suffers the trauma of every woman, that is, to be excluded from humanity ... "Hypertrophiée, c'est ça. Le trauma ini ... initial de toute femme" (Les Parleuses, p.159), yet she does not continue to suffer in the same way. Instead, the famous "accident" occurs whereby she moves into her fantasy as though into an underworld, like Persephone pulled down into Hades from the field of Narcissi. "S. Thala désert" in which Lol exists, is the isolation and projection immanent to "le regard": the nothingness, "le rien" of the third excluded which is, according to the writer, as much woman in relationship to male-defined humanity (and to the woman as object within herself) as it is the third excluded from the couple:

Arrêté devant elle il la regarde.
Elle doit voir quelque chose de la violence du regard. Elle cherche la destination de cette violence, elle s'étonne, elle demande:
— Qu'est-ce qu'il y a?
— Je vous regarde.
Elle dit, elle demande:
— Il n'y a pas de voyage n'est-ce pas?
— Non. Nous sommes à S. Thala, enfermés — il ajoute
— je vous regarde.
(L'A., p.115)

Removed as it were from her own body, she seems destined to wander

nameless, as Echo wanders bodiless, repeating, throwing back the answer in the same form as the question still not hers, in her non-identity of "Lol" and "la femme", to ask:

Elle se tait. Il ne questionne pas. La phrase reste ouverte, elle n'en connaît pas la fin. Elle se fermera plus tard, elle le ressent, ne précipite rien, attend.

(L'A., p.62)

The discourse evolving within the text is successive to listening; it follows instead of leading, like the language of Echo, yet it lacks the sequacity of her repetitive chatter. It is a language intimately connected to voice, and involved in an expansive/receptive "seeing" very different from the "vouloir/pouvoir" normally associated with "le regard". It is kindred to the contemplation of the innocent Narcissus, (before he fell prey to interpretation!), enthralled by the image before him in the pool - in love with pure image, and not with anything he identifies with an ego self. If we imagine Narcissus in this disconnected state, in which seeing is less the usual effort to render the other "object" and more an act of receiving, the role of "le fou" becomes clearer. With his even step and his vast, all-encompassing, transparent blue gaze, the madman/fool "guards" the world of L'Amour, the reversal of the world of order, theory, and the domination of the "look":

Le voyageur désigne la mer devant eux,
la mer, puis derrière, l'épaisseur:

— Qu'est-ce que vous faites,
vous marchez au bord de la mer?

Au bord de S. Thala?

— Oui

— Rien d'autre?

— Non.

Le regard bleu se tourne vers la mer,
revient. Il est limpide, d'une intensité
fixe.

Le voyageur reprend:

— Pourtant... ce mouvement si
clair, si régulier... ce parcours
si précis...

— Non. Non... — il s'arrête
encore

— je suis fou.

(L'A., p.31)

These eyes reveal a cold, searching objectivity that goes far beyond the usual play of looks entrapping us in our world, the world painted by Sartre and destroyed in the Durassian text:

Ses yeux sont bleus, d'une transparence
frappante. L'absence de son regard est
absolue. (L'A., p.16)

Le regard bleu est d'une fixité
engloutissante. (L'A., p.17)

Ses yeux brillent. L'obscurité est
presque totale. Il regarde comme en
plein jour. Longuement (L'A., p.69).

The "objectivity" (in the sense of "exteriorizing", not "reducing to an object") of such vision is deeply disconcerting since it points beyond the reassuring world of accepted views, thus obviating the usual "regard" involved in games of seduction and domination. In the myth of Inanna, the "eyes of death" that belong to Ereshkigal, the dark sister-queen of the underworld, and which Inanna has incorporated when she is rescued and brought back to life and the upper world, are described by Sylvia Perera in similar terms of "objectivity":

Archetypally, these eyes of death are implacable and profound, seeing an immediate is-ness that finds pretense, ideals, even individuality and relatedness, irrelevant.¹⁸

It is these eyes which enable Inanna to confront her consort, Dumuzi, and through that confrontation realize a new autonomy in her love relationships.

Like the penetrating vision of "le fou", these eyes "make possible a perception of reality without the distortions and preconceptions of a super-ego. This means seeing not what might be good or bad, but what exists before judgment, which is always messy and full of affect and of the pre-verbal percepts of the near senses (touch, smell, taste)."¹⁹

In this process of altering seeing from the prison of the look to the expansive vision of "le fou", the images and symbols become more ambiguous, allowing greater scope for individual interpretation.

L'Amour, for example, is tenuously constructed of fragments, of words grouping together, then falling away and regrouping into other simple groups. The central component is the image which appears to be influenced more by the flux of nature — the sea, the alternation of light and dark, the movement of the figures on the beach — than by any conscious effort on the part of the writer to form a narrative. Duras describes her method as "description par touches de couleurs."²⁰ Again it involves a "seeing" which relates to the "eyes of death" in the myth of Inanna:

Seeing this way — which is initially so frightening because it cannot be validated by the collective — can provide what Logos consciousness fears as mere chaos, with the possibilities of a totally fresh perception, a new pattern, a creative perspective, a never ending exploration.²¹

Words flow in a tumble of fresh images — of sound, of touch, of taste, and of smell —

Il entre dans l'espace clos, seul, la porte
sa referme. Tout à coup, avec lui, l'iode
de la mer, le sel, la fulgurance bleue des
yeux du plein jour, de nuit pleine.

(L'A., p.40)

The footsteps of "le fou" join together the footsteps of the two others, reforming constantly the love triangle at the heart of the "story". They come together and separate again in a rythm reflecting the cadence of the waves on the sandy beach, in turn influenced by the alternation of day and night:

La colère, la plainte vient de cesser.
Un dernier flot de paroles sort de lui.
Ses yeux brillent et se ferment, face à
la paix des eaux.

— Objet du désir absolu
dit-il, sommeil de nuit, vers
cette heure-ci en général où
qu'elle soit, ouverte à tous
les vents — il s'arrête, il
reprend — objet de désir,
elle est à qui veut d'elle,
elle le porte et l'embarque,
objet de l'absolu désir.

Ses yeux s'ouvrent. Il se tourne vers cet
autre homme, le voyageur, puis vers elle qui
dort, puis son regard traverse S. Thala, se
perd.

(L'A., pp.50-1)

We are in a kinesthetic universe where the senses have become
blended, as though attached to the continuous movement of the elements, and
where sound and vision are connected in a pure synaesthesia:

Dans l'impossibilité de répondre, le
voyageur lève la main et montre autour
de lui, l'espace. Le geste fait, il
parvient à avancer dans la réponse.

— C'est-à-dire... — il s'arrête
— je me souviens... c'est ça...
je me souviens...

Il s'arrête.

La voix au timbre lumineux se hisse
jusqu'à lui, elle lui porte la réponse,
sa clarté est éblouissante.

— De quoi?

Une poussée incontrôlable, organique,
d'une force très grande le prive de voix.
Il répond sans voix:

— De tout, de l'ensemble.
(L'A., pp.18-9)

The effect of the synaesthesia — "la voix au timbre lumineux", is to put us, through the sensation and emotion evoked, into immediate contact with the undulating world of disintegrating time and memory in the text.

"C'est uniquement la fonction émotive qui met en jeu l'expression d'une pure synesthésie."²² It is a world, according to the writer, existing before theory and reflection:

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, que j'aime profondément (Les Lieux., p.98).

Considered from the linguistic point of view, it is a time before the intellectual constructions of symbol and metaphor:

La métaphore apparaît ainsi comme l'introduction dans le discours d'une image constituée au niveau de l'activité linguistique. Elle occupe une situation intermédiaire entre le symbole, qui introduit l'image au niveau de la construction intellectuelle, et la synesthésie, qui est la saisie d'une correspondance au niveau de la perception elle-même, en deçà de l'activité linguistique.²³

In this synaesthetic world of L'Amour, time has been transformed into space and the narrative shattered into images occupying this space.

Memories, like small fragments, side by side, form the substance of the "story" constantly vanishing and re-appearing with the trio on the beach:

— Dites-moi quelque chose
de l'histoire.

Il ne se retourne pas, ne voit rien que
devant lui, il répond:

— A mon avis, l'île est sortie
en premier — il montre la mer —
de là. S. Thala est arrivée après,
avec la poussière — il ajoute —
vous savez? le temps...

(L'A., p.49)

We are held in a compelling and rarefied here and now of unbroken ebb and flow, becoming and dissolution. Order and sequence seem of little or no consequence; or perhaps we are down to the bare essentials of time:

Instants or the "eternal nows" are, as the mystics claim, the stuff out of which the real time is made. In this sense, instants are like images: individual monadic wholes without pre-established order or sequence.²⁴

The remembering of the ball, which formed the basis for Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein, has been reduced in L'Amour to the remembering of the second which brought the ball to an end: the withdrawal of the couple and simultaneous collapse of Lol. It is the precise second in which we are faced with the nothingness, the absence, the silence upon which this text floats:

— Pendant un instant elle
sera aveuglée. Puis elle recom-
mencera à me voir. A distinguer
le sable de la mer, puis, la mer
de la lumière, puis son corps de
mon corps. Après elle séparera
le froid de la nuit et elle me le
donnera. Après seulement elle en-
tendra le bruit vous savez...? de
Dieu?... ce truc...?

Ils se taisent. Ils surveillent la progression de l'aurore extérieure.

FIN

The end is the beginning of a new day, and each day is a waiting and a repetition —, until the myth begins to move on, as occurs in the Durassian text with the appearance of Aurélia Steiner, clearly a rebirth of the sacrificed Lol. We cannot force transformation and rebirth just as we cannot force the archetypes within us; it is in dream, poetry, and myth that they reveal themselves to us. During the dark periods of descent, we can do no more than witness "la femme" doing at the end of the text: performing her ritual and waiting. "There we wait with patience" writes Perera, "going deeper and waiting together until the goddess as Time is ready to 'decree a kind fate'".²⁵

We find that, side by side, these fragments embody a mnemonic leading us implacably to the same story "... la ville bleue, la blanche, puis d'autres aussi, d'autres encore: la même"(p.20) of overwhelming desire and absence, "rien", silence, pure space, and pure image — the essence of the feminine voice beginning to stir, to move slowly towards rebirth from its land of Hypnos and Thanatos:

Elle marche lentement, continûment
vers la digue. Elle ne se retourne pas
vers l'hôtel. Elle va, dans la nuit, droit.
L'enfant, c'est l'enfant, sa naissance.
Lui, l'autre, cette nuit, la suit. Elle
fonce, bestiale, elle va.
Elle disparaît derrière la masse noire de
la digue, elle se perd dans les sables, le
vent illimité.
Il se perd à son tour, disparaît à son tour.
Plus rien. Que l'épaisseur innombrable,
endormie.

(L'A., p.73)

It is toward this story of woman that a second perusal of L'Amour, now in relationship to Le Vice-Consul, will take us.

L'Amour and Le Vice-Consul: a Devolution of the Myth of Woman.

There is a place on the beach in L'Amour that seems to act as an orientation point, attracting, for obscure reasons, the repetitive wandering of the three central characters. This point is "la digue", the dyke, or another word for "barrage", sea wall:

Elle le regarde, lui, le voyageur, elle
scrute les vêtements, le visage, les mains.
Elle touche la main, l'effleure avec pré-
caution, douceur, puis elle l'appelle,
elle désigne la digue, elle dit:

— Le cri arrivait de là.

De la direction qu'elle vient de montrer,
il surgit.
Il est loin encore.
De la digue, il revient, celui qui marche.
Le voilà.

(L'A., p.28)

The character who manifests the greatest interest in this point of visual reference upon the beach is "l'homme de T-Beach", "le voyageur" — the same Michael Richardson who left Lol sitting stunned behind the plants the night of the renowned ball. He left with the beautiful older woman whom he later followed to India, towards the south; the author did the reverse, leaving the south for the north:

X.G. --Quand Richardson s'en va, c'est comme
s'il allait vers un passé, alors, vers
ton passé.

M.D. --Oui, oui, c'est vrai. (Les Parleuses, p.120)

The woman of the original sea wall, the mother of the author, was a woman from the north in a foreign southern land. The use of reversals, a dominant Durassian technique, brings to mind the Tarot symbol of the hanged man: having lost his customary upward "ego" stance in the world, he is forced to experience the world from the "unconscious", his head dangling among the tree roots. The effect of the reversal in the Durassian universe is of a similar magnitude.

The sea wall has thus reappeared, transformed into a mobile dyke, since the meaning of "digue" is "barrage mobile". "Mobile" may even refer to its portability from text to text. When the criss-crossing of looks and sounds stop for an instant, a cry is heard arriving from behind the dyke:

Un cri. On a crié vers la digue.
Le cri a été proféré et on l'a entendu
dans l'espace tout entier, occupé ou vide.
Il a lacéré la lumière obscure, la lenteur.
Toujours bat le pas de l'homme qui marche,
il ne s'est pas arrêté, il n'a pas ralenti,
mais elle, elle a relevé légèrement son
bras dans un geste d'enfant, elle s'en est
recouvert les yeux, elle est restée ainsi
quelques secondes,
et lui, le prisonnier, ce geste, il l'a
vu: il a tourné la tête dans la direction
de la femme.

(L'A., p.12)

"Un cri" — an echo from former times? The screams of the murdered woman in Moderato Cantabile? The cry of Lol from behind the plants? The cries of the vice-consul? The absent cries of the dying baby given to the mother, who in turn gave it to the daughter²⁶ — an autobiographical anecdote first recounted in Un Barrage contre le Pacifique? With the arrival of the cry from behind the sea wall, the story can now begin:

L'histoire. Elle commence. Elle a commencé avant la marche au bord de la mer, le cri, le geste, le mouvement de la mer, le mouvement de la lumière.

Mais elle devient maintenant visible. C'est sur le sable que déjà elle s'implante, sur la mer (L'A., p.13).

It is the cry, the dimension of "l'écoute", that makes the story visible.

