



*It needs
three to be*



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PRÉCIS

In a presentation on October 30, 2022, to Lacanian Compass towards the Clinical Study Days, The Empire of the Images, Sophie Marret-Maleval elucidates aspects of the subjective position from the perspective of Lacan's reading of The Ravishing of Lol Stein, Marguerite Duras' masterpiece. In this conference, the presenter remarked that the ball scene in which the character, Lol V. Stein, was trapped into a traumatic scene, was crucial to a possible development of a subjective position. She was the object of shame, but at the same time the voyeur of a loving encounter between her fiancé and a charming woman. All turns around the gaze, and this object gaze becomes a mark in Lol's experience as an abandoned woman. Sophie takes the function of the narrator in the story, pointed by Lacan, as a subject that gives consistency to Lol as an object. From being invisible, she appears in the scene of the social bond. This emphasizes the importance of the imaginary in the construction of the fantasy. Lacan distinguishes the object a from i(a) and their relation to desire or the absence of it. For Lol V. Stein, there is a dress of another character that gives consistency to a body. This dress becoming a word-hole for this character, more than a fetishistic object, becomes the veil of a feminine body that couldn't exist.

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"IT NEEDS THREE TO BE"

A Reading of "An Homage to Marguerite Duras on the Ravishment of Lol V. Stein"¹

On 23 June 1965, during the last lesson of his seminar *Crucial Problems for Psychoanalysis*², Lacan brought up *The Ravishment of Lol V. Stein*³ for the first time, in the context of a presentation proposed by Michèle Montrelay for a closed seminar. The book had been published a year earlier, and he had emphasised that it 'has not always been favourably received by critics', but nevertheless, it seemed 'very important'⁴ to him. He specifies that he considers it so 'not only because it can be spoken of, with the greatest relevance, as pertaining to certain reference points that I believe I have elucidated quite well before you, this year, concerning what we call desire'⁵. He underlines the particularities of the heroine's name - Lol V Stein - where the middle name (Valerie) is reduced to a single letter (he nevertheless mentions American customs thus toning down the originality of this choice), as well as of the first name, Lola, which becomes abbreviated. He places these truncated first names in the context of the fact that the novel is not to be read as a 'psychological story'. 'It's absolutely not psychology'⁶. He specifies: 'the important thing is what happens to her, at a given moment, that is unique, around which she [...] remains fixed', starting with the 'traumatic' scene at the ball, which he narrates, emphasising that everything is played out in terms of the gaze: 'She remains fixed on the fact that, one fine evening, with her then fiancé, a third person, a charming woman, enters, the fiancé looks at her, and the deal is done, they will leave together at the end of the evening, and everything really happens in full view, not only of Lol, but of everyone'⁷. He indicates that the narrator will accompany the reader, enter Lol's life and that, through her, will manifest 'the state in which Lol V Stein has remained'⁸. He concludes that what he said about 'the subject and its supports is truly illustrated here'. 'It emerges that the very structure is written there'⁹. In other words, what is important is that Lol's singular story beyond the drama of the abandoned woman, demonstrates the

'supports'¹⁰ of the subject, i.e., \$ and a.

The structure of the subject

Duras' novel is a writing of the structure of the subject. On the one hand we have the word-hole which Lol mentions that she missed and which the truncated first names approach and the position of the narrator which makes us grasp what the subject owes to the lack in the signifier, its lack of being; and on the other hand, an unveiling of the function of the object.

Lacan specifies that the narrator is 'at the same time [...] the entity, the typical lover, but he is also someone she follows, who is there, the one who is going to take the place of this hole, this gap, around whom, in short, her entire being-as-subject is organised'¹¹. Lol encounters a hole during the ball scene, to which she has remained fixated. The narrator arrives at the place around which 'her being-as-subject'¹² is organised; it concerns Lol, but the equivocation of the personal pronoun suggests that the narrator occupies the place of the subject. Lacan indicates that this place is 'organised'¹³ as well. He points to the reparative aim of the second part of the novel, which starts from the hole, the fall of the subject, and recomposes it by re-articulating its constitutive elements: the linguistic element, the symbolic, which Jacques Hold embodies as the narrator, and the real element, the lost object after which he runs under the phallic guise. Lacan states: 'And [Lol] following him, having met him in the street, Lol waits for what he is waiting for, i.e., the woman with whom she senses, she presumes, that he has an appointment'¹⁴. Lacan concludes on what 'is demonstrated here and can be shown', that the novel pertinently addresses 'the profound coherence of this function of the proper name with everything that is this seat, this central seat of the subject insofar as it is represented here in the most articulated way by the word-hole, by the missing word -

1 Jacques Lacan, 'Homage fait à Marguerite Duras du Ravissement de Lol V. Stein', (1965) in *Autres écrits*, Paris Seuil, 2001, pp. 191 à 197.

2 Jacques Lacan, 'Problèmes cruciaux pour la psychanalyse', (1964-65), unpublished seminar.

3 Marguerite Duras, *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein*, Paris : Gallimard, 1964.

4-6-7-8-9-10-11-12-13-14: *Ibid.*

the word hole or the word-hole', and then that 'it is in the measure in which this being [Lol V Stein], is designated by the proper name which is the title of Marguerite Duras's novel, and is only really specified, incarnated, and brought to consciousness in her novel in so far as she exists just in the form of this core object, this object a, of this something which exists as a gaze, but which is a diverted gaze, a an object-gaze?'¹⁵.

