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Present Love and the Remembrance of Mythical Love in *The Sailor from Gibraltar* and *Hiroshima mon amour*

The Sailor from Gibraltar is Marguerite Duras' fourth novel, and it was published by Gallimard in France in 1952. This work is notable for being one of the few first-person narratives written by Duras in which the narrator is a male character. The narrator, a 32-year-old employee of the French government, is vacationing in Italy with his partner Jacqueline in the summer of 1947.¹ He is utterly unhappy with his life, especially with his work. He expresses his boredom caused by his monotonous routine in an early dialogue of the book with the driver who takes him and Jacqueline to Florence:

- Et toi, me demanda-t-il, qu'est-ce que tu fais ?
- Ministère des Colonies, dis-je. Service de l'état civil.
- Ça te plaît, ce travail-là ?
- Terrible, dis-je.

¹ "C'était la deuxième année de la paix," Marguerite Duras, *Le Marin de Gibraltar* [1952], Paris, Gallimard, "Folio", 2017, p. 11 (henceforth, page references will be provided in the text with the mention MG).

- Qu'est-ce que tu fais ?
- Je recopie des actes de naissance et de décès (MG, p. 219).²

The dialogue continues and the narrator tells the driver that his father also worked for the Ministry of Colonies. He never enjoyed his position but would not quit, despite his loathing. Moreover, he mentions that during the war he worked for the Vichy government for three years, and on account of that was demoted after the war. He adds that he issued false birth certificates for Jewish people during the War and, by doing so, wants to imply that he was not a collaborator. His indifference towards Jacqueline is also evident in this episode, since he shows no concern for the fact that she is in the back of the truck with drunken workers who are misbehaving towards her. His disregard for her is confirmed later in the book, when they are staying in Florence: "Puisque j'étais devenu honnête, subitement ou pas, on devient bien fou subitement, et que rester à l'État civil et avec elle – je ne dissociais pas les deux choses – était malhonnête, je ne pouvais plus rester ni à l'État civil ni avec elle" (MG, p. 57).

This truck driver is also crucial to the narrative for it is he who mentions Rocca, a small village on the coast of Tuscany, and talks about a beautiful woman and her yacht. The narrator becomes intrigued by this place and decides to leave Florence and go to Rocca. There, he meets Anna, the woman in the yacht, who is searching for a former lover: the sailor from Gibraltar. He remains fascinated by her and finally ends his relationship with Jacqueline. Eager for a new and more adventurous life, the narrator joins Anna in her quest for her former lover, embarking on a journey sailing through the Mediterranean Sea.

2 In order to maintain the purity of Duras' work, all excerpts of her literary work will be quoted in the original French. Her published interviews, on the other hand, and all other sources, are translated into English with the original text referenced in the corresponding footnote. Unless otherwise stated, all translations are my own.

The novel is characterized by a *mise en abyme* structure that occurs in two stages. Firstly, there is Anna's story of her love affair with the sailor, which she tells the narrator in different parts of the novel. Secondly, there is the constant mention of the narrator's desire to write an "American novel": "Un jour, dis-je, j'écirais sur toi un roman américain" (MG, p. 204), a reference that reappears when Anna says: "Dans ton roman américain, me dit-elle, si tu parles de cette rencontre, il faudra dire qu'elle a été pour moi, très importante" (MG, p. 217). Since *The Sailor* is a first-person narrative, this recurring reference to the writing of a novel gives the impression that what we are reading is the product of his writing, a technique that Duras will employ even more explicitly in *The Vice-Consul* (1966) with "écrit Peter Morgan."³

The specific mention of "an American novel" can be traced to the influence of Hemingway on the conception of the work. Not only did Duras herself confirm that she wrote Anna's story after reading *Green Hills of Africa*,⁴ but the term "American writer" appears to evoke Hemingway in her later work *Emily L* (1987), as demonstrated by Brian Stimpson in his genetic analysis of Duras' manuscripts.⁵ According to Stimpson, several of the early drafts of the 1987 novel have a direct mention

3 Marguerite Duras, *Le Vice-consul* [1966], Paris, Gallimard, "L'Imaginaire", 2012, p. 9.

4 "Mais je n'ai jamais dû chercher bien puisque je n'ai jamais su d'où ça me venait. Sauf peut-être pour *Le Marin de Gibraltar*. Ça vient de Hemingway. Ça vient d'un livre de Hemingway qui est *Les Vertes Collines d'Afrique*. C'est dans l'enthousiasme de la lecture des *Vertes Collines* que j'ai écrit l'histoire d'Anna. [...] C'est dans le bruit de la ferraille qu'il lui dit qu'il l'aime, je me souviens de ça. Et que je me suis beaucoup amusée en écrivant, aussi" (*Au-delà des pages*, interview with Luce Perrot, TF1, February 1988, transcription: "Le scandale que je suis", in Marguerite Duras, *Le Dernier des métiers : entretiens 1962-1991*, Sophie Bogaert ed., Paris, Seuil, 2016, p. 381).

5 Brian Stimpson, "Des 'Coréens' à *Emily L.* : genèse d'une poétique durasienne", *Revue des Lettres modernes*, série "Duras", n° 2, "Écriture, écritures", Myriem El Maïzi & Brian Stimpson eds., 2007, p. 25-48.

of Hemingway's name, which did not make the final version of the text. Duras instead chose an indirect reference in the form of "an American writer." Thus, she transfers to the narrator of *The Sailor* her intention of writing a novel inspired by Hemingway's work and uses the reference to the "American novel" as a way of signaling it within the text itself. Stimpson also highlights how *Emily L* bears a resemblance to *Moderato Cantabile* and *The Sailor from Gibraltar*, as one can recognize elements characteristic of Duras' work: evocation of passage, endless trips and an atmosphere of regret and loss.

