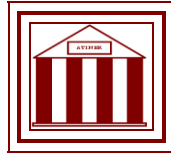


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**Marguerite Duras' India Cycle:  
Women's Trajectories, Word's Trajectory**

**Maria Cristina Vianna Kuntz  
Professor  
Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo  
Brazil**

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Women's Trajectories, Word's Trajectory**

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**Abstract**

In the year of 2014 the centenary of Marguerite Duras was celebrated. She was born in Indochina in 1914, and she went to France when she was seventeen years old. During one of her interviews, the author explains that the spatial elements are important in her novels as well as in her life. These elements remit to her past in the far East, to her childhood in those savage places, in the end of the world (Duras and Gauthier, 1974: 120). Dura's most appreciated novels are those related to the "India cycle": *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein* (1964), *Le Vice-Consul* (1965) and *L'Amour* (1970). Genette teaches us about the importance of the study of the space in the novels since that it can be not only decorative, but also symbolic, often justifying the actions or the inactions of the characters (Genette 1969: 59). In this sense, in this work, we will examine the main characters' «mouvence», their ways in each novel in order to reveal the route of abandon, loneliness and emptiness that finally will open to an infinite desire.

**Keywords:** Marguerite Duras, spatial element, French Literature

In the year of 2014, the centenary of Marguerite Duras was celebrated. She was born in Indochina in 1914, and she went to France when she was seventeen years old. During one of her interviews, the author explains that the spatial elements are important in her novels as well as in her life. These elements are a flashback to her past in the Orient, her childhood in those savage places, away in the time and space, in the end of the world (Duras and Gauthier 1974: 120).

Dura's most loved novels are those related to the «India cycle», as follows: *Le Ravisement de Lol V. Stein* (1964), *Le Vice-Consul* (1965) and *L'Amour* (1970). Critics assemble these novels in a specific cycle -the India cycle- due to the transmigration of the characters, even though Madeleine Borgomano recognizes this cycle as a "réseau mouvant" (moving net) (Borgomano 1997: 21).

Lol is the main character of the 1964's novel and she returns without name in *L'Amour* (1970). Anne Marie is the kidnapper of Lol's fiancé in *Le Ravisement de Lol V. Stein* and the charming and melancholic main character in *Le Vice-Consul*.

Gérard Genette teaches us about the importance of the study of the space in the novels since it can be not only decorative, but also symbolic, often justifying the actions or the inactions of the characters (Genette 1969: 59).

In this sense, in this work, we will examine the main characters' «*mouvence*» and their trajectories in each novel in order to reveal the route of abandonment, of loneliness, and emptiness that finally will open to an infinite desire.

In *Le Vice-Consul*, the city of Calcutta becomes the allegory of the misery, the leprosy of body and soul, and the immense route of the «*beggar*» that will be the way of her ruin and mythification. In *L'Amour* and in *Le Ravisement*, St. Thala will be the fictive town, «*the end without end*» (Duras 1964: 184) of Lol's perdition.

Thus, these territories become literary spaces, since they coincide with the «*word movement*» and reveal «*the depth and vibration*» of the Duras' writing (Blanchot 1955: 183).<sup>1</sup>

## **Marguerite Duras**

Marguerite Duras was born in 1914, at Gia Djin, in Vietnam, during the French colonization. Her parents were French and teachers and they had gone there searching for adventure and for a better professional opportunity. They did not belong to the high level of the white colonizers.

Her father died when she was seven years old and her mother preferred to stay in Indochina with her two sons and Marguerite. She studied there until the age of seventeen, when she went to France to study in Paris. She graduated in Law and Mathematics.

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<sup>1</sup> All the Translations from French were done by the author.

In 1943 she published her first novel *Les Impudents*, which was followed by more than forty titles during half a century, until 1995, one year before her death. *C'est tout* is the title of her last novel.

In the thirties, in Paris she lived in a very intense and freeway style. She had many boyfriends and she got married twice: Robert Antelme and Dionys Mascolo, who was father of her only son, Jean.

She participated in one of the most important historical moments in France of the XXth century, as the Second World War and the Resistance to the German Occupation in France, the campaign to the Liberation of the Colonies in the 60s, the 1968's French University's movement and the feminist movement, although not officially.

She has worked in many different artistic fields, comprehending novels, chronicles, theatre plays and also producing 19 films, mainly during the 70s.

In 2014, her whole work was published in four volumes at «la Pleiade», by Gallimard's Editor in Paris, and her work was recommended to the university's examinations, which mean a real consecration in France as well as a world intellectual recognition.

### **Le Ravissement De Lol V. Stein**

The first novel of India's cycle is *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein*, which was published in 1964; and is one of the most beautiful and famous of Duras' novels. This is the story of a nineteen years old girl who was abandoned by her fiancé in a ball, at the S. Thala's Casino.

Time passed by, but even after a convenient marriage, this trauma would hurt the girl and persist in both her heart and soul.