We are in a very different world from our known and reassuring world of visual "reality". Woman's story begins here since, according to the writer, it is women who hear and recognize the anguish in cries and screams:

Les femmes le savent, ça, à cause du silence dans lequel elles se tiennent depuis des millénaires.²⁷

Marguerite Duras recognizes a sign of her sex in the subversity of these screams. She causes her characters to cry out...

... parce que je suis une femme, les hommes n'oseraient pas le faire. Les hommes n'auraient pas osé faire crier le vice-consul comme il crie. Ils auraient tout de suite parlé de décence ou d'indécence. Moi l'indécence, je ne sais pas ce que c'est parce que je suis une femme qui fait les films. Si je ne faisais rien, j'en serais sans doute encore là à être confinée dans la décence. Tandis que j'en sors en écrivant et en faisant des films. C'est le seul point féministe peut-être auquel je peux faire allusion.²⁷

The sea wall becomes an orientation point for the unfolding of feminine destiny in suffering. A woman, it would seem, has the task of uncovering and of weaving her own identity from a multiplicity of identities within her. "La femme" of L'Amour, for instance, is essentially an interweaving of Lol, "la mendiante", at times Tatiana Karl and at other times, by metonymical linking of the motifs of sleep, forgetfulness, and

death, that other mysterious Durassian heroine, Anne-Marie Stretter. Like Echo, the identity of woman seems to exist only in connection to other identities, as mirroring, reflection, and continuation: "J'attends un enfant, j'ai envie de vomir" (L'A., p.23)... "J'ai faim, j'attends un enfant" (L'A., p.35). Hunger and vomiting are elements of the story of "la mendiante", first recounted in Le Vice-Consul, and seen here irrupting into the story of the woman on the beach. "Le rongement incessant" of S. Thala (L'A., p.22, 27, 38, 109, etc.), heard beside "la femme" of L'Amour, brings us back, by the similarity in sound, to the gnawing inside the stomach of the starving, pregnant "mendiante" of Le Vice-Consul:

Elle vomit, s'efforce de vomir l'enfant,
de se l'extirper, mais c'est de l'eau de
mangue acide qui vient. Elle dort beaucoup,
elle est devenue une dormeuse, c'est in-
suffisant: nuit et jour l'enfant continue
à la manger, elle écoute et entend le gri-
gnotement incessant dans le ventre qu'il
décharne, il lui a mangé les cuisses, les
bras, les joues — elle les cherche, il
n'y a que des trous là où elles étaient
dans le Tonlé-Sap —, la racine des che-
veux, tout, il prend petit à petit la
place qu'elle occupait, cependant que sa
faim à elle il ne l'a pas mangée. Le feu
acide de l'estomac apparaît comme un soleil
rouge pendant le sommeil (Le V.C., p.18).

When the "rongement" later transforms into a "chant", the parallel with the story of "la mendiante" becomes more striking, for the "chant" of the beggar woman is a salient motif in both Le Vice-Consul and India Song:

Le bruit, ici, a cessé. Le rongement
incessant, là-bas, recommence. Il grandit.
Il se transforme.
Il devient un chant. C'est un chant
lointain.
Les populations de S. Thala chantent.
(L'A., p.38)

Further along in the text, when we learn the place where the babies of "la femme" are born and where they are abandoned, the connection with the beggar woman, and with the author's own past, becomes increasingly apparent:

Ils marchent, ils longent la gare. Il montre au voyageur l'épaisseur, la masse de S. Thala.

— Ses enfants sont là-de-dans, ce truc, elle les fait, elle leur donne — il ajoute — la ville en est pleine, la terre.

Il s'arrête, il montre au loin, du côté de la mer, de la digue:

— Elle les fait là, du côté du cri, elle les laisse, ils viennent, ils les emportent.

Il fixe la direction de la digue, il continue:

— C'est un pays de sables.

Le voyageur répète:

— De sables.
— De vent.

...

Il montre de nouveau au voyageur l'enchaînement continu:

— Elle a habité partout, ici ou ailleurs. Un hôpital, un hôtel, des champs, des parcs, des routes — il s'arrête — un casino municipal, vous le saviez? Maintenant elle est là. (L'A., pp.52-3)

The universality of the story of the beggar woman, "la mendiante", is here personified in the incredible story of the giving of children who soon fill the earth; the image retained is again one of hypertrophy, an apparently senseless multiplying without meaning, an organic economy that

knows no bounds — a denuded fable of a nameless wanderer who, having travelled the earth leaving behind children instead of monuments, now sits passively before us in her nausea, vomiting, and insatiable need for sleep. The cruelty of this life which has defined "woman" is described aptly in the following passage from Descent to the Goddess:

Woman's life has been the reality of constantly recurring childbirths, attended by real deaths — a natural cycle that kept most of her life focused on the harsh malevolence of reality, on a sense of living at the brink of the abyss. So woman's creativity has gone into actual births and the arts and sustenance of the household — all subject to wear and destruction, to devouring — and not much appreciated in the wider cultural context; though they are the basic civilizing force of any culture, immediate, personal, made in the small interstices of the process of sustaining survival.²⁸

Sleep is a motif closely tied to that of the infant, and is perhaps the richest of the "feminine" motifs in the "India Song" texts. The Durassian heroine's experience is deeply linked to sleep, to fantasy, and by metonymy, to dream and to death. Her universe is one of sleep, of mystery, of death and of ruin — as though the masculine world of hierarchies, order, and spirit, had been subsumed by a shadowy underworld of death, silence, wandering, and a nameless existence connected always to "la mer/mère"; here sounds begin to dominate, defining what is real through inner feelings, senses, and synaesthetic associations:

Les bruits des moteurs se multiplient encore,
le mouvement des bateaux se multiplie encore,
l'engouffrement de la mer continue.
Il parle, il dit:

— Quel désordre — il ajoute
— il faut attendre encore une
heure, il n'y aura plus de départs

et à mon avis la mer aura cessé
de monter — il ajoute — car
quand même le temps passe.

...

Il montre la rivière envahie, les déchirures de l'eau, le mélange des forces d'eau, la remontée brutale du sel vers le sommeil.

(L'A., pp.47-7)

Sleep (Hypnos) and death (Thanatos) are the brothers who reside in the underworld or "memoria", a world to which the repressed feminine in the patriarchy has withdrawn. It is through the motif of sleep, for example, that the identities of Anne-Marie Stretter and "la mendiante" become interwoven towards the end of Le Vice-Consul. Anne-Marie Stretter sleeps, in the following passage, as the others, the males, discuss the novel about the beggar woman which Peter Morgan is writing:

Pourquoi parler à cette femme qui dort?
— Discours inutile et silence profond, dit
Michael Richardson.

...

— Serait-elle seule dans le livre?
demande Charles Rossett.
— Non, il y aurait une autre femme qui
serait Anne-Marie Stretter.
Ils se tournent vers elle.
— Oh, dit-elle, je dormais.
(Le V.C., pp.182-3)

Towards the end of Le Vice-Consul, in the hallucinatory atmosphere created by the heat of Calcutta, there is a disorienting juxtaposition and parallel of narrative levels: Peter Morgan writing his book, the monotonous conversation between the director and the vice-consul, the delirious perspective of Charles Rossett who has fallen under the combined spell of Anne-Marie Stretter and the heat of Calcutta, and the ongoing discussion by the others, while Anne-Marie Stretter sleeps, on the subject of the

beggar woman and Peter Morgan's novel. The discussion of the novel parodies and reflects, in extraordinary fashion, the fluidity, hypnotic quality, and organic connectedness of the language within the larger context of the novel Le Vice-Consul. Through this "mise en abîme", the language that is emerging becomes apparent: it is characterized by organic image, sound in space, metonymy, non-reference, and constant becoming — the female voice which the self-portrait is revealing:

— Elle chante et parle, elle fait des discours inutiles dans le silence profond. Il faudrait peut-être dire ce que sont ces discours, dit George Crawn. Un rien l'amuse, un chien qui passe la fait sourire, la nuit elle se promène; moi, si j'en parlais, je lui ferais faire des choses à l'envers, elle dormait dans la journée à l'ombre des arbres, au bord du Gange par-ci par-là. Ce serait dans le Gange... en définitive que... qu'elle s'est perdue, qu'elle a trouvé comment se perdre il me semble, elle a oublié, ne sait plus qu'elle est la fille de X ou de Y. Plus d'ennui pour elle — George Crawn rit —, nous sommes là pour ça en principe. Jamais, Jamais le moindre soupçon d'ennui... (Le V.C., p.181)

...

— Elle serait à Calcutta comme un... point au bout d'une longue ligne, de faits sans signification différenciée? Il n'y aurait que... sommeils, faims, disparition des sentiments, et aussi du lien entre la cause et l'effet?

— Je crois que ce qu'il veut dire, dit Michael Richard* c'est plus encore, il voudrait ne lui donner d'existence que dans celui qui la regarderait vivre. Elle, elle ne ressent rien. (Le V.C., p.182)

...

— Peut-être faudrait-il qu'elle fasse quelque chose que les autres ne savent pas faire, tu ne crois

*The spelling has changed from "Richardson" in Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein to "Richard" in Le Vice-Consul.

pas? Ainsi son passage pourrait être signalé.
Une chose à quoi t'accrocher, même minuscule.
(Le V.C., p.183)

The last passage may be making an allusion to a hidden meaning in the text, and the one before to the role of the reader. Hidden meaning begins to emerge when the texts are read from the perspective of ancient myths; language, when permitted the poetic freedom it is in the Durassian text, seems to reveal the basic paradigms from which myth is construed. The Narcissus and Echo myth, for instance, reflects the plight of the feminine in a masculine dominated world as well as in masculine dominated language. Nor Hall describes this situation in the following passage:

Wherever the domination of masculine values begins, as, for example, with the reigns of Yahweh and Zeus, complications of life for the feminine are taken up into the myths of the people. The main reason, then, for going back to those shepherd poets, who (according to Hesiod) had stories blown into their ears through reeds by wind-borne maidens, is that the plots and solutions of their tales prefigure the plight of the feminine in a patriarchate. Myths (to repeat) are not false stories but are complex and essential psychic facts. They arise out of the sleep cycle of a culture the way a dream comes up in the sleep of an individual.²⁹

Sleep, hunger, vomiting, rotting flesh, suffering, boredom, wandering — Lol asleep in the rye field before the hotel window, "la mendiante" sleeping by the river with the lepers, Anne-Marie Stretter sleeping in the exhausting heat of Calcutta — all are threads from which a woman's identity is woven, forming her language, as they have formed her existence. Anne-Marie Stretter, woman of mystery and focus of so much passion, states it with simple elegance:

— C'est très difficile de l'apercevoir.

tout à fait — elle sourit —, je
suis une femme... ce que je vois
seulement c'est une possibilité
dans le sommeil...

(Le V.C., p.127)

In the centre of L'Amour there is a woman in a house who calls herself "la morte de S. Thala". She is related in some obscure way to "le voyageur" and to the woman on the beach; it is as though she, in the house still, were a fragment of the past of the woman of the beach. By her hair — "mes cheveux noirs teints en noir" (L'A., p.83) — we associate her with Tatiana Karl, Lol's childhood friend. The house is on the hill dominating the beach, and the yard, in contrast to the carefully tended garden belonging to the Lol of Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein, is in a state of unruly abandon:

La maison est un rectangle gris aux
volets blancs. Elle domine la plage, la
masse de la digue, la ville empoisonnée.
Le jardin est en friche, l'herbe est très
haute et déborde les murs.

La grille entrouverte invite, fait peur.
(L'A., p.55)

"La grille", the iron barrier to keep out, and to keep in, is present as always, reminding us of the empty tennis courts, the iron fencing around the embassy and the island estate in Le Vice-Consul — all potent symbols for the barriers experienced by women when confronting male society, as well as poignant reminders of the emptiness and silence which signal the presence of the feminine in the text. Here the gate stands open as a disquieting sign of change, of abandonment, of the order having been upset. The woman in the house is now "dead": an implacable alteration has occurred, something has changed definitively. Tatiana Karl is the woman of

the hotel who is kept by men, chained to her body, to her identity as desired sexual object, perhaps to self-abandonment in her life of adulterous love in hotel rooms. She has sought the "possible", nothing more, nothing less; whereas the others — Michael Richard in his love for the fabulous Anne-Marie Stretter, and Lol V. Stein in her obsession to join the couple, sought the "impossible" and therefore wander endlessly in the diffuse desire which is the undifferentiated passion of love, represented by the limitless beaches of S. Thala:

— Je m'en suis tirée.
Elle attend encore, elle termine encore
la phrase.

— La seule de vous tous —
elle ajoute — la seule, la morte
de S. Thala (L'A., p.84).

"La femme", that same eighteen-year-old Lol, remains on the beach, her hands blackened by the fires of S. Thala, in a reversed world of memory, an underworld to which she seems to have been drawn (like Persephone by Hades) from the field while gathering the beautiful narcissus flower. Like Inanna she hangs to rot in the desert underworld:

Il n'est plus là. Elle est seule allongée
sur la sable au soleil, pourrissante, chien
mort de l'idée, sa main est restée enterrée
près du sac blanc (L'A., p.125).

The only thing she carries in that "petit sac de jeune fille" is a mirror:

Ils marchent. Elle retourne à regarder
le sol. Elle est en blanc, coiffée. Il
l'a préparée, dans l'île ce matin, il l'a
lavée, coiffée. Elle porte un petit sac de
jeune fille, également blanc, le sac blanc
du voyage à S. Thala. Elle le prend et
l'ouvre. Elle en sort une glace. Elle
s'arrête, se regarde, repart. Elle lui tend
la glace, elle la lui montre.

— Il m'a donné ça avant de partir.

Elle ouvre de nouveau le sac. Elle y remplace la glace. Il regarde: le sac est vide, il ne contient que la glace. Elle le ferme, elle dit:

— Un bal.

