

October Seminar 2019
NIDA LACAN STUDY AND READING GROUP

Date: Wednesday 30 October 2019

Time: 6-8 pm

Location: Tutorial Room, No.3, NIDA, 215 Anzac Parade

Duras and the Poetics of Writing Feminine Desire in *The Lover*

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S'vére savoir sans moi ce que J'enseigne.
J. Lacan: "Homage to Duras"

Marguerite Duras, the French novelist, playwright and film maker is a towering figure of the late twentieth-century French feminist literature who was justly glorified by Cixous as the *grand dame of écriture féminine*. Her text constructs a visual and imaginary staging that integrally mirrors a hypertrophy of the unconscious fantasies, desire, and a *jouissance* grounded in body. Owing to its analogous structure, Marguerite Duras' fiction offers a potential for building a psychoanalytic recontextualization and interpretation. The significance of Duras have to be sought in her sustained engagement with the formalization of feminine mode of writing in a free language, initially in an attempt to move beyond the preordained tradition of phallogocentric exposition of a woman and her desire. With the publication of *The Lover (L'Amant)*, a 132-pages novel (in English translation) in 1984, Duras entered the World literary centerstage. In *The Lover* (the winner of the French *Prix Concourt*), Duras can be said to have built a solid foundation for the much sought-after truth of feminine desire in all its complexities and minutiae. To understand the theory and praxis of feminine writing one must come to know about Duras and engage with her fiction. This essay deals with this dominant trend of writing feminine desire in *The Lover*. I wish to investigate how does Duras shape and articulate the inarticulable desire and *jouissance* in the texture of her fiction. I argue that Lacan's theory of writing especially after engaging with Joyce in the 1970s is coextensive with the French feminists understanding of feminine writing. Both models of theories emerged in Paris at the same time. I wish also to examine a transposition of Lacanian interests into the field of writing that is best exemplified by Duras' works. I would also like to demonstration how Lacan's theory of sexuation extends the scope of feminine desire beyond the grasp of the feminist thinkers.

The first thing that strikes us in reading the inaugural paragraphs of *The Lover* is a merger of the first-person, *I*, the third person, *She*, fractured narrative, a non-chronological sense of time, and a playful setting. Similarly, Duras undermines the age-old *tenet* in writing fiction—don't tell, show it— even when re-counting the eventual madness of her mother. This method helps Duras to

create ocular images to be seen by the readers. In her golden days, Duras (the protagonist/narrator) goes back into her memories of distant past and dig out a treasured memory fragment from her teen years about her love affair with a Chinese rich man. The memory of this romance has been ensconced as an indelible image in her unconscious, which is endlessly erupting across short paragraphs of the entire novel. In the meantime, this event is the central theme upon which the novel is structured.

I often think of the image only I can see now, and of which I've never spoken. It's always there, in the same silence, amazing. It's the only image of my-self I like, the only one in which I recognize myself, in which I delight. (TL: 7)

In the second paragraph of the novel, the author pronounces the articulation of her writing style, which has to be perceived as the blazing bravura of feminine writing in French literature. Such boldness of performance in writing that Duras masters tends to be free from determination and purposiveness, which sustains itself powerfully outside the conscious control. In other words, Duras shows the eruption of feminine desire as auto-writing, which flow forcibly from the depths of the unconscious like *qi*—the stream of life-force in Chinese philosophy. Duras makes this plain when she speaks about her relation to writing, “I have never written when I thought I was writing, I have never loved when I thought I loved, I have never done anything but wait before the closed door,” (Duras cited in Cohen, 1993, 101). As she writes at the outset of the novel, the memory traces always sustain themselves as images, not as words, phrases or sentences in the unconscious. The primary image, “a ferry crossing the Mekong river,” (TL: 8) is that unequivocal image that is tied up with a vast unconscious pool of eroticism, paranoia, and solitude with no center or frontiers. This ferry crossing the bridge is the material trace of the moment of transformation in the life of the protagonist that she loves as the delight of her amorous recollection. For Duras, writing comes forth from a silence and ends in ‘void’ that evoke the site of enduring loss and lack, and fundamental splitting of self, and emptiness from which an insatiable desire arises. Duras suggests that if writing fails to accommodate this chaotic frame, or sustains within itself barriers and moral concerns, it is reduced to an advertisement. Such barriers force writing to hide somewhere in order to be read. This is the first incessant impression that novel gives us on the enigmas of *feminine writing* and the writing of *feminine desire*. As such, Duras endeavors to shift the focus of novelistic parody of life into an investigation and unmasking of life as it flows beyond the exterior manifestation of the deceptive ego. It is worth citing here how this is discerned by Duras so admirably.

