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Mad Love and Narrative Uncertainty in the Twentieth Century: A Study of the Good Soldier and Le Ravisement de Lol V. Stein

Rose DuCharme
Scripps College

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**MAD LOVE AND NARRATIVE UNCERTAINTY IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY:
A STUDY OF *THE GOOD SOLDIER* AND *LE RAVISSEMENT DE LOL V. STEIN***

by

ROSE EMILY DUCHARME

**SUBMITTED TO SCRIPPS COLLEGE IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
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PROFESSOR NETTLETON**

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I shut my eyes and all the world drops dead.

(I think I made you up inside my head.)

—Sylvia Plath, *Mad Girl's Love Song*

“The sickest persons are always the most worried by the sickness of Others. After cursing Others, Oedipus finds he himself is guilty.”

—René Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*

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Introduction

This thesis is primarily an investigation into the literary convention of an unreliable narrator that became increasingly common in the twentieth century. In examining this form of textual destabilization of meaning, I focus also on the representation of madness and adultery because both were particularly strong plot elements of the novels I chose, *The Good Soldier* by Ford Madox Ford and *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein* by Marguerite Duras, as well as subjects that I believe are intrinsically related to the unreliability of the narrators. Adultery often relies upon a lie told to the outside world and undermines both the ideal of love and the traditional narrative arc society provides for what the good life should be: marriage and a family. Madness functions as an unreliable monologue within one's head, an untrustworthy sense of self. There is furthermore a long tradition of both the novel of adultery as well as the use of madness as a subject of fascination in European literature, as I will discuss in Chapter I.

The Good Soldier and *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein* might seem highly different novels at a glance. *The Good Soldier* is a British novel published in 1915 and associated with early twentieth century Modernism and Ford's theory of literary Impressionism.¹ Ford was heavily involved in the British literary scene, and after publishing *The Good Soldier*, he enlisted to fight in World War I and lived in France. Marguerite Duras grew up in a poor French family in colonial Indochina, and moved to France as an adult, where she joined the Communist Party. Duras wrote *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein* fifty years after *The Good Soldier*, publishing it in 1964. Critics have grouped her works with the French *nouveau roman*, although Duras insisted

¹ See Chapter 2.

that her novels did not belong to this movement.² I chose to compare these novels because in spite of the cultural, temporal, and biographical disparities in their authors, their narrative structures and central themes are remarkably similar. *The Good Soldier* is narrated by John Dowell who is obsessively focused on Edward Ashburnham, later revealing that this is in fact the story of his wife, Florence's betrayal. Edward is a serial adulterer, and over the course of the novel has an affair with Florence, Mrs. Maiden, who dies of a heart condition, and Nancy, who goes mad after Edward commits suicide. *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein* is narrated by Jaques Hold who, like Dowell, fixates on telling a story about another person, Lol, which is similarly tainted by his own emotional involvement, his love for her. Lol allegedly goes mad after her fiancé, Michael Richardson, abandons her for another woman, and then she replicates this instance of adultery by having an affair with Hold after she has married another man. To be with Lol, Hold cheats on his previous lover, Lol's childhood friend, Tatiana (who is also married to someone else). At the end of the novel, Lol returns to the casino at T. Beach where Michael abandoned her, and she experiences a final relapse of madness.

While this thesis sets up a genealogy of nineteenth and twentieth century British and French literature that traces madness and narrative as influenced by love and desire, it is not my intention to claim that these works directly influenced one another, but rather that *The Good Soldier* and *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein* caught themes and motifs that were already literary undercurrents, and that these subjects are essential to the unreliability of their narratives. I have no evidence as to whether or not Duras read Ford's writing, however she was aware of British

² The *nouveau roman* is a twentieth century experimental style of writing, particularly associated with writer Alain Robbe-Grillet. According to her biographer, Laure Adler, during the publication of *Le Vice-Consul*, Duras "announced she didn't understand the *nouveau roman* at all, had never been party to it and condemned its sometimes caricatural experimentation. She accused it of going around in circles and of being a fairly skilled rereading of American surrealist literature" (263).

and American Modernism. As a student, Duras “read Faulkner’s *Light in August*, discovered the poetry of T. S. Eliot and the works of Joseph Conrad. She loved Conrad and would read him over and over again, all through her life” (Adler 77). Her love of Conrad is particularly interesting since he collaborated very closely with Ford and the two co-authored several novels. Ford wrote literary criticism on nineteenth century French authors and considered Flaubert in particular an important precursor to his Impressionist style.³ Furthermore, Ford translated *The Good Soldier* into French himself, and in his “Dedicatory Letter to Stella Ford” (1927), he cited his friend, John Rodker, who referred to the novel as “the finest French novel in the English language” (Ford, *Good Soldier* 5). While it is not possible to determine direct influence or productive to pursue such an argument, the particular cross-cultural interest of Ford and Duras makes them particularly useful subjects for comparison.