— Oui — il hésite — vous étiez, à ce moment-là, supposée aimer. (L'A., pp.112-3)

The mirror is a particularly potent symbol in the world of the Durassian text. Here the mirror seems to be guarding the reflection of Lol, half buried in the sand (time), as though ready to disappear. "Keeping a mirror", writes Nor Hall, "is a precautionary measure to be taken whenever there might be fear of losing oneself to the other side."³⁰ The mirror was given to her by "le fou", whose slow, rhythmic pace provides a kinetic structure for the flow of fragments and images forming the tenuous world of the text. Lol is an important link leading to the writer's own past — an essential stage in an important transformation of perspective. In order to go forward it has been necessary to take a long journey back: "Bending back far enough to get a sense of one's own prehistory", writes Nor Hall, "is the first step in the process of conscious evolution."³¹

The wandering of Lol in the desert of S. Thala continues in La Femme du Gange. Here, experimentation with the sound/image relationship in film creates a new dimension in the text, which is that of the "voices". It is this new dimension which allows the myth to evolve, preparing the way for a transformation into the writing voice of Aurélia Steiner.

La Femme du Gange: The Myth Evolves.

When Lol tries to join the couple by calling out "qu'elle voulait les suivre pour continuer à les voir" (F. du G., p.183), she is also expressing a fundamental urge which Marguerite Duras transposes into broader cultural terms in the following passage from Les Parleuses:

M.D. — Tu crois que ce mouvement qu'elle avait de se fondre aux amants, de rejoindre les amants et auquel on a opposé un refus, est le même mouvement que toute femme a en elle de rejoindre... tous et à qui on oppose un refus, de rejoindre tous, de rejoindre le groupe, l'humanité (Les Parleuses, p.159).

Woman's alienation seems to reside in the unhappy fact that her difference from man has been devalued in male culture; she has had to take, as Simone de Beauvoir wrote so long ago, her assigned role as "the second sex". Luce Irigaray expresses it in the following way in Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un:

Le désir de la femme ne parlerait pas la même langue que celui de l'homme, et il aurait été recouvert par la logique qui domine l'occident depuis les Grecs. Dans cette logique, la prévalence du regard et de la discrimination de la forme est particulièrement étrangère à l'érotisme féminin. La femme jouit plus de toucher que du regard, et son entrée dans une économie scopique dominante signifie, encore, une assignation pour elle à la passivité: elle sera le bel objet à regarder.³²

The world within the Durassian text, representing woman's enslavement and incarceration by "le regard masculin", her captivity within the confined space of her own image (or her own annihilation, as in the fantasy/obsession of Lol), is in a more advanced state of deterioration in La Femme du Gange:

M.D. — Je vois la réalité minée. Alors il y a aussi, dans le film, une sorte de retour à des éléments comme ceux de la nature, le sable, la mer, c'est jamais des rues, vous avez remarqué. C'est des gens... des maisons, mais vides, comme après, des hôtels, mais désaffectés... (Les Parleuses, p.63)

M.D. — C'est un monde en ruine, dans mes films. (Les Parleuses, p.64).

The "India Song" texts have entered the world of film. The possibility of the separation of image from sound — the core of the author's experiment in language — can now attain its full potential. As one film critic has perceptively commented:

Duras proceeds with her most visually austere film, a film of static shots and seemingly overdue cuts, with little fluidity or continuity between shots, except in their long duration or in their repetition. In this way, she forces the spectator to "look" to the voices.³³

What she has done is "reversed", once more, the normal "image-sound relationship, whereby we always look to the visuals and 'trust' them, while not always hearing or saving the sound, even deliberately losing the sound, mistrusting the sound."³⁴

Though still constantly present, "le regard" is now rendered even more passive, and separate from the world of meaning, than it was in L'Amour. While in the latter the madness of Lol was still alive, her obsession "de les voir" attached to her, and to her somnambulic wanderings on the beach, in the present text/film, she is mute and totally passive:

Assise sur une marche, contre un mur,
une idiote regarde tout autour d'elle
avec une égale attention: la jeune fille
de S. Thala. Dite L.V.S. N'a pas suivi
— là-bas — les amants du bal. Son regard
a la douceur angélique de la démence.

Gouffre nu, pur de toute mémoire. Sur le visage, plaquées, les voix informent:

Voix I

Ici, il n'était jamais revenue?

Voix 2

Jamais.

Voix I

Il avait suivi l'autre femme aux Indes?

Voix 2

Oui. Après sa mort il est parti des Indes. Il s'est marié. Il a eu des enfants.

(F. du G., p.126)

"Voices" have now appeared separate from the story held in the images on the screen where Lol passively sits, a mute phantom. The only characters seen and heard are "la femme" (this time perhaps Anne-Marie Stretter or Tatiana Karl), "le voyageur" (the same Michael Richardson), "le fou", the man in the casino, and an anonymous young man. Their conversations are static, truncated, often containing only meaningless "echoes", always of the same story, which is essentially the story of the end of an end-of-summer ball, which may be allegory for the end of a certain period in the life of the author. A stronger allegorical reference would be to the end of a certain culture, to the imprisonment of women by "le regard":

La femme. Elle est dans un endroit indéterminé. On voit son visage de très près. Elle pleure. Son visage aux yeux morts est déchiré par la douleur intolérable qui sort par vannes du bal mort de S. Thala. Elle est au rendez-vous des amants, des premiers amants de S. Thala.

Son visage détruit, c'est la plaie toujours ouverte du désir.

Voix I, peur.

Où êtes-vous?

Voix 2, tendresse.

Je suis là. Près de vous.

Silence.

Voix I

Je n'entends plus le bruit de la mer...

Voix 2

Qu'entendez-vous?

Voix I

Le bruit d'un bal, MORT.

Silence.

(F.du G., p.162)

Love stories in the traditional sense are finished, these texts are saying. The story of Lol V. Stein and the couple is a reversal of the paradigm: Lol does not suffer in the usual sense of the third excluded - "Pas de souffrance... Aucun signe de souffrance..." (F.du G., p.139). Instead, she follows her own fantasy, reflecting a pattern of ancient feminine initiation, leading through madness and death to transformation — first into the "voices" of La Femme du Gange and India Song, and then into the writing voice of Aurélia Steiner. Neither do the couple live "happily ever after". They follow, instead, a path which leads toward the author's past in a foreign southern land, joining there the universal feminine in the suffering and madness of the "mendiante", and death, symbolized by Anne-Marie Stretter and her suicide

in "la mer indienne":

M.D. — Tu ne crois pas que c'est le monde de l'exaspération folle de l'amour qui est fini? A mon avis c'est fini.

(Les Parleuses, p.140)

Surrounding this "finished" world, in ruins, are the signs of absence, of abandonment, of emptiness and of silence — signs we have come to recognize as the formless, and as yet unexplored, terrain of the feminine:

Cette espèce d'obscurité dans laquelle était plongée la femme, je pense que c'était ce rôle d'aimer. Prodiguer l'amour lui était assigné depuis des millénaires et du fait qu'elle prodiguait l'amour on la voyait dans l'obscurité. Elle ne pouvait pas transgresser cela, elle se tenait coïte dans cette obscurité. Ce stage gigantesque dans l'amour a fait la richesse de la femme, richesse insondable. Pascal procède déjà d'une certaine androgynie. Cette obscurité pascalienne est, à mon avis, une obscurité de nature féminine. Il en est sorti des fulgurances qui n'ont jamais été dépassées en intensité et en violence. Ce rôle d'amour, qui a été le malheur de la femme, c'est maintenant son terrain de départ. Autour de la femme il y a ce terrain fécondé, immense.³⁵

No longer hiding in concrete symbols (for example, the empty tennis courts of Détruire, dit-elle), nor merely surrounding the physical as an unseen disrupting force, the emptiness is now taking on actual "presence", in the same way that we began looking to the bodiless voices for meaning:

L'endroit est redevenu vide comme avant l'arrivée du Voyageur.

Ce vide, facteur de liaison, restera la charnière selon laquelle, sans cesse, s'articulera le film. (F. du G., p.113)

Nous avons pénétré dans le lieu vide de l'amour. (F. du G., p.124)

Quelqu'un ici a voulu fuir, suivre, a

renversé tout dans sa fuite. Entre le paravent japonais et la table, la place vide de la jeune fille de S. Thala, statufiée.

(F. du G., p.140)

The limitless obscurity of the feminine begins to take form. This is done by subverting the usual power of "le regard" and transforming the passivity of "l'écoute", rendering it a sort of composite of all the senses, thus revealing the substance of matter rather than merely its outward form, the territory of the "look". It is the "voices" which now reveal life in their attachment to the sounds, odours, and movements of the moment, as though redeeming it from the now dead images on the screen:

Les trois regards ne suivent plus. Ils s'arrêtent sur le point de disparition du Voyageur. Restent là, fixes.

Espace des sables qui contient l'accident. L.V.S. assise contre une barrière près du perron de L'hôtel, les yeux au sol. Arrêt sur cet endroit banal.

Lent émergement de la Femme et du Fou vers l'espace cerné. Ils se rapprochent de l'hôtel. Les voix parlent d'eux:

VOIX 2

Ils ont perdu la mémoire?

VOIX 1

Oui. Leur mémoire est maintenant dehors.

VOIX 2

Des cendres...

Temps.

VOIX 1

Oui. Cette odeur de feu dans S. Thala le soir...?

VOIX 2

Oui...

Silence.

(F. du G., pp.110-11)

The absence of usual significance is striking. Paralleling this reduction in readily grasped meaning is an augmentation in "folie", madness. The characters roam freely in a confined space, detached from even the memory of the situation which originally intertwined their destinies. "Le Fou" of L'Amour has multiplied into a community, with the characteristics of "la femme" of L'Amour now projected, exteriorized into the characteristics of "les fous". Her blackened hands, associated with "les incendies interminables" of L'Amour, appear now as part of them:

LE VOYAGEUR

Vos mains sont noires.

Les fous regardent leurs propres mains,
voient qu'elles sont noires. Ils ne le savaient
pas. Les fous ne savent pas être des incendi-
aires: c'est leur présence qui est incendiaire,
leur existence qui "met le feu" à ce dont
s'approche.

LA FEMME

C'est l'incendie.

LE FOU, en écho.
...l'incendie...

LE VOYAGEUR, temps.
On vous cherche.

LA FEMME

Oui.

LE FOU, en écho.
...oui...

LE VOYAGEUR
On va vous tuer.

LA FEMME

Nous ne pouvons pas mourir.

LE FOU, écho.
...on peut pas...

(F. du G., p.175)

Their "echoing", often exact repetition of conversations from L'Amour, brings to mind, once again, the myth of Narcissus and Echo, and of the plight of the feminine in the patriarchate. But now they exist only as shadows in a dead world. The growing madness, a sign of the growing subversion of the world of hierarchies and the powerful unidimensional "look", is sealing, within the text, the doom of writing and reading as we have known them. From a semantic point of view:

Dans l'entremêlement des pulsions au langage, le risque schizophrénique marque ici les limites du texte. Mutisme ou tournant en rond, le résultat est le même: il y a annihilation et annulation de toute signification et de toute signifiante possible. Autrement dit, la folie signe la mort du texte.³⁶

Something different is beginning to occur with the presence of the "voices", however, for their repetitions are not the sterile repetitions of Echo; on the contrary, their appearance has opened up a vital new dimension. The transformation process at the base of the "India Song" texts becomes more readily accessible since the voices are at once "new", in the present, yet somehow, at a very deep level, connected to the story held captive in the ruined world of the images. Returning to the myth of Inanna will help elucidate the subtlety of this relationship.

When Inanna does not return after three days from the desert home of her dark sister, her faithful servant initiates measures to secure her rescue. It is Enki, "the wily water and wisdom god"³⁷ whose "energy flows with and breaks up the rigidity of the underworld,"³⁸ who comes to her aid. Rather than abiding by the precedents and laws, he initiates a new process and he does so by resorting to what was hitherto ignored: he moves with feeling."³⁸ From the dirt under his fingernail, he fashions

two mourners who manage to slip into the underworld unnoticed. They are "sexless devotees, perhaps hermaphroditic or androgynous, polymorphous creatures, (...) thus they do not embody consciousness as discrimination based on cutting apart, separation, and standing adversary, but consciousness as empathy and mirroring."³⁹

Listening to the "voices", we experience their deep sharing in the grief and passion of the "story" buried in the now almost ghost-like and static figures in the deserted places before us, and before them, on the screen:

VOIX I, plainte douce.
Quel désert autour de nous certains
jours...
Cet hôtel est si grand...
Nous sommes seules...
(F. du G., p.116)

VOIX 2
N'y pensez plus...
Venez près de moi...
Silence.

VOIX I, douleur, douleur.
Quel amour c'était.
Quel désir... Impossible...
Terrible...
Silence.
(F. du G., p.127)

Enki's mourners are "humble creatures" who "affirm Ereshkigal in her suffering... theirs is a created capacity. They see and feel, and they groan with."³⁹ When Ereshkigal moans "Woe, oh my inside", they echo her with empathy, and similarly when she moans "Woe, oh my outside."⁴⁰ "Their echoing makes a litany, transforms the pain into poetry and prayer. It makes out of life's dark misery a song of the goddess. It establishes art as a reverent and creative and sympathetic response to the passions

the pains of life."⁴¹ A comparable role is played by the Durassian "voices", for they become manifestation, the incarnation of the desire now released from the original "story", fragmented and scattered among the ruins where the now nameless and "dead" characters wander mindlessly.

As the sentences break up, adjectives and pronouns falling away, the discourse reveals a world of emotion. Like the movement "with feeling" of the watery wisdom god, Enki, this language becomes personified in the two female voices. One of them is "épouvantée" at the love story contained in the remnants before her on the screen, while the second is consumed by the desire she now feels for the first:

VOIX 2

Vous êtes si jeune et je vous aime tant...

Pas de réponse.

VOIX 2, suppliante.