After ten years of her marriage, in a considered "regular" rhythm, she starts walking every day through the village; which could mean that she has overpassed the problem, nevertheless the author explains that these walks served to other purposes as follows: "It was during this walks that her memory returned".<sup>2</sup>

One day she notices a couple that walked by her house and made a comment: "maybe dead" (*Morte peut-être*), Lol follows them until the suburb, on the other side of the village, at «*du Bois*» Hotel.

There she lies in the rye field in front of the hotel and stays there just staring at the illuminated window. In the twilight, Lol is involved in peace: "Away from her only some meters, this field dives, dives deeper in a green and milky darkness".<sup>3</sup>

Like the rye grain, Lol, "maybe dead", she seems to disappear and to mimic with the place in order to dive deeper in her own shadow:

Leaving or dying, she breathes deeply, this evening, the air is of honey, of an exhausted gentleness. She does not ask herself where the

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<sup>2</sup> "C'est en marchant qu'une autre mémoire lui vient" (Duras and Porte, 1974: 98).

<sup>3</sup> "Ce champ à quelques mètres d'elle plonge, plonge de plus en plus dans une ombre verte et laiteuse" (Duras, 1964: 62).

marvelous frailty that made her lying in this field comes from. [...] The rye hisses under her kidneys. Young rye of the beginning of summer.<sup>4</sup>

Sound, light, perfume and color (the green from the «young rye»), this reminds us of the Baudelaire's poem «*Les Correspondances*» and creates a "temple" to Lol's ecstasy ("ravisement"). Attired by the window's lightness, Lol is hypnotized by the scene that is going on in the room.

The lover's movement and their intimacy oppose infinitely to the loneliness and passivity of Lol, reduced to a "dark blotch" ("*tache sombre*") on the rye field.

Thus, Lol seems to recover the memory of another moment that she has lived with her *fiancé*. She will come many times to this field in order to watch this couple's "movie", recognizing the girl as being Tatiana, her classmate from past times.

The unexpressed emotion enlarges the moment, interrupts the time within this space of ecstasy. Nevertheless the words are not enough: "I would like to do, to say, say a long *moo* done of all the smashed words and come to the same magma, understandable to *Lol V. Stein*".<sup>5</sup>

She will return to T. Beach's Casino, with Jacques Hold, Tatiana's lover, so she will do the contrary of the trajectory she had done after the dance, ten years ago: it was the final try to recover her memory, «*l'insaisissable*»/the «unattainable».

Duras explains that she tries to recover the past: "It is an universal past, the past of everyone. [...] she dies of recalling".<sup>6</sup> We would say that it is the past of all the women, it is the delusion, the suffering, the separations, the abandonment and the deaths.

## Le Vice-Consul

*Le Vice-Consul* is the second novel of the "India's Cycle", that was published in 1966. The action of the novel takes place in India, earth of mysteries and ancient wisdom. Nevertheless, the novel starts with an enchained story. It is not the vice-consul story but one of a young girl who had been thrown out from home by her mother, because she was pregnant.

One year after the child's birth, in total poverty, she will have to abandon her sick child.

Thus, it is an original way of showing the great separation and the misery experienced by that girl, transformed in a "beggar" during the ten years of pilgrimage of hunger and solitude, on her way from Savanakheth, in the Vietnam to Calcutta, in India.

<sup>4</sup> "Vivante, mourante, elle respire profondément, ce soir l'air est de miel, d'une épuisante suavité. Elle ne se demande pas d'où lui vient la faiblesse merveilleuse qui l'a couchée dans ce champ. [...] Le seigle crisse sous ses reins. Jeune seigle du début d'été" (Duras, 1964: 62).

<sup>5</sup> "Je voudrais faire, dire, dire un long mougisement fait de tous mots fondus et revenus au même magma, intelligible à *Lol V. Stein*" (Duras, 1964: 30).

<sup>6</sup> "C'est un passé universel, c'est le passé de tous. [...] elle (*Lol*) meurt de se souvenir" (Duras and Gauthier, 1970: 120).

This story mingles to the main story about the Vice-Consul and Anne-Marie Stretter, the Ambassadors of France in India, surrounded by her friends. It is the mirror effect that gives the meaning to the novel.

In fact, Calcutta is presented as an allegory of the biggest poverty of the world. The human geography corresponds to the reality, that is, the multitude of poor people, of leprosy people, beggars as per the abbreviated description of the town: "palm trees, leprosy, twilight".<sup>7</sup> In opposition, the colonizers, the "non-adapted white people"/("les blancs non-adaptés"), though living in luxury and comfort, they will always be suffocated by the great heat and wet weather:

[...] it is the twilight, a himalaya of immobile clouds recover the Nepal, under an infected and stagnant vapor, the monsoon is going to start in some days more.<sup>8</sup>

Anne Marie incorporates this town: she will be "The white of Calcutta", "The queen of Calcutta", ("*la Blanche de Calcutta*", "*La Reine de Calcutta*"), but she is melancholic, she will always live in emptiness and be overloaded by her obligations as a hostess, although she has the good company of the young boys of the Embassy.

The river Ganges arouses the town, in a majestic presence. In its sacred waters, the beggar will look for retirement and purification, in the company of the leprosy people.