I begin this thesis by establishing the nineteenth and early twentieth century origins of what I call the mad narrative, which investigates madness as a subject along with the subjective and obsessive lens of the narrator, as well as madness’ relation to love, desire, and disillusionment. The second and third chapters respectively take *The Good Soldier* and *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein* as case studies of how these themes unfold in the twentieth century novel when told by an unreliable male narrator. The situation of a man obsessively focused on a madwoman whom he both fetishizes and silences is common in nineteenth and twentieth century literature and culture and the subject of many feminist critiques, and it is not my intention to base my comparative reading of these situations solely upon the gender of the author. I intentionally focus my reading of *The Good Soldier* and *Le Ravissement* specifically on the account produced by their narrators rather than the author because the frame of a first person narrator telling a story

³ Ford writes in *The March of Literature*, “There was writing before Flaubert; but Flaubert and his coterie opened, as it were, a window through which one saw the literary scene from an entirely new angle” (732-2)

inherently establishes some distance between narrative production and the author's writing. Both novels are metafictional in the sense that they call attention to the characters' construction of the story and how stories are told and interpreted.

While this thesis deals with characters who are explicitly and implicitly categorized as "mad," the usage of this term is unspecific, largely resulting from its somewhat indiscriminate usage in literature. While most of the "mad" characters studied may not actually be clinically insane or suffer from the same mental health disorders, much as hysteria in the nineteenth century was a nondescript and broadly diagnosed condition, the madness in the novels I examine is loosely applied. The authors themselves do not attempt to provide a medically specific account of their characters' psychology. It is therefore impossible to say whether Duras's *Lol* or Ford's *Nancy* are really insane, what precise medical condition they suffer from, and what is this madness' real source. Furthermore, to do so is not essential to understanding the workings of these narratives. The project of this thesis is rather to understand how and why madness is employed in novels of the twentieth century and its relation to the unreliability of language, social relations, and the overarching concepts around which society is structured. Through my analysis, I hope to demonstrate how psychological unreliability and social lies carry over into the language of the narrative and how the stability of linguistic meaning in the twentieth century collapses alongside faith in larger social institutions and the soundness of one's own mind.

Chapter I: Love and the Mad Narrative: A Genealogy

The production of fiction inherently involves awareness that the story does not entirely conform to reality, however realistic it may be, and therefore the willing acceptance on the part of the reader of something that is not true. While the novel has addressed its own precarious existence as a producer of false illusions since *Don Quixote*, conventions of the unreliable narrator and recognition of the decline of social institutions, and even the inability to trust one's own internal reality begin to infect literature at a greater rate in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. In narratives that illustrate the shattering of frameworks by which we understand the world and betray an anxiety of confinement within a limited, even psychologically unstable mind, protagonists are also often preoccupied with uncovering an elusive meaning. Some novels do not abandon the limited and fragmented narrative perspective as flawed, but rather probe their characters' fixations upon an object, investing it with signification as if it were the key to all troubling uncertainties. In the works I will examine, this object is another person whose story and its underlying meaning becomes the source of narrative desire. As narrative structure, the mind, and society degenerate in parallel form or are revealed as corrupted or broken, love becomes a particularly forceful and destabilizing aspect of this desire to find the hidden meaning. The aim of this chapter is therefore to trace the infection of narrative with madness and social decay alongside its reinvestment of desire in interpretation, which results in delusion. While this chapter places several disparate works in dialogue with *The Good Soldier* and *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein*, the purpose of this study is not to trace specific lines of influence, but rather formulate a partial genealogy of a particular type of unreliable narrative. I begin with the nineteenth century and the sense of destabilization that spontaneously arises to undermine adherence to the institutions that structure society (namely marriage) in Gustave

Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* and end with a study of how this destabilization extends into twentieth century Modernism.

1. The Ruptured Dream

Deception of the characters within a novel creates a sort of narrative lie, albeit one in which the reader may be complicit. The next step of the lie is the narrative's deception of the reader. This thesis examines the novel of adultery and its evolution into the twentieth century as not only an instance of deception within the narrative, but its effects of rupturing narrative convention and producing delusion. Tony Tanner argues in *Adultery in the Novel* that adultery works to undermine not only social, but linguistic convention in nineteenth century literature. As Tanner explains, there is a cultural anxiety that the destruction of the marriage contract, which is part of a larger social contract, can lead to the destabilization of other sorts of societal codes, and even the structure of the novel:

On another level we may say that as the contact between man and wife loses its sense of necessity and binding power, so does the contract between novelist and reader... In confronting the problems of marriage and adultery, the bourgeois novel finally has to confront not only the provisionality of social laws and rules and structures but the provisionality of its own procedures and assumptions. (15)

Tanner examines adultery's threat to the economic union of the family and the linguistic terms particular to marriage to show that because systems of social classification are interconnected, adultery destabilizes societal meaning beyond the individual marriage. As Tanner states, "if rules of marriage, economic rules, and linguistic rules are in some way interdependent, then the breakdown of one implies the possible breakdown of all three" (85). Because marriage is "the all-subsuming, all-organizing, all-containing contract" (15) that is so essential to the stability of society in the nineteenth century, novels of that period are inevitably structured in relation to it.

