

## The Spiritual Quest in the Novels of Marguerite Duras

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The world encountered in the novels of Marguerite Duras could be summed up very briefly by saying that is a world without love and without God. It is a world of waiting and watching in solitude, of seeking and never finding, of pain and despair, of nothingness and death. It is also essentially a world of female characters, living in a state of emptiness and personal negation in their inner beings, while pursuing the only path they know to eliminate the void, that of sexual desire, with increasingly less resemblance to love as the novels progress. The initially fragile identity of these female characters continues to weaken throughout the novels as relationships grow less and less personal and more and more destructive. According to Alain Vircondelet, Duras' world is "un monde où il n'y a pas de valeur transindividuelle, pas de dieu, pas de patrie, pas de famille, pas de vérité absolue, pas de société. C'est un univers qui continue d'exister mais autre; aucune transcendance, aucune valeur, aucune vertu" (46).<sup>1</sup>

From the midst of this spiritual vacuum, however, comes a piercing cry, echoing throughout the novels of Duras, a cry on the one hand of despair and death, but also a cry for life and hope, a cry which shatters complacency and the acceptance of a world which is fundamentally unacceptable. It is the kind of cry we hear, for instance, in *Moderato Cantabile*, when a woman shot by her lover awakens another woman to the possibilities of passion culminating in dramatic death, forever bringing to an end meaningless, everyday existence. It is the cry, as well, of the vice-consul, in the novel of that name, desperate in his attempts to gain access to the only woman he has

ever loved, the ravishing wife of the French ambassador, who refuses to include him in her closed circle of lovers and admirers.

Duras' characters long for an event or experience which would transform their lives, lift them out of the relative and the mundane, and project them into a new dimension of sudden and total fulfillment, completely eradicating inner negation and despair. They crave for a definitive state, not to be tarnished by life's routine, which is why the term "amour impossible" has been applied to the kind of love sought for by her characters. Nothing less than an absolute of love will ever satisfy. As Henri Micciollo points out in regards to Anne Desbaresdes, and to all other Durassian heroines, "cette femme qui vit dans le relatif aspire à l'absolu. Et pour elle, il n'y a qu'un absolu: celui de l'amour. Seul l'amour, vécu dans sa totalité, peut apporter la plénitude, la réalisation complète de l'être" (31).<sup>2</sup> He adds, however, that the search for an absolute is doomed to failure. We realize that in novel after novel, the quest goes on both for an absolute of love and an absolute of being than is unattainable.

The spiritual quest implicit in this search for absolutes has been brought to the fore in recent years through a proliferation of critical writings, including the work of Madeleine Alleins, who as early as 1984 emphasized the spiritual side of Duras' writing: "Signaler l'existence d'une dimension spirituelle qui fait partie intégrante du réel m'a paru d'autant plus nécessaire que le climat actuel imprégné de matérialisme n'incite guère à en tenir compte" (11).<sup>3</sup> In a 1997 colloquium in Paris, entitled "Duras, Dieu et l'Écrit", Pierre Saint-Amand follows this trend, in expressing a view of Duras' spirituality which bears examination in the light of our discussion of the desire for absolutes characterizing Duras' work:

L'éloignement de Dieu de notre monde, la vacance extraordinaire de toute transcendance, l'inconsistance désormais des êtres est ce qui éclaire et oriente l'écriture durassienne. Il n'est pas question de réinterroger l'oeuvre de Duras à partir des thèmes du salut et de la rédemption, rechercher la configuration de motifs chrétiens dans ses écrits, ce serait méprise. Le sacré, tel qu'il est réactivé dans l'oeuvre, ne l'est que par sa force d'abandon, sa trace délibérément absente." (221)<sup>4</sup>

While this analysis on the whole is very perceptive, in that

Duras' conscious elimination of the sacred only serves to underscore its presence, I believe that the search for absolutes in her works can, in fact, be linked to at least two major themes of the Christian faith: the human longing for God's absolute love and the need for a divine transformation of our basic human nature, or redemption. By highlighting expressions of these particular yearnings, this brief examination of Duras' novels will lead to the affirmation that notwithstanding God's seeming absence or rejection, and in spite of individual failure to encounter His love, a search for His reality permeates the lives of characters whose deepest longings point back to God.