Near the Delta of alluvion - accumulation of her sadness and secrets, Anne-Marie will contemplate the tempest and the immensity of the marine waves. She stares at the "horizon that is a straight stream as before the trees or after the deluge".<sup>9</sup> The horizon that she looks for "is the most hostile point",<sup>10</sup> the same horizon the girl had stared in the beginning of the novel, that is the future without issue, their unbearable and suffocating life in India.

Then, the two main characters, although being opposite by their social situation, they are approximated in the same space, because of their similar trajectory they did until arriving to Calcutta. There, in the Ganges' waters, both are looking for peace and the end of their suffering and solitude.

Thus, their women's destinies will be similar, since both will be abandoned, hungry physically and spiritually.

## L'Amour

*L'Amour* is the third novel of the cycle, published in 1971, maybe considered the most hermetic and difficult novel of all the extension of Duras' work.

<sup>7</sup> "*palme, lèpre et lumière crépusculaire*" (Duras, 1970: 32).

<sup>8</sup> "[...] *la lumière est crépusculaire, un himalaya de nuages immobiles recouvrent le Népal, dessous une vapeur infecte, stagne, la mousson d'été va commencer dans quelques jours*" (Duras, 1965: 31).

<sup>9</sup> "*L'horizon est un fil droit comme avant les arbres ou après le déluge*" (Duras, 1966: 175).

<sup>10</sup> "*le point le plus hostile*"- (Duras, 1965: 9).

Tree anonymous characters that build and rebuild a triangle, appear and disappear on the stage, in a village, in the seaside - S.Thala. None of them has a name. They are called a Voyager, a Prisoner and the woman is simply a woman. They only walk and look.

We do not know why they go to the beach, nor whether they know each other. Nothing is clear. The rare dialogues are "anemic" and do not explain anything.

Emptiness is installed in the novel as well as a "*malaise*" that is significant. The Prisoner is called Fool and perhaps the woman is a fool too. She sleeps under the stars. Like the beggar of *Le Vice-Consul*, this woman has had many children and has given them to the village people. Mute, she almost cannot see, since she walks like a beggar: "She walks and the phrase with her".<sup>11</sup> This will correspond to the way of the Duras' writing, now rarified, hesitating and full of gaps (Duras, 1993).

Little by little, in a "slowness net", ("*réseau de lenteur*", Duras, 1970: 9) the indications that lead the reader to the 1964's novel can be seen: the name of the village - S.Thala, among others. Thus, we can consider this novel as a "prolongation", a continuation or a variation of Lol's story, as declared by Jean Pierrot (Pierrot, 1986: 243).

In this novel, the author discusses the woman's destiny, her submission, her annihilation: "The tempest has hollowed her lines. [...]. She has the sand's scent, salt's. The tempest has blackened her eyes".<sup>12</sup>

Both women are dead: the blond, maybe Lol, feels as being dead and the other with the black hair, visited by the Voyager is sick and a fool, as a dead person.

Thus, Duras examines the human relationship, as well as the "sacred" feelings, she demystifies the feeling of love, its indissolubility.

On the other hand, S. Thala is a strange village: "Behind the parks, the density, unattainable, dressed S. Thala".<sup>13</sup> It will be the symbol of all the modern villages where people live in a constant movement, as zombies, without meeting each other, without communication, without love, they will attain total annihilation. "Thus, each day they must take the distance, the sand's space of S.Thala".<sup>14</sup>

In this novel, the lack of love introduces an emptiness that leads to madness or to death (Adler, 1998: 646). In this desert space, the author installs a deep solitude and her poetic and fluid word lead the reader to a matrix emptiness, to an endless search "the endless end"/"*la fin sans fin*", the infinity (Duras, 1964: 184).

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<sup>11</sup> "*Elle marche et la phrase avec elle*" (Duras, 1966: 180).

<sup>12</sup> "*L'orage a creusé ses traits. [...]. Elle a l'odeur du sable, du sel. L'orage a noirci ses yeux*" (Duras, 1970: 34-35).

<sup>13</sup> "*Derrière les parcs, l'épaisseur, insaisissable, S. Thala dressée*" (Duras, 1970: 42).

<sup>14</sup> "*Ainsi chaque jour doivent-ils couvrir la distance, l'espace de sables de S.Thala*" (Duras, 1970: 36).



## Conclusions

In *Le Vice-Consul*, Anne-Marie and the beggar have crossed long distances until Calcutta; Lol has tried to experience again the tragic moment she had had at the Casino in T. Beach and the ecstasy in the rye field. Finally the woman in *L'Amour*, as a symbol of all the women, annihilates herself at the St. Thala's sand.

Impelled by an undefined desire, that lead them forward, these women followed the "abandon route", searching for love or seeking death. They stare to "the point of the horizon", on the seaside, but they can see nothing, they can see no issue.

The literary space is transformed in the "opening of the poem", that is "the space where everything returns to the deep being [...], where everything dies, but where the death is the wise companion of life, where the fear is ecstasy [...]"<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> "l'espace où tout retourne à l'être profond [...] où tout meurt, mais où la mort est la compagne savante de la vie, où l'effroi est ravissement [...]" (Blanchot, 1955: 183).