Je vous aime plus que tout au monde.

Arrêt.

La voix n. 2 a demandé que l'on vive.
Pas de réponse. Silence.
La voix n. 1 se fait très lente, très basse, elle est exténuée.

VOIX 1

Si je vous le demandais, accepteriez-vous de me tuer?

La réponse à la demande de mise à mort est lente à venir. Elle vient. Elle est affirmative. Elle témoigne du désir entier, mortel qui, de même, liait les héros du bal de S. Thala.

VOIX 2

Oui.

(F. du G., p.182)

Like a distillation of the female voices preceding them, these "voices" resonate with the cries, the anguish, the chanting, the laughter, the fear, the anger, and finally the silence defining the unfolding feminine universe:

VOIX I

Quelqu'un crie. Loin.

VOIX 2

Où?

VOIX I

Vers le GANGE...

VOIX 2

Une femme...?

VOIX I

Oui... Elle marche... Dans
la chaleur de la mousson, elle
va... elle marche...

VOIX 2

Que crie-t-elle?

VOIX I

DES MOTS SANS SUITE... ELLE
RIT...

Silence.

(F. du G., p.159)

According to Sylvia Perera, the "inside" and "outside" referred to in Ereshkigal's moaning, and mirrored in empathy by Enki's mourners, is "a border region that is one of the earliest parameters of awareness in childhood."⁴² It is in this region in "sybiotic bond" that the mother feels her child's needs as her own and vice-versa. This field of "participation mystique" is so fluid that "there is often no clear sense of

objectivity and difference between the psychic boundaries of two persons. Rather there is a sense of union and intimacy that can be tuned into with subtle intuitive and kinesthetic perceptions."⁴³

The Durassian "voices" exist in just such a "border region" where identities mix, transforming one into the other, merging, then separating again in different ways. For instance, "L.V.S." of La Femme du Gange, is no longer "la femme" of L'Amour whom we associated with Lol V. Stein of Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein; instead of giving birth to those children behind "la digue", she has become again like a child herself:

M.D. — Donc ce n'est pas la femme de
L'Amour, pas tout à fait.

— Je pense que ça a été remplacé:
elle a enfanté les voix. Je crois que l'une
des voix, c'est elle (Les Parleuses, p.69).

This is further substantiated in the text since "Voix I" is also eighteen years old:

VOIX 2

Quel âge avez-vous?

VOIX I

Dix-huit ans.

Silence.

(F. du G., p.155)

In a related transformation or "giving birth to", the child born to the woman in L'Amour has also been replaced by the "voices":

M.D. — L'enfant criait à l'intérieur,
voyez, il habitait aussi le lieu, de l'intérieur.
Je pense qu'il a été remplacé par les voix.
(Les Parleuses, p.68)

"To flow into awareness of the border", writes Perera, "is to begin to find one's own separate ground of being", and "often when we experience the border it is with a consciousness born of suffering and loss."⁴⁴ The process which began with Moderato Cantabile, propelling the writer and the writing deeper within, toward the foreign land of her childhood and her mother's suffering, attains a point of "no return" in the text/films of La Femme du Gange, India Song, and Son nom de Venise dans Calcutta désert. Marguerite Duras reveals to us the importance of the region opened up with the discovery of the voices in the first of these three films:

J'ai l'impression quelquefois que j'ai commencé à écrire avec ça, avec Le Ravisement 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.
(Les Lieux., p.90)

The figures of the passive "dead" women on the beach, of "le désert de S. Thala", can be related to the active upper world goddess, Inanna, hanging to rot in the desert of her bereft and suffering dark sister. They are two parts to be put back together into a renewed whole. Like Enki's mourners who begin the reversal by finding the right attitude through their sympathetic mirroring of Ereshkigal's moaning, the Durassian "voices" create poetry and song with their commiseration in the pain

of the end-of-summer ball. Through this creation of song, the mourners of the myth arouse the generosity of the dark sister, thus regaining their queen Inanna, who then returns to her upper world realm. Similarly, the newness, the poignant emotion of the "voices", already having assimilated the "dead" Lol, contain the seed of the complete transformation which will be into the writing voice of Aurélia Steiner. No longer will the essence of writing be in the written word which creates distance, becoming narrative and formula; rather, the essential goal is to communicate feeling more directly through sound, thus subverting the usual power of the "look" so connected as it has become, through metaphor, to the intellect — "see clearly", "see the light", "illuminate", etc. The distance permitting this process of "intellectualization" has been removed and the reader experiences the Durassian world through the closer "feminine" bodily senses of sound, touch, smell and sensation, evoked by an imagistic language. This movement away from incarceration in "le regard" began with Lol's rejection of her name.

At the end of the section in Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein dealing with Lol's illness and her rejection of her name, there appears an enigmatic phrase: "Puis un jour ce corps infirme remue dans le ventre de Dieu" (p.51). The motif of "Dieu" continues throughout the "India Song" texts, always in relationship to the anger and the rejection manifested by Lol:

VOIX 2

Vous ne mangez plus... vous
dormez mal...

VOIX I

C'est la colère.

VOIX 2

Contre qui?

VOIX I

Dieu. Dieu en general.

Silence.

VOIX 2

Que je vous aime... que je
vous désire...

Silence.

(F. du G., p.153)

There are two lines, earlier in this section of Le Ravisement, each which provide another indication as to how this motif is functioning within the text. First: "Elle n'est pas Dieu, elle n'est personne"(p.47), then, two pages later: "Mais Lol n'est encore ni Dieu, ni personne" (p.49). Playing "God" — the omnipotent, omnipresent third person narrator, has been the role of the writing persona traditionally assumed by the novelist. A reversal of this all-controlling omnipotence is conveyed by the concept that here the writing is by "personne", that "Ecrire c'est n'être personne."⁴⁵ This reversal gives rise to the writing voice of Aurélia Steiner. The origin of the writing voice is experienced as a nameless source, the place where our voice joins the voices of others, and where myth is generated. Nor Hall describes this place in the following way:

Putting the events of the extraordinary experience together in a meaningful way makes a mythos, a myth — not a made-up story but literally a "mouthing", a telling of primary experience using the first words of coming to consciousness.⁴⁶

What we experience in the Durassian text is a breaking down of the accepted myths of womanhood which have grown out of the patriarchal

culture (mother, wife, lover, adultress, whore), and their replacement by the emergence of myths which are far more rudimentary and connected in some way to a feminine "source". This feminine source is in fact the psyche of Marguerite Duras, who has uncovered her own process of becoming — as woman, as writer — in these texts which can be read as self-portraiture. It is here that we come to experience woman as a continuum, as a perpetual becoming through the cycle of giving birth. Organically connected to the child, she continues through its life, and by this experience gains intimate knowledge of the "border region" where the experience of self and not-self, merging and separation is born:

Feminine receptive consciousness does not experience the border as a tidy boundary separating what is sensed as "me" from what is sensed as "not me". The border is not a fixed barrier demarcating a clear sense of individual identity in opposition to the other, who is felt to be the object of heroic action. Rather the border is permeable, easily penetrated by emphatic sensing of the other, a capacity to feel with and to share the other's emotional presence.⁴⁷

The masculine dominated universe of "le regard", here reflected in the visual images of a world in ruins, is disintegrating, as though, like Narcissus, the world of form is rejoining the unformed matter of the earth — the sea, the sand, and the sounds emanating from the flow of life. What continues now are the "voices", these fragile female androgynous-like explorative yearnings emitting so much emotion. The desire of voice 2 for example, is unable to save "la voix brûlée", voice I, from being consumed by the intolerably painful love story still contained in the dying images on the screen:

Le désir exprimé par la voix brûlée (n.I)
est le seul moment de jonction entre le film
de l'image et le film des voix. Le film de
l'image touche ici le film des voix. Cela
dure le temps d'une phrase. Mais ce contact
provoque la mort. Le film des voix est
également tué. (F. du G., p.183)

Lol, the sacrificial virgin (she is always in white — femininity in the active upper world is pulled into the underworld of death) has not yet been ransomed by the "voices", like Inanna by Enki's mourners. We remain in that world in ruins for which the voices now evince such devastating compassion. We sense the narrative contained in the images to be turning in circles like Narcissus, obsessed by his own image; yet we are also acutely aware of the empty center, the silence in which significance is now contained. Madness as a positive force has come into being. Lol, symbol of "absence", of "rien", is also "la folle"; in this madness, the refusal of a certain order of things, is the seed of positive change. It is this death to a certain order of things that "les fous" of La Femme du Gange symbolize:

Cette passivité, cette immense force des fous de S. Thala, ce refus organique, si tu veux, il ne peut s'exercer que dans la vie. Il se tue à un certain ordre de choses, il meurt à un certain ordre de choses, à ce qui est proposé. Mais moi aussi je suis morte à cet ordre de choses. Toi aussi. Dans notre milieu, on ne voit que des gens qui sont morts... au reste.

(Les Parleuses, p.123)

Death is at the center — there can be no transformation without it. It is not surprising that the self-portrait centers around India Song, a film "sur la fin du monde"⁴⁸, with Anne-Marie Stretter, always dressed in black, at its centre.

India Song: The End of a World.

In the world of India Song we are immersed in the fascination of the writer for Anne-Marie Stretter, the archetypal feminine: Ce qui est mis en scène, c'est ma fascination, l'amour que j'ai d'elle. Je me demande si l'amour que j'ai d'elle n'a pas toujours existé" (Les Lieux., p.65). When we are fascinated, we are held captive by our own emotional attachment to that entity outside of ourselves containing our desire (or to ourselves projected into the world as in the case of a Narcissus cognisant of his own image): "Elle est plus mon désir que ce que je croyais être mon désir, elle répond plus que je ne questionne, si vous voulez. Parce qu'elle répond complètement" (Les Lieux., p.24). It is this fascination, and the passion surrounding it, woven constantly with the mythos of death, which creates the essence of the Durassian text-tissue:

VOIX 2

Elle était arrivée tard à ce bal...
au milieu de la nuit...

VOIX 1

Oui... habillée de noir...
Que d'amour...
Que de désir...

Silence.

(I.S., pp.15-6)

The presence of the "voices", startlingly fresh in their attachment to the here and now, contrasts with the "dead" images before the camera, caught, as it were, in a voyeuristic complicity of which they are unaware. A large mirror dominating the set during the embassy "ball" scene, reveals Anne-Marie Stretter attended by her admirers. Their glances are constantly doubled in the mirror, beside the distant ethereal contemplation of

the heroine. At one point, while dancing with the young attaché, her reflection appears next to that of the onlooking Michael Richardson.* We are witnessing a voyeurism of which the others seem unaware. Their passivity implies that they exist as shadows in a dead world:

Ce n'est pas seulement la mort de
l'histoire qui est écrite dans India
Song, qui est dite dans India Song.
C'est la mort de notre histoire.
(Les Parleuses, p.77)

Obscured by the incense (which fills the theatre according to the stage play directions), and by the haze of the hot humid air of the summer monsoon, they sink into a past as though carried off by the harmony of the music. The mirror dominating the set accentuates the dream-like quality of the scene before us in which the images appear to be detached from "reality". "Glass", writes James Hillman, "is the metaphor par excellence for psychic reality: it is itself not visible, appearing only to be its contents, and the contents of the psyche, by being placed within or behind glass, have been removed from palpable reality to metaphorical reality, out of life and into image,"⁴⁹ Visually we move about in a world of pure image, where the "voices" continue to mirror in sound the passion released from the now dead narrative: a love story, which like an outgrown consciousness, is finished:

VOIX I

Elle n'a jamais guéri la jeune
fille de S. Thala?

VOIX 2

Jamais.

*The "Richard" of Le Vice-Consul has become once again the "Richardson" of Le Ravisement de Lol V. Stein.

VOIX I

Ils ne l'ont pas entendue crier?

VOIX 2

Non.
N'entendaient plus rien.
Ne voyaient plus rien.

Temps.

VOIX I

L'ont abandonnée? (Temps.) Tuée?

VOIX I

Oui.

Temps.

(I.S., p.37)

These "voices", however, do not become consumed by the passion for which they are feeling such compassion, as did the voices in La Femme du Gange. Instead they have strengthened by increasing their numbers, having become two sets of voices: females and males, a potentially androgynous whole.

The dialogue on the screen in La Femme du Gange has also disappeared and we now hear only detached rumours of conversations, recounted separately from the images on the screen: "Aucun mot prononcé sur scène" (I.S., p.58). The reversal of the world dominated by the "vouloir/pouvoir" of "le regard" is complete: the visual images are condemned to passive silence, and the "voices" exist in a vital world, separate from the world contained in the visual images, and to which we now "look" for meaning. Since the visual world is now "unreal", we await the presence of the "voices" for tangible contact with the present world. In the visual images we exist in a world totally merged with a dead past — "Je pense qu'on est là dans la fin du monde" (Les Lieux., p.77); and in the "voices" we exist in a world almost painfully new, breathing the rawness of dis-

covery. Yet it is the same passion which, having destroyed the former, now nourishes the latter. In the words of the author at the end of the text:

L'histoire est une histoire d'amour immobilisée dans la culminance de la passion. Autour d'elle, une autre histoire, celle de l'horreur — famine et lèpre mêlées dans l'humidité pestilentielle de la mousson — immobilisée elle aussi dans un paroxysme quotidien.

La femme, Anne-Marie Stretter, femme d'un ambassadeur de France aux Indes, maintenant morte — sa tombe est au cimetière anglais de Calcutta — , est comme née de cette horreur. Elle se tient au milieu d'elle avec une grâce où tout s'abîme, dans un inépuisable silence. Grâce que les VOIX essaient précisément de revoir, poreuse, dangereuse, et dangereuse aussi pour certaines des VOIX. (I.S., p.148).