The similarities between *The Sailor from Gibraltar* and Duras' later work were also acknowledged by the author in an interview with Italian journalist Leopoldina Pallotta della Torre in 1987:

Until *Moderato cantabile* it was as if I did not recognize the books I wrote. *The Sea Wall* or *The Little Horses of Tarquinia* are still books that are too full, where everything, too much is said. Nothing is left to the reader's imagination. There may be a resemblance with what I now consider my maturity phase, at most, with certain aspects of *The Sailor from Gibraltar*: a woman lives endlessly waiting for the sailor, for an inaccessible love. Something very similar to what I am currently writing.⁶

In *Les Parleuses*, Duras shows the same ambiguity when addressing *The Sailor*. On the one hand she was often very critical towards her first novels, recognizing that they were "easier novels", which would rely on the "vulgarity" she had

6 "Jusqu'à *Moderato cantabile*, c'est comme si je ne reconnaissais pas les livres que j'ai écrits. *Un barrage contre le Pacifique* ou *Les Petits Chevaux de Tarquinia* sont encore des livres trop pleins, où tout, trop est dit. Rien n'est laissé à l'imagination du lecteur. Il peut exister un rapport avec ce que je considère maintenant comme ma phase de maturité, à la rigueur avec certains aspects du *Marin de Gibraltar* : une femme vit dans l'attente infinie du marin, d'un amour inaccessible. Quelque chose de très similaire à ce que j'écris en ce moment." Marguerite Duras, *La Passion suspendue* [interview with Leopoldina Pallotta della Torre], transl. in French by René de Ceccatty, Paris, Seuil, 2013, p. 52 (my translation).

in her.⁷ On the other hand, she also mentioned *The Sailor* as the one novel among her first period that resonated with the more critically acclaimed second phase of her production due to “this sort of huge preamble to an inexistent story.”⁸

Joëlle Pagès-Pindon groups *The Sailor* together with *The Little Horses of Tarquinia* (*Les Petits Chevaux de Tarquinia*, 1953) and *Ten-Thirty on a Summer Night* (*Dix heures et demie du soir en été*, 1960) as what she calls “couple novels” (roman du couple), in which the texts focus on telling a story⁹ centered around couples. Furthermore, according to her, in the texts that follow these “couple novels”, such as *The Square* (*Le Square*, 1955), *Moderato Cantabile* and *Hiroshima mon amour* (1960), Duras inaugurated a more personal way of writing which would become the voice of durassian written text.¹⁰

Despite that, elements in *The Sailor*’s narrative foreshadow recurring themes and features of her writing after *Moderato Cantabile*, specifically in *Hiroshima mon amour*. Beneath this early and simple “couple story” set in a holiday atmosphere, evoking 1950’s “dolce vita” lifestyle, as Pagès-Pindon¹¹ describes it, lies the genesis of the narrative style that Duras would later become known for. When addressing durassian writing in the 1950’s and 1960’s, Brazilian researcher Leyla Perrone-Moisés classifies the screenplay of *Hiroshima mon amour* as Duras’ most technically innovative text.¹²

7 Marguerite Duras & Xavière Gauthier, *Les Parleuses* [1974], Paris, Minuit, 2013, p. 63.

8 “Cette espèce d’énorme préambule à une histoire inexistante”, “Se laisser faire par l’écriture”, interview with Hubert Nyssen, 1969, in Marguerite Duras, *Le Dernier des métiers*, op. cit., p. 73.

9 Joëlle Pagès-Pindon, *Marguerite Duras : l’écriture illimitée*, Paris, Ellipses, 2012, p. 133.

10 *Ibid.*, p. 134.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 133.

12 Leyla Perrone-Moisés, *O novo romance francês*, São Paulo, Buriti, 1966, p. 129.

Accordingly, this article aims to demonstrate how *The Sailor*, often regarded as unpretentious, resonates in the making of *Hiroshima mon amour*, one of her most emblematic pieces.

The screenplay for Alain Resnais' first feature film was a turning point in Duras' career not only because it made her internationally renowned but also because it kickstarted her career as a screenwriter and later as a filmmaker. Moreover, it established the hybrid and multimedia aspects that would characterize her work from the 1960s onwards, until her death in 1996. This screenplay was also groundbreaking in the field of screenwriting studies as it was the first screenplay to be published as a standalone volume in France in 1960.¹³ Duras often mentioned that Resnais asked her to write the screenplay after reading *Moderato Cantabile*, which he would have liked to adapt for the screen.¹⁴ Interestingly, Duras always emphasized the literary dimension of the script/film, stating that *Hiroshima mon amour* was a novel written on film.¹⁵

Indeed, the screenplay is written in a rather unconventional way. It omits scene headings and is not divided into scenes. The sequences set in Hiroshima between the French woman—portrayed by Emmanuelle Riva and referred to in the screenplay only as “Elle” or occasionally by the actress's surname, “Riva”—and her Japanese lover, identified solely as “Lui”, are divided into five parts. The dialogue is often written as if it were a poem, especially Riva's lines:

13 Sandrine Vaudrey-Luigi, *La Langue romanesque de Marguerite Duras : « une liberté souvenante »*, Paris, Classiques Garnier, 2013, p. 388-389.