Tanner's analysis is important to understanding the centrality of love and sexuality to disillusionment and novelistic uncertainty because if love is at the crux of a larger destabilization of faith in society,⁴ this means not only that the breach of faith in the social narrative has a high emotional impact, but that the individual's conception of others, and by extension their relation to the external world, is also at stake.

Insanity and textual madness, the dark side of narrative uncertainty, may spring from a sort of misdirected and overbearing desire left unfulfilled. In *Reading for the Plot*, Peter Brooks argues that narrative produces pleasure through readers' anticipation of the end, which is what enables meaning to be retrospectively ascribed. Brooks demonstrates how desire entraps the reader in a perpetual search for knowledge and meaning:

Narratives portray the motors of desire that drive and consume their plots, and they also lay bare the nature of narration as a form of human desire that seeks to seduce and to subjugate the listener, to implicate him in the thrust of a desire that never can quite speak its name—never can quite come to the point—but that insists on speaking over and over again its movement toward that name. (Brooks 61)

Narrative desire thus constitutes the obsessive pursuit of the absent or unknown and the effort to interpret or impose a meaning, and the narrator continues the story out of this frustration. Adding a narrator as the interpretive voice or constructing a frame narrative only adds multiple levels of narrative desire, for narrative transmission is an exchange arising from the intersection of the desires of those speaking and those listening, the author and the reader. Simply put, the text becomes “a place of rhetorical exchange or transaction” (Brooks 234). Characters pursue, for example, knowledge of their elusive love, and the reader pursues the characters' story in a

⁴ In broader terms, the sense of societal destabilization that informs early twentieth century literature began in part in the nineteenth century as a result of the large scale social and political reorganization that arose from Europe's many revolutions. Events such as the repeated French revolutions restructured social class and reorganized the political system, and yet perpetually failed to attain the ideal society.

parallel fashion. As narratives of deception and delusion such as those of adultery and the unreliable narrator demonstrate, meaning in the novel is contingent and sometimes not fully graspable. When interpreting a story is based on absent knowledge (the lack of meaning, the impossibility of knowing another's mind), a character's obsessive insistence upon reading becomes a sort of madness (as it does for the reader). One of literature's oldest preoccupations with madness is that derived from reading. Don Quixote's delusion is not unlike that of Emma Bovary, for whom love is infused with her obsession with a novelistic ideal, perpetually shattered by the reality devoid of any such grandeur. If the novel's role is to produce a delusion, those of the late nineteenth and the twentieth century consciously do so, continuously warning readers of the limitations of representation and the unreliability of narrators.

Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* illustrates a disruption of social and linguistic order not only because it is a novel of adultery and quixotic delusion, but because Flaubert so thoroughly demonstrates how marriage and the manufactured narrative of individual identity are parallel illusions that quickly give way to nothingness. Flaubert demonstrates how Emma's idealized vision quickly gives way to her recognition of the boredom and emptiness of life beneath the illusion:

D'où venait donc cette insuffisance de la vie, cette pourriture instantanée des choses où elle s'appuyait?... [...] Rien, d'ailleurs, ne valait la peine d'une recherche ; tout mentait ! Chaque sourire cachait un bâillement d'ennui, chaque joie une malédiction, tout plaisir son dégoût, et les meilleurs baisers ne vous laissaient sur la lèvre qu'une irréalisable envie d'une volupté plus haute. (Flaubert 371)

Tanner probes this "insufficiency" underlying Emma's existence, arguing that Flaubert's language repeatedly tends towards a nothingness, that characters trace meaningless patterns seeking a narrative for themselves that is nothing more than illusion. From the dreadful ennui

that continually recurs, reflected in the monotony and void underlying novelistic signs,⁵ Tanner argues that the entire novel is drawn from an absence. While the novel presents a study of Emma Bovary's life, Tanner casts her as another source of narrative lack:

We have the music of Flaubert's text, and from it and within it we hear and infer the 'motif' of Emma Bovary. But if we search harder and harder for that motif, exactly what happens is that we lose all sense of a founder, or 'original' or 'originating' person. Instead we confront a— "zero at the beginning." (Tanner 273)

As objects become indistinct and the lovers that Emma expects to furnish a novelistic fantasy only perpetuate the monotony of life,⁶ even her existence is a source of insignificance and emptiness behind the veneer of narrative.

Desire in a novel such as *Madame Bovary* thus flows into a vacuum, for its object does not exist. The despair at the center of *Madame Bovary* lies in the suggestion that the idealized romance of adultery in fact leads only to the repeated boredom of marriage. There is no outside to the monotony of the domestic life. As Tanner argues, limits of what was socially acceptable in the nineteenth century corresponded to possibility within a novel, and "thus language is, as it were, as trapped and idle within the house as the wife who all too often was condemned to a circularity that could not be transcended....The bourgeois home turns out to be a hothouse of desire" (Tanner 99). As the example of Emma Bovary demonstrates, desire easily slips into delusion, the next step of which is madness. Unfulfilled desire propels characters to construct or invest in false narratives such as Emma's ideal of love in hopes of finding an alternative to the monotony, and disillusionment sets in when the characters are forced to confront the failure of these dreams. Hysteria, the all-encompassing and easily dispensed diagnosis of women in

⁵ Tanner points to circular symbols within the novel (including the wedding ring) that become indistinguishable representations of nothingness: a hole or a zero (256-7).