Gradually the visual images on the screen before us are blended into the torpidity of the landscape as a fatal harmonization is conjured up by the music, causing a movement back, towards the chant of the beggar woman, and towards childhood. "J'écoute India Song", says the vice-consul, (Temps) "Je suis venu aux Indes à cause d'India Song" (I.S., p.76). The song is associated with his mother who would play to him when he was young. Anne-Marie Stretter had been an accomplished pianist in her youth as Anna-Maria Guardi (I.S., p.41) in Venice. A grand piano sits near centre stage in two of the principle scenes. On top of the piano is a photograph of Anne-Marie Stretter as a young woman:

J. attaché: Vous faites de la musique?

A. - M.S.: Parfois. (Temps.) Moins depuis quelques années...

J. attaché (douceur, de l'amour déjà): Pourquoi?

A. -M.S. (lent): C'est difficile à
exprimer...

Temps long.

J. attaché: Dites-le-moi.

A. -M.S.: Une certaine douleur...
s'attache à la musique... depuis quelque
temps... pour moi...

Pas de réponse.

Silence.

(I.S., p.85)

The mother in Un Barrage contre le Pacifique also played the piano.
It was by playing the piano for silent movie matinées, and by giving private lessons, that she earned the necessary money to buy the piece of land which was to prove her ruin; (also recounted later in 1977 in a play version entitled L'Eden Cinéma).⁵⁰ The music pulls us back toward woman, mother, childhood and myth, into a mysterious unknown blackness where the visual is no longer present:

La 14^e Variation de Beethoven sur un thème
de Diabelli. Loin.

NOIR COMPLET

Puis, au-delà du jardin, dans le ciel, lueurs,
soit du jour, soit d'un feu — d'un feu couleur
de rouille.

Voix lente — calme énoncé.

VOIX I

Ces lueurs... Là?

VOIX 2

Les crématoires.

VOIX I

On brûle les morts de la faim?

VOIX 2

Oui.
Le jour vient.

Silence.

La 14^e Variation jusqu'à la fin sur la lueur
des crématoires.

NOIR.

(I.S., pp.52-3)

There are two other associations with burning bodies that come to mind immediately in the context of Marguerite Duras' writing, and in the context of our culture: the Jews burned during the holocaust, and the startling phenomenon of the burning of witches from the middle ages on. These histories still exist semi-obsured by blackness. Blackness becomes synonymous with depth, and the further back and within we go the more unsure the terrain becomes and the closer our own stories touch the stories of our culture; it is here that language searches for its mythopoetic roots:

Anterior comes before in time. Interior comes from within, If the two are drawn together they form a vast terrain inviting exploration: it is as if your psyche were an unfathomably deep, many-caverned lake. Beneath its mirrored surface the water extends infinitely downward. We would see ourselves in the surface ripple, the history of all life in its dark depths.⁵¹

Here we move about guided by the near senses, and by emotions, sensations, and inner connections. This feminine kinesthetic universe is described by Duras as a place of "passion":

"... le cinéma que je fais, je le fais
au même endroit que mes livres. C'est ce
que j'appelle l'endroit de la passion. Là
où on est sourd et aveugle. Enfin, j'essaie
d'être là le plus qu'il est possible."
(Les Lieux., p.94)

In comparison to Christ's passion which was his suffering on the cross for the sins of all mankind, female suffering is within a very personal

realm, as in Geshtinanna's sacrifice for her brother in the Inanna myth. It is a suffering involving a descent to the underworld which takes the form of real depressions. Marguerite Duras' descents have often involved alcohol, and it is as an attempt at facing the fear of having to live without alcohol (perhaps a way of trying to escape the descents) that she first engaged in the spontaneous writing, beginning with Moderato Cantabile. In other words, whereas her writing had been "un labeur quotidien... dans l'aliénation totale, dictée", it became a movement into her own fear and into her self:

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 Ravisement de Lol V. Stein. Là, il y a une période, je sortais d'une désintoxication alcoolique, 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 séquelle de la désintoxication, je ne sais pas.

(Les Parleuses, p.14)

In India Song, the "fear" appears attached to the voices, and always in relationship to the potent signs of the feminine, in liaison with death, silence, emptiness — the underworld desert of Inanna's dark sister into which the story contained in the images has descended:

DES GRILLAGES DE TENNIS SORTENT DU NOIR.
CONTRE LE GRILLAGE, UNE BICYCLETTE DE FEMME
— DE COULEUR ROUGE.
C'EST DESERT.

Les voix reconnaissent ces choses qui les effraient:

VOIX I (sourde exclamation
de peur)

Les tennis déserts...

VOIX 2 (id.)

... La bicyclette rouge d'Anne-Marie
Stretter...

Silence.

(I.S., pp.26-7)

Anne-Marie Stretter, "le modèle parental pour moi, le modèle maternel, ou plutôt le modèle féminin" (Les Lieux., p.65) joins the "mendiante", as in Le Vice-Consul, through the metonymical juxtapositioning of images which are visual, auditory, olfactory, and tactile; the result is an almost alchemical mixing of the basic elements making up language at the dream or archetypal level where the text performs its mysterious logic. In semantic terms:

A travers ce mouvement d'aller-retour d'une oeuvre à l'autre, dans cette mise en relief des constants et les variations qu'offre chacun des textes, la lecture intertextuelle finit par imposer un texte, le "texte", creuset de tous les autres, précipité, dépôt (au sens chimique du terme), laissant affleurer le lieu même de l'inconscient. Comme si le langage, d'un récit à l'autre, de façon ponctuelle, était traversé, fissuré par des marques anciennes: frayages, traces, stases d'inscription antérieures, d'un autre texte, premier, originaire.⁵²

The text opens a path leading back and in, as though searching constantly for the mythical place of origin. Norman O. Brown's definition of happiness indicates why the search, to be fruitful, must lead in this direction:

Happiness is the deferred fulfillment of a pre-historic wish. That is why wealth brings so little happiness; money is not an infantile wish.⁵³

As we recall, both Anne-Marie Stretter and "la mendiante" have come from "Savannakhet" ("ça va à quête"). In the second to last act, Act IV, Anne-Marie Stretter and her admirers have arrived on the islands at the

"Prince of Wales" hotel. The "mendiante" has followed and is seen lurking by the others. The sea has been attained, "la mer/mère", the center around which the self-portrait revolves. It is here that Anne-Marie Stretter drowns herself, and that the "mendiante" is last seen laughing in the oblivion of youth, in which her sterility and madness have left her:

... il y avait chez les jeunes filles que j'ai connues là-bas — toutes mes amies était vietnamiennes —, jusqu'à seize ans, une espèce de joie, de joie de vivre, très, très animale... ici, jeune fille, c'est un mot dégradé, c'est un mot péjoratif. Je me souviens d'une grâce, de grâce presque collective, tu vois, circulante, de ces jeunes filles qui était... faite d'une sorte d'état de réceptivité de la nature. Elle parlaient peu, elles s'amusaient entre elles, et elles recevaient la pluie, la chaleur, les fruits qu'elles mangeaient, les bains dans les fleuves, tu vois, une réceptivité très, très élémentaire, apparemment (Les Parleuses, p.143).

In Calcutta the stories of the two heroines are brought to an end like "notre histoire", "la fin du monde"; the space absorbs them, as they absorb the space: "Elle devient Calcutta, il y a un double glissement, Calcutta va vers la forme d'Anne-Marie Stretter et elle va vers la forme de Calcutta. Et pour moi à la fin du film elles ne font qu'un" (Les Lieux., p.73). The victimization by an unsympathetic, exploitative system is readily grasped in the case of the "mendiante". Less obvious, however, is the situation of Anne-Marie Stretter at the opposite end of the social scale: beautiful, still in her prime, surrounded by wealth and doting admirers, pampered by a devoted husband; her sickness is described as "un mal de l'intelligence".⁵⁴ In the text it is hinted that her death resulted from her intolerance of Calcutta: "ne supportait pas. Déjà." (I.S., p.42) Since she becomes one with Calcutta in the end, her tragedy

may be related to the stifling, closed space of the city, which in turn would reflect her intolerance to certain personal inner and outer restrictions. The following comparison of male and female tragedy elucidates the situation of the Durassian heroine:

The tragic pattern for women, too often unrecognized, is the reverse (of the male). Tragedy, for many women characters, springs from the fact that consciousness must outpace the possibilities of action; that perception must pace within an iron cage.⁵⁵

Again we experience the fabulous richness of depth which is woman's terrain, combined with the reduced terrain of action which has been hers in the masculine-dominated visual world. The contrasting richness and poverty of the Durassian text is rooted in this contradiction. The mission of the text is an exploration in language leading to an exteriorizing of the untapped inner feminine resources. The expression in image of this new territory is what is being referred to as the "female voice". It is the "voices" in the dimension of "l'écoute" who open up these vast reaches:

Les voix d'hommes se mêlent aux voix de femmes.

VOIX 3

Ces lueurs.

VOIX 4

Le jour.

La première enceinte est celle
de la lèpre et des chiens. Ils sont
au bord du Gange, sous les arbres.
Sans plus de force. Indolores.

VOIX 3

Les morts de faim?

VOIX 4

Plus loin dans la densité du Nord:
C'est la dernière enceinte.

Temps.

VOIX 4

Le jour. Le soleil.

Temps.

VOIX 3

Quelle lumière. Terrible.

Silence.

VOIX I

Quelle lumière. D'exil.

VOIX 2

Elle dort?

VOIX I

Laquelle?

VOIX 2

La Blanche.

VOIX I

Non. Elle se repose.

Silence.

(I.S., pp.113-4)

In the obscure atmosphere created by heat and burning bodies, the "voices" begin confusing one heroine for the other. Odours mix in an aura of decay, as though life were being transformed in a fundamental way. Then more confusion ensues, as though the process of mixing and blending on all levels were infectious. The male voices, unaware of the presence of the female voices, echo the personal dialogue of the latter, but in reference to Anne-Marie Stretter. The above dialogue continues:

VOIX 2 (plainte)

Comme vous êtes distraite. Profondément absente.

Pas de réponse.

Silence.

Michael Richardson tourne lentement la tête vers Anne-Marie Stretter. Il la regarde.

"Voix 3" suddenly becomes aware of the nearby presence of the two female voices, while "voix 4", the one who has "le moins oublié l'histoire" (p.105) does not perceive their presence at all. Then "voix 3" unknowingly uses the same adjectives to describe the mood of Anne-Marie Stretter, as "voix 2" used to describe the mood of "voix I":

VOIX 3 (effroi)

Des voix tout à coup près de nous...?
Vous entendez...?

VOIX 4 (temps)

Non...

VOIX 3

Très jeunes... de femmes?...

VOIX 4 (temps)

Je n'entends rien. (temps) C'est le
silence.

Silence.

VOIX 4

Il la regarde.

VOIX 3

Oui.
Elle est distraite. Profondément
absente.

Silence.

We are again in the border region of Enki's mourners, where to "experience the flow of sensed identity across and unbounded is to be nurtured in archaic consciousness."⁵⁶ "To flow into awareness of the border", writes Perera, "is to begin to find one's own separate ground of being."⁵⁶ There is the experience of merging with the other, and the experience of one's separateness: "Either we are aware of the loss of bliss and merger when we pass through to our sense of separateness, or we

may experience the loss of individual autonomy when we merge or are swallowed up or dissolve in a larger container. But we cannot exist without both experiences."⁵⁷

Individually, the Durassian voices reflect both poles. "Voix I" in La Femme du Gange is actually absorbed into the passionate love story contained in the visual images, while "voix I" and "voix 3" of India Song come perilously close. It is by the strength of the separateness of voices 2 and 4 that they are prevented from being totally consumed by "l'histoire". Since "voix" is feminine, and the male voices are referred to as "voix 3" and "voix 4", the third person feminine pronoun is used for all four voices. The atmosphere, as a result, is pervasively androgynous, bringing to mind the polymorphous qualities of Enki's mourners:

Les voix 3 et 4 sont des voix d'hommes.
Rien ne les lie que la fascination qu'exerce
sur elles l'histoire des amants du Gange, sur-
tout, encore une fois, celle d'Anne-Marie
Stretter.

La voix 3 ne sait presque plus rien de la
chronologie des faits de l'histoire. Elle
questionne la voix 4 qui la renseigne.

La voix 4 est, de toutes les voix, celle
qui a le moins oublié l'histoire. Elle la
sait presque tout entière (I.S., p.105).

Like the mourners, the "voices" seem to have come into existence for the unique purpose of forming a liaison between a dying past and a new era struggling to be born:

Latente chez l'une, manifeste chez l'autre,
l'histoire des amants du Gange était DANS les
deux voix. En instance de survivre ou de
resurgir (I.S., pp.105-6).

When Inanna is ransomed by the mourners and brought back to the upper world, she is changed: she has returned with the objective eyes of

death of her dark sister. With her new-found power she has the strength to confront her consort, Dumuzi. These "eyes" bring about the separation essential to forming an autonomous being. Since merging is so powerful in the female psyche, it is paramount to her process of becoming an individual that she descend to the "underworld" in order to confront her unknown self, her "dark sister" and thereby gain the vision (insight), the "eyes of death" which give her the power to prevent her merging with the loved ones, thus enabling her to set herself apart as a self-motivated individual. Only now can the artist emerge.

An analogous pattern is seen in the process of Lol V. Stein. For Lol, who was the nothingness, "O" contained between the two gracefully winged "L's", "la folle", the suffering which she does not experience is somehow redeemed and present in the "voices", and is finally transformed into the writing voice of Aurélia Steiner:

Ce n'est pas sans appréhension que la voix 4
renseigne la voix 3. Sans hésitations, non plus,
souvent. La voix 3 est en effet exposée au
danger — non pas de la folie comme la voix I —
mais de la souffrance (I.S., p.106).

The suffering not experienced by Lol has appeared transformed, as was Ereshkigal's suffering by Enki's mourners. It has become a poetic language rich in hyperbole, heralding the birth of a new rhetoric which will characterize the writing voice of Aurélia Steiner, the final stage in the "India Song" self-portrait of a female writer.

Aurélia, Aurélia, Aurélia.