Initially, transcendent love or experience would not appear to be the goal of Duras' characters; in fact, just the opposite seems to be true. Some of the relationships described are as far removed from the ideal of love as possible. Duras works explicitly to break down any certainties we might have about love. After all, love is a concept linked to spirituality and hence to the notion of God, suggesting a mystic union between two people for whom the partner has significance beyond the physical plane, providing a high degree of emotional fulfillment. It is true that Duras' characters inherently desire this fullness of being and a permanent solution to solitude, but persuaded that it cannot be found, they let go of all attempts to find it, inventing other kinds of relationships based on desire and even sexual deviancy.

In Duras' novels, we see the spiritual replaced by the physical, positive emotions by inner void, understanding by the impossibility to communicate, and intimacy by plurality in relationships. The importance of the individual eventually gives way to the idea that everyone is endlessly replaceable in love. Vircondelet describes these relationships by stating, "la sexualité est le pivot. Elle laisse loin derrière elle l'image de la spiritualité. L'acte de faire l'amour est devenu central" (18).<sup>5</sup>

By rejecting traditional notions of love, Duras plunges her characters into an empty abyss where death becomes the final and logical consequence of a relationship. Even here, however, Duras reflects her ruthless pursuit of absolutes, death being the only absolute that is certain and accessible in the absence of transcendent love. To die of passion, rather than to die little by little in a world of no hope is perhaps the ultimate solution for someone facing the emptiness of a

universe without God. By denying individuality, commitment, and permanence in love, Duras calls for the destruction of concepts which society still holds dear, but she refuses to pretend that anything less than an absolute of love will truly satisfy one's inner being.

The spiritual quest of Duras' heroines can be evidenced right from the start in her first successful novel, *La Vie tranquille*, published in 1944. Here we encounter a young woman, Francine Veyrenattes, who must come to grips with her own identity after the brother she adores is pushed to the point of suicide by a woman who deserts him, leaving Francine in a state of total emptiness. We realize that in the absence of parental love, Francine has lived her life vicariously through her brother, idealizing his life while ignoring her own. Throughout the novel, Francine reflects at length upon her nothingness, her inability to feel accepted: "Je n'étais personne, je n'avais ni nom ni visage. En traversant l'août, j'étais: rien" (72).<sup>6</sup>

In the hotel room where she retreats after her brother's death, she continuously interrogates herself in front of the large mirror, a symbol of her narcissistic personality. She sees her body with its various members virtually dissociated from herself, as she clings to the image of her brother in order to find herself again. A new consciousness of self, however, is aroused by her contact with the sea, a powerful force which brings her face to face with both life and death: "On est les yeux dans les yeux pour la première fois avec la mer. On sait avec les yeux d'un seul regard. Elle vous veut tout de suite, rugissante de désir. Elle est votre mort à vous, votre vieille gardienne" (145).<sup>7</sup>

The sea reveals both Francine's desire to lose herself in the water's ubiquity, and to be transformed by it, to emerge anew, purified of the past, reborn out of the sea. Ingrid Safranek views the ocean in Duras's works as "l'envers de la <vie matérielle>, c'est le négatif de la terre, le néant incarné, l'infini devenu sensible. Reflet du ciel sur la terre, la mer est ici le véhicule essentiel de la spiritualité . . ." (255).<sup>8</sup> Plunging herself into its depths, Francine discovers a new identity, albeit temporary:

L'océan crache sa sève dans les éclosions de l'écume. J'ai fait des séjours dans les vestibules chauds et boueux de la terre qui m'a crachée de sa profondeur. Et me voilà arrivée. On vient à la surface . . . . Je suis fleur. Toutes les parties de mon corps ont