⁶ See the discussion of Tanner's theory in Chapter II.

particular, is one potential outlet of this unsatisfied desire for an alternative. Freud references the “housewife’s psychosis” (Dora 13), manifested through obsessional fulfillment of domestic duty, which indicates that confinement and isolation can lead to fixation and disease spreading through the mind with no outlet.

2. The Hysterical Narrative

Madness has been an object of literary fascination for centuries, a contributor to the unsettling tragedy of *Hamlet* and a source special insight to the sane through the fool in *King Lear*. Michel Foucault begins *A History of Madness* with an investigation of insanity’s allure in literature, examining how the language of madness is appropriated and distinguished from reason. The category of reason relies upon the exclusion of non-reason, and thus Foucault emphasizes the liminal position of the insane in medieval society, “a highly symbolic role, made clear by the mental geography involved, where the madman was *confined at the gates of cities*.... A posture that is still his today, if we admit that what was once the visible fortress of a social order is now the castle of our own consciousness” (Foucault 11). Madness is both constructed as exterior to reason and contained by it as a category to be studied and mastered. Because of this construction, the allure of madness goes beyond a cultural fascination with insanity, for the “sane” subject is categorically defined against the “insane.” The investigation of madness is therefore detached from a real person or object, and heavily invested, for madness offers special insight into what we are or are not. In his analysis of the various ways in which madness has been made to speak in literature, Foucault positions it paradoxically as a source of otherwise inaccessible insight, for “while men of reason and wisdom see only fragmentary figures that are all the more frightening for their incompleteness, the madman sees a whole, unbroken sphere.

For him, the crystal ball empty for others is filled with invisible knowledge” (19). In the nineteenth century, Foucault argues that madness becomes a means of accessing “a truth of man” (517), and in novels narrated out of the speaker’s madness, this madness also reflects the supposedly sane outside world, functioning to “reveal its non-sense” (537). Madness thus draws novelistic fascination, particularly in the nineteenth century, and yet in the case of the narrator bent upon interrogating another’s madness, the narrative never reaches a complete understanding of madness itself, but rather reveals the narrator’s own anxieties and desires.

In her analysis of nineteenth century French novels alongside medical narratives of hysteria, Janet Beizer traces how hysteric’s bodies and language are inscribed with meaning by others. Hysteria in the nineteenth century presented both the allure of transcendence and a threat to the societal order because it constituted an overflowing of the boundaries of reason, a mobility of the mind beyond the doctor’s control. Beizer connects the medical conception of hysteria as a disease of the wandering womb with a larger motif of transgressive movement:

The focus on the vagaries of the woman’s mind and the travels of her uterus serves to occult political issues related to the fear that women will not stay in her place within the home, the family, and society, and the threat that, moving outside these traditional structures, she will dislocate ostensibly fixed social boundaries and values. (48)

While Hysteria is feminized and specifically a diagnosis of women, when Charcot applied this diagnosis to other groups, including racial minorities, he likewise associated them with mobility and transgression (Beizer 50). Whether or not the hysteric has power from within madness, Beizer’s analysis demonstrates that hysteria in the nineteenth century presents the potential destruction of reasoned language and the social framework, for much like the adulterer, the hysteric undoes the household by rupturing a prescribed social role.

While the doctors creating accounts of hysteria and the writers chronicling it have authorial control over its narrative expression, they nevertheless position hysteria as a source of

language. As Beizer argues, hysterical symptoms are associated with “one of the most consistent aspects of female effusiveness is verbal incontinence. Hysterics are, not unexpectedly, hyperbolically loquacious: they deliver an irrepressible flow of words and noises that sometimes takes the structured form of fictions and lies” (Beizer 43). While hysterics speak, what they say is uninterpretable, or even deceptive, and thus the symptom of madness is contained within the language they produce, made evident to all who hear, and even perpetuated as it is overheard, interpreted, and transcribed by the doctors. The danger of mad language is its potential to infecting others with belief in the lie, and therefore the speech of the hysteric may present a transgressive threat, though hysterics were often confined within asylums and restricted by doctors. When taken up in literature, the expression of hysteria is not merely a record of the disease, but a source of inspiration, made to convey meaning that transcends the bounds of sanity:

By means of fetishistic reversal, the nineteenth century recuperates its hystericized margins: indefinability is endowed with the portent of meaning, secretions carry secrets, emotional overflow suggests lyrical flow, delirium is the troubled voice of revelation, and speech loss opens the space of an incommunicable sublime. [...] the conversion of hysterical symptom into literary sign always involves the mediation of a controlling discourse whose own story is at stake in the conversion process.
(Beizer 54)

As Beizer emphasizes, the narrative of hysteria is doubly controlled by the doctor who interprets it before the public and the writer who channels it as poetic inspiration, and therefore any study of the narrative of madness must pay close attention to who is speaking. In the following chapters, I will investigate the contagious transfer of madness through narrative by illustrating how the speakers who obsessively probe the mystery of another character’s madness take on the characteristics of madness themselves. Their narratives of madness become an outpouring of unreliable language ensues from these speakers’ own psychological instability.