14 The feature film of the same name based on the novel was directed by Peter Brook and released in 1960, starring Jeanne Moreau as Anne Desbaresdes and Jean-Paul Belmondo as Chauvin.

15 “Pour moi, d'autre part, *Hiroshima* est un roman écrit sur la pellicule”, “L'écrivain : un homme qui publie”, interview with Pierre Hahn, 1963, in Marguerite Duras, *Le Dernier des métiers*, op. cit., p. 18-25.

ELLE

... Je te rencontre.

Je me souviens de toi.

Qui es-tu ?

Tu me tues.

Tu me fais du bien.

Comment me serais-je doutée que cette ville était faite à la taille de l'amour ?

Comment me serais-je doutée que tu étais fait à la taille de mon corps même ?

Tu me plais. Quel événement. Tu me plais.

Quelle lenteur tout à coup.

Quelle douceur.

Tu ne peux pas savoir.

Tu me tues.

Tu me fais du bien.

J'ai le temps.

Je t'en prie.

Dévore-moi.

Déforme-moi jusqu'à la laideur.

Pourquoi pas toi ?

Pourquoi pas toi dans cette ville et dans cette nuit pareille aux autres au point de s'y méprendre ?

Je t'en prie...¹⁶

Furthermore, in the screenplay, the French woman's background story in Nevers is completely separated from the present timeline of the film in Hiroshima. It is placed in the appendices, under two main titles: "Les évidences nocturnes" and "Nevers", each further subdivided into several subheadings. Here, the text presents many first-person narratives, which will be the basis for Riva's monologues in the film. Additionally, it includes third-person excerpts. These not only describe the scenes as stage directions, but also include quite literary passages adding layers and details to minor characters such as Riva's mother:

¹⁶ Marguerite Duras, *Hiroshima mon amour* [1960], Paris, Gallimard, "Folio", 2006, p. 35 (henceforth, page references will be provided in the text with the mention HMA).

La mère est vive. Bien plus jeune que le père. Ce qu'elle aime le plus au monde est son enfant. Quand Riva crie, elle s'affole pour elle. La mère a peur que l'on fasse encore du mal à son enfant. Elle tient toute la maison dans ses mains. Elle est forte. Elle ne veut pas que Riva meure. Elle est avec son enfant d'une tendresse brutale. Mais d'une tendresse sans limites. Contrairement au père, elle ne désespère pas de Riva. (HMA, p. 136)

In screenwriting, it is traditionally recommended that stage directions result in the construction of the *mise en scène*, hence psychological descriptions of a character's state of mind akin to third-person omniscient narrative, are usually avoided.¹⁷ However, this demonstrates the artistic freedom Resnais granted Duras and how she approached the piece as a literary text and did not restrain herself by any type of format convention. This is crucial for our analysis, since one could argue that a novel and a screenplay belong to separate artistic domains and therefore any direct comparison between them would be methodologically ill-advised. Contrary to that view, Duras always enjoyed blurring any sort of frontier in terms of textual genre.¹⁸

17 Isabelle Raynauld, *Lire et écrire un scénario*, Paris, Armand Colin, 2017, p. 6. It highlights that the first manual designed to establish guidelines for screenwriting, *The Technique of the Photoplay*, was published in 1911, by Epes Winthrop Sargent. Since then, as cinema organized itself as an industry, a myriad of more or less prescriptive manuals has been published with the purpose of defining a specific format for the screenplay. Raynauld defends the conception that the screenplay differs from a play or a novel because each word should lead to "filming and not telling." Thus, the author emphasizes that the text in a screenplay must show the story, by resulting in concrete images, and not tell the story, as written narration. According to Bessières, screenwriting as a practice is still very much subject to prescriptive rules, which often results in an impoverished writing style due to the standardization and codification of the format. See: Vivien Bessières, "Manuels de scénario et enjeux stylistiques du dialogue", in *Films à Lire : des scénarios et des livres*, Mireille Brangé & Jean-Louis Jeannelle eds., Bruxelles, Les Impressions Nouvelles, 2019, p. 49-72.

18 "Je viens de donner à Gallimard un texte qui a ce titre : *ÉCRIRE*. Ce que je fais toujours, dans la vie, le théâtre, le cinéma, l'amour, la politique, c'est Écrire. Les plus écrits de tous les textes sont mes scénarios. Quand on me

The Sailor from Gibraltar and Hiroshima mon amour: echoes and persistence

Repetition has been pointed out by many critics as a major feature in durassian work. She purposely repeats sentences—such as the well-known “Tu n’as rien vu à Hiroshima” (HMA, p. 22)—, characters, and plots in her cycles. Alazet states that for Duras, repetition is associated with difference, since rewriting or re-saying implies constantly changing what had been previously said. Thus, the challenge of constant writing and rewriting becomes her poetic art. This process becomes even more explicit at the end of the 1950s when very few texts are not re-elaborated in new titles and remain as single, on-time productions.¹⁹ This repetition also creates a sense of continuity in her work. The author constantly develops not only her texts, but also the way in which she builds and structures the plots starting from the same elements.