éclaté sous la force du jour, mes doigts qui éclatent de la paume de ma main, mes jambes de mon ventre, et jusqu'au bout de mes cheveux, ma tête. J'éprouve la lassitude fière d'être née, d'être arrivée à bout de cette naissance. Avant moi, il n'y avait rien à ma place. Maintenant, il y a moi à la place de rien. (V.T. 143)<sup>9</sup>

Her symbolic death to a destructive image of herself and rebirth to a new identity indicate a longing for new life, the kind of transformation that can only come with the spiritual experience of regeneration, evoked by the image of baptism poetically portrayed in the text. Her failure to hang on to her fleeting moment of renewal and self-realization, however, plunges her once again into a state of skepticism, a return to her obsession with her brother, and a continued longing for love and happiness, which she knows she will not find in her impending marriage. Before leaving the hotel, Francine reveals her disappointment in the fact that nothing has really changed in her inner life: "Je voudrais que l'été soit en moi aussi parfait que dehors, réussir à oublier d'attendre toujours. Mais il n'y a pas d'été de l'âme. On regarde celui qui passe tandis qu'on reste dans son hiver" (179).<sup>10</sup>

In the novels which follow, Duras continues to portray female characters with an extremely weak self-image, seeking ideal love relationships which never materialize. Suzanne, in *Un barrage contre le Pacifique*, is a young woman who also passionately admires her brother despite his indifference towards her, following him to the big city with dreams of finding romance when her mother dies at the end of the novel. The naïvety which persists in her after she has rejected not only a wealthy man trying to buy her affection, but also a neighbouring young man who genuinely cares for her, makes it abundantly clear that she is headed for disillusionment and the very opposite of love. The next novel, *Le Marin de Gibraltar*, takes up the theme of the search for an impossible love, as the main female character spends the entire novel sailing from port to port, looking for a sailor she has fleetingly seen and imagines she passionately loves, while the real relationships in her life are relegated to second place and become, in fact, dependant on this search. It becomes obvious that she is pursuing the wind and that the ideal love she is looking for does not and cannot exist, except as an unfulfilled aspiration.

In succeeding novels we find women of the upper middle class, such as Sara in *Les petits chevaux de Tarquinia*, and Maria in

*Dix heures et demie du soir en été*, who are characterized by an attitude of abandonment towards themselves, their husbands, and their bourgeois environments, all the while trying to maintain the status quo. Both Sara and Maria carry on their duties as wives and mothers while remaining prisoners of unfulfilled marital relationships. The husbands are involved in illicit affairs while the wives turn ever inward, psychologically rejecting and despising themselves. Sara decides to back away from an affair which just barely begins in the novel, withdrawing into her own world and that of her child in the end, while Maria drowns herself in alcohol and searches for a way out of her pain by helping a criminal escape the police. The almost spiritual high and sense of gratification which this daring act of compassion procures for her is soon shattered as she discovers that this man, who had murdered his young wife along with her lover, has committed suicide before she is able to bring him further help. She realizes there is no escaping her own life, which forces her to see her weaknesses as she compares herself to the woman who has stolen her husband and whom she idealizes for her beauty. Her utter resignation before the new lovers and her tendency to live their love vicariously suggest yet again the impossibility of knowing love except as an unreachable ideal which others might experience. By elevating their relationship to an image of near perfection, Maria is dispossessed of her dignity, her self-image, her marriage and her hope for the future, as her world crumbles around her. Vircondelet comments on the cyclical nature of despair produced in these characters who fail to find an absolute of love: "Ainsi parti du désespoir, ils reviennent à lui" (22).<sup>11</sup>

Anne Desbaresdes, in *Moderato Cantabile*, is once again a woman who must imitate another couple in order to experience a relationship with a man. In this novel, the wife of an important industrialist acquires a morbid fascination for a "crime passionnel" which she sees committed in a working-class café, far from her respectable bourgeois neighbourhood. Scandalously, she returns day after day to share wine and conversation with a young factory worker who happens to frequent the café, and who happens to be willing to pursue with her the game of discovering, or rather inventing, this couple's motivation for the crime. It is the woman's cry as she was being murdered by her lover that continues to haunt Anne, as well as the fact that after he has killed her the man cannot let go of her body,

obsessed by his desire for this woman who is now dead.