Upon meeting Jacques Hold, Lol literally clings to him, notes Lacan, 'as if she were joining this subject divided from herself, the one that only she can support, which is also, in the novel, the one that supports her, it is the narrative of this subject thanks to which she is present. The only subject is this object, this isolated object, this object by itself, in a way, exiled, proscribed, fallen from the horizon of the fundamental scene, which is this pure gaze that is Lola Valerie Stein.' 'And yet, in the novel, it is the only subject, the one around which all the others are supported and revolve and exist.'¹⁶ Lacan emphasises Lol's identification with the object a, as what remains of the subject at the end of the ball scene. Jacques Hold is the subject 'divided from herself'¹⁷, the symbolic part thanks to which all the others exist. The third-person narrative 'is the symbolic part thanks to which she is present, whereas as an object, she is absence. The third-person narrative 'allows the object to be present somewhere in the form of an object, a fallen object, a detached object, as waste of the being. That which is the essential being that we see in a novel, that we see embodied, with a degree of presence - in my eyes, in the eyes, I think, of those who have already read it, and in the eyes of those who here will read it again - in the most intense form, deserves to be called a subjectivity'¹⁸. In other words, if the barred subject is a pure want-of-being, the being of the subject relates to the object. Lacan emphasises that subjectivity is supported by the object a, and, contrary to any ontological aim, that there is no being except of the object a.

Fantasy and the Imaginary

The 'Homage to Marguerite Duras, on the Ravishment of Lol V. Stein' was written following the last lesson of the seminar and subsequently published in December 1965, when he was giving his seminar *The*

*Object of Psychoanalysis*¹⁹.

Lacan opens this seminar as follows: 'The object of psychoanalysis (I'm showing my hand and you can see it coming along with it), is none other than what I have already advanced about the function of the object a. Would knowledge of the object a then be the science of psychoanalysis? This is precisely the formula that must be avoided, since this object a is to be inserted, as we already know, into the division of the subject which specially structures [...] the psychoanalytic field'²⁰. He highlights, a few lessons further on: 'The point of suture, the point of closure unnoticed in the 'I think therefore I am', it is there that we have to reconstruct all the elided part of what gets opened up, that we reopen this gap which can only appear, in any form of discourse that is human discourse, in the form of a stumbling, an interference, an obstacle in the discourse which wants to be coherent. [...] You will clearly understand that this is to indicate here the place where functions that which sustains, as divided, everything of the subject that is produced in discourse, that this is the place where we must search for the function of the object a'²¹.

To question the way in which the object a supports subjectivity will lead him to take an interest in the structure of fantasy reduced to the writing $\$ \diamond a$, at the junction of the symbolic and the real, seeking however to situate it in relation to the imaginary. He maintains that the object a is not equivalent to $i(a)$, it is not 'another function of the imaginary', but he stresses that 'The function of the fantasy in the economy of the subject is no less to support the desire of its illusory function. It is not illusory. It is through its illusory function that it supports desire. Desire is captive to this division of the subject insofar as it is caused by the frame of the fantasy'²². He will then seek to situate the question of the object in terms of the hole in topological figures. These questions inform the *Homage*, in which Lacan shows that Marguerite Duras situates the object of fantasy between the man and the woman, as Eric Laurent points out²³. Lacan detects in her novel an intuition of the structure of fantasy, but he articulates it more precisely to the question of the image of the body, particularly in the scene in the rye field. Lol embodies the gaze, the object a, extracted from the scene in which Jacques Hold strips Tatiana of her dress. He knows he is being looked at, he is 'the voice of narration'²⁴, the barred

15-16-17-18: *Ibid.*

19 Jacques Lacan, 'l'objet de la psychanalyse', (1965-1966), unpublished seminar.

20 *Ibid.* Lesson I, 1st December 1965.

21 *Ibid.* Lesson X, 9 February 1966

22 *Ibid.* Lesson XIII, 30th March 1966.

23 Eric Laurent, 'un noeud logique, Intervention d'Éric Laurent dans le cours *Les Us du laps*', published in Duras avec Lacan, Paris, Editions Michèle, date, pp. 15-35.

24 Jacques Lacan, 'l'Homage fait à Marguerite Duras du Ravissement de Lol V. Stein', p 192.

subject, \$, supporting his division with the object placed in Lol, but Tatiana also occupies the place of i(a) in the scene, the image of the body, stolen from Lol. The question of the knotting of the three categories then comes to the fore, as Lacan expresses it more clearly in his 'Homage to Lewis Carroll'²⁵, an intervention on France Culture that follows by a year. 'So how does this work have so much hold? That's the secret, and it touches the purest network of our condition of being: the symbolic, the imaginary and the real. The three registers through which I introduced a teaching that does not claim to innovate, but to re-establish some rigour in the experience of psychoanalysis, here they are playing in their purest state in their simplest relationship'²⁶. He also reproaches Marguerite Duras for having missed Carroll's genius in her commentary on the work in the same programme, limiting herself to emphasising its power of moral subversion. He would have liked to 'hear her also speak of her work as a novelist'²⁷, he remarks, even though he points out that Carroll's work meets Duras' in the demonstration they make of the function of the object in sublimation. He concludes the 'Homage to Lewis Carroll' by referring to his text on Marguerite Duras.

The emphasis on i(a), on the imaginary, on the function of Tatiana leads us to read the 'Tribute paid to Marguerite Duras, On the Ravishment of Lol V. Stein' in the perspective of the emergence of a new interrogation on the knotting of the Real, the Symbolic and the Imaginary that was undone during the scene of the ravishing, i.e., the scene of the ball, and that which Lol attempts to restore by embodying the extracted object, that commands fantasy.

The subject and the object

Lacan immediately points out the enigmatic dimension of the novel's title, carried by the ambiguity of the genitive 'de' or 'of', as subjective or objective. Is Lol ravished or does she ravish? The question of whether she is a subject or object is present from the very beginning in the title. 'Ravished. One evokes the soul, and it is

beauty that operates. From this sense at hand, we will get disentangled as best we can, with some symbol. Ravishing is also the image that this wounded figure will impose on us, exiled from things, that we don't dare touch, but which makes you its prey'²⁸. From the outset, Lacan emphasises the intertwining of registers and above all stresses the function of the imaginary when he evokes, rather than the mystical, symbolic dimension of this rapture, the part played by the beauty of the other woman, Anne-Marie Stretter, and then how Lol is herself a rapturous image. From the very beginning, he summons up what lies beyond sense, the equivocation that points to the enigma of the real, the entanglement of the dimension of the subject with that of the object. He points out that the imaginary is tied up in it, a reduced imaginary, beyond figuration, since Lol is a 'figure of the wounded, exiled from things, whom one does not dare touch, but who makes you her prey'²⁹. This image evokes, on the one hand, the constitutive flaw of the subject, the want-of-being, but also the exile from material things, the immaterial and captivating object. He also underlines the truncated first names, pointing to the function of the letter (understood at this point in his teaching as the symbolic function, that of the phallus which names the lack).