While madness is not a contagious disease, it can almost be considered as such in select nineteenth and twentieth century texts, for rather than being isolated to a single character, it becomes a symptom of society and the narrative itself. In opposition to the glorification of madness as source of inspiration associated with the Romantic movement, Naturalism takes a darker view of madness as symptomatic of a larger societal disease. Emile Zola sets a precedent for the hereditary spread of psychological degeneration in Rougon-Macquart cycle. In *Le Roman Expérimentale*,⁷ Zola outlines his theory of the novel as a study of human nature following scientific methods. Zola argues for a fatalistic *déterminisme*, a hereditarily transmitted social degeneration waiting to unfold in certain environmental conditions. Zola applies this concept to an analysis of Balzac's *Cousine Bette*: "Hulot se gangrène, et aussitôt tout se gâte autour de lui, le cercle sociale se détraque, la santé sociale se trouve compromise" (Zola 27). Hulot's actual disease manifests itself as a metaphorical societal rotting. Zola's theories of hereditary degeneration and transmitted vice certainly fit with nineteenth century medical ideology, for Charcot, for example, saw hysteria as a result of "degenerate heredity" (Roth 3). The idea of hereditary and contagious degeneration positions madness as a broader contagion, the insanity of one person being transmittable to all. Madness becomes the symptom of broader social decay rather than an individual malady.

While notions of heredity and contagion evoke the rampant transmission of madness, medical texts that point to memory as a source of hysteria cast madness as something that can be preserved and revisited. Erasing the mind therefore became a way of purging the disease. Charcot considered hysteria "a radical dysfunction of memory" resulting from psychological

⁷ This work presents Zola's theory of writing and was highly influential for the late nineteenth century Naturalist movement, which undertakes study of humans as scientific subjects whose lives are governed by larger environmental forces rather than individual will.

trauma (Roth 3-4). Treatment might involve excising the memory, thus stifling the ongoing recurring narrative of hysteria, for “Janet used hypnosis as a technology of forgetting in a variety of circumstances. In their somnambulistic states, hysterics had their traumatic memories or *idées fixes* removed like malignant tumors; or, perhaps more accurately, the growths were rendered benign” (Roth 11). Freud and Breuer’s theory of trauma posits memory of trauma as an agent that can operate even when the patient is not consciously aware.⁸ Breuer and Freud note that traumatic memories may be “completely absent from the patients’ memory when they are in a normal psychical state” (9). While the patient represses traumatic memory, the source of hysteria remains concealed and preserved in the patient’s mind unless the doctor can uncover and remove the memory. The mind repetitively replays traumatic memories, yet this occurs only within repressed unconscious thought, perpetuated without the patient’s awareness. While Nineteenth century doctors treated hysteria as a medical phenomena rather than a literary subject, memory is a clear concern of the novel, which in a sense functions to preserve a narrative after its author is long dead. Memory affected by trauma preserves the disease of hysteria, and yet in both medical texts and nineteenth century novels on hysteria, hysteric’s memories are not directly represented, rather they are mediated through another’s interpretation and limited perspective. The narrative of hysteria paradoxically works to preserve what cannot and yet must slip into oblivion.

Since Ezra Pound’s “make it new” serves as the manifesto of Modernism,⁹ it is easy to read twentieth century literature as a breach of what came before it. The image of the wandering womb distorting hysterics’ speech seems an antiquated notion of the nineteenth century, and yet

⁸ “We presume rather that the psychical trauma—or more precisely the memory of trauma—acts like a foreign body which long after its entry must continue to be regarded as an agent that is still at work” (Freud and Breuer 6)

⁹ When referring to Modernist literature, I am primarily considering early twentieth century literature and its late nineteenth century precursors.