The story of my life doesn't exist. Does not exist. There's never any center to it. No path, no line. There are great spaces... Writing, for those people, was still something moral. Nowadays it often seems writing is nothing at all. Sometimes I realize that if writing isn't, all things, all contraries confounded, a quest for vanity and void, it's nothing. That if it's not, each time, all things confounded into one through some inexpressible essence, then writing is nothing but advertisement. But usually I have no opinion, I can see that all options are open now, that there seem to be no more barriers, that writing seems at a loss for somewhere to hide, to be written, to be read. (TL: 11-12)

The theory of writing and writing as theory of which Duras' text is an inevitable part emerges with the proliferation of a set of theories in literary studies and other disciplines across humanities in France. Lacan's theories of gender differences and writing greatly influenced feminist writing in the post-war years. Lacan repeatedly makes attempt in his late works to provide consistent but theories of writing, feminine sexuality, and feminine desire, feminine *jouissance* and so on. *The Seminar XX*, for example develops a theory of writing which defines writing as a collection of traces that the effect of language produces, “Writing is thus a trace in

which an effect of language can be read (*se liti*). That is what happens when you scribble something,” (Lacan, 1999, 121). What is the effect of language? The language brings the lack as its irreducible symptom, as the absence and “break in being,” (Ibid, 120), and the loss of (the primordial object), located in the space of the Other, in the symbolic order. These breakages in knowledge or in being are already written up, “that solitude, as break in knowledge, not only can be written but it is that which is written par excellence, for it is that which leaves a trace of a break in being,” (Ibid). Something which is written is those unconscious knots that cannot be written but can be erupted through writing as the effect of language. The fiction of Duras writing represents an unequivocal prototype of such writing. This power makes her fiction more and more feminine in which the flesh and text are permeable. Duras was well aware of this distinction in her writing even in her earlier fiction, dramas and films. She has repeatedly stated that *The Lover* has been an autobiographical novel, which make her text typically feminine since it catalogues her own experiences.

The novel is set in Sadec, an area close to Saigon, part of former French Southern Indochina, where the author was borne and brought up. She tells the story of her close family, a hysteric mother and two brothers, the elder brother was by all counts a *déclassé*, sadistic, and criminal with whom the protagonist sustained an unconscious incestuous bondage. The elder brother terrorized her younger brother who was killed by this fear. The paranoiac sister who was afraid of death at darkness of nights shows extreme jealousy vis-à-vis her mother over her preference for her elder brother defined as the object of the mother’s love’. Part of her troubled relationship with her mother seems to be contingent over this rivalry. Her younger brother was fragile, naïve and innocent. The protagonist, a French teenage girl is locked up in a passionate love affair with a 27-year-old Chinese opulent man. The members of the dysfunctional lived in an utter poverty. Sometimes, they were forced to eat ‘garbage, stork and cooked baby-crocodiles. The fear of darkness comes to her from her mother. Her mother epiphanically knew about the death of her sick husband who lived in France several nights before the arrival of a telegram about the news of his death. She saw his apparition at a terrible night when she was haunted by the death of her husband.