In the case of *The Sailor from Gibraltar* and *Hiroshima mon amour*, one of the first elements that caught our attention is the role the main characters played during the war. In the aftermath of the conflict, both characters represent controversial figures for French society. As we have already previously mentioned, the narrator of *The Sailor* worked for the Vichy government and suffered the consequences of having done so. As for the French woman in *Hiroshima mon amour*, she was the lover of German soldier and, therefore,

dit : venez pour nous écrire quelque chose, je n’y vais plus. Le cinéma, je n’y vais plus du tout depuis dix années. J’écris. Quand j’écris sur mes films j’écris aussi. Et quand j’écris Yann Andréa Steiner je fais aussi du cinéma. Et c’est ça que j’aime, tout mélanger en apparence et être seule à reconnaître la route” (Marguerite Duras, “Lettre à Antoine de Baecque” [March 1993], in *Cahiers de l’Herne*, “Marguerite Duras”, Bernard Alazet & Christine Blot-Labarrère eds., Paris, L’Herne, 2014, p. 220).

19 Bernard Alazet, “La réécriture chez Marguerite Duras : entre épuisement et relance”, *Revue des Lettres modernes*, série “Duras” n° 2, op. cit., p. 63.

had to endure the public humiliation and violence inflicted on her by her countrymen after the liberation of France. If in the novel the consequences of the narrator's collaboration were only briefly mentioned when he talks about his work, in the screenplay they play a much more significant role, leading Riva's character to leave Nevers for good. Despite the difference in terms of relevance to the plot that the war plays in each narrative, Duras chose both her protagonists to be in the spectrum of the collaborators, rather than members of the French Resistance. This is noteworthy, especially considering the autobiographical aspects of her writing and her own experiences in the Resistance and her husband's deportation during the war, which she would address in her writing only much later, with *The War* (*La Douleur*, 1985).

When faced with the challenge of writing a story about the catastrophe in Hiroshima, Duras chose her leading character to be someone who was considered unpatriotic and worthy of punishment, instead of a more traditional heroic figure. Therefore, both narratives have protagonists that can be considered stigmatized characters for French society, especially in the 1950s, when the world was still reeling from and trying to process the tragedies of war.

The violence suffered by the women who had their heads shaved in front of large and angry mobs—such as Riva's character—was intended to publicly shame them and expose their liaisons with enemy soldiers, so they would not pass undercover.²⁰ According to Alain Brossat, the episode of the “*femmes tondues*” relates to the slow and long history of misogyny and antifeminism in the West. This specific violence inflicted on women turned them into scapegoats. These women were symbolically accused of betraying and sullyng the nation

20 The documentary *Tondues en 44* (Jean-Pierre Carlon, Productions du Lagon, France Télévision, 2007) addresses this subject with historical footage, photos, interviews, and research, resulting in in-depth reflection on this subject.

through their own bodies as if their bodies belonged to the collectivity.²¹ In his book, originally published in 1992, Brossat describes how even almost five decades after the end of the war, this was still a very sensitive topic of research due the lack of historical material and, moreover, the necessity of relying on testimonials who were not only blurred by memory but also filled with emotional trauma.

Thus, Duras touches a sore point in her work, significantly raising this question in *Hiroshima mon amour*, and more subtly in *The Sailor*. The stigma surrounding those accused of collaborating with the Germans also underpins the dialogue between the narrator and the truck driver in *The Sailor*, when he makes sure to mention, that despite working for the Vichy government, he issued false certificates to help Jewish people. This line comes after the narrator interprets the driver's silence as a demand for "additional explanations" (MG, p. 23). Moreover, this piece of information is something the reader cannot be sure of, since he admits he was unable to track any of them to testify favorably on his behalf. So, this leaves us to wonder whether his claim is just an attempt to absolve himself from the shame associated with being labeled a collaborator.

Through these examples we see how Duras' characters often transgress social morality. But the author does not write with a biased perspective that would invite the reader to pass moral judgment on the characters. Quite the contrary. In *Hiroshima mon amour*, Duras humanizes these controversial figures and instills empathy towards them. The love affair with the German soldier is portrayed from a mostly romantic perspective in which love is a force that releases the young woman from shame or moral judgment, as we see in the following passage called "Le mariage de Nevers":

21 Alain Brossat, *Les Tondues : un carnaval moche*, Paris, Téraèdre, 2015, p. 18.

Je devins sa femme dans le crépuscule, le bonheur et la honte. Quand ça a été fait, la nuit était venue sur nous. Nous ne nous en étions pas aperçus.

La honte avait disparu de ma vie. Nous avons été joyeux de voir la nuit. [...] Celle-là était une nuit noire comme jamais je n'en ai vu depuis. Ma patrie, ma ville, mon père ivre, s'y trouvèrent noyés. Avec l'occupation allemande. Dans le même sac.

Nuit noire de la certitude. On l'a regardée avec attention et ensuite avec gravité. Puis une à une, des montagnes sont montées à l'horizon. (HMA, p. 132)

By calling this passage “the wedding of Nevers”, Duras elevates the characters’ feelings for one another above social or religious practices. Their love is strong enough to metaphorically transform this sexual relationship out of wedlock into the consummation of marriage. Moreover, love has a redeeming force to stand against shame, the moral conflict of being with an enemy soldier, her family issues, and introduces certainty in this dark night that announces the suffering and trauma that are about to fall upon the lovers. The love affair with the German soldier is presented by the text in a very romantic manner, echoing classic forbidden love narratives. According to Dugast-Portes, Duras employs a rhetoric in *Hiroshima mon amour* in which extreme passion does not lead to living but to “die of living” (*mourir de vivre*). Thus, these lyrical passages, along with syncopated phrases and obsessive ritornellos, juxtaposed to images of fire and violence, “say the unsayable in *Hiroshima mon amour*”²² and restate the impossibility of writing a story about the bomb in Hiroshima.²³

The text also affirms its direct criticism towards the people who have harassed and shaved women’s hair by describing

22 “Disent l’indicible dans *Hiroshima mon amour*” (Francine Dugast-Portes, *Le Nouveau Roman : une césure dans l’Histoire du récit*, Rennes, Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2018, p. 245).