The two movements, however, are knotted together in a figure that reveals itself in this adroitly formed name, in the outline of the writing: Lol V. Stein.

Lol V. Stein: paper wings, V scissors, Stein, the stone, in the game of la mourre you get lost.

One answers: O, open mouth, what do I want to do - three leaps on the water, aside of love's game, where do I dive?³⁰

Referring to the game of 'la mourre' (an archaic game, akin to rock paper scissors, which equivoques l'amour or love) Lacan emphasises here that the theme of the novel, the love triangle, operates as the arrangement of the data of a game, simultaneously emphasising that the consistency of the character is reduced to a function within it. The name evokes the articulation of the signifier with the object; the letter, the phallus as a cipher, points to the object. The question of being between subject and object unfolds into a game, in the sense of a series of arrangements and displacements. The question of the game opens onto the question of an

25 Jacques Lacan, 'Hommage rendu à Lewis Carroll', text delivered on 31 december 1966 on France Culture, under the title 'commentaire d'un psychanalyste'. Transcription by Marlène Béllilos from the audio tapes. Text established by Jacques-Alain Miller, in *Ornicar ? n° 50, a journal of the Champ Freudien*, distributed by Navarin-Seuil, 2002, pp. 9 to 12.
26 *Ibid.* 10.

27 *Ibid.* 12.

28 Jacques Lacan, 'l'Hommage fait à Marguerite Duras du Ravissement de Lol V. Stein', p 191.

29 *Ibid.*

30 *Ibid.*

aside, 'aside of love, where do I dive?'³¹ where we hear Lol's singular position: she is aside, having become a ghost of herself. She tries to recover a place in the game of love from that of the object. Let us note that it is already a question of knotting, of the way in which the Real is attached to the Symbolic and the Imaginary, to sense (which Lacan mentions above when he reminds us that it is situated at the joint of the imaginary and the symbolic). A theoretical issue depends on this, that of the subject in its link to the object, but a clinical question already posed in terms of unravelling of the knot also emerges discreetly, that of the subject when left aside of the game, reduced to the object.

Jacques-Alain Miller has proposed a close reading of the novel from the perspective of psychosis, emphasising that Lol is rather reduced to nothing and seeks in the incarnation of the object to recover a place in the subjective montage through a knotting of the elements of the structure. Lacan seems to raise this possibility, expressing it more clearly at the end of his 'Homage', evoking what he had heard from Marguerite Duras concerning Lol's madness. Indeed, we know that she modelled her heroine on a young woman she met in a psychiatric asylum. She had probably confided this to Lacan. In any case, he described the novel as a 'clinically perfect delirium'³². That Lol identified with 'nobody' is also mentioned in the lines that follow this passage. Marguerite Duras, on presenting her novel in a filmed documentary, spoke of 'de-personage' and 'impersonality', in relation to Lol as well³³.

Trios

Moreover, Lacan introduces a new element in the game of the novel: the reader, whose function is decisive to seize the impact of the work, of the Durasian writing: 'This art suggests that the ravisher is Marguerite Duras, we the ravished. But if, we make our steps on the steps of Lol, which resonate throughout her novel, if we hear them behind us without having met anybody, is it then that her apparition moves in a duplicated space? or that one of us passed through the other, and which of her or of us then let itself cross?'³⁴ Lacan makes the disidentification of Lol the factor of the read-

er's subjective involvement in the novel. He revisits literary theories and the Freudian theory of identification with the hero to specify that the capture of the reader, his ravishing, is done at the point where he engages his division, his want-of-being (he allows it to be traversed), even his *jouissance*, and that is where he meets Lol. The apparition supports subjective division, moves in a duplicated space, a space where there is someone and no one at the same time. In following her, we meet no one, nothing but the sound of her steps. In other words, she evolves in a split space between presence and absence, identification, and lack of being, subject and object.

It is what leads Lacan to pose that to seize what happens in term of ravishment implies to count oneself three. "Where we see that the figure is to be tied up in another way: for to grasp it, we must count ourselves three."³⁵ In this case, Lol is divided between presence and absence, but we must add the function of the reader who is part of the game in terms of the rapture. The reader's gaze must be accounted for, just as Lol intervenes as a gaze in the scene set in the rye field, the scene through which she aims to reconstitute the structure of fantasy; to re-connect the elements of subjectivity: to count oneself as one, one must count oneself as three. Perhaps it is also necessary to understand that one can pin down fantasy through writing, the dimension of illusion of fiction which supposes projection, identification, i.e., not without the imaginary again.

Lacan would unfold the implications of this three-element arrangement in the novel and specify it.

The scene of which the novel is entirely the recollection, is properly the ravishing of two in a dance that unites them, and under the eyes of Lol, third, with the whole ball, to undergo the abduction of her fiancé by the one who has suddenly appeared.

And to touch on what Lol is looking for from this moment on, don't we make her say an "I am two" to conjugate *douloir* with Apollinaire?³⁶

The ball scene is based on a three-way scenario, the cause of Lol's painful splitting. On the one hand, the fiancé, the lover, the barred subject, welded to the one who only has to appear, *i(a)*, the image of the body, the object of desire, imaginary (i.e., the first version of the structure of the fantasy), and Lol precipitated into a, a

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Madeleine Borgomano, *Madeleine Borgomano commente Le ravissement de Lol V. Stein de Marguerite Duras*, Paris : Gallimard, col. Folio, 1997, p. 124.