...she finally gives up her careless to-ing and fro-ing, that I see the madness clearly for the first time. I see my mother is clearly mad. (TL: 34

There he is, standing by the table in the big octagonal drawing-room. Looking at her. I remember a shriek, a call. She woke us up, told us what had happened, how he was dressed. (36)

Beside the image of ferry on the river the second image that has a metaphorical presence in the novel is the protagonist’s own narcissistic love with her own body image. She is wearing high-heel shoes, but what makes her extraordinary, is her wearing of a man’s hat, “the crucial ambiguity of the image,” (TL: 16). She loves the flat-brimmed hat so much for it is a sign that “makes her whole,” (Ibid). The hat is also a major symbol of feminist representation in the novel. In a parody of Lacanian viewpoint, Duras associates the protagonist with the emblematic hat in order to make her look ‘whole’ in the symbolic order by a masculine marker. At home front also Duras portrays the narrator deprived and despised as a result of the dominant familial patriarchy. She is subjected to a harsh treatment by her mother in comparison to her brothers.

The first encounter with the ‘elegant’ Chinese financier was simple and easy, when she allowed him to drive her in his black limousine to boarding school. But the first day when she gets in the car, her mind is invaded by a fog of anxiety: “A barely discernible distress suddenly seize her, a weariness, the light over the river dims, but only slightly. Everywhere, too, there’s a very slight

deafness, or fog,” (TL: 37-38). Still, her obstinacy in every of her sexual encounter with the Chinese man simply put, speaks of the force of her full-blown unconscious fantasy which recurs throughout the novel.

That’s how I came to be here with you...I weep. He lays his head on me and weeps to see me weep...we couldn’t possibly have any future in common, so we’d never speak of the future...it’s taken for granted I don’t love him, that I’m with him for the money, that I can’t love him, it’s impossible,” (TL: 49-55).

In *Seminar V: Formations of the Unconscious*, Lacan argues that unconscious fantasy is ‘dominated’ and ‘structured’ by the playful organization of the signifiers not by the articulation of the conscious imagination of the author.

It’s absolutely impossible to distinguish, in any valid way, unconscious fantasies from this formal creation that is the play of imagination, if we do not see that unconscious fantasy is already dominated and structured by the state of the signifier. (Lacan, 2017, 236)

From this perspective it seems that Duras is attentive to chronicle tense, tantalizing, and unspoken intersubjective exchanges between her characters. Her brothers would not speak to the protagonist’s Chinese lover but all gorging when he would invite the family for dinners at exorbitant restaurants. The girl gracefully read the mind of her interlocuter and manipulates moments in conversation that she traces out in her lover’s thinking. She draws conclusions from these discursive elements to turn things to her own advantage: “because of his ignorance she suddenly knows: she was attracted to him already on the ferry,” (TL: 41); “I look at him. He looks back, apologizes, proudly. I’m a Chinese. We smile at each other. I ask him if it’s usual to be sad, as we are,” (TL:48)

The small family of four, the girl, two brothers and nauseating mother shared their miserable life in a colony where the colonizer seems to be more desperate and wretched than the native people of the colony. No one ever sent letters back home a family member was away. There was only one letter that sent to the girl by her younger brother in ten years when he was on travelling. No celebration nor a Christmas tree ever was seen in their house. The protagonist’s mother had bouts of violent rage and madness. Every day they dreamt of destroying one another, “my elder brother will always be a murderer. My younger brother will die because of him. As for me, I left, tore myself away. Until she died my elder brother had her to himself...My mother has attacks during which she falls on me, locks me up in my room, punches me, slaps me, undress me, comes up to me and smells my body, my underwear, says she can smell the Chinese’s scent,” (TL: 61-62). Her elder brother would listen all this and encouraged her to do more of this.

