

INTRODUCTION

*'Lacan is not all'*¹

Expressed with the simplicity of her elliptical put-down which we have adopted for our title for this special issue, Marguerite Duras' attitude towards psychoanalysis was ambiguous to say the least.¹ Frequently, when she speaks of psychoanalysis, she leaves us in no doubt of her very great mistrust of it, her acute sense of being a stranger to its discourse. Yet, regarding the event that inspired these invitations to express her opinion on psychoanalysis – Jacques Lacan's "Homage to Marguerite Duras, on *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein*," – she is generally positive, at times even enthusiastic.²

Since its first appearance in 1965, Lacan's sibylline essay has provoked a flood of commentaries and further explorations of the topics it alludes to: love, desire, femininity, writing, among many others. Therefore, it seems natural to us to launch this issue with Jean-Michel Rabaté's essay on *The Ravishing of Lol V. Stein*, the pivotal novel in Duras' oeuvre and the text that originally sparked the Lacanian interest in Duras. In his candid contribution, Rabaté raises the issue of *ravissement*, starting from his question, "Why were we all in love with Marguerite Duras?" This 'all,' we discover, may first and foremost include Lacan, whose "Homage" entails an analysis of his own ravishment by Duras or, more precisely, by the unfolding triangles in *Lol V. Stein* that end up encompassing the reader. It is for this reason that, even as he pays careful, 'academic' attention to the ternaries inside, yet transgressing, the confines of the novel, Rabaté also cannot refrain from a 'personal' questioning of the triangle that was constituted by Duras, her work and himself, as he recalls in this intimate memoir recounting the remarkable times that they spent together in Dijon, and later, in Paris in the 1970s and 1980s.

Elaborating on the relation of love from a feminine perspective, in "Acts of Love and Unconscious *Savoir* in Marguerite Duras' Writing," Fernanda Negrete investigates Duras' practice of the letter, taking into account the most successful of Duras' novels, *The Lover*, as well as the aforementioned *Lol V. Stein*. Even if, as Duras once argued, "the meaning [*sens*] of desire eludes us all, including Lacan,"³ Negrete's essay offers an elegant proof of the way a Lacanian approach may all the same

do justice to the negativity of desire and the impossibility inherent to love. While Lacan considers love a supplement to the 'sexual non-relation' and conceptualizes the latter mainly via logics, Negrete maintains that Duras' work writes this non-relation. That is, her work is a writing that paradoxically testifies to a fidelity to what cannot be written, which comes to be exemplified in Lol's 'hole-word,' in the lovers' failed encounter in *The Lover*, or in the emptiness created between 'her' and 'him' in *Hiroshima mon amour*. Negrete stresses how this writing is not without leaving its marks on and in Duras' stories, which often revolve around memory traces unable to cohere into one single story – hence the repetitions of what cannot be repeated – but also on the reader, including Lacan. Through a 'literal' reading of certain passages of Lacan's later work, Negrete uncovers the indelible impression of Lacan's encounter with Duras and *Lol V. Stein*, suggesting an influence that exceeds his *Homage*.

If destruction is one form of negativity, then *Destroy She Said* may be one of its best examples. In "Formal Destruction: the *Art of the Fugue* in *Destroy, She Said*," Joe Hughes discusses Maurice Blanchot's intriguing idea that, in Duras' film, destruction appears *as* music. This refers to the final minutes of the film, a silence-noise-(loud)music-speech sequence, which suggests the destructive power of desire, belonging to the forest, putting an end to any possible story yet suggesting the beginning of another, untold one. Here, Hughes not only pays attention to an often overlooked dimension of Duras' work, music, but goes on to argue that *Destroy* takes on the *form* of music, namely Bach's *Art of the Fugue*. Music's act of formal destruction, that is, resides in revealing the void that both underlies any coherent form and subtracts the story from its narrative patterns, moving it from one form to another.

A writing that promises nothing – this is how Alexi Kukuljevic conceives Duras' story-telling project in the shape of something that yearns, but does not succeed in its attempts, to recount a story. In his analysis of *The Vice-Consul*, Kukuljevic draws the reader's attention to the novel's opening sentence, which stages the young writer, Peter Morgan, aiming to tell a story about the Cambodian beggar woman in Calcutta. This staging includes two different narrative voices, Morgan's and the narrator's whose presence interrupts Morgan's story with a related, yet different story. Just as the miserable life of the beggar woman can be perceived only from a safe distance, her story is told only at the expense of excluding a misery that is too close to entertain: the Vice-Consul's. And this other story, the Vice-Consul's, as Kukuljevic observes, becomes catastrophic to every idea of story as such. His screams silence all sense; his catastrophic existence ends up leading Morgan's attempts at a sensible story astray, not unlike, Kukuljevic argues, Duras' idea of writing as "not making sense" and "screaming without sound."