23 Madeleine Borgomano, India Song, *Marguerite Duras*, Lyon, L’interdisciplinaire, 1990, p. 11.

them as young heroes without imagination.²⁴ There are brief mentions in the screenplay to the homeland, dishonor and the enemy when talking about the liberation of Nevers, which shows that the young woman is not oblivious to the moral dilemma in her love affair. However, the focus lies much more on the depth of her feelings for the soldier, as can be observed when she describes the German's death and how she laid beside him when he was dying, summarizing it by saying: "C'était mon premier amour" (HMA, p. 100). She chooses to stay next to him until his dead body is taken away and hence to face the consequences of her involvement with him instead of hiding or abandoning him. Her loyalty to her first love and to her true feelings stands out as she mourns him while the rest of the town celebrates.

In *The Sailor*, Duras' approach to the past love affair is less lyrical, but the storyline also reinforces the mythical aspect in the narrative due to the premise of the never-ending journey throughout the seas in search of the disappeared lover. Furthermore, we never know his name and he is frequently referred to as: the sailor of Gibraltar, which surrounds him in a mysterious aura. In *The Sailor*, as in *Hiroshima*, the object of the woman's affection is also a controversial character. Anna is searching the world for a man who is a murderer. This is addressed in the dialogue in a very straightforward manner in different parts of the novel:

– Il était recherché, dit-elle, pour un assassinat.

Cela ne m'étonna pas outre mesure. Elle le dit avec beaucoup de simplicité et peut-être aussi avec un tout petit peu de lassitude.

[...]

– Tout le monde peut tuer, dit-elle, ce n'est pas le privilège de quelques-uns. (MG, p. 141-142)

– Qui c'est le marin de Gibraltar ? demandai-je.

– Je te l'ai déjà dit, dit-elle, un assassin, de vingt ans.

24 "Ils sont jeunes. Ce sont des héros sans imagination" (HMA, p. 96).

- Et encore ?
- Rien d'autre. Quand on est un assassin on n'est que ça, surtout à vingt ans.
- Je voudrais, dis-je, que tu me racontes son histoire.
- Il n'a pas d'histoire, dit-elle. Quand on devient un assassin à vingt ans, on n'a plus d'histoire. On ne peut plus avancer ni reculer, ni réussir, ni rater quoi que ce soit dans la vie. (MG, p. 163)

Although Anna and the young French woman do not try to hide the moral blemishes of their lovers, but rather speak about them very bluntly, the narrative does not focus on these social conventions and moral dilemmas, which is also a recurring element of Duras' fictional universe.²⁵

Durassian heroines are passionate women who go straight to the object of their desire, sometimes with shamelessness or impudence, without worrying about public opinion or conventional morality. In *Hiroshima*, the young girl from Nevers loves an enemy soldier; Anne Desbaresdes in *Moderato* becomes the object of gossip due to her meetings in a port café with one of her husband's workers; Anna in *Sailor* travels the world in search of a murderer. Many heroines are adulterous without a shadow of visible guilt; Agatha, finally, in the film of the same name, one day, transgressed the immemorial taboo of incest.²⁶

²⁵ Male characters commit crimes in other texts as well, which are addressed with the same somewhat nonchalant attitude, such as Nicolas beating up Uncle Jerome leading him to die in *The Easy Life* (*La Vie tranquille*, Paris, Gallimard, 1944) and the vice-consul opening fire against the lepers in *The Vice-Consul* (*Le Vice-consul*, *op. cit.*).

²⁶ "Les héroïnes durassiennes sont des passionnées qui vont droit vers l'objet de leur désir parfois avec impudeur ou impudence sans se préoccuper de l'opinion publique ou de la morale conventionnelle. Dans *Hiroshima*, la jeune fille de Nevers aime un soldat ennemi ; Anne Desbaresdes dans *Moderato* fait jaser par ses rencontres dans un café du port avec un ouvrier de son mari ; Anna dans *Le Marin*, parcourt le monde à la recherche d'un meurtrier. Nombre d'héroïnes sont adultères sans ombre de culpabilité visible ; Agatha enfin dans le film du même nom a un jour transgressé le tabou immémorial de l'inceste" (Yvonne Guers-Villate, *Continuité, discontinuité de l'œuvre durassienne*, Bruxelles, Éditions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 1985, p. 71).

In *Hiroshima*, this morally dubious nature is openly stated by Riva's character when the Japanese man asks her if she often has trysts such as theirs:

LUI

Dis-moi..., ça t'arrive souvent des histoires comme... celle-ci ?

ELLE

Pas tellement souvent. Mais ça m'arrive. J'aime bien les garçons...

Un temps.

ELLE

Je suis d'une moralité douteuse, tu sais.

Elle sourit.

LUI

Qu'est-ce que tu appelles être d'une moralité douteuse ?