Not only do we not talk to one another. When you’re being looked at you can’t look. To look is to feel curious, to be interested, to lower yourself. No one you look at is worth it. Looking is always demeaning. (TL: 59)

That feminine writing is itself puzzling phenomenon is obvious. A great deal of Duras’ art is related by her depiction of the perplexity and vicissitude of feminine desire that Lacan’s theories ground feminine desire in the original trauma of a permanent loss and lack. In *Seminar XX*, Lacan outlines feminine desire intrinsically ambiguous due to its polymorphous structure. In this, Lacan’s theory is characteristically distinctive from Freudian misogynistic predilections. He locates feminine desire outside anatomical and biological imperatives. The space of feminine desire is open to members of either gender. In his famous diagram of sexuation, Lacan defines feminine position as that which places a subject in a dual relationship with the Other and the

phallus. As such, the feminine position has a double detour, which connects the feminine position easily to the signifier of the lack in the Other $S(\mathbb{A})$, and to the object of the subject's desire as both object a and the phallus—the signifier of masculine desire Φ . Moreover, desire and love converge in feminine desire on the one and the same object, which gives rise to frigidity in women. The feminine frigidity according to Lacan is correlated with the castration complex, and with the imaginary identification with the phallus.

Woman has a relation with $S(\mathbb{A})$, and it is already in that respect that she is doubled, that she is not-whole, since she can also have a relation with Φ .

I designate Φ as the phallus insofar as I indicate that it is the signifier that has no signified, the one that is based, in the case of man, on phallic jouissance. (Lacan, 1999, 81)

By emphasizing a high ground of femininity, Lacan suggests in the above seminar that the feminine *jouissance* is a domineering surplus of enjoyment. Feminine jouissance and desire have a common border with melancholy the real, as Lacan states, “it’s clear that the jouissance of the real includes masochism...Masochism is the main share of the jouissance endured by the real,” (Lacan, 2016, 63). The opacity and indefinability of feminine desire and jouissance have always been reflected in literature and art in terms of hysteria, bisexuality, and perversity, in which the demands of drives occupy the place of desire. Feminine desire is uncontrollable, fluid, melancholic, ecstatic, and always centered within multiple zones of the body and beyond. Other component of the lack of the signifier for femininity is inscribed in the unconscious which is synonymous with negativity, for a woman isn’t marked by the phallus like a man. In other words, a woman is inscribed “not by what she is but by what she isn’t...In the unconscious the difference between femininity and masculinity is always assimilated to the difference between passivity and activity,” (Safouan, 2004, 49).

Furthermore, we also know that desire by definition doesn’t have a specific object and it arises from the lack of being as a result of the effect of the signifier. This object is always a semblance of something as the objects in fetishism. The object of desire can be spoken of metaphorically. The lack of being cannot be attained except by the metonymy of desire which is in fact the metonymy of being. This is what happen in *The Lover*, as hinted above, the demand of the drives takes hold of desire and as such the drives always underwrite the unsatisfied desire. If the protagonist was able to love the Chinese man, it would give the impression of an indefinable satisfaction. That is why she doesn’t demand what she desire—the Chinese man. In other words, keeping desire unsatisfied defines the metonymic nature of desire.

Duras in *The Lover* writes a comprehensive landscape of feminine desire and its complex unconscious matrix. Like a piece of patchwork, the novel illustrates insatiable desiring feminine subject, fractured by hysteria, imprudence, violent revulsions, lesbianism, incest, melancholia, despair, and death wish. With despair and suffering, she is enjoying the status of being objectless subject, for desire by definition means the absence and dispossession of a specific object, except a paradoxical and invisible object that causes it. Perversion and bisexuality bring about the possibility of an objectless love or love with a plethora of objects, as Dura writes, “One can dream of a love without an object,” (Duras, 1999, 402). The protagonist is always at the threshold of an abstruse demand, as she confesses that her love is just for money with the Chinese man, but in the meantime, this typical obsessive love destabilizes her at the core of her subjectivity. The pleasure-seeking drive in her is punctuated with intermittent bouts of suffering, which itself is the source of her unconscious enjoyment. “The suffering is her sex, the high point of her eroticism...Such suffering expresses an impossible pleasure; it is the heartrending

sign of frigidity. Holding back a passion that could not flow, suffering is nevertheless and more profoundly so the prison where mourning is locked in,” (Kristeva, 1989, 239-240).