It is this idea of non-sense that gets picked up and elaborated further by Cindy Zeiher in her account of the object-like quality of a proper name. In her essay, "The Woman and her Name: *Baxter, Véra Baxter*," Zeiher focuses on the sense-absorbing qualities of the name *Véra*. Despite its obvious connotation of 'truth' and its con-

nection with the surname Baxter, which provides the carrier of the name with a symbolic place, it is the sound of this name that first attracts the attention of the female Unknown. This *Inconnue* is the one who, later on in the film, allows Véra to speak *with* her. All of the stories that Véra recounts may be factually true or untrue, yet, as Zeiher argues, the issue revolves around speaking the truth in a male, symbolic universe in which one can inevitably only ‘lie’ about one’s femininity. Thus Véra’s melancholic quest for truth entails a questioning of the name, ‘Véra’, a questioning of what – or, indeed, *if* – this name would be without its surname and, hence, a questioning of the status of Véra’s existence as a woman beyond her identity as Baxter’s betrayed wife. Here, the forest we encountered in *Destroy She Said*, reappears as the place where a woman may be not ‘one,’ but rather ‘many.’

Released the same year as *Baxter*, *Véra Baxter*, the film *Le camion* (1977) testifies to Duras’ self-professed “murderous” relation to cinema. For rather than rendering an audiovisual, representational illusion of something that ‘is’ or ‘happens,’ *Le camion* instead recounts elements of a story that ‘would have been.’ Taking up Duras’ challenge to traditional logics concerning representation and time, in his essay, “In Duras’ Dark Room,” Dominiek Hoens focuses on Duras’ use of the conditional mood as a formal means for marshalling another model of temporality, specifically, an image of time that “transgresses any precise moment.” In Hoens’ analysis of the world-destroying but also world-opening structure of the past conditional, Gustave Guillaume, Jacques Lacan and Giorgio Agamben are brought into dialogue with one another to shed contemporary insight into Duras’ abysmal statement: “Let the world go to ruin, that is the only politics.”

This issue’s ‘odd one in’ is Sigi Jöttkandt’s non-thematic essay on a short story by Vladimir Nabokov, an author whose antipathy towards psychoanalysis is matched only by his abhorrence of all forms of totalitarianism. In “History’s Hard Sign: Vladimir Nabokov’s ‘The Visit to the Museum,’” Jöttkandt accepts Nabokov’s invitation to take a second look at “history,” this time through a cinematic lens. If certain parallels can be drawn between a Europe on the brink of WWII and Trump’s era of hyper-jouissance, in Jöttkandt’s hands an unexpectedly psychoanalytic Nabokov suggests a path forward in the form of a revised political practice of reading for the letter.

We wish to thank all our contributors and the anonymous reviewers who brought this issue into being.

Notes

1. *Le livre dit. Entretiens de Duras filme*, ed. J. Pagès-Pindon (Paris: Gallimard, 2014), 52.
2. “Je suis dans une méconnaissance et une méfiance très grandes de la psychanalyse. [...] je me sens étrangère à la psychanalyse.” *Marguerite Duras à Montréal*, eds. S. Lamy and A. Roy (Montréal: Les éditions Spirale, 1981), 20.

3. Jacques Lacan, "Homage to Marguerite Duras, on *Le ravissement de Lol V. Stein*," trans. P. Connor, in *Marguerite Duras* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1987), 122-129. For Duras' recollections of her meeting with Lacan, soon after the publication of *The Ravishing of Lol V. Stein*, see "On ne peut pas l'atteindre, Lol V. Stein" (interview with Catherine Francblin, 1979), *Le dernier des métiers. Entretiens 1962-1991* (Paris: Seuil, 2016), 217 and *La passion suspendue. Entretiens avec Leopoldina Pallotta della Torre* (Paris: Seuil, 2013), 65f. For a recent and more detailed account of Lacan's fascination with Duras, see Michel David, "Marguerite Duras passeuse de Jacques Lacan", in *Marguerite Duras. Passages, croisements, rencontres*, ed. O. Ammour-Mayeur, F. de Chalonge, Y. Mével and C. Rodgers (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2019), 211-223.
4. Duras, *Le livre dit*, 188.