The despair of Anne's materialistic but hollow life, with its empty protocol and meaningless ritual, coupled with a marriage totally devoid of love and communication, drives her to idealize the passion of this couple who have carried their desires to the extreme. Obviously, love lived in ordinary life cannot succeed or bring fulfillment; only a relationship suddenly petrified in death can hope to attain the intensity sought for by Duras' heroines. "Le meurtre est le garant de l'absolu, sa pétrification," remarks Micciollo (43).<sup>12</sup> However, this absolute of love, which has now become a dangerously suicidal goal, proves to be slightly beyond Anne's grasp. In the café, Anne only mimes the behavior of the other woman, while Chauvin, her accomplice in this fatal game of love, can only murmur in the end, "Je voudrais que vous soyez morte," as Anne replies, "C'est fait" (84).<sup>13</sup>

The necessary role which alcohol plays in the lives of Sara, Maria, Anne, and other women in the novels is worth noting because of its relationship to the spiritual void in Duras' own life, as she reveals in *L'Amant*: "L'alcool a rempli la fonction que Dieu n'a pas eue" (15).<sup>14</sup> She develops this idea further in *La vie matérielle*, showing at the same time the futility of this form of substitute:

On manque d'un dieu. Ce vide qu'on découvre un jour d'adolescence rien ne peut faire qu'il n'ait jamais eu lieu. L'alcool a été fait pour supporter le vide de l'univers, le balancement des planètes, leur rotation imperturbable dans l'espace, leur silencieuse indifférence à l'endroit de votre douleur . . . L'alcool ne console en rien, il ne meuble pas les espaces psychologiques de l'individu, il ne remplace que le manque de Dieu. (22)<sup>15</sup>

Writing, for Duras, became another means of escaping the void, as Alette Armel notes in "Marguerite Duras et l'absence de Dieu": "Face à cette difficulté à vivre dans la séparation d'avec les autres hommes, face à ce monde qui court à sa perte dans le silence de Dieu, Marguerite Duras cherche des moyens, des palliatifs, des ersatz permettant d'oublier que <rien ne vaut la peine>: la politique, l'alcool, l'amour, l'écriture" (18).<sup>16</sup> In the absence of absolutes, however, no human activity, no temporary solution could ever fill the inner void.

The painful absence of God which some characters try to alleviate with alcohol can be felt palpably but in a different way in

the life of a woman who is the very essence of self-abnegation, Lol V. Stein: "Elle n'est pas Dieu, elle n'est personne" (*L.V.S.* 47).<sup>17</sup> The deep emotional trauma she experiences after being spectacularly abandoned by her fiancé at a ball serves to push her even farther from hope and self-realization than the others. As her fiancé dances the latter part of the night away with a ravishing "femme fatale," Lol can only stare at them from behind the greenery of the bar, fascinated by the couple formed by her fiancé and this woman. Her cry at the end of the night is not so much of one suffering, but a desire to see them stay, an imperious need to entwine herself with this couple and to live, over and over again, their experience vicariously. Her idolizing of Anne-Marie Stretter brings about the total negation of her own being and a sense that this kind of passionate, fatal love can only exist for an idealized couple, outside of which she, Lol V. Stein, can never find love.

Years later, still replaying the scene of the ball in her secret imagination, Lol manages to reconstruct a similar triangle between two lovers and herself, spying on their hotel window from a field of rye while Jack Hold, the ideal lover, and Tatiana Karl, a new "femme fatale", enact the love scene which Lol imagines she is part of. The idealized moment of passion exists outside of Lol V. Stein, invisibly enacted in a mental space forever impossible to reach, while Lol is infinitely replaced by another woman, her imagined self fused to this perfect being, even at those times when she herself is in the arms of Hold. Her emptiness is increased by the fact that even in her imaginary world where she continues to pursue the ultimate moment of passion, she is unable to bring her fantasies to their desired end. Lol's strange behavior, which would no doubt be characterized as hysterical in Freudian terms, points once again to the absolute of love which the author's heroines endlessly pursue, emptying themselves more and more of any kind of positive identity and sinking deeper and deeper into an abyss of nothingness, "un gouffre de néant."