I don't dance with my elder brother, I've never danced with him. I was always held back by a sense of danger, of the sinister attraction he exerted on everyone, a disturbing sense of the nearness of our bodies. (*TL*: 58)

Suffering while desiring is a unique feature of feminine desire, which appears as the recreation of this repressed desire on the consciousness of a speaking subject. The repressed desire always tries to go beyond the boundaries of repression. Thus, the despondent consciousness allows to procure *jouissance* and a sense of wholeness for the female subject. Even perversity, especially incest and a sexual pleasure on the verge of death revealed by Duras is part of feminine *jouissance*. Should we understand this despondent consciousness what Kristeva calls, 'delirium' that which manifest the arrival of the death drive, “a discourse which has supposedly strayed from the presumed reality...delirium, would disintegrate rapidly into a symptom, indeed, into the unleashing of the death drive,” (Kristeva, 1986, 307-308).

By showing complex mother-daughter relationship in the novel, Duras transcribes the unconscious fantasy for staging feminine desire. The protagonist portrays her mother as her potential rival that Lacan describes as a loveless and devouring mother. In the meantime, after her mother's death she identifies with her mother.

When I'm on the Mekong ferry, the day of the black limousine, my mother hasn't yet given up the concession with the dyke. Every so often, still, we make the journey, at night, as before, still all three of us, to spend a few days there. We stay on the verandah of the bungalow, facing the mountain of Siam. Then we go home again. (*TL*: 29)

In the middle of the novel, the protagonist's mother dies, and Kristeva read this as a crucial juncture in the mother-daughter relationship. By this death, the daughter wants to occupy her mother position and her madness in the novel.

Destroy, the narrating daughter in *The Lover* seems to say, but in erasing the mother's image she simultaneously takes her place. The daughter acts as a substitute for maternal madness; rather than killing her mother she continues her through the negative hallucination of an always faithfully loving identification. (Kristeva, 1989, 243)

Duras presents on occasions, feminine desire in terms of intersubjective and unconditional demands of the drives. The narrating protagonist for example, extends her desire by controlling the pleasure of her lover. She is in the middle of her unconscious fantasy whereby she is at once the object of her lover's desire and the subject, where her lover is also an object of her desire. In other words, she enjoys the other body while lending her own body to be the *jouissance* of the other body. She wants her lover to weep with her and feel the pain that she is feeling, “It was as if he loved the pain, loved it as he'd loved me, intensely, unto death perhaps,” (*TL*: 116). It doesn't stay there, as it was stated above, she goes further to experience bisexuality, incestuous, in her unconscious fantasy. She is enjoying together with her lover, “Everything chimed with his desire and made him possess me I'd become his child.” (*TL*: 106). As such, Duras extends control of two bodies and additional bodies in order to achieve the excessive and boundless feminine *jouissance*. As such, she outspreads her body to other bodies. Duras takes a further step from Irigaray who considered the entire feminine body as the site of pleasure for a feminine subject. Duras *jouissance* is thus related to rhizomatic network of multiple bodies.

She feels pleasure just about everywhere. Without even mentioning the hysterization of her whole body, the geography of her pleasure is much more diversified, multiple in its differences, complex, subtle, than is imagined. (Irigaray cited in Selous, 1988, 56)

However, nothing is enough to fill the gaps and the emptiness of her inner self. This fundamental emptiness, according to Kristeva, denotes the splitting of the being of a desiring feminine subject, as she writes, “such a splitting is experienced as the emptiness of a boredom that would be insuperable if it emerged at the very site of subjective division.” (Kristeva, 1989, 243)