Il y avait quand même une marge entre les textes
de Césarée, des Mains négatives et mon émotion, mon
mouvement. Il n'y a plus de marge dans ma passion

d'Aurélia et le texte. A la fin, à Vancouver, je suis Aurélia. Dans le texte de Paris, quand Aurélia a sept ans, sous le bombes, dans cette tour noire, au milieu de la forêt, je suis aussi Aurélia. Le chat lépreux dans la caverne noire, le chat juif qui rejoint la mendiante de Calcutta, le chat sous les ponts qui crève de faim et qu'elle laisse mourir, je le rejoins aussi, comme Aurélia le rejoint.⁵⁸

With the voice of Aurélia Steiner, the movement back towards childhood, and within towards the zone of universal experience (the zone the writer refers to as "l'ombre interne")⁵⁹ culminates. It is as though a wound had been healed and now a new movement, toward the outside world, can begin again:

Dans la glace de ma chambre, droite,
voilée par la lumière sombre il y a mon
image. Je regarde vers le dehors. Les
voiliers sont immobiles, scellés à la
mer de fer, ils sont encore dans le
mouvement où les a surpris ce matin
l'évanouissement du vent.

(A.S., p.140)

The small mirror in Aurélia's room has a very different function from the large mirror that dominated the set in India Song. There we witnessed the voyeurism of the actors alongside the image of Anne-Marie Stretter. Visually, Anne-Marie Stretter belongs more to the spectators and to her male admirers than to herself. What she represents to others overrides what she is to herself, or what she represents to herself comes to her via the "look" of others: she is woman as object. She escapes that prison through suicide in the sea, symbolically a reunion with the mother.

Few traces remain of the victimized Lol in the world of Aurélia,

except in the Jewish name Stein; yet we know the space from which the writing arises is on a related continuum that has now been fully opened allowing a new unimpeded freedom to the movement from past, to present, to future. The voice of Aurélia is at the same time the unique voice of the writer Marguerite Duras, and the female voice emerging from the dark cavern of time, joined to the Jewish voice emerging from a common wound inflicted by a humanity cut off from an intimate knowledge of its own death and of its own violence:

Je crois que les juifs, ce trouble pour moi si fort, et que je vois en toute lumière, devant quoi je me tiens dans une clairvoyance tuante, ça rejoint l'écrit. Ecrire, c'est aller chercher hors de soi ce qui est déjà au-dedans de soi. Ce trouble a une fonction de regroupement de l'horreur latente répandue sur le monde, et que je reconnais. Il donne à voir l'horreur dans son principe. Le mot juif dit en même temps la puissance de mort que l'homme peut s'octroyer et sa reconnaissance par nous. C'est parce que les nazis n'ont pas reconnu cette horreur en eux qu'ils l'ont commise. Les juifs, ce trouble, ce déjà vu, a dû certainement commencer — pour moi — avec l'enfance en Asie, les lazarets hors des villages, l'endémie de la peste, du choléra, de la misère, les rues condamnées des pestiférés sont les premiers camps de concentration que j'ai vus. Alors, j'en accusais Dieu.⁶⁰

We rediscover remnants of the former world in Aurélia's language, which is characterized by absence, nostalgia, and pervasive desire combined with active receptivity. Listening now plays the stronger role of the dominant senses, "l'écoute" having firmly replaced "le regard" as the sense of orientation in this fluid universe of the text:

Ecoutez,

sous les voutes du fleuve, il y a maintenant le bruit de la mer.

Ceux de la caverne noire.

Ceux des cris du chat lépreux, vous savez, celui aveuglé par la faim et qui appelle à travers le temps.

Vous l'entendez?

Non?

Vous n'entendez plus rien peut être?

Non?

Ecoutez encore. Essayer. Essayer encore.

Comment venir à bout de notre amour?

(A.S., pp.124-5)

This is the first Aurélia. The familiar elements of her dialogue reverberate in the limitless spaces now existing where once there was incarceration and the paralysis of fascination. From Lol, "la folle", to "le fou", to "les voix" and now to Aurélia, we witness an increasing exteriorizing of the passion which once devoured ("le rongement incessant" of S. Thala) in the Durassian heroine once held captive in relatedness and undifferentiated sleep. A cycle is described through the descent into madness and death, the refusal, the desert of separation, and the return with the incorporated anger and strength to confront and to stand separate in the world. Woman has now returned to autonomous life in an active world and with her has brought "eros" back to circulate freely in the world. The "look" that would contain, define, capture, limit, has no place in the universe of Aurélia Steiner where words surge up into open-ended phrases forming questions to which there may exist an infinite number of responses:

Comment faire pour que nous ayons vécu cet amour?

Comment?

Comment faire pour que cet amour ait
été vécu? (A.S., p.134)

The questions asked are: how? where? who? "Mais qui êtes-vous?"
They are questions summoning forth images in space, explorations in "memoria" or the modern "collective unconscious":⁶¹

Où êtes-vous?

Que faites-vous?

Où êtes-vous perdu?

Où vous êtes-vous perdu tandis que je
crie que j'ai peur?

On dit que vous vivez sur une de ces
îles des côtes de la France et encore
ailleurs.

On dit que vous êtes dans une terre
équatoriale où vous seriez mort il y a
longtemps, dans la chaleur, enterré dans
les charniers d'une peste, dans celui
d'une guerre aussi, et aussi dans celui
d'un camp de Pologne allemande.

(A.S., pp.119-20)

These questions are the very antithesis of theoretical questions demanding an abstract intellectual response; the possible answers they call forth exist in a physical space where we can feel them circulating. Aurélia Steiner is free, it seems, because she listens attentively and guides our vision with her own toward the other in a movement of desire which is a receptive act, subordinating sight to the multiplicity of polyvalent perceptions surging in the natural world evoked by her writing:

Ecoutez.

Sous les voûtes du fleuve, ce déferlement.

Ecoutez...

Cette apparente fragmentation dont je
vous ai parlé, a disparu.

Nous devrions nous rapprocher ensemble
de la fin.

De celle de notre amour.

N'ayez plus peur.

(A.S., pp.125-6)

There is a second Aurélia and then a third. Yet there is no
necessity to stop there, for we sense that "Aurélia" (aura- coming via
the ear) arises from the multiplicity of writing voices within the writer.
"The paradox of the objective psyche", writes James Hillman "is a paradox
grasped by Augustine who saw that memoria, or the collective unconscious,
as Jung called it, is both "in my mind" and yet far beyond me and the range
of my mind. He too was struck by the multiplicity of souls in this unity
called "I".⁶² (Augustine's Confessions are another paradigm of the self-
portrait, according to Beaujour). Marguerite Duras describes this same
phenomenon in reference here to "les voix":

...longtemps j'ai cru que c'étaient des voix
extérieures, mais maintenant je ne crois pas,
je crois que c'est moi (...) C'est une sorte
de multiplicité qu'on porte en soi, on la porte
tous, toutes, mais elle est égorgée; en général,
on n'a guère qu'une voix maigre, on parle avec
ça. Alors qu'il faut être débordée.

(Les Lieux., p.103)

"Eblouissement" is a word that I have associated with Aurélia
Steiner since first reading these texts. It describes an overflowing into
a vibrant world of fresh emotion and sensation — an opening in the full
sense of the word:

La mer est montée à l'assaut de la ville,
elle a escaladé, envahi.

Elle a cassé les vitres, elle a fracassé les portes et les fenêtres, elle a crevé les murs, elle a emporté des toits et la ville est restée ainsi, ouverte, béante sur le vent. Dans les accalmies soudaines qui se produisaient, les reprises de forces et de souffle, on entendait les gens chanter à pleine voix leurs prières des morts.

(A.S., p.150)

This is the second Aurélia Steiner, Aurélia, Vancouver; it is this text that most clearly reveals Aurélia Steiner as metaphor for the emerging writing voice (voices) which the aim of this thesis has been to reveal, first as self-portraiture and secondly as the new "female rhetoric" referred to by Marguerite Duras.

It is like a poem of strange origins arising from an electrically charged sea of memory and eros which is the world of Aurélia Steiner. Her voice searches the memory traces in images of her fabulous birth in a German concentration camp, a birth marked by the death of her mother, another eighteen-year-old Aurélia, and her father, "le pendu voleur de soupe" (p.151):

Ma mère, dix-huit ans, se meurt. Devant elle, au bout de sa corde, il l'appelle, il crie d'amour fou. Elle n'entend déjà plus.

(A.S., p.152)

Aurélia, Vancouver is the kernel of the self-portrait we have been tracing since the footsteps of Lol began leading us through a labyrinth onto vast stretches of sand in another world. The main elements continue to be the same: the priority of space over time, the free and all-pervasive circulation of eros (passion), and the linked motifs of "la mer/mère" and "la mort", thanatos. To these three, Aurélia adds a fourth and seemingly definitive factor: the presence/absence of the father. It is

to him that Aurélia's writing, as testimony of their unseen erotic bond, is addressed:

Je suis revenue dans ma chambre très vite pour vous écrire. J'ai fermé les portes et les fenêtres. Je me tiens là avec vous dans la découverte de la plage. Je me suis éloignée de la glace. Je me regarde. Les yeux sont bleus, dit-on, les cheveux, noirs. Vous voyez? bleus, les yeux, sous les cheveux noirs. Que je vous aime à me voir. Je suis belle tellement, à m'en être étrangère. Je vous souris et je vous dis mon non.

Je m'appelle Aurélia Steiner. Je suis votre enfant. (A.S., p.142)

It is as though the absence of the father forms an essential catalyst to her writing process which, it is evident throughout the texts, is her existence. Nor Hall describes the child's relationship to the father in the following insightful passage:

We are bound to the father by an invisible thread in contrast to the flesh and blood umbilical bond of pregnancy. "Seeing" the father's connection to his children, recognizing the reality of the invisible, or accepting the unknown behind the known signals the birth of spirit, of metaphor, of the capacity for creative thought.⁶³

"Je pleure sans tristesse", writes Aurélia, "le soir qui tombe sur l'absence, vous voyez, toujours" (p.148). The father has been conspicuously absent throughout the "India Song" texts, as he was absent from the autobiographical works and from the life of the author, having died when she was four years old (Les Lieux, p.48). This motif of "absence" has always been present and circulating around the figure of Lol V. Stein; it returns now in relationship to the male/father.

In an article entitled "Du corps au texte",⁶⁴ Louis Marin analyzes

the relationship of the birth of speech and the origin of the "récit" to the story of the resurrection of Christ. His tomb, when visited by the "Maries" was found to be empty and to contain, instead of the body of Jesus, the following message: "Fear not I know that you seek the crucified Jesus. He is not here for he is risen as he told it. Come and see the place where he lay." There is a substitution, according to Marin, of the missing body by the word, bringing to birth another event of another order which is the event of the spoken word replacing the "real" event. Its own "reality" is in turn the "other", the irreducible other which is proof of experience but only in language, thus "message". We may ask, he continues, if all speech, all narrative or production of the transforming of experience into discourse, is not the result of such a "manque", and if the discourse entirely is not intended to fill this "manque originaire qui le produit et où il se produit."⁶⁵ The symbolic order, he continues, would thus be established by the split of the same from the other, by the fact that the thing in its presence is in a way "creusée de sa différence",⁶⁶ in other words, that "being" is constituted by the "difference" which reflects the relationship to the other. The father represents the "other" in the world of Aurélia Steiner. She realizes the absence of her father as a "difference" in her most profound being; he is a lack to be filled. "Separateness", in the sense used by Perera to define the "border region" between our self and the other, is another way of describing this "difference." Through the experience of "separateness" or "difference", Aurélia discovers the realm of the symbolic where her writing fills this lack or absence of the other.

Yet in order to begin her movement toward the symbolic (the "other", the father) Aurélia first had to experience her "sameness" with her mother

Aurélia. This has been the meaning of the wandering of Lol in the desert of her dark sister, the drowning of Anne-Marie Stretter in the sea, the "mendiante" lost in the eternal childhood of madness. "The female void", as Nor Hall uses myth to argue, "cannot be cured by conjunction with the male, but rather by an internal conjunction, of an integration of its own parts, by a re-membering or putting back together of the mother-daughter body."⁶⁷ "Vous baigner dans le sang de ma naissance", writes Aurélia. "Je reposais à vos côtés dans la poussière du sol." (A.S., p.149). Together with her mother, separated from the father, Aurélia has access to the symbolic represented here by "le rectangle blanc":

Je ne peux rien contre l'éternité que
je porte à l'endroit de votre dernier
regard, celui sur le rectangle blanc de
la cour de rassemblement du camp.
(A.S., p.148)

It is with her writing that Aurélia fills the void of the absent father:

Je me regarde, je me vois mal dans la
vitre froide de la glace. La lumière est
si sombre, on dirait le soir. Je vous
aime au-delà de mes forces. Je ne vous
connais pas. (A.S., p.140)

In Descent to the Goddess, when Inanna returns from her intimate and devastating encounter with her dark sister (her female within which is also her mother), she has incorporated essential qualities from her dark side, namely the "eyes of death" which see below the surface into the fundamental nature of things; it is this power which enables her to confront the male. This essential union of the two poles of the feminine implies a certain incestuous bonding. "The incest suggests uroboric* nurture", writes Perera, "the level of the symbiotic bond that confirms a

*Uroboros: mythological serpent devouring its own tail.

woman in her self-worth and lets her go forth with her own feminine soul, free from bondage to the collective."⁶⁸

In parallel fashion, the relationship of Aurélia to her dead mother Aurélia clearly has incestuous overtones evoked by the language of the sea flowing continuously, weaving sensuously together its various parts. We can no longer separate "la mère" from "la mer", "l'enfant" from Aurélia, the writer, Aurélia, the mother, the words as signifiers from the experience of the signified, our own feelings evoked by the images from the images themselves:

Je suis allée me coucher sur la profondeur
de la mer, face au ciel glacé. Elle était
encore fiévreuse, chaude.