twentieth century Modernist literature is still heavily invested in the portrayal of madness and the narratives that arise from it. David Trotter undertakes a project similar to Beizer's in examining the manifestation of paranoia in literature, particularly in terms of how Modernist fiction betrays symptoms of paranoia inherited from the nineteenth century. Trotter defines paranoia as fundamentally a delusion, "a homeostatic system, adjusting the degree of fantasized persecution to the degree of fantasized grandeur. The symmetry thus produced constitutes a parallel universe" (Trotter 22). Trotter argues that paranoia reflects an aspect of the modern identity tied to the destruction of the *ancien regime* that comes out of the French Revolution and the professionalization of British society following the Industrial Revolution. These events caused modern society to operate with a greater promise of social possibility, where individuals could hope to make a living off of the uniqueness and value of their own ideas, though Europe's class structures still restricted social mobility. The downside of this system is of course the constant pressure placed upon the individual to be a self-made success, which produces the dual fantasy of greatness and fear of insignificance. Trotter demonstrates the conflation of political anxieties with novelistic delusion, for example, in the case of the Edwardian spy novel: "The years between 1900 and 1914 saw the establishment, not at all coincidentally, of the British spy novel and the British secret service. Both invested heavily in fantasy. Indeed, they invested in the *same* fantasy, of an omnipotent German adversary. They invested in paranoia." (Trotter 142). The sense of imminent political threat, while justified by the real danger of Fascism and the World Wars, also fueled delusion. The idea of the average young man suddenly stumbling into international conspiracy, Trotter argues is an instance of paranoia that is similarly manifested in Modernism's continual search for the exceptional.

Paranoid delusion is indeed a form of madness more intrinsic to twentieth century thought than hysteria, and Trotter finds in it similar concerns of the anxiety of fictionality. By casting paranoiacs as living in a “parallel universe,” Trotter portrays paranoia as an exercise in fictionality and the production of an alternative narrative of oneself. He emphasizes the importance of internal narrative laws governing the delusion, for “paranoiacs condemn themselves to meaning; they lock themselves away inside interpretation, inside their own systems. For them, there is no such thing as accident, or mere causality (the ordinary operation of the laws of the universe)” (30). The act of interpreting signs, which goes along with applying meaning to the uncertain, can thus be construed as an act of paranoia by Trotter’s definition. Trotter traces paranoia through conventions of the exceptional protagonist and the hero, which engineers the villain. Through his analysis of hero and villain, Trotter demonstrates how characters identities are imagined constructions in relation (or opposition) to the other characters:

Narrative does the protagonist’s reimagining for him. Narrative enmeshes him in ‘actual’ conspiracy. Narrative externalizes paranoid symmetry as the mutual pursuit of hero and villain, whose ultimate cornering of each other gives both a reason to live, a certain (doubled) uniqueness. (Trotter 82)

Literary plots thus become themselves manifestations of paranoia. Desire for an exceptional hero produces his rival as a double, both perpetuating the desired fantasy, the delusion of something greater or more fulfilling than the mediocrity of life. This desire for something greater than the unexceptional life as the root of delusion or even madness runs as a current throughout literary history, present in *Don Quixote* and *Madame Bovary*. It is a particularly strong current in Modernism, however, because escape of the ordinary through language and literary style becomes important in a way it was not before. The Modernist convention of the unreliable narrator adds a metafictional layer by making readers aware of the possibility that the narrator’s story could be part fantasy produced consciously or unconsciously in an effort to uphold this sort

of paranoid identity. I now turn to a more specific examination of psychological instability in the early twentieth century, focusing on obsession with another's story, the desire to interpret, the maddening force of love, and the unreliability of individual perception, taking as case studies Freud's *Dora* and Proust's *Un Amour de Swann*.

3. Mad Love, Textual Desire

As Brooks explains, stories are told out of desire. The speaker often has a purpose in telling, and the interlocutor may have a motive in hearing out the end. In relation to Balzac's frame narrative in *Le Colonel Chabert*, Brooks uses the language of psychoanalysis to explain how the stories told within a novel are not simply catalogues of past events, but the passing on of the speaker's own desires:

[The speaker and listener's] relationship is propitious to the full development of the transference, where the analyst in dialogue with the analysand becomes the fictive object of all past investments of desire, and where the interlocutory situation becomes the place of repetition and working through of a past not yet mastered and brought into correct, therapeutic relation with the present. (Brooks 226)

If the act of telling a story can be interpreted as informed by the speaker's desire, so can the drive to interpret. The precarious construction of meaning from another's speech is particularly uncertain when the other's story is not a coherent narrative, but ridden with inexpressible gaps. Curiosity to find meaning in the riddle of hysteria is of course at play, but there are other forces, such as the desire for authorial power and fascination with the hysteric woman, that make exchanges an unfolding of desire.

While it was clearly not produced as a novel, I argue that Freud's *Dora* could be read as such, for it not only provides a compelling attempt at fathoming the mystery of another person's mind, it is the product of Freud's own interpretations and impressions rather than an objective

portrayal. Claire Kahane argues psychoanalysis is propelled by desire, for “Freud discovered that a conversation about sexual matters itself evoked desire, that especially the embodied dialogue between a masterful doctor and a vulnerable patient generated erotic and aggressive effects through and in the circulation of the speaking voice” (16). Psychoanalysis need not be erotically charged to be governed by the doctor’s desire to interpret the patient, for while Kahane may attribute such motives to Freud, the unreliability of *Dora* is more clearly grounded in his desire to apply his own meaning to her experience. In the novels I will later examine, however, love and sexuality expressly underly the narrator’s unreliable reading. David Trotter takes this analysis of Freud a step further, casting case histories such as *Dora* alongside fiction and fantasy, for “Psychoanalytic theory constructs a parallel universe in which an intense desire to make meaning has displaced a tolerance of or complicity with cause and effect” (58). The ability to interpret another person’s psychology using an index of signs from psychoanalytic theory provides an appealing guide to understanding another that is pervasive in twentieth century culture. And yet excessive reliance on psychoanalytic theory can reinforce delusion and fantasy by masking the ways in which we can never fully fathom the workings of the mind.