Two decades before the publication of *The Lover*, Lacan found out vivid examples of the illustration of the unconscious in Duras’ text. He published his brief review “Homage to Marguerite Duras,” on Duras’s most accomplished novel *The Ravishing of Lol V. Stein*, in 1965. The most important point in Lacan’s review has been his assertion that how this book reveals that literature precedes in knowing psychoanalysis without psychoanalysis. He writes, “this is precisely the case in *The Ravishing of Lol V. Stein*, where it turns out that Marguerite Duras knows without me, what I teach” (Lacan, cited in Rabaté, 2001, 116). Lacan read Duras’ novel as a testimonial to desire, suffering, the object, and unknowable feminine *jouissance*. In a literary text. This novel unfolds a passionate feminine desire and its melancholic effect, like most of Duras’ writings and films. Lacan’s interest falls on a series of repeated scopic episodes in the novel. This is mainly because the scopic field in his theory is an unconscious field of desire in which scopic drives come into play. In this review “Lacan opened the door to a new theory of the relation between art and the artist as well as between a text and the reader, by stating that the unconscious is not entirely repressed or hidden, but operates and functions in the text,” (Ragland, 2012, 228).

Lacan concludes that the gaze belongs to the locus of the Other, and its starting point, what Lacan calls the life of the subject, remains between two deaths, one where he enters into the symbolic order and the other, the natural physical death. With this, Lacan arrives at a crucial point where it can be said of Duras’ characters that they are all “gravitating” around the locus of the Other. In Duras’ text, the re-enactment of the primary separation takes place but usually within a scopic field that always deciphered as a cinematographic quality of her text. Moreover, the scopic field of the Other is the place around which the eyes of a voyeur or the feet of a dancer circle. Lacan saw in Duras’ novel a historical evolution of the novel that replaced courtly love with “[a] mere fictional account, and then to cover up the losses incurred—losses parried by the convention of courtly love—as it developed into the novel of marital promiscuity” (Lacan, cited in Rabaté, 2001, 128).

In Duras’ text, desire is often encountering with a demand for divided being and a will to *jouissance* through the unconscious fantasy in practice. I mean by in practice, the staging of sexual acts that leads to a desire for *jouissance* for, according to Lacan, “You derive *jouissance* from your fantasy,” (Lacan, 2018, 97). The arrival of *jouissance* in *The Lover* turns over desire which as hinted above, “is defined as equivalent, if not so a will, at least to an aim of *jouissance* [*une visée de jouissance*],” (Soler, 2002, 106) this is also a *jouissance* that “which eliminates,” the lack of being,” (Miller, 2000, 26). The feminine *jouissance* is independent from man and his desire as Lacan states, “in what constitutes feminine *jouissance* insofar as it is not wholly occupied with men, and even insofar, I will say it is not, as such, at all occupied with him.” (Lacan, 1999, 87). However, a *jouissance* in the novel also necessitates a slide into suffering, pain, horror, and death which all represent a masochistic position that constitute femininity in relation to lack and desire. Feminine masochism in Duras’ text brings up the unconscious death drive into play in the text which is a direct path to *jouissance*, as Lacan argues, “for the path toward death—this is what is at

issue, it's a discourse about masochism—the path toward death is nothing other than what is called *jouissance*. (Lacan, 2007, 18)

The wild love I feel for him remains an unfathomable mystery to me. I don't know why I loved him so much as to want to die of his death. (*TL*: 112)

And, weeping, he makes love. At first, pain. And then the pain is possessed in its turn, changed, slowly drawn away, borne towards pleasure clasped to it. (*TL*: 42)

And now once more they are caught together again, locked together in terror, and now the terror abates again, and now they succumb to it again, amid tears, despair and happiness. (*TL*: 107)

Duras simply means that a writing could be worthy of calling feminine when it is arising from the unconscious and derived and controlled by the unconscious drives via the body, as she once wrote, "We must move on to the rhetoric of women, one that is anchored in the organism, in the body," (Duras, 1986b, 238). Perhaps this modality of writing makes a feminine voice the most paradoxical in literature. This was discovered by Kristeva and other French feminist theorist who have emphasized that femininity can never fully be defined for being incompatible with the network of phallogocentric symbolic order and language. It is impossible for woman to write her desire in a language which "replete" words (*morts pleins*) belongs to man," Unable to verbalize her unconscious in language a feminine would need to be hysterically fractured in order to "make audible that which agitates within us, suffers silently in the *holes of discourse*, in the unsaid, or in the non-sense," thus, "...because the aspect of feminine writing which is the most difficult to verbalize because it becomes compromised, rationalized, masculinized as it explain itself," (Gauthier, 1986, 163-164).