Duras' female characters who are absorbed by their incessant quest for more than life seems to offer can be divided into two basic categories: those who are spectators to love, looking on from the outside, experiencing vicariously some strange expression of their desire, contrasted with the woman who alone stands apart as an object of desire, totally irresistible to men. Anne-Marie Stretter, in *Le Vice-consul*, seems to be the culmination of the fantasies of all the other



female characters seeking love. The beautiful, seductive, mysterious wife of the French ambassador to India is surrounded by a sophisticated coterie of lovers who think that with her they can find forgetfulness in the midst of India's sea of human misery. For them, the need for God is evidently replaced by this ever-available love-goddess. However, beyond her mask of calm indifference to the world, this solitary, impenetrable woman shows signs of deep suffering, strangely revealed by the occasional tear, even in the presence of the men who adore her:

Je pleure sans raison que je pourrais vous dire, c'est comme une peine qui me traverse, il faut bien que quelqu'un pleure, c'est comme si c'était moi . . . elle donne le sentiment d'être maintenant prisonnière d'une douleur trop ancienne pour être encore pleurée." (198)<sup>18</sup>

Micheline Tison-Braun relates this inner suffering to a spiritual void in the universe, of which Anne-Marie Stretter is more conscious than others: "Elle est consciente, au suprême degré, de l'indifférence cosmique. L'harmonie douloureuse de son être vient du soin qu'elle met à rien attendre, à ne pas lutter" (56).<sup>19</sup> Having renounced the possibility of a committed love, leading a completely relativistic style of life, Anne-Marie Stretter lives in silent despair. The emptiness of her inner being reflects the nothingness of the world around her, the absence of God and of a personal unconditional love. Hélène Cixous describes best the lack of absolutes in Stretter's life and its effect on the men around her, by stating, "ils tiennent à elle et elle ne tient à rien. Et par elle, ils touchent à la mort" (19).<sup>20</sup> She adds, "C'est ça, le désespoir: tu passes par l'amour et tu tombes dans la mort" (19).<sup>21</sup> The novel suggests that one day Anne-Marie Stretter will be found dead with her preferred lover, Michael Richard, "pour rien, par indifférence à la vie" (152).<sup>22</sup>

Juxtaposed with this fatal beauty who has everything, the novel introduces us to a beggar-woman of Calcutta who is totally dispossessed, both physically and mentally. The spiritual and moral bankruptcy of Anne-Marie Stretter, which parallels the condition of this deprived woman, appears even more devastating by comparison, because possessing everything, she has nothing. "Vanité d'Anne-Marie Stretter" (202) declares the narrator at the end. Being the

incarnation of the ideal imagined by the other women in the novels of Duras, she underscores the futility of their search for meaningful love. Her relentlessly nihilistic philosophy of life forever prevents her from discovering the Author of love she so desperately needs and longs for.

Duras' most autobiographical novel, *L'Amant*, combines the two types of female characters we have been discussing, while providing a key to many of the other novels. Duras, the child-lover here, bears a striking resemblance to the aging but ageless Anne-Marie Stretter, in that they both choose relationships pared down to nothing but desire, while their lovers prove to be desperately attached to them. The adolescent in *L'Amant* seeks to initiate herself into the mysteries of physical love with her Chinese lover, through whom she gains an acute awareness of her sexual identity and the power she can hold over men. Although he declares his love to her, she begs of him to treat her like he would any other woman he had brought into his bachelor's suite. The willful penchant for pleasure which is awakened in her is more than counterbalanced by the overwhelming sadness of the physical experience with no commitment and no love on her part. The fact that the man knows his wealthy father would never allow marriage to this poor white girl, considered essentially a prostitute, provides an element of interdiction and infinite sorrow which has become the token of Duras' love relationships.