Petite fille. Amour. Petite enfant.

Je l'ai appelée de noms divers, de celui
d'Aurélia, d'Aurélia Steiner.

Dans sa profondeur encore elle se débattait
entre l'épuisement et l'envie de tuer.

Quelquefois, de grands mouvements la sou-
levaient, des flancs de bête qui se tournent,
ronds, et reprennent leur place dans la
litière.

Amour, amour, toutes ces choses qui disent
pour nous. Toi, enfant, la mer.

Je lui ai raconté l'état de la ville.

Et je lui ai parlé de l'histoire.

Elle était sous mon dos, épaisse de dix
mètres? de huit cents mètres?

La différence n'existait.

Sa surface était purement illusoire, une
chair sans peau, une déchirure ouverte, une
soie d'air glacé. (A.S., p.155)

As the sea invades the landscape and with persistence insinuates itself as central signified/signifier of the text, we come to sense it, and its tale, as symbol representing the new zones of expression where the writer experiments alone with her new found art. Once again we slip into the self-consciousness of the text and listen as it describes its own process:

Je me tiens toujours dans cette chambre
sombre face à la mer. Je suis seule dans
cette maison depuis des années. Tout le
monde en est parti pour rejoindre des zones
plus calmes de la terre. A cause des
tempêtes ici terribles (A.S., p.146).

We witnessed the anger of Lol as she refused her name Lola Valérie Stein, shortening it to Lol. V. Stein. The motif of "la colère" continued throughout the India Song texts, most often in connection to "Dieu" and to the now famous ball and Lol's resulting madness; it joined the story of the beggar woman and her dying child and the anger of the mother in "Le Barrage..." (the writer's mother) against the gross injustices of this world. In "la femme" of L'Amour these sources merged:

La plainte, toujours.

— Cette plainte, c'est elle?
— Oui — elle s'impatiente
vous comprenez, mais elle dort
— il s'arrête — ça c'est de
la colère seulement, ce n'est
rien. — Contre quoi?

Il montre autour de lui le mouve-
ment général.

— Dieu — il reprend — contre
Dieu en général, ce n'est rien.
(L'A., p.45)

The word "Dieu" has a different acception in the lexique of Marguerite Duras than it has within the larger context of her culture; for instance, she had her particular version of "Genesis" as a child.

Life coming into existence in the world reflected "un marécage gigantesque et inerte à la surface duquel, tout à coup, une bulle d'air vient crever, puante, une seule, puis — des milliers d'années passent — une autre."

(...) "L'Esprit de Dieu, pour moi, était le contenu nauséabond des bulles crevées." (...) "Je n'ai jamais été croyante, jamais, même enfant. Et même enfant, j'ai toujours vu les croyants comme atteints d'une certaine infirmité d'esprit, d'une certaine irresponsabilité" (Les Parleuses, p.239).

God is a word like any other word. Therefore, in relationship to the story of S. Thala and Lol V. Stein, "une boucle se ferme. Il est évident que lorsque L.V.S., "remue dans le ventre de Dieu", elle revient dans le marécage matériel, mais pas vers le dieu créateur, vers le marécage où il était, comme le reste englouti" (Les Parleuses, p.240). Duras does not hesitate to use words such as "God" and "religious" because they have a history of meaning perhaps antithetical to her usage; on the contrary, as she contends in response to Xavière Gauthier's comment that such words have "un sens indéracinable": "Il se déracine, quand même, de plus en plus" (Les Parleuses, p.179).

The anger surrounding the woman on the deserted beach in L'Amour and said, by the madman, to be against "Dieu en général", has become re-integrated in Aurélia Steiner. It is now the force behind the sea, a metaphor for the writing itself:

Le lendemain matin la ville est encore
ruisselante, elle se retire des terres en-
vahies, des rues, des parcs, des cathédrales.
Les bateaux du port sont couchés sur leurs
flancs, démâtés. Les plages sont recouvertes
de poissons morts asphyxiés par le sel des
réservoirs. Des religieux sont sortis des
parages de la ville, ils sont venus ramasser
les poissons morts pour les donner à manger

aux orphelins du monde, ils chantent des
cantiques de gratitude (A.S., p.153).

...

Quand je suis rentrée un marchand de
journaux criait le titre de la colère de
la mer. (A.S., p.156)

The movement toward self-portraiture, as discussed in Part I, is initiated by a crisis, and, particularly for women, by the articulation of a refusal and subsequent depression (madness in Lol's case), leading to eventual healing of the original split through a re-membering of the mother/daughter body. This is seen in the Persephone/Demeter myth with Persephone's return from Hades and reunion with the mother. "This split", writes Nor Hall, "is healed when she herself becomes mother."⁶⁹ It was after she herself had become a mother that Lol returned to S. Thala and to T. Beach where she re-created the same scenario that had caused her original illness; this time, as we learned in L'Amour, she did not re-emerge from the madness. Instead, as implied in the passage from Les Yeux verts cited in the preliminary to Part II (p.77), she re-emerges later, transformed into Aurélia Steiner. It is to the myth of Aphrodite, the goddess of love who gives birth to Eros, that Aurélia Steiner can be related, for, again in the words of Nor Hall:

Becoming your own father or Aphrodite's cure*
would mean becoming self-generating, father to
your own experience, capable of independent
thought and action, especially in the realms of
love.⁷⁰

In each new male she encounters erotically, Aurélia rediscovers the

*Aphrodite was born from the members of her father, Sky, (Uranos), severed and thrown into the sea by her mother, Earth, who was angered by the fact that he would stuff their children back into her womb not allowing them to see the light of day.⁷¹

presence/absence of the father; it is he who symbolizes the invisible source from where her writing voice arises:

Je suis rentrée dans ma chambre, j'ai
rincé mon corps et mes cheveux à l'eau
douce et puis j'ai attendu le jeune marin
à cheveux noirs. C'est en l'entendant,
lui que je vous écris.

C'est tremblante du désir de lui que
je vous aime.

Je les rassemble à travers vous et de
leur nombre je vous fais. Vous êtes ce
qui n'aura pas lieu et qui, comme tel, se
vit. De tous vous ressortez toujours
unique, inépuisable lieu du monde, inal-
térable amour. (A.S., p.157)

The myth of Aphrodite is much older than that of Persephone and Demeter. The latter falls into the category of the classical Greek myths which speak of the plight of the feminine in a patriarchate. Aphrodite's origins go back to somewhere between 7000 to 3500 b.c., to a "pre-Hellenic stratum in which women and goddesses supposedly played a preponderant and dominant role."⁷² One of her likely antecedents is Inanna, another Ishtar. When Inanna re-emerged from the underworld with her dark sister's "eyes of death", she was feared by everyone. The re-emergence of the repressed feminine causes fear, for its presence in the world, like the presence of Aurélia Steiner, confronts the world with a frightening new order that first appears as chaos and disorder:

Ici, c'est l'endroit du monde où se
trouve Aurélia Steiner. Elle se trouve
ici et nulle part ailleurs dans les
terres des sociétés protégées d'elle,
la mer.

Elle entend que le monde entier se
débat contre la même peur, elle voit

que ce qui se passe ici se répand sur
le monde.

Elle voit que le centre de la peur se
déplace. Qu'il tourne autour d'elle.

Elle voit que le monde entier la craint,
elle, Aurélia Steiner (A.S., p.152).

When the father of Aurélia Steiner dies in the concentration camp,
the event is again marked by the three day period so integral to initiation
myths. With his death, symbolic perhaps of the death of the rule of Logos,
he announces the birth of Aurélia, a rebirth of "muthos", since her writing
cannot be separated from her voice which emanates from the inner depths of
her being:

Vous avez appelé trois jours durant au
bout de votre corde, vous avez crié, répété
sans fin qu'une enfant nommée Aurélia Steiner
venait de naître dans le camp, vous avez
demandé qu'on la nourrisse, qu'elle ne soit
pas donnée aux chiens. Vous avez hurlé,
supplié le monde, qu'on n'oublie pas la
petite Aurélia Steiner (A.S., p.158).

Whereas Lol rejected her name in anger, and the vice-consul, Jean-
Marc de Lahore cried out the name of Anne-Marie Stretter in anger and grief
in the lonely desert of a world unreceptive to his suffering, Aurélia
Steiner offers her name in love to the anonymous sailors — as the writer
offers her writing to us — to accept and to experience as it is:

Je lui dis: je vais vous donner un nom.

Vous allez le prononcer, vous ne com-
prendrez pas pourquoi et cependant je vous
demande de la faire, de la répéter sans
comprendre pourquoi, comme s'il y avait
à comprendre.

Je lui dis le nom: Aurélia Steiner.
(A.S., p.161)

Aurélia, language of the body, longs to be utterly exposed:

Il enlève ma robe avec soin. Il dispose,
dirait-on, d'un temps très grand devant lui.

Il commence à découvrir le corps d'Aurélia
Steiner.

Elle ne regarde toujours pas, les yeux
fermés sur le rectangle blanc de la mort.
(A.S., p.162)

"Undressing", according to the archetypal psychology of Carl Jung, symbolizes for human beings — already incarnated in body egos — a disincarnation mode, the end of one form of body-ego existence and the revelation of the hidden self."⁷³

The disrobing of females has been a salient theme throughout the "India Song" texts. It was the disrobing of Anne-Marie Stretter by Michael Richardson, and later the disrobing of Tatiana Karl by Jacques Hold, that formed the center of Lol's obsessive fantasy; it was this act which allowed Lol to experience her nothingness as something almost tangible. It is as a process of "undressing" words that Marguerite Duras describes her writing:

Cette lenteur, cette indiscipline de la
ponctuation c'est comme si je déshabillais
les mots, les uns après les autres et que
je découvre ce qui était au-dessous, le mot
isolé, méconnaissable, dénué de toute parenté,
de toute identité, abandonné.⁷⁴

When the young sailor penetrates the body of Aurélia Steiner, it is with her name. It is as though the dead father, as metaphor, marries the name to the object, the signifier to the signified, by the sexual act, which, by extension of the metaphor, becomes the creative act:

La pénétration du corps d'Aurélia Steiner
par le marin aux cheveux noirs, c'est le nom
d'Aurélia Steiner qui s'inscrit dans le corps
d'Aurélia (...) C'est-à-dire une inscription

et un effacement, et encore une inscription
et un effacement. Elle ne peut pas attraper
ce nom, elle ne peut pas attraper cet imagi-
naire qu'elle se crée, elle ne peut l'appré-
hender que par la pénétration de son corps,
comme si le nom s'écrivait là, dans le corps.⁷⁵

Aurélia Steiner, the transformed Lol V. Stein, having encountered her dark side in the underworld in a symbolic incest with the mother, has given birth to her own eros, the male within her, becoming father to her own experiences and thus reborn to her own creative potentialities:

Je lui ai parlé longtemps. Je lui ai
raconté l'histoire. Je lui ai parlé de
ces amants du rectangle blanc de la mort.
J'ai chanté. Je lui parlais, je chantais,
et j'entendais l'histoire. Je la sentais
sous moi, minérale, de la force irréfra-
gable de Dieu. (A.S., p.156)

The Durassian text moves down into the body and its dark secrets, winding a way through death in a never-ending search for rebirths, descents and re-emergings, Thanatos and Eros, the writing voice of Aurélia. We begin to understand this writing in the original sense of "com-prendre"; that is, we understand through the experience of taking in the words, their sound, and allowing them to reverberate — a reverberation in which the meaning we draw from the silences parallels that which we draw from the words themselves:

Parfois c'est la place d'une phrase à
venir qui se propose. Parfois rien, à
peine une place, une forme, mais ouverte,
à prendre. Mais tout doit être lu, la
place vide aussi, je veux dire: tout
doit être retrouvé. On s'aperçoit quand
on écoute, combien les mots sont friables
et peuvent tomber en poussière.⁷⁶

"The archetype of rebirth is initiation",⁷⁷ writes Nor Hall, in-
volving the waters of Lethe, forgetfulness, and Mnemosyne, memory.

Lethe symbolizes "amnesia" involving "an essential sacrifice of the self, a deep sleep or complete death to an old way of life."⁷⁸ We recognize this pattern in Lol V. Stein and in Anne-Marie Stretter who, by La Femme du Gange, have totally lost their memories and wander in a purgatory of time, directionless, along the endless stretches of sand. The "anamnesis" is recalling your entire story, a narrative of experience, telling the tale of "passing through the double rocks of the sea" (Finnegan's Wake) "as though through the birth canal into daylight."⁷⁸ We see here the pattern of the third Aurélia Steiner who recalls, in exquisite detail, the experience of the seven year old Aurélia in that black stone tower in the midst of the forest. The remembering for Marguerite Duras attains a level of profound clarity (of emotion and of sensation) when, after having made the journey into the past throughout the writing of the "India Song" texts, and having attained a rebirth with the arrival of the writing voice of Aurélia Steiner, she was able to write the superbly lucid and richly detailed autobiographical text L'Amant (1984). In it she recounts the story of her first love affair at age fifteen in that foreign southern land:

Je suis encore dans cette famille, c'est
là que j'habite à l'exclusion de tout autre lieu.
C'est dans son aridité, sa terrible dureté, sa
malfaisance que je suis le plus profondément
assurée de moi-même, au plus profond de ma certi-
tude essentielle, à savoir que plus tard
j'écirai (L'Amant, p.93).