I think "feminine literature" is an organic, translated from blackness, from darkness. Women have been in darkness for centuries... The writing of women is really translated from the unknown, like a new way of communicating rather than an already formed language. But to achieve that, we have to get away from plagiarism. (Duras, 1986, 174)

In conclusion, Duras writing bears evidence that feminine writing is inextricable from pulses of body, feminine unconscious, desire, and feminine *jouissance*. The body knows to enjoy itself but Duras pushes the body in her discourse to its limit when she is rigorously trying to extend her body's *jouissance* to other bodies in a way that she engages the others and their bodies in her own unconscious fantasy. By taking control over the fantasy she touches and enters the other unconscious. The experience of the *jouissance* in her writing is felt between the lines of her images that functions as signifiers. in the space of *jouissance* border with the horror, death. This *jouissance* beyond the phallus that women re able to experience only knows that it is an experience. In other words, the substance of such a prodigious and oceanic *jouissance* is inscribed in the feminine body. In Duras' text, the body, the unconscious and writing are conjoined for the production of feminine *jouissance*. In this way as Lacan proffered in relation to the obsessional neurosis, the insistence of the unconscious, autoerotic body and drives come into a dynamic play. As such in Duras' text as Guathier suggests, "the writing changes to incorporate silence and the circulation of a specifically feminine pleasure and desire," (Sellers, 1991,126). Thus, the fate of feminine writing is connected with the unconscious, the real, the signifier, and corporeal drives. Moreover, this writing presents the written of the real and the unconscious. What is presented as written in this writing is already written as the effect of the unconscious which is related to the binding of the subject to its constituting signifier, desire that underwrite the *jouissance* in writing, "it is the signifier in its material aspect (its being 'in-isolation') that

provides this written, material ground to meaning,” (Eyers, 2012, 57). The enclosure of this written is what Lacan experienced in his own writing and traced out in writing by Joyce, Philip Sollers, Duras, and others in the late phase of his teaching. Lacan relates this quality of writing responsible for the unreadability of this writing as well. In other words, writing the unconscious implies that this writing present what is written which is the effect of the unconscious in language. This effect is the effect that the Saussurean bar between the Signifier and the Signified. This bar is the effect of the unconscious in language that produces its traces in writing, as Lacan emphasizes in the *Seminar XX*, “The bar, like everything involving what is written, is based only on the following—what is written is not to be understood. ... That is why you are not obliged to understand my writing,” (Lacan, 1999, 34). This is the reason why Lacan chose to mathematically formalize of the real in his theories like the unconscious written such as *a*, *S*, *s*, *Œ*, and so on. The inclusion of the real gives privilege to the practice of writing that through its artifice restores the knots of the registers, Symbolic, Imaginary, and the Real—Borromean knot. Lacanian enigmatic real is always an erasure that reveal a hole in itself, as Lacan says, “indeed, the real does lie, the real entails the hole that subsists within it,” (Lacan, 2016, 26).

More specifically, in Duras’ fiction, desire always finds itself in the text in the gnawing disruption and fragmentation of language that signify the subversion of the subject and the split of being. The fragmentation is resulted by the perseverance of the loss in language, “in a sense, desire is temporarily resolved into narration, but in a language, which seeks undo itself into its constitutive desire, but in a language, which returns to reenact the loss that afflicts every such linguistic effort.” (Butler, 1995, 382). Duras solution for the return of the primordial loss by reproduction of the unconscious fantasy beyond the phallogocentric orthodoxy that perpetually returns upon itself from the beginning to the end of the novel. This is symbolically illustrated by the final sentence of the novel that serves as predicate to the subject—the rich Chinese man—at the beginning of the novel.