At the same time as she is discovering what it is to be a woman with this man, the adolescent Duras reveals her strong tendency toward self-negation, as she imagines herself replaced in the arms of her lover by Hélène Lagonelle, a student in her boarding school whose physical attributes allure her because they seem more desirable than her own. As in previous novels, we find that the place of love-making becomes in reality the place of death, with Duras tying her experiences with the lover to an obsession with death and dying, with fantasies of self-effacement, and a view of her future as being nothing but a desert. A feeling of inconsolable sadness invades not only the characters but also the reader, as we penetrate the life of this fifteen-and-a-half year-old girl who already does not believe in love and who describes the death of the soul to us in the way we would expect a deluded older woman to do, perhaps Duras herself.

The attraction of this bitter-sweet story, and one of the reasons for its popularity, I believe, is the suggestion, at the end, of an absolute

which transcends time and space, despite the apparent meaninglessness or absence of a spiritual dimension in the relationship. The unflinching love declared in the end by the lover, after years of separation between the young Duras and himself, and in spite of his marriage to another woman, elevates this carnal relationship to the level of an absolute, with even memories of a purely physical love having the power to haunt and remain unchanged through time. In the phone call which comes as it were out of the blue at the end of the novel, to a mature, far-removed Duras, the words of her first lover suddenly and uncharacteristically evoke the real longings which penetrate her life and work:

Il était intimidé, il avait peur comme avant... Et puis il le lui avait dit. Il lui avait dit que c'était comme avant, qu'il l'aimait encore, qu'il ne pourrait jamais cesser de l'aimer, qu'il l'aimerait jusqu'à sa mort. (*L'Amant*, 142)<sup>23</sup>

Like the biblical Hosea, who was told to love an adulterous woman as a symbol of God's faithfulness, this man remains true to his love for Duras, even though he realizes from the start that she is destined to be promiscuous, as he tells her after their first encounter.

The heart-wrenching side of the story is that even though, in this novel, Duras comes closest to producing an absolute of love which resembles the eternal, it is nonetheless the inversion of a spiritual love, totally undermined by the author's refusal to acknowledge transcendence, as well as the inherent impossibility of this love to be lived out in real life. Separation has proven to be in fact, essential, in preventing the disintegration of the lover's feelings. As in all of Duras' novels, love is only attainable in its absence; reality contaminates and destroys both passion and any deeper aspirations of the heart. Of course, these more spiritual aspirations are not explored as such, we must conclude, for some form of desire is all that can be pursued by the unfulfilled characters of this bleak, material world. As the writer of the biblical Proverbs declares, in words which capture the essence of these characters' pursuits, "There is a way which seems right to a man [or a woman], but its end is the way of death" (Proverbs 16:25). Duras' seemingly endless search for that which surpasses the human plane ends in the culmination of what she has sown, namely death, wrapped in the seductive cloak of sexual desire.

And yet, the world of transient relationships, devoid of spirituality, is not Duras' ultimate goal, as this study has shown, and as Danielle Bajomée so aptly expresses in "Duras et le désir d'éternité": "C'est que, pour Duras, l'ici n'est pas notre véritable demeure. Textes et films ne cessent d'appeler, de rappeler cette quête de l'inapprochable, de l'incernable lieu." (271)<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, as Bajomée's words also imply, the sought for place of perfection, the contact with the Eternal, is never attained, even though it continues to beckon like an almost invisible light trying to shine in the darkness. In the end, we can only hope that some spark of Duras' true quest for the spiritual, for inner transformation and transcendent love, will rise from the ashes of negation, kindling in her readers and admirers the desire to continue the search.

## NOTES

(All translations from the French are mine)

<sup>1</sup>"A world where there is no value beyond the individual, no god, no country, no family, no absolute truth, no society. It is a universe which continues to exist, but otherwise; no transcendence, no value, no virtue" (46).

<sup>2</sup>"This woman who lives by relative values aspires to an absolute. And for her, there is only one absolute: that of love. Only love, lived in its totality, can bring about a fullness and complete realization of one's being" (31).