Ton très léger

ELLE

Douter de la morale des autres.

Il rit beaucoup.

LUI

Je voudrais te revoir. Même si l'avion part demain matin. Même si tu es d'une moralité douteuse. (HMA, p. 54-55)

Through the repetition, the dialogue creates an antithesis, since the French woman claims that she is a morally dubious person because she questions others' morals standards. Therefore, she affirms her criticism towards common moral conventions, which demonstrate the character's change in comparison with the background story in Nevers. The French woman is no longer the young girl publicly and misogynistically punished that had to flee the town during the night. Many years later, mature and accomplished, she owns her feelings and desires by stating them bluntly to her new lover.

Anna, in *The Sailor*, is also described to the narrator as a woman who has had several short-term relationships with

different men: "C'est une femme qui ne peut pas se passer des hommes" (MG, p. 78), says Eolo. However, Anna's promiscuous nature is not regarded in a negative way. Eolo emphasizes that there is no malice in his comment, to what the narrator replies that one can see that Anna is not a difficult woman. This aspect also adds to the narrator's interest in Anna as he seeks to break free from his monotonous life and relationship.

Raphaëlle Lavandier states that we often find in Duras' work the pleasure of making love with an unknown person. According to Lavandier, Duras' writing sheds light on fantasies hidden behind brick walls of social interdictions. Once these walls crumble, waves of desire and fantasy reverberate through the page.²⁷ The relationship between the narrator and Anna and the Japanese architect and the French actress reside in this spectrum. Both couples know very little about one another and quickly engage in sexual relationships, which seem bound to be short-term. After being physically intimate, the men take pleasure in discovering the women's past stories and their emotional intimacy.

At the same time, both women make sure to state early on that they have had other lovers after the mythical love affair of the past with the German soldier and the sailor. In *The Sailor*, a similar dialogue takes place when Anna is convincing the narrator to join her:

Elle détourna la tête et dit avec un peu de honte :
 – Il ne faut pas croire que tu serais le premier.
 – Je n'ai jamais cru une chose pareille.
 Elle se tut. Puis elle reprit :
 – Je te le dis pour que tu ne croies pas que c'est une chose extraordinaire que tu ferais. Pour que tu viennes.
 – Il y en a eu beaucoup ?
 – Quelques-uns, dit-elle... Il y a trois ans que je le cherche... (MG, p. 162)

²⁷ Raphaëlle Lavandier, *Écritures féminines et psychosexualité : l'empreinte indélébile du lien à la mère chez Colette et Marguerite Duras*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2018, p. 79.

Both remain emotionally connected and loyal to this mythical love of the past, but this does not prevent them from embracing their current desires and affirming their position as sexually liberated females. Although the French woman's smile and Anna's shame indicate some embarrassment, they do not try to disguise it. The reaction of both men is also similar in the sense that they do not seem to bother or to give it a lot of thought. Moreover, the love affair between the French woman and the Japanese man is also of an adulterous nature as both say in the dialogue that they are happily married. Anna also admits to having been unfaithful to her late husband:

– C'est pendant ce mariage que tu as pris l'habitude de coucher avec... n'importe qui ?

Elle se tut, un peu interdite, puis sur le ton de l'excuse, elle dit :

– J'ai essayé quelques fois de lui être fidèle, mais je n'y suis jamais arrivée (MG, p. 172)

Although the narrator in *The Sailor* affirms that Jaqueline was his first sexual partner "Je n'avais pas eu de femme avant elle" (MG, p. 153), and therefore he does not share the adulterous experiences of the other three characters in the two texts, the questioning or doubting of common morality as a practice is not only sustained by him, but also praised: "J'ai toujours pensé, dis-je, que c'est plutôt quand on a fait douter quelqu'un du bien-fondé de sa morale, qu'on n'a pas vécu inutile" (MG, p. 168).

In addition to these character profiles and dialogue similarities, there are strong resemblances in the structuring of both narratives that show how *Hiroshima* further develops elements that were already present in *The Sailor*. Mainly the *mise en abyme* aspect of both texts in which the center of the narrative is the telling of the past story by the female character. Both women have experienced a failed love affair

in the past that remains a milestone in their lives. And the core of the narrative in the novel and the screenplay is the retelling of this previous mythical love affair.

Another interesting feature is that the telling of the past story is triggered by the narrator and the Japanese architect. Both will insist on the women sharing with them their experience: "Je voudrais que vous me parliez de lui" (MG, p. 140) ; "Parlez-moi, dis-je, du marin de Gibraltar" (MG, p. 144) ; "Si tu as le temps, lui dis-je, il faudra me raconter cette histoire" (MG, p. 160) ; "Je voudrais, dis-je, que tu me racontes son histoire" (MG, p. 163) ; "LUI : J'ai pensé à Nevers en France" (HMA, p. 66) ; "LUI : Il était français, l'homme que tu as aimé pendant la guerre ?" (HMA, p. 78) ; "LUI : À cause de Nevers, je peux seulement commencer à te connaître. Et, entre les milliers et les milliers de choses de ta vie, je choisis Nevers" (HMA, p. 80).