I am worn out with desire,” (*TL*:79)

He could never stop loving her, that he’d love her until death. (*TL*: 123)

This is what Lacan calls towards the end of *Seminar- V: Formations of the Unconscious*, the acting out of the unconscious desire in literature demarcated by “an active repetition, for this is to drown it in compulsion to repeat,” (Lacan, 2017, 397-398). Lacan suggests this in response to an influential essay by Phillis Greenacre, “General Problems of Acting Out”. Such a textual inscription of desire turns Duras’s novel to an inside story of psychoanalysis, for her writing as it was explored here, gives way to the incessant voice of the unconscious and the excesses of the libidinal economy of feminine body. The dynamics behind this literary acting out is the discharges that unconsciously provides the alleviation of inner traumas as envisioned by Greenacre in his essay and endorse by Lacan. Conclusively, writing represents an exalted position of signifying practice in later Lacan, for through this medium we are recreating ourselves as a compensation for our forfeiture of fragmentation by language. In his account, historically speaking, with the invention of writing “we entered the real, that is, that we stopped imagining,” (Lacan, 2016, 54). As it was unraveled in this essay, late Lacan’s theory of femininity in terms of her desire, fantasy, unconscious, and *jouissance* allies itself with the theory of feminine writing put forward by French feminists, such as Irigaray, Cixous, and Kristeva, despite their occasional criticism of Lacan. Duras’ novel put all these on display by weaving the living body with her writing.

P.S.

A conversation was held between Michell Foucault and Hélèn Cixous *À propos de Marguerite Duras* in 1975, which provides us with a host of stirring insights into Marguerite Duras' art and practice as a writer. Both thinkers agree with the powerful effect of reading Duras' fiction. Cixous goes further by insisting that Duras' writing touches and captivates the reader. I present here an anecdotal rewording of this conversation:

Foucault: With Duras the memory is all what it is but a memory with no recollection.

Cixous: I put up a resistance while reading Duras because I don't accept the position she puts me in. There is an implication of her gaze that you call it memory without recollection. There is always a loss in her works, the loss that never stops. The memory only can be re-claimed if you take a journey back into the distant past. What we get is the images and 'gaze of extreme intensity—what gets looked at is never being looked at'. All Duras wants from me is 'passivity'. She is being looked at but doesn't know she is being looked at. The passivity comes from the one has no means to return the gaze.

Foucault: In her books she is linked with Blanchot and there is always a cancellation and in her film to Bacon. In her books, 'presence' hides behind its own gaze. In her films the opposite is true. It is always the apparition of a look. Cancellation versus apparition.

Cixous: In Duras there is always a voice and it is always a voice from the past. This voice tells tales from the past. The voice is linked to what you are seeing. This is like a counter flashback which remains 'indeterminate'. The voices take up what you are seeing.'

Foucault: Another important thing in Duras is the emergence of dialogue but the dialogue does not take part in the development of plots. It goes along the narration; However, the dialogue undermines it. It comes in the text from beyond the text. Dialogue seems as though it was said by the author.

Cixous: Exactly. The speech comes from somewhere, from the past, memory and time out of the deepest despair and mourning. Even if they come from lovers it comes from their mutual despondency.

Foucault: There is despair in her fiction but more important the 'oddness' of this despair. By odd I mean something weird, vague, and instantaneous.

Cixous: In Duras things are received from the living flesh and goes infinite. The force behind this is in her unconscious. As said Duras doesn't see but the unconscious sees it. There is no separation of the conscious and unconscious.

Foucault: Things happens in her books, because she has seen them. So, there are 'visible' and 'tactile' therein.

Cixous: I think the gaze in her text is often interrupted by touch.

Foucault: The touch in her is visible and the 'looking available to her are touch.' Seeing is by means of 'sense' and 'touch'.

(Cixous, 2008, 157-165)

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