<sup>3</sup>"Pointing out the existence of a spiritual dimension which is an integral part of reality seemed to me all the more necessary because the present, materialistic climate in no way encourages us to take it into account" (11).

<sup>4</sup>"The distancing of God from our world, the extraordinary absence of all transcendence, the inconsistency henceforth of our beings, is that which illumines and orients Duras' writing. It's not a question of interrogating Duras' work in relation to the themes of salvation and redemption, of looking for Christian motifs in her writings, that would be to misunderstand her. The sacred, such as it

is reactivated in her work, is only that by dint of its abandonment, its deliberately absent trace" (221).

<sup>5</sup>"Sexuality is the pivot. She leaves far behind the image of spirituality. The act of making love has become central" (18).

<sup>6</sup>"I was nobody; I had no name or face. In living out the month of August, I was: nothing" (72).

<sup>7</sup> "You are staring the sea in the eyes for the first time. You know with a single glance. She wants you right away, roaring with desire. She is your own death, your old guardian" (145).

<sup>8</sup>"the inverse of "material life", it is the negative of the earth, nothingness incarnated, the infinite rendered sensible to our perceptions. Reflection of the sky ['ciel' can also be translated 'heaven'] on earth, the sea here is the essential vehicle of spirituality . . ." (255).

<sup>9</sup> "The ocean spits out its life force in the birthing of the foam. I have sojourned in the hot and muddy halls of the earth which spewed me out of its depths. And here I am. One arrives at the surface....I'm a flower. Every part of my body has exploded with the strength of the day; my fingers are bursting from the palms of my hands, my legs from my stomach, as is my head right up to the ends of my hair. I feel a proud weariness in being born, in having come to the end of this birth. Before me, there was nothing in my place. Now, there is me in the place of nothing." (V.T. 143)

<sup>10</sup> "I wish that summer were as perfect in me as it is on the outside, that I could forget about always waiting. But there is no summer of the soul. You see the one that goes by while you stay in your own winter" (179).

<sup>11</sup> "Thus, having set out from despair, they return to it" (22).

<sup>12</sup> "Murder is the guarantee of the absolute, its petrification" (43).

<sup>13</sup> "I wish you were dead." / "It's done." (84).

<sup>14</sup>“Alcohol filled the function that God didn’t have” (15).

<sup>15</sup>“We are lacking a god. This void that we discover one day in our teens, nothing can prevent it from occurring. Alcohol has been created so that we can cope with the emptiness in the universe, the motion of the planets, their imperturbable rotation in space, their silent indifference toward our pain....Alcohol consoles nothing, it doesn’t fill the empty psychological spaces in the individual, it only replaces the absence of God” (22).

<sup>16</sup>“Faced with the difficulty of living separated from other men, faced with a world that is rushing toward its destruction while God remains silent, Marguerite Duras seeks means, palliatives, ersatz, which will help her forget that “nothing is worth it”: politics, alcohol, love, writing” (18).

<sup>17</sup>“She is not God, she is nobody” (L.V.S. 47)

<sup>18</sup>“I weep without any reason I could tell you, it’s like a hurt passing through me; somebody needs to cry, it’s as if it were me....she gives the impression now of being prisoner to a sorrow too ancient still to be grieved for” (198).

<sup>19</sup> “She is conscious, to the ultimate degree, of cosmic indifference. The painful harmony of her being comes from the care she takes to wait for nothing, to not struggle” (56).

<sup>20</sup>“They cling to her and she clings to nothing. And through her, they touch death” (19).

<sup>21</sup>“That’s despair: through the experience of love, you fall into death” (19).

<sup>22</sup>“For no reason except indifference to life” (152).

<sup>23</sup>“He was intimidated, afraid like before...And then he told her. He told her that it was like before, that he still loved her, that he could never stop loving her, that he would love her till death” (*L’Amant*, 142).

<sup>24</sup> "For Duras, here is not our true dwelling place. Texts and films never cease to call for, to recall, this quest for the unapproachable, the undefinable place" (271).

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