Throughout the narrative, both men end up knowing a lot more about the women than the women will know about the men. This creates an ambiguous power dynamic between both couples. On one hand, the women expose their feelings to the men by detailing their past stories in an almost confessional way, which could make them more vulnerable. On the other hand, the men's insistence on knowing their past stories ensures the women's protagonism. The men are supporting roles who embark on the women's narratives as the narrator literally boards Anna's yacht. Her quest for the sailor becomes the life of adventure and excitement he longed for.²⁸

In a similar manner, the two men will try to revive their new lovers' mythical love affair of the past by rekindling it through storytelling. The intimacy of these two new couples relies on the women's sharing the story of these groundbreaking past love affairs with the new lovers. The relationships with the sailor and the German soldier are crucial to the men's interest in them, as can be seen in the Japanese man's response to why he wants to know about Nevers: "C'est là, il

28 "J'aurais voulu être coureur cycliste, explorateur, des choses impossibles. Et finalement j'ai fini par entrer au ministère des Colonies" (MG, p. 22).

me semble l'avoir compris, que tu as dû commencer à être comme aujourd'hui tu es encore" (HMA, p. 81).

Both texts create a particular type of spectral love triangle in which the two love affairs, – the present ones, between Anna and the narrator and the French actress and the Japanese architect, and the past ones, between the two women and the sailor and the soldier respectively—are juxtaposed, existing in two different time frames. The present love affair is nurtured by the love story of the past, as it tries to build itself upon the foundation of mythical love. While the narrator concretely joins Anna in her yacht, the Japanese architect roleplays as the German soldier in the reenactment of the episode in Nevers and speaks as if he were the killed soldier "LUI : Quand tu es dans la cave, je suis mort?" (HMA, p. 87). This has led many critics to make a comparison between *Hiroshima* and *Moderato Cantabile*, due to Anne Desbaresdes and Chauvin's reenactment of the crime in the coffee shop. As for the narrator of *The Sailor*, he does not try to assume the sailor's position concretely in the retelling of the story; however, it is the mystery of this never-ending search for Anna's former lover that makes him want to board her yacht and join her quest. His constant interest and curiosity stress the mythical standing of the man who gives title to the book but is never present. Anna even tells him at some point that he is obsessed with it and, at times, she is somewhat reluctant to tell him the story. But he keeps asking her to talk about him.

Therefore, the narratives are built in such a way that these mythical stories are not merely flashbacks but are placed at the narrative core of each text. As Lynn A. Higgins states: "Nevers is not the origin of a story, then, but the story itself,"²⁹

29 Lynn A. Higgins, *New Novel, New Wave, New Politics: Fiction and the Representation of History in Postwar France*, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1996, p. 45.

because the present tense love affair exists by projecting itself over the mythical love of the past.

If the search of the missing sailor is what brings Anna and the narrator together in the beginning of the narrative, the study of different stages of the text demonstrates that the love story between Anna and the narrator precedes over the love story between Anna and the sailor. [...] And the triangular structure finds itself often associated to a *mise en abyme*, an entrenchment of stories through narratives that circulate among lovers with this function of mediation, the characters project themselves in what becomes a "legend", in other words, in the etymological meaning of "what must be said, told."³⁰

This triangular love affair introduced in the narrative structure of *The Sailor* will be further developed and play a significant role in the Indian Cycle. Both Lol V. Stein and the Vice-Consul will nurture a similar type of parasitic love towards Michael Richardson and Anne-Marie Stretter, as is clear in the following dialogue from *India Song*:

A.-M. S. : J'aime Michael Richardson,
je ne suis pas libre de cet amour.

V.-CONSUL : Je le sais.
Je vous aime ainsi, dans l'amour de Michael Richardson.³¹

This creates a paradoxical situation in which there is no rivalry or jealousy in these relationships, since the present

30 "Si la quête du marin disparu est ce qui rapproche Anna et le narrateur au début du récit, l'étude des différents états du texte montre que l'histoire d'amour entre Anna et le narrateur prend le pas sur l'histoire d'amour entre Anna et le marin. [...] Et la structure triangulaire se trouve souvent associée à une mise en abyme, à un enchâssement d'histoire par le biais de récits qui circulent entre les amants avec cette fonction de médiation, les personnages se projetant dans ce qui devient une 'légende', c'est-à-dire au sens étymologique 'ce qui doit être dit, raconté'" (Joëlle Pagès-Pindon, "L'intertextualité de l'imaginaire durassien dans *Le Marin de Gibraltar*", in *Le Marin de Gibraltar de Marguerite Duras : lectures critiques*, Joël July & Najet Liman-Tnani eds., Aix-en-Provence, Presses universitaires de Provence, 2019, p. 24).

31 Marguerite Duras, *India Song : texte, théâtre, film* [1973], Paris, Gallimard, "L'imaginaire", 2012, p. 96.

partners love each other because of the process of projection of the mythical love of the past. Just as the Vice-Consul, the current love is anchored in the existence of this previous mythical love affair. Thus, both the narrator and the Japanese man love Anna and the French woman, respectively, in their love for the sailor and the German soldier, and not despite it.