Much like the uncertainty that prefigures *The Good Soldier* and *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein*, Freud begins *Dora* with a discussion of the shortcomings of the psychoanalytic account:

[The patients] can, indeed, give the physician plenty of coherent information about this or that period of their lives; but it is sure to be followed by another period in which their communications run dry, leaving gaps unfilled, and riddles unanswered; and then again will come yet another period which will remain totally obscure and unilluminated by even a single piece of serviceable information. The connections— even the ostensible ones— are for the most part incoherent, and the sequence of different events is uncertain. Even during the course of their story patients will repeatedly correct a particular date, and then perhaps, after wavering for some time, return to their first version. (Freud 10)

Freud's description not only corresponds strikingly to how one might describe twentieth century unreliable narratives, but illuminates the great uncertainty inherent in any project of interpreting another's story. The portrait the interlocutor receives is already incomplete, effaced by the speaker's own mind and filtered in their telling. We are therefore not unjustified in taking *Dora* not solely as a historical document, but also examining the narrative control and desire of Freud the narrator as he becomes caught up in an inconclusive interrogation of Dora's madness.

For Freud, the rupture of love and the horrors that ensue provide the crux of the trauma and fascination. Freud casts Dora's hysteria as the result of unfulfilled love and repressed sexual desire. Over the course of their meetings, he envisions her symptoms as derived from the denial of love from her father (sentiments which she transfers onto Freud), Frau K. (her father's mistress), and sexual desire repressed into horror at Herr K.'s advances. It is not merely love, but the frustration of underlying, transgressive desires that provokes Dora's madness:

She told herself incessantly that her father had sacrificed her to this woman, and made noisy demonstrations to show that she grudged her the possession of her father; and in this way she concealed from herself the contrary fact, which was that she grudged her father Frau K.'s love, and had not forgiven the woman that she loved for the *disillusionment* she had been caused by her betrayal. (Freud 55, emphasis mine)

The adultery committed by Dora's father and Frau K.¹⁰ is thus the betrayal that shatters Dora's illusion of love and makes desire sordid, causing Dora's madness. Freud furthermore draws parallels between Dora's discomfort with sexuality and her repulsion at her father's philandering.¹¹ He seeks out the sexual implications of Dora's language, probing her knowledge of sexuality, to arrive at the conclusion that "she pictured to herself a scene of sexual gratification

¹⁰ Freud suggests that Dora's father brings her into his care in hopes that Freud will dissuade her conviction that he is having an affair with Frau K. When Freud does nothing of the sort, her father loses interest in having her continue the treatment.

¹¹ Dora's father appears to have had a series of affairs, having at one point contracting a sexually transmitted infection which he passed on to his wife, thus literally infecting his family through his transgressive sexuality.

per os between the two people whose love affair preoccupied her mind so incessantly” (41).

While Freud clearly distinguishes between love and sexuality, in his analysis of Dora, her repressed sexual desires and transgressive sexual knowledge join forces with unfulfilled love to cause hysterical symptoms. Love becomes overdetermined,¹² applied to multiple potentially conflicting relations (Dora envying both Frau K. and her father the other’s love), and transcending any one concrete relationship. Whether the actual cause of Dora’s illness or the result of Freud’s supposing,¹³ this chain of love illustrates that obsessive preoccupation is not contained to a special relation with the object of love, but rather a fantasy surrounding the idea of love that overflows into madness.

Freud’s characterization of the “gaps” and “riddles” (10) from which he must piece together the patient’s story provides a model of narrative produced by madness, for the perplexing dreams and partial memories recounted are themselves products of hysteria. In analysis of Freud’s discussion of the unreliable speech of hysterics that frames *Dora*, Steven Marcus explains that “human life is, ideally, a connected and coherent story.... And inversely, illness amounts at least in part to suffering from an incoherent story or an inadequate account of oneself” (277). Unreliable narration betrays the unstable mind, and yet this would pin the narrative failures of omission, misrepresentation, and distortion upon Dora, or perhaps the hysteria that has overtaken her reason. Freud is well aware of unconscious desires driving linguistic production. He explains that Dora’s desperate love for Herr K. mediates her speech and writing:

¹²Freud uses this term in relation to a symbol within a dream that takes on an excess of meanings.

¹³ Dora clearly rejects many of Freud’s interpretations of her desires towards the others in question. Particularly problematic is Freud’s interpretation of fourteen year old Dora’s failure to experience sexual arousal when assaulted by Herr K. as a symptom of hysteria and his insistence that she is repressing love for Herr K. following these repeated nonconsensual advances. Feminist scholars have heavily criticized Freud for these assertions.