³³ Interview de Marguerite Duras à propos du *Ravissement de Lol V. Stein*, document de l'INA : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HWBeyd5vufE&feature=youtu.be>

³⁴ Jacques Lacan, 'l'Homage fait à Marguerite Duras du Ravissement de Lol V. Stein', p 191.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

real object, excluded, a pure gaze. Lol looks at the lovers who do not see her, even when Mickaël Richardson looks for 'someone' with his eyes to the back of the room³⁷. As for Anne-Marie Stetter, she 'sweeps' a 'non gaze' across the room³⁸. Lol then splits herself between subject and object, between presence and absence. 'But precisely, she cannot say that she suffers', remarks Lacan³⁹, the subject has vanished, leaving only the object. Marguerite Duras, in an interview with the INA notes: 'she saw the thing completely, she attended to the thing as completely as possible, until she lost sight of herself'⁴⁰. Jacques-Alain Miller will push the reading of the novel further, using Lacan's subtle clinical remarks in the 'Homage', to show that the object has been taken away with i(a) at the end of the ball scene when Lol collapses, no longer able to look at the lovers who leave the room⁴¹. She will need the presence of her mother who comes to look for her behind the green plants where she has hidden and from which she looks at the couple fascinated, so that a 'plaintive modulation'⁴², then a cry, comes out of her mouth, then finally that she faints when she loses them from sight. The sentence: 'when she no longer saw them, she fainted', concludes the first part on the ball scene⁴³. A few years later, Tatiana asks her:

- Did you want them to stay?
- Which is to say, says Lol?
- What did you want?

After a silence, Lol finally answers: 'to see them'⁴⁴. Seeing gives her a place, but to enter the game it is necessary for her that Jacques Hold knows that he is being looked at by her, that she embodies the gaze, like the stain in the rye field.

From then on, Lacan emphasizes, Lol seeks to remake the undone knot rather than to repeat the traumatic event, through the meeting of Jacques Hold and Tatiana, whom she spies from the rye field. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*⁴⁵ Freud proposes two versions of the repetition of the trauma, on the one hand an attempt at mastery, on the other, the repetition as the implementation of the death drive. Lacan, it seems to me, separates the two, he situates on the side of the repetition the death drive and on the side of the attempt of repair, the attempt of knotting, of rearrangement

37 Marguerite Duras, *Le Ravisement de Lol V. Stein*, p. 20.

38 *Ibid.*, p.16.

39 Jacques Lacan, 'l'Homage fait à Marguerite Duras du Ravisement de Lol V. Stein', p 192.

40 Interview by Marguerite Duras on Ravisement de Lol V. Stein, document by l'INA : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HWBeyd5vufE&feature=youtu.be>

41 Jacques-Alain Miller, *Lessons 20 and 22 from his course Les Us du Laps*, published in *Duras avec Lacan*, op. cit., pp. 61-79.

which is not pure repetition. With the experience of the writer, Lacan is interested in the modifications and the possible treatment of the drive through writing, which is essential for thinking about the experience of psychoanalysis, without forgetting the background of his interrogations concerning the treatment of psychoses. Lol's knot 'encloses' that which 'properly ravishes'⁴⁶, i.e., object a. It is a question of thinking about the conjunction of language and jouissance, and already Lacan's metaphors open the way to a Borromean topology. Let us also note that the object is not so much embodied in the narrative as 'enclosed' between the symbolic, the imaginary and the real.

Lacan is thus interested in the function of the narrator, 'he whom Marguerite Duras makes the voice of the narrative: the other partner of the couple. His name, Jacques Hold'⁴⁷. Lacan specifies: 'For he too is not what he seems when I say: the voice of the narrative. Rather, he is its anguish⁴⁸. He is not omniscient, but points to what divides him, i.e. the object a; he is not in the place of the object (as the term voice could be understood), but in that of the barred subject, and Lacan does not fail to separate this place from any psychology. Anguish evokes the subject's flaw, and he adds: 'Where the ambiguity comes back again: is it his or that of the narrative?'⁴⁹ In other words, he does not occupy the place of a character so much as that of a narrator, the expression 'voice of the narrative' evokes the S1, the symbolic trait to which the voice is joined; the saying, from which the narrative starts. 'He is in any case not a simple presenter of the machine, but one of its springs and who does not know everything about what takes him there'⁵⁰, Lacan states. The function of Jacques Hold, split between character and narrator, leads us to grasp how the barred subject is one of the springs of the being in three, of the 'machine', of the structure that can no longer be thought of as purely signifying, without considering the object a and the imaginary, here i(a).

The death of the author

Lacan introduces a third ternary from which to read the novel, that of the author, the text and the reader. Lacan the reader steps forward as a subject: 'here I am

42 Marguerite Duras, *Le Ravisement de Lol V. Stein*, p. 21.

43 *Ibid.* p.22

44 *Ibid.* p. 103.

45 Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Standard Edition, Volume 18, p.15-16

46 Jacques Lacan, 'l'Homage fait à Marguerite Duras du Ravisement de Lol V. Stein', p 192.

47-48-49-50: *Ibid.*

the third party to be ravished, in my decidedly subjective case'⁵¹. The text, 'The Ravishing of Lol V. Stein', to which Lacan does not put italics, and which therefore evokes the theme, the subject of study, the phenomenon, is 'taken as an object in its very knotting'⁵². It grasps the object, it is taken as object, as that which arouses ravishment. Is it in the place of a or of i(a)? Where is the Author, Marguerite Duras, then? In the place of cause? Of small a or of big A? Lacan does not specify, but there is a strong temptation to see another ternary governing the 'Homage', 'barred S, i(a), a' and emerging behind the classical ternary 'A, a, barred S'. It is a progressive erasure of the function of the Other to which Lacan seems to grant only a little place here, notably when he makes the ternary 'author, text, reader' a functional arrangement, following the path of the structuralist literary criticism of the time (one thinks of Gérard Genette - *Figure I* appeared in 1966 at Seuil -, of Roland Barthes - *Writing Degree Zero* and the *Elements of Semiology* appeared respectively in 53 and 65 and 'The death of the author' would appear in 67-68), rather than making the author a figure of the ideal.

This is not a madrigal, [*a complimentary poem*] but a methodological milestone, which I intend to affirm here in its positive and negative value. A subject is a term of science, perfectly calculable, and the reminder of its status should put an end to what we have to designate by its name: the caddishness, let's say the pedantry of a certain psychoanalysis.

This face of its frolics, to be sensitive, we hope, to those who throw themselves into it, should serve to point out to them that they are slipping into some foolishness: that of attributing, for example, the avowed technique of an author to some neurosis: caddishness, and of demonstrating it as the explicit adoption of the mechanisms that make up the unconscious edifice: foolishness⁵³.

Lacan reminds us that to take literature seriously, it is advisable to depart from all psychology, from all applied psychoanalysis following the example of Marie Bonaparte, and to consider the author from the function, and from the terms with which he articulates

51 *Ibid.*

52 *Ibid.*

himself (text, reader, narrator). Lacan slips in yet another 'methodological milestone' concerning the subject: 'A subject is a term of science, as perfectly calculable', in other words, the subject is calculable in its position with respect to the poinçon or lozenge of fantasy, to that of the object so somehow to the imaginary and the real. The author as subject comes into function from the coordinates which construct him, (the real that he treats by writing for example - we can also understand that Duras encloses the object by writing the novel). He or she can also enter a configuration in which they occupy another place, in this case that of the cause of jouissance, of the cause of ravishing, for the reader. No more than the narrator, he is not 'a simple presenter of the machine', he is rather an element of it. Lacan states:

I think that, even if Marguerite Duras gives it to me from her mouth that she does not know in all her work where Lol comes from, and even should I glimpse it from what she tells me in her following sentences, the only advantage that a psychoanalyst has the right to take from their position, being thus recognizable to him as such, it is to remember with Freud that in this matter, the artist always precedes and that he does not need to be the psychologist where the artist clears the way for him⁵⁴.

The extract is well known, denouncing the way of applied psychoanalysis, celebrating the knowledge of the artist, but let's stop on its terms: Lacan, recalling that Duras does not know where Lol comes from, points towards the enigma that governs meaning, towards the command of jouissance, and not towards the Other (let's not forget that Lol is in the place of this enigma). Lacan adds:

This is precisely what I recognize in the ravishing of Lol V. Stein, where Marguerite Duras turns out to know without me what I teach. In that I am not mistaken as to her genius to support my criticism on the virtue of its means. That the practice of the letter converges with the use of the unconscious, is all that I will testify to by paying her homage⁵⁵.

Marguerite Duras knows without knowing, because it is

53 *Ibid.*

54 *Ibid.* p. 192-193.

55 *Ibid.* p. 193.

the practice of the letter, which 'converges with the use of the unconscious', that is to say an unconscious founded on a beyond of sense, which carries a knowledge reduced to a beyond-of- sense of the real, of the object. The written word gets articulated to the object. Lacan deliberately leaves the regime of truth.

This version of writing is joined by a practice of reading: Lacan proposes to 'exercise oneself in the knot that I untie'⁵⁶. It is no longer a question of following the thread of meaning, but of the arrangement of the coordinates of the narrative, to locate those of the subject.

Function of the dress

Lacan constructs his reading from an equivocation that runs through the novel, between 'robe' (dress in French) and 'robbery'⁵⁷. He is indeed interested in one of the opaqueness points of the novel. The theme of the dress correlates with the ball scene: Lol missed seeing Mickaël Richardson take off Anne-Marie Stretter's black dress, a gesture by which she would have been replaced, annihilated: 'This velvet annihilation of her own person, Lol never managed to bring it to an end'⁵⁸. Lol, tracking down Jacques Hold and Tatiana who have become lovers, then seeks to surprise them with this same gesture and to see Tatiana 'naked in her black hair'⁵⁹. This theme, Lacan indicates, 'supports the fantasy where Lol attaches herself to the time after, to a beyond of which she has not been able to find the word, this word which, closing the doors on the three of them, would have joined her at the moment when her lover had taken off the dress, the black dress of the woman and revealed her nudity'⁶⁰. He evokes here the first occurrence of the theme of the dress that Duras correlates to the defect of a word 'word-absence, word-hole, pierced in its centre with a hole, of this hole where all the other words would have been buried'⁶¹, a phallic signifier that would have 'retained those who wanted to leave, it would have convinced them of the impossible, it would have deafened them to any other word than itself, in one time, it would have named them, them, the future, the instant'⁶². 'For the lack of its existence, [Lol] is silent'⁶³. The word that founds the word, that would have 'bricked up' the ball, would have held Lol back, she would have seen Mickaël Richardson

undress Anne-Marie Stretter.

The function of this scene is complex because Duras evokes on the one hand the total annihilation of Lol that would have resulted, the completion of the ravishing, where she remains suspended in a ghostly non-existence. But this scene is also the one Lol is looking for, to hold on to the other, to existence. The missing word is also the one that would have given her speech. Thus, Lacan emphasizes that the time after the ravishing, Lol tries to attach herself to the fantasy through this scene, she first summons it as what is missing (she gives form to what is missing) and then makes it exist through Jacques Hold and Tatiana. The function of the missing word is that of joining, of conjoining her', to the scenario of the fantasy. Such is the function that Lacan will give to the phallus in his very last teaching, to ensure the stapling of S1 and a. It is already at the time part of the writing of the fantasy, since the poinçon is the mark of castration. It is as object a that Lol would have to correlate herself to this scene, which she will do by making herself exist as a gaze.

But let us note again the complexity of the Durasian montage, which includes the imaginary, with the unveiling of nudity. Lacan continues: 'Does this go further? Yes, to the unspeakable of this nudity that insinuates itself to replace its own body. There everything stops'⁶⁴. The annihilation would be the replacement, the replacement of its body, by that of the other woman. But the image of the body is also point of stopping of the ravishing.

Isn't it enough that we recognize what happened to Lol, that which reveals what it is about love; that is to say, about this image, image of oneself with which the other dresses you and which leaves you when you are robbed of it, what is underneath? What to say about it when this evening, Lol, as you were all to the passion of your nineteen years, was your start in the world, your dress taking⁶⁵, and that your nudity was projected on the dress, giving it its brilliance?

What remains with you then is what people said about you when you were little, that you were never all there.⁶⁶

56-57: *Ibid.*

58 Marguerite Duras, *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein*, p. 49-50.

59 *Ibid.*, p. 64 and p. 115.

60 Jacques Lacan, *l'Homage fait à Marguerite Duras du Ravissement de Lol V. Stein*, p 193.

61 Marguerite Duras, *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein*, p. 48.

62 *Ibid.*

63 *Ibid.*

64 Jacques Lacan, *l'Homage fait à Marguerite Duras du Ravissement de Lol V. Stein*, p 193.

65 "Dress taking" is the translation of "prise de robe", which means one's entry into the world by wearing a specific dress

66 *Ibid.*

Lol arrived triumphant at the ball, dressed in Mickaël Richardson's love, which gave the image of the body its brilliance, its phallic value, but also which made the nudity pass over the dress, that is to say that his desire was correlated to the object a, hidden, veiled by i(a) but here exposed as *agalma* when Lol's body is a beloved, desired body. She was advancing as a desirable young woman. That was her dress taking. Lacan points out that when this image is stolen, when Michael Richardson's love moves to another, he leaves Lol reduced to nothing, to non-existence, because the object is no longer *agalma* but *palea*. 'What has not been accomplished' for her, explains Jacques-Alain Miller, 'is to be able to witness the appearance of the other's denuded body, denuded by the man. By the same token, Lol is in deficit of this body that would have given her a body, a body of desire. At that moment, it is as a subject that she finds herself denuded. Plunged into her emptiness, she wanders in search of an equivalent of this body in the eyes of men'⁶⁷.

Lacan evokes the question of the lack of feminine being which is then revealed with this non-existence when he refers to the experience of the young girl who becomes a woman, her dress taking, but he does not push his reading too far in this sense either. No doubt one can hear that the clinical question of psychosis remains present for Lacan. Jacques-Alain Miller accentuates and specifies this in his own reading of the novel: 'This is not the story of a woman forsaken and deceived, it is the story of a woman who is waiting to capture the magic moment when the object of the man's desire will be revealed [...] insofar as another woman would be the object. [...] In Lol V. Stein, the narcissistic identification is not accomplished. To find her body, and to find even the image of herself, she must go through the other. And beyond the image of oneself, to find its being, it is necessary that it passes through the other'⁶⁸. He specifies that the singularity of the experience of Lol is about what i(a) took away and left her deprived of any identification, even to the object, as pure non-existence.

The centre of gazes

For his part, Lacan indicates that what has fallen apart for Lol at the end of the ball is to be 'the centre of

all gazes'⁶⁹. She was that at the beginning of the ball, in her dress taking, on the phallic side, then in her drama. What remains, when the image of the body is stolen from her by the other woman, is a vacuity which places her at the centre of all gazes. During the scene of the ball, she finds herself identified with the object a. Let us note that Lacan points out, as Jacques-Alain Miller emphasizes, that this is what drops out at the end of the ball scene. Lacan specifies that the object a, the centre of the gaze, is constitutive of the knot, of his knot which he places at the heart of his topology (which is not yet the Borromean topology of the *sinthome*). He rather evokes the topological objects, torus, Klein bottle, Möbius strip, envelopes without an inside or outside, to underline 'that in the seam of its centre all the glances are turned back to yours, and your own saturates them and that forever, Lol, you will crave from every passers-by. Let us follow Lol in the seizing this talisman while it passes from one to the other, and which everyone is in a hurry to get rid of as if it is dangerous: the glance. Any glance will be yours, Lol, as a fascinated Jacques Hold would say to me being for himself ready to love 'all of Lol'⁷⁰. Lol tries to recover her gaze, through the gaze of the other. Let us note that Lacan does not say that she seeks to recover in the eyes of the passers-by the image of the body that she will seek in the other woman, but rather the primordial identification with the gaze that has dropped, to situate herself again as the centre of the gazes.

Lacan does not dwell on these clinical notations that Jacques-Alain Miller will bring out, but he underlines the knowledge of the novel concerning the function of the object in the structuring of the subject.

There is a grammar of the subject where one gathers this brilliant trait. It will return under a pen that has pointed it out to me.

Let us verify, this gaze is everywhere in the novel. And the woman of the event is very easy to recognize from the fact that Marguerite Duras depicts her as a non-gaze?

I teach that vision splits between the image and the gaze, that the first model of the gaze is the stain from which derives the radar that the section of the glance offers to the expanse.⁷¹

67 Jacques-Alain Miller, commentary at the intervention of Eric Laurent at his course *Les Us du Laps*, published in *Duras avec Lacan*, op. cit., pp. 37-43

68 *Ibid.*

69 Jacques Lacan, *l'Homage fait à Marguerite Duras du Ravissement de Lol V. Stein*, p. 193.

70 *Ibid.*, p.194.

71 *Ibid.*

Lacan also avoids situating the feminine question on the side of the ravished Lol but rather in the relation to the semblant: Anne-Marie Stetter is 'the woman of the event', the image, i(a), a non-gaze; Lol, the gaze, the stain in the rye field. The female lack of being is compensated by the masquerade, the handling of the clothing, of the image which veils the nudity and makes it agalmatic. She who points towards the object cause of the desire, (promets la maenad) 'promises debauchery'⁷² as he will say it later in *Encore*.

Yet he chooses not to pull the reading of the novel too far in the direction of an interpretation of knowledge about femininity, not to go too far in the direction, where the criticism has tended to go. He immediately reminds us that his aim is the demonstration that Durassian writing proceeds from the 'schism of the eye and the gaze', evoking very directly his teaching in Seminar XI (the term 'stain' also refers to the passage on the sardine can⁷³). The gaze is the cause of the vision, it is eluded from its field, that is how it look at me, it concerns me (Lacan plays on the equivocation *ça me regarde*). The sardine can reveals that Lacan is the stain in the painting, the centre of the fishermen's gaze, the identification with the object beyond phallic identification, that the gaze extracted is his own. 'the gaze, is that which can be spread with the brush on the canvas, to make you put down yours in front of the work of the painter'⁷⁴, adds Lacan. He reminds that the work catches the glance of the one who contemplates it, the satisfaction is the appeasement of the tension of the scopic jouissance, bound to the deposit of the glance in a casket.

However, Lacan correlates the results of Seminar XI with those of Seminar X when he returns to the question of anguish. Lol aiming at Jacques Hold's attention, seeks to arouse his anguish.

One says that what concerns you is the gaze. But it is rather the attention of what looks at you that it is a question of obtaining. Because of what looks at you without you looking at it, you do not know the anguish. It is this anguish that seizes Jacques Hold when, from the window of the hotel where he is waiting for Tatiana, he discovers, at the edge of the rye field in front of him, Lol lying down.⁷⁵

It is essential that Jacques Hold knows himself to be looked at, to give his anguish, i.e., he incarnates the divided subject. What the novel specifies is the conjunction of the subject and the object, that the subject is supported by the object and that the object is situated by the barred subject. It is the signifier that is the cause of its extraction. The object then operates as the cause of the subject's desire. Lacan emphasizes that Jacques Hold moves from panic to acceptance, to consent to the extraction, to castration. The conjunction of the subject and the object can only be made by maintaining the gap between the two.

It is at this point that Lacan introduces, following Marguerite Duras, the third term, the imaginary. It will still be necessary that he shows her, propitiatory at the window, Tatiana, without being moved by the fact that she has not noticed anything, cynical of having already sacrificed her to the law of Lol, since it is in the certainty of obeying Lol's desire that he goes, with a tenfold vigour, to get it on with his lover, stirring her up with these words of love of which he knows that it is the other one who opens the floodgates, but of these cowardly words of which he also feels that he would not want them for her.⁷⁶

Tatiana does not see, Lol is thus presence and absence. Tatiana does not know. She is the substitute object. Jacques Hold's desire is governed by the object of cause, Lol, at the command of the law (it is no longer the Other, the symbolic that is in the place of command but the real). It is the extraction of the object that opens the fault line of the subject, the floodgates of the words of love, that leads Jacques Hold to give his lack, his castration, to someone who does not want it. It is in this sense that Tatiana is 'sacrificed' to the law of Lol: love sustains itself with an illusion although what commands is the extracted object. Should we understand, moreover, that it is to the image of the body that the phallic value is attached, participating in the gap between the barred subject and a, in the being of three? Lacan seems to be trying to situate the function of the imaginary in the fantasy, in relation to the real and the symbolic. The fact that Jacques Hold shows Tatiana to Lol proves essential.

⁷² Jacques Lacan. *Seminar XX. Encore*. Trans Bruce Fink. Norton 1998. p.6.

⁷³ Jacques Lacan. *Seminar XI. Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, p.

⁷⁴ Jacques Lacan, « *L'Hommage fait à Marguerite Duras du Ravisement de Lol V. Stein* », p 194.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

Being in three

After having situated Jacques Hold as a barred subject, he specifies Lol's place as the object gaze in the scene in the rye field. 'It is not Lol who looks, if only because she sees nothing. She is not the voyeur. What is happening is happening to her. Lol is not a subject but a spot that locates the gaze, from which Jacques Hold sees himself looked at. The scene 'realizes' Lol's being as gaze, as object a, to be correlated to the barred subject, to Jacques Hold.

The locus of the gaze is demonstrated when Lol makes it emerge as a pure object, with the right words, for Jacques Hold, still innocent.

'Naked, naked under her black hair', these words from Lol's mouth generate the passage from Tatiana's beauty to the function of the intolerable stain that belongs to this object.⁷⁷

Lol's expression, naked under her black hair, formulates to Jacques Hold that nudity lies under the veil, pointing towards the object a. She dedicates herself to embodying it, dividing Hold. Lacan emphasizes:

This function is incompatible with the maintenance of the narcissistic image where the lovers work to contain their enamoration, and Jacques Hold immediately feels the effect.

From then on, doomed to realize Lol's fantasy, they will be less and less together, the one to the other.⁷⁸

The unveiling of the function of the object makes the subject appear in its division. It punctures the imaginary completeness and no longer lets the one who is warned about it delude himself completely. The lovers are doomed 'to realize the fantasy of Lol'. The real is in the place of command, Lol's 'fantasy' holds in the being of three, the conjunction of the three dimensions.

Lacan approaches the fantasy anew in order to situate the imaginary there, he opens there the way to a Borromean topology. Lacan emphasizes that he situates there the teaching of the Ravishing of Lol V. Stein: the logical or topological approach of the fantasy, of the being in three, of the constitutive dimensions of what

will become the 'parlêtre':

It is not, manifest in Jacques Hold, his division as a subject that will hold us longer, it is what it is in the being in three where Lol suspends herself, placing on her emptiness the 'I think' of the bad dream that makes the matter of the book. But, in doing so, he is content to give her a consciousness of being that sustains itself outside of her, in Tatiana.⁷⁹

The clinical thread is held when he notes that Lol 'suspends herself' as this "being in three" reconstructed from the object position that she makes consist as identification on her side. Jacques Hold 'places on her emptiness' an 'I think', he gives her a 'consciousness of being'. He confers on her the place of the subject of the consciousness that is nonetheless non-existent, illusory; but Lol uses him to consist as an object on the one hand, and to tie the object to the barred subject and to the image of the body through Tatiana on the other.

The following remark: 'This being in three however, it is well Lol who arranges it'⁸⁰, underlines the responsibility of the subject in its own construction, the Other gradually fades away, and especially puts us on the way to a non-deficit approach to the psychoses. Lacan notes:

And it is because the 'I think' of Jacques Hold comes to haunt Lol of too close a caring, at the end of the novel, on the road where he accompanies her on a pilgrimage to the place of the event, - that Lol becomes mad.

Of which indeed the episode carries signs, but of which I intend to state here that I hold it of Marguerite Duras⁸¹.

He comes too close and does not maintain the necessary distance between subject and object. Engaging his desire for her, he makes the impasse at the necessary mediation of the phallic veil, he pushes at her lack of bodily envelope and ignores the knotting of three. She finds herself in the direct position of the object of desire of the Other, without any phallic mediation. Jacques-Alain Miller specifies that what has been taken away from Lol is her being and that when Jacques Hold makes her say 'I am Tatiana', he makes her admit 'that

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

her being is elsewhere, that she no longer knows the difference between herself and the other woman', which is what drives her mad⁸². He notes that 'Lacan's text is a clinical text through and through'⁸³. "To be understood does not suit Lol, who cannot be safe from ravishment"⁸⁴, concludes Lacan.

Sublimation

To conclude his 'Homage' Lacan celebrates the artist's know-how that he considers to be of greater scope than that of theoretical knowledge:

More superfluous remains my commentary on what Marguerite Duras does in giving the existence of discourse to her creation.

Because the thought where I would restore her knowledge to her, would not encumber her with the conscience of being in an object, since this object, she has already recovered it by her art.

This is the meaning of sublimation, something which still confounds psychoanalysts, since on bequeathing to them the term, Freud had remained tight-lipped⁸⁵.

He opposes his commentary to the work of sublimation of which he gives a definition elsewhere (the recovery of the object by art), which amounts to opposing the way of meaning to that of praxis, of the practice of the letter such as he will specify it later, which aims directly at the object, operates on and with it. Evoking the fact that Freud gave few indications on this term, he situates the logic in that sublimation does not come from sense. He denounces the readings of those who take literally the thesis of the derivation of the sexual impulses by understanding that it leads to a satisfaction that would not be the right one, a fake one regarding sexual enjoyment. 'The satisfaction that it carries away is not to be taken for illusory⁸⁶', he affirms on the contrary. 'It is that we open here on the ethics of the psychoanalysis'⁸⁷, he underlines, when we take seriously the work of the artist who points towards the function of the object. A reference to his commentary of the Heptameron of Marguerite de Navarre of which he denounces the readings that would aim at only the historical truth, confirms it in this perspective, as well as the testimonies received by

82 Jacques-Alain Miller, 'Leçon 22 du cours Les Us du Laps', published in *Duras avec Lacan*, op. cit. p 61-79

83 Ibid.

84 Jacques Lacan, 'l'Homage fait à Marguerite Duras du Ravissement de Lol V. Stein', p 195.

85 Ibid.

86 Ibid. p. 196.

87 Ibid.

Marguerite Duras of how her novel with the uncommon plot, touches her readers.

Lacan prefers making the structure visible to sociological criticism, the seizure by writing of the function of the object. The Durassian work proceeds to a reversal of the glance in beauty, it ventures on the 'threshold of the between-two-deaths'⁸⁸, i.e. to apprehend, or to approach, beyond meaning, between the signifiers, the question of the jouissance. 'It is around this place that gravitates, [...] the characters of the Durassian work'⁸⁹, Lacan concludes, leading the reader towards an approach towards scopic jouissance.

Lacan's lyricism in this conclusion, the evocative images of the pitfalls of courtly love, of heroism, of the night sky, invite us to use the crossing of fictional universes without seeking a recognition of reality but to let the medieval imagination wander beyond the mystical sense towards an apprehension of the stain in a sky without God. The parallel between Marguerite Duras and Marguerite d'Angoulême allows us to give a nobility to the exploration of the theme of love in the novel, to project on it a new light but also to shift our reading of any search for truth by verisimilitude. If Marguerite Duras differs from her predecessor in her unbelief, Lacan lends her a faith, a 'charity'⁹⁰ that animates her work and constitutes the proof of it. Marguerite Duras has faith in the fallen object⁹¹ that Lacan, through his metaphors, puts in the place of God, like a spot in the sky. She reveals the non-existence of the Other and the command of the object. It 'celebrates the taciturn nuptials of the empty life with the indescribable object'⁹².

Love is a matter of conjunction of the signifier and the object, it brings us to the heart of the structure of the subject, to 'the structural relation that to be of the Other, the desire sustains to the object that causes it'⁹³. Let us note that the only reference to the Other in this text amounts to the mentioning of its flaw, that of desire. The 'empty life' evokes the metaphor of the potter in Seminar VII, the collection of the Thing⁹⁴ by the work of the artist, the elevation of the object 'to the dignity of the Thing'. But if the vase was then the signifier, the empty life in the context of this 'Homage' can as well evoke the envelope of the body. Lacan will take up this metaphor

88 Ibid., p. 197. This reference evokes his approach to Antigone in his seminar *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*

89 Jacques Lacan, 'l'Homage fait à Marguerite Duras du Ravissement de Lol V. Stein', p 197.

90 Ibid.

91 'Télévision' is evoked where Lacan says: 'Un Saint, pour me faire comprendre, ne fait pas la charité. Plutôt il se met à faire le déchet : il décharité' in *Autres écrits*, op.cit., p. 519-520.

again in Seminar XXIII, The Sinthome, to situate in the place of the vase the consistency of the imaginary, and in the place of the hole, the symbolic (instead of the real). Here, already, the Thing, pure lack of being, is displaced into the indescribable object, as the only remainder of being, sounding the death knell of all ontology⁹⁵.

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92 Jacques Lacan, 'l'Homage fait à Marguerite Duras du Ravissement de Lol V. Stein', p 197.

93 Ibid.

94 Ibid.

95 The text was first published in Duras avec Lacan, op. cit. p 81-108

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