The Japanese man, by joining and assuming the position of the German soldier, also makes the present love affair prevail over the mythical one. The evocation of the mythical love affair makes her claim to forget it:

Quatorze ans que je n'avais pas retrouvé... le goût d'un amour impossible.
Depuis Nevers.
Regarde comme je t'oublie...
Regarde comme je t'ai oublié
Regarde-moi. (HMA, p. 110)

This new love affair is also an impossible one, since it is also radically illegitimate by social standards. The relationship between the French actress and the Japanese architect transgresses not only marital, but also national and racial boundaries.³² The mythical love affair must be completely revived as Riva must leave the Japanese man to never see him again, metaphorically reenacting her previous lover's death. Therefore, the impossibility of their love concludes the psychoanalytical transfer, as Duras herself put it in her interview to Jacques Chance, as she must kill him a second time by leaving him, just as the German was killed:

To wit, this psychoanalytical transfer and reenactment of the past story is more complex than the narrative structure we find in *The Sailor*. In the novel, the constant references to the narrator's "American novel" also create a simpler justification of his interest in the story. However, when he justifies his interest in the sailor's story simply because he had spent the last eight years of his life in public administration, registering

32 Lynn A. Higgins, *New Novel, New Wave, New Politics*, op. cit., p. 36.

certificates while such adventures took place, Anna replies: "Je ne crois pas, dit-elle, que ce soit ça" (MG, p. 243). The narrator is also intrigued by the sailor, and affirms that he would be outshone by him, to which Anna replies "Oh non, [...] il me semble que tout le monde doit pouvoir l'aimer...", to which the narrator replies: "Tout le monde l'aime celui-là" (*ibid.*). Thus, here there is a difference in how the triangular relationship occurs. If in *Hiroshima* the Japanese man had the same metaphorical fate as the German soldier, the narrator does not abandon Anna as the sailor did. He continues by her side in her journey in the Caribbean. He fully embraces her never-ending search as her companion by not trying to take The Sailor's place.³³

Nevertheless, a similarity we find in both texts is how little information is provided about these two mythical lovers. The soldier and the sailor remain as specters constantly being evoked but never fully described a literary expedient which reinforces the mythical aura of the love affair, always present in its absence. Higgins affirms regarding *Hiroshima mon amour*: "The love affair itself is a prehistoric fantasy, presented according to the conventions of a romantic fairy tale."³⁴ Duras' text in the screenplay is very lyrical, and the absence of more prosaic details of the love affair with the German soldier contribute to the atmosphere of a tragic romantic tale.

The relationship between Anna and the sailor is less lyrical, but the whole plot of a woman sailing the seas for three years in search of a former lover creates a larger-than-life, fantastically romantic adventure, which is confirmed in the dialogue when Anna and the narrator say:

– Ce n'est pas de sa faute, dit-elle doucement. Il ne le sait même pas que je le cherche
 – C'est la tienne, dis-je. Tu voulais vivre le plus grand amour de la terre.
 Je ris. Nous étions un peu saouls.

³³ Marguerite Duras, *Radioscopie*, France Inter, produit par Jacques Chancel, 28 déc. 1969, transcription: "Une pierre dans le cinéma", in *Le Dernier des métiers*, op. cit., p. 164.

³⁴ Lynn A. Higgins, *New Novel, New Wave, New Politic*, op. cit., p. 44.

- Qui n'a pas voulu le vivre ? demanda-t-elle.
- Bien sûr, dis-je, mais on ne peut les vivre qu'avec eux, qu'avec des types comme lui.
- Ce n'est pas leur faute, dit-elle, si on les aime pour de mauvaises raisons. (MG, p. 242)

Both texts also include a momentous episode in a coffee shop. In *Hiroshima*, in part IV, the lovers meet in a coffee shop by the river where the reenactment of the love affair in Nevers fully starts, with the Japanese man taking the German soldier's place and speaking as if he were him, as the French woman evokes her memories and retells the forbidden love affair.

In *The Sailor*, Anna's retelling of her love affair with the sailor is divided and told in pieces throughout the book. In her final narrative of her past with him, she describes an encounter with the sailor in a coffee shop in Paris. In this episode, the sailor calls her "Mon amour" for the second time. Anna tells this encounter to the narrator with great attention to detail, including everything they said, how he held her hand and smiled. The conversation between them is somewhat prosaic, but she externalizes her long-lasting feelings for him by saying:

Il a repris ma main et il l'a serrée. Je ne me suis pas plainte. Il a détourné son regard. Sa main était froide parce qu'il venait du dehors et qu'il n'avait pas de gants. Il a dit : Longtemps qu'on ne s'est pas vus. Sa main dans la mienne, j'ai compris qu'il n'y avait rien à faire, que ce serait encore de cet homme-là que le bonheur me viendrait, et le reste, le malheur. (MG, p. 251)

The telling of this episode also takes place in a restaurant in which Anna and the narrator are having lunch. Although the reenactment is not as evident as in *Hiroshima*, we can find an echo of the same triangular love structure in the juxtaposition of both scenes: Anna in a restaurant telling her current lover about her meeting with her mythical lover of

the past, also in the coffee shop. If these types of encounters in a coffee shop in Duras' works immediately bring *Moderato Cantabile* to our minds, they were in fact foreshadowed by the narrative structure of *The Sailor from Gibraltar*.

The Sailor from Gibraltar belongs to what is commonly referred to as the first phase in Duras' writing, a period during which her narratives are often considered simpler and less audacious. However, as Duras herself stated in many interviews, this novel presents a series of elements that would later be further developed and would characterize Duras's more acclaimed titles. In particular, we can see how this 1952 novel introduces a triangular love affair where a mythical love from the past nurtures the current love as a legend that must be told and somewhat revived. If often the reenactment of the past connects *Hiroshima mon amour* to *Moderato Cantabile*, we see in *The Sailor from Gibraltar* the origin of this *mise en abyme* structure where two love stories coexist in different time frames, enriching each other, as past and present intertwine.

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