Dora's aphonia, then, allowed of the following symbolic interpretation. When the person she loved was away she gave up speaking; speech had lost its value since she could not speak to him. On the other hand, writing gained in importance, as being the only means of communication with the absent person. (Freud 33)

The overflow of Dora's inexpressible desire into writing posits writing as a medium for thoughts that cannot be otherwise expressed as well as a product of the excesses of hysteria. Textual production becomes the outlet of desire, demonstrating how the force of love can be transferred onto language. The act of telling becomes an end in itself, taking on the obsession and desire that was previously directed at the object of love.

While Freud's writing is grounded in logic and scientific investigation, Freud adds his own dimension of interpretive uncertainty to the narrative of *Dora* by taking on her words and attributing new meanings to them, assigning symbolic associations that she rejects. Although Freud argues that patients often experience resistance to the process of revealing repressed unconscious thoughts, his work deals in uncovering what is buried within another's mind, and therefore we can question the certainty of Freud's interpretations. Brooks argues that Freud mapped human psychology onto a "primal masterplot" (280-1) which takes for its origin the underlying family drama of sexual frustration. *Dora*, however, as indicated by its subtitle, will always be *A Fragment of an Analysis* that does not fully satisfy Freud's desire to map her trauma onto this master plot, for *Dora* is written out of Freud's efforts to understand her hysteria met with the incompleteness of his knowledge of her and the early termination of her treatments.¹⁴ *Dora's* contribution to an understanding of the hysterical narrative is not necessarily a direct novelistic influence emanating from Freud's works. Rather, *Dora* serves as a model of love,

¹⁴ Dora prematurely broke off treatments with Freud. Freud writes that "her breaking off so unexpectedly, just when my hopes of a successful termination of the treatment were at their highest, and her thus bringing those hopes to nothing—this was an unmistakable act of vengeance on her part" (100), which clearly indicates his personal investment in interpreting Dora's hysteria.

madness, and narrative becoming enmeshed at the beginning of the twentieth century, as well as a study of how interpretation of another's story is driven by the speaker's preexisting interpretive framework.

Marcel Proust's *Un Amour de Swann*¹⁵ provides a similar instance of novelistic obsession with the unknown interior of another person, propelled by love and desire. This episode within *À la Recherche du temps perdu* mirrors narrative obsession later on in the novel, as Marcel's¹⁶ love for Albertine has a similar effect.¹⁷ While Marcel at one point calls Swann's love for Odette his "folie" (185), it is not necessarily Swann's sanity that is at stake, but the reliability of the impressions he receives. As Swann becomes obsessively jealous of Odette, envisioning her with other lovers and tracing her movements, his intense despair at the dissatisfaction of his continual pursuit becomes the focus of the novella. While *Un Amour de Swann* is more a narrative of melancholy than of madness, it serves as an example of the subjective gaze of the individual and the destructive force of love specifically tied to narrative style.

Swann's love is not attached to Odette as a person, despite his crippling jealous pursuit of her. She instead becomes a manifestation of a transcendent concept of desire that is associated with a female image and resounds throughout the novella. Swann's fascination with the phrase of Vinteuil's sonata (for "phrase" is gendered feminine in French) becomes entwined with his obsession with Odette, and eventually replaces her as a more worthy object of love. The phrase initially seems to Swann "une personne qu'il avait admirée dans la rue et désespérait de ne

¹⁵ *Un Amour de Swann* is a novella within *Du Côté de chez Swann* that may be read independently. Proust's *Du Côté de chez Swann*, the first installment of *À la Recherche du temps perdu*, was first published in 1913, two years before Ford's *The Good Soldier*.

¹⁶ Proust's unnamed narrator, often referred to as Marcel, is considered a fictionalized version of Proust himself.

¹⁷ In *Un Amour de Swann* Marcel states that many years later, "je commençai à m'intéresser [au] caractère [de Swann] à cause des ressemblances qu'en de tout autres parties il offrait avec le mien" (47). Marcel's jealous obsession with Albertine, which mirrors Swann's relationship with Odette, is the focus of *La Captive*.

jamais retrouver” (71), an image that looks forward to his frantic search for Odette in the streets. It reemerges, while Swann’s affair crumbles, as “une déesse protectrice et confidente de son amour” (247), the perfected and transcendent woman that Odette fails to be. In the midst of Swann’s anguishing jealousy, a further manifestation of a shadow image of a woman, who seems to be not quite Odette, and yet becomes conceptually attached to her, poses as the inoperable disease of love:

Il se disait presque avec étonnement: « C’est elle », comme si tout d’un coup on nous montrait extériorisée devant nous une de nos maladies et que nous ne la trouvions pas ressemblante à ce que nous souffrons. « Elle », il essayait de se demander ce que c’était ; car c’est une ressemblance de l’amour et de la mort.... Et cette maladie qu’était l’amour de Swann avait tellement multiplié, il était si étroitement mêlé à toutes les habitudes de Swann ... comme on dit en chirurgie, son amour n’était plus opérable. (196)

The phonetic slip between “l