The self-portrait created by Marguerite Duras reveals a way of initiation for women; each woman can be Aphrodite and give birth to Eros, her creative, autonomous self. It involves a transformation in perspective whereby woman, the object of masculine objectifying love based on "le regard", comes to realize her own freedom through self-regenerating

creativity; she is no longer dependant upon, and trapped within, the power held by the masculine look. "God", within the context of this Durassian schema, is no longer an omnipotent being in the sky who speaks to us through ordained men down here on earth — the priests, the writers, and the wealthy politicians; if "Dieu" exists, it is as a force within the individual which allows her/him to move beyond the confines of the narrow ego-self:

Ça a à voir avec Dieu. L'écrit a à voir
avec Dieu. Aurélia Steiner dix-huit ans,
dans l'oubli de Dieu, se pose en équiva-
lence à Dieu face à elle-même.⁷⁹

Aurélia, the writer, autonomous in the love she experiences with her anonymous sailor lovers, explores, within the solitude of her room, the universe of the blank page where the voice of the writer joins the voices of the rest of humanity:

Dès que nous appelons, nous devenons, nous
sommes, déjà pareils. A qui? A quoi? A ce
dont nous ne savons rien. Et c'est en deve-
nant personne pareille que nous quittons le
désert, la société. (A.S., back cover).

In the Durassian universe, the desert created by the alienating, objectifying power of "le regard" has been transformed. The other senses know an equal autonomy. Aurélia can now look out from her room in freedom upon a world where her predecessors were once held captive and captivated before the power of the look:

Voici, je recommence à voir.

Devant moi est née une couleur, elle est
très intense, verte, elle occupe une partie
de la mer, elle retient beaucoup d'elle
dans cette couleur-là, une mer, mais plus
petite, une mer dans le tout de la mer. La
lumière venait donc du fond de la mer, d'un

trop-plein de couleur dans sa profondeur,
et ce contre-jour noir, un moment avant,
venait de son jaillissement de toutes
parts au sortir des eaux. La mer devient
transparente, d'une luisance, d'une
brillance d'organes nocturnes, on dirait
non de phosphore, mais de chair.
(A.S., p.141)

Notes (Part II)

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4. Ibid., p.107
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6. Husserl-Kapit, Susan. "An Interview with Marguerite Duras." Signs, Autumn 1975, p.434.
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30. Ibid., p.233.
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32. Luce Irigaray, Ce Sexe qui n'en est pas un (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, Collection "Critique", 1977), p.25.
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37. Descent to the Goddess, p.67.
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77. The Moon and the Virgin, p.24.
78. Ibid., p.25.
79. "Les Yeux verts", p.76.

Conclusion

"Sleep is the curse", writes Nor Hall, "but it also heals."¹ As Marguerite Duras' writing moves away from the chronologically ordered story-telling of the traditional novel, and the temporal orientation of the autobiography with its central question "what have I done?", it moves into the open spaces of the self-portrait which probes the more metaphysical question "who am I?". The poetic mode of the Durassian text-self-portrait which "forces the eye to slow to the cadence of the images"², presents us with a portrait of woman in which "space" has become the dominant orientation. "Who (what) is woman?" — a question whose answer has been shrouded by several millenia of masculine definitions — begins to be answered creatively, through her writing. The sleep and silence which have been her prison become the fertile ground from which a new rhetoric, the "rhetoric of the body", begins to be explored. Silence, as potential expression, indeed as expression, takes on a power in the Durassian text, as it does in the writing of other women, equal to that of what is being said. This idea is elucidated by Julia Kristeva:

—le silence, le non-dit, criblés de répétitions, tissent une toile évanescence où Blanchot voyait se révéler la "pauvreté du langage" et où des femmes articulent, par la parcimonie de leurs mots et les ellipses de leur syntaxe, une lacune congénitale à notre culture mono-logique: le dire du non-dire.³

Alongside the silence in the Durassian text, we hear the cries of anguish of the oppressed in an unsympathetic world. In and out of these two spaces, the "India Song" texts weave an arcane tapestry of sensorial

images depicting, when viewed from the perspective of myth, female initiation or transformation. The rhythm created by this kinesthetic world of constant becoming and dissolution within the text, compels us to follow "sourd et aveugle" (Les Lieux., p.94) into a world of "passion" and transformation.

The perspective dominated by the fixed, one-dimensional "regard" which has defined the traditional novel, loses its power of orientation when, as we witness in Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein and Le Vice-Consul, the male narrators symbolizing this perspective follow, with no sense of their own direction, the enigmatic female subjects of their narration. The paths of these heroines, Lol V. Stein, "la mendiante", and Anne-Marie Stretter, lead us back to the eastern atmosphere of the author's childhood, and to the new multidimensional perspective of "écoute". Here, in contrast to the linear, intellectual ordering of the novelesque world of "le regard", an abundance of sensorial reverberations form the contours of a different "inner" world. The writer's exploration through language leads to a discovery of the potential new voice of the long repressed feminine. The world has been reversed: instead of being seen from above and distanced by the projective power of "le regard", the world is now being experienced from below with the "lower" tactile and kinesthetic senses.

The alteration in perspective which occurs within the Durassian text destroys the prison of mortifying heartbreaks of erotic love experienced within the paradigm of romantic love, the dominant love myth of our culture. The myth of Echo and Narcissus, when applied to the situation of the Durassian heroine before the advent of Lol V. Stein and hence the transformation, was found to clearly reveal the incarceration and sub-

mission experienced by women within culture where the power falls to the male. As we saw, Narcissus, denying Echo any "power" over him, was doomed to the unkind fate of falling in love with himself, "narcissism".

Romantic love is exclusive to the couple, and an excluded third (most often a woman), must suffer. "Le chaînon sauté" (Les Parleuses, p. 20) which creates a "paradigm shift" allowing a new perspective to come about, refers to the absence of Lol's suffering in the role of excluded third. It was replaced instead by her movement into madness and into eventual freedom through transformation into the writer, Aurélia Steiner. The Durassian "India Song" texts where the transformation occurs, leaves (the myth of romantic love) in ruins in the "desert" which is our society.

The victimizers and oppressors are excluded from the Durassian universe, "indifferent" to the master/slave dichotomy; the men now follow the exploratory paths of women in a world deaf to political orders, in "La nouvelle grâce d'un ciel sans Dieu."⁴ And yet this world of indifference is profoundly ethical, despite the thinking of our culture's misogynous philosophers, such as Spinoza, who have claimed that women, children and madmen are excluded from the revered realm.⁵ These three: women, children, and madmen, dominate the "India Song" texts; furthermore, the domain of ethics along with the larger domain of the written word, is no longer a realm "revered" by the writer. On the contrary, her goal has been, and remains, to rescue writing from such separation and encapsulation:

Il faut le déconnecter de sa... de son
handicap d'être de l'écrit, le sortir de
cette gangue de l'écrit, cette gangue
sacralisée (Le Parleuses, p.196).

The Durassian text leaves categories behind and enters upon a

unique search for the origins of its own language. Here it shares the quest of the self-portrait:

L'auto-portrait ne s'intéresse pas aux
diverses conditions de l'homme dans la soci-
été mais à une "vérité cachée" qu'il poursuit
dans ce terrain privilégié qu'est sa propre
mémoire, et sa propre écriture.⁶

A woman's self-portrait, an examination of the "India Song" texts has disclosed, reflects the fundamentality of the mother/daughter relationship to a woman's writing. Woman exists, by extending this basic relationship of sameness with the mother, in a state of relatedness to the other. In order to discover her own creativity, her own voice, a woman must first experience her separateness from the other. The writer's realization of autonomy and separateness in the act of writing is the secret of the pain permeating the "India Song" texts. It is also its joy: "Instruite de la douleur, Aurélia, et de la joie. Regarde."⁷ It is thus a different "separateness" from the separateness brutally forced upon women in the patriarchy and referred to by Marguerite Duras in the quotation cited as preface to this thesis. Here is another source of ambiguity within the text. The "Who am I?" of the male self-portrait, becomes who is this woman "I am" at the same time as "I am not"?: paradox underlying the identity quest in these texts. The anonymity attained in the end, the "Ecrire c'est n'être personne" of Aurélia Steiner (A.S., back cover), inserts itself into the larger context of the unique excursion of self-portraiture:

Au yoga oriental du vide, l'auto-portrait
oppose la dispersion des lieux, l'absence du
centre, et le texte de personne.⁸

Aurélia Steiner, our analysis of the "India Song" texts has revealed,

represents the culmination of this paradoxical identity quest involving the loss of identity. It began with the madness of Lol V. Stein and her rejection of her name.

In applying the ancient Sumerian myth of female initiation, "Inanna", as explicated by Sylvia Perera in Descent to the Goddess, we were able to unclothe the subtlety of the transformation underlying the movement from Lol V. Stein, in her victimization, to Aurélia Steiner, in her total freedom. Inanna's descent to the underworld where she encounters her "dark sister" and subsequently is "killed", permitted us to see Lol S. Stein's madness and "death" and the appearance of the "voices" followed by the birth of Aurélia Steiner, as one transformation.

The altered perspective which results from this transformation is qualified by a "seeing" involving all the senses, and reflecting an active receptivity we have been calling "l'écoute". This way of seeing, which is the vision of the newly autonomous androgynous creative woman represented by Aurélia Steiner, is intimately connected to voice. It is a new relationship that grew from Duras' experimentation with sound and image in film. As we experience in India Song and La Femme du Gange, a reversal of their roles forces us to "look" to the voices for meaning.

When Inanna returns from the underworld desert she has assimilated her dark sister's "eyes of death" (p. 96). These eyes enable her to see beneath relatedness, the usual feminine mode:

Psychologically, this mode of seeing, this knowledge, implies that destruction and transformation into something even radically new are part of the cycle of reality.⁹

We recognize this vision in the vast blue all-encompassing gaze of "le fou"

in L'Amour. Even before encountering the unusual new objectivity of his vision, we get premonitory glimpses in the "non-regard" of Anne-Marie Stretter, and the strangely opaque and difficult to capture vision of Lol V. Stein (p.24). Aurélia Steiner embodies the penetrating power of all these eyes as she brings into focus the renewed vision of the autonomous female writer. The writing voice of Aurélia is, metaphorically, reborn from the ashes of Lol V. Stein, who is in turn the space of S. Thala (thalassa gr, "mer"): the mer/mère to whom all the Durassian heroines return when faced with the devastating love story that dominates the narrative of the "India Song" texts as it has dominated the history of women in patriarchal culture.

The role (in the myth of Inanna) of the "wily water and wisdom" god Enki and his "mourners" provides us with further insight into the significance of the Durassian "voices", precursors of the writing voice of Aurélia Steiner. By creating a litany of the woes of the dark sister, Ereshkigal, the mourners transform her suffering into poetry. By analogy, we listen to the "voices" in La Femme du Gange and India Song transform the anguish of S. Thala:

Voix 2 (très lent)
QUELLE NUIT
QUELLE CHALEUR
ENTIERE MORTELLE

Silence.

(I.S., p.39)

Their poetic language, so rich in hyperbole, presages the advent of a new rhetoric symbolized by the birth of Aurélia (coming via the ear) in "le rectangle blanc", symbol of the blank page.

The repetitions of the "voices" are no longer the impotent babbling and repetitions of Echo but are instead, like the litanies of Enki's mourners, a new poetic voice assuaging the deep wound initially created in early childhood when one first discovers the "border region" between self and other. It is from here that we experience the separation and the merging, each essential to the full realization of individuality. The difficulty lies in being able to move freely from one mode to the other. Eros, relatedness, and Thanatos, separation, death. Creation and destruction, the rhythm of the Durasian text. Man in the patriarchy has glorified his separateness as "hero" while condemning woman alone to fulfill the task of relationship and merging. Aurélia Steiner is a new breed of woman; self-actualized and autonomous in her creative mode as writer, she opposes the women of the patriarchy in their merged roles of wife, mother, and lover. The writing of Aurélia is experienced as a movement toward the other, a continual mapping out of the distance that separates them. Her solitude, like the solitude of her creator, is manifest:

Je crois que tout se trouve seul. Mais
c'est mon... , c'est mon défaut. C'est ma
maladie (Les Parleuses, p.150).

Marguerite Duras' writing is a solitary adventure since the terrain is new and the exploration has just begun; the questions proliferate and there are no definitive answers, and likely never will be. What is the female rhetoric of the body? It is intimately connected to space and to voice, and is realized more through a physical relationship to language in figures such as metonymy and synaesthesia than through metaphor and symbol. Metaphor and symbol, it becomes clear in the Aurélia Steiner texts, are present but as possibility and potential initiating the never ending explor-

ation which the voice of Aurélia invites the reader to join. We are at the beginning of an endless dialogue between explorers of a new territory in creative language use, the writing of Marguerite Duras suggests. She offers to the reader her personal experience of transformation through a return to early childhood and the forming of the essential bond for women: union with the woman within herself. The dominance of the visual which has kept woman to herself, and to others, as object, has been and still is, the greatest obstacle to a woman's being present to herself and to others as subject.

The desert remains, our final quote from the author informs us; however, her relationship to it as a woman writer is marked definitively:

La distance qui nous sépare est justement celle de la mort. C'est une seule et même distance pour vous et pour moi. De la même façon que vous, vous voulez la garder pure entre nous, de la même façon, moi, je la recouvre de mes cris et de mes appels. Comme vous, je sais que cette distance est infranchissable, impossible à couvrir. La différence entre vous et moi c'est que pour moi cette impossibilité est un inconvénient négligeable. Alors voyez, nous sommes pareils, nous nous tenons tous les deux pareillement dans nos cases respectives, dans nos territoires brûlés incalculablement narcissiques, mais moi je crie vers les déserts, de préférence dans la direction des déserts.¹⁰

Notes (Conclusion)

1. The Moon and the Virgin, p.200.
2. James Hillman, "Image-Sense", Spring, 1979, p.137.
3. Françoise Rossum-Guyon and Julia Kristeva, "A Partir de Polylogue: Questions à Julia Kristeva", Revue des sciences humaines No.4, 1977, p.498.
4. "Les Yeux verts", p.23.
5. "A Partir de Polylogue: Questions à Julia Kristeva", p.498.
6. Miroirs d'encre, p.156.
7. "Les Yeux verts", p.66.
8. Miroirs d'encre, p.350.
9. Descent to the Goddess, p.33.
10. "VOUS, L'AUTRE, CELUI DE NOTRE SEPARATION", "Les Yeux verts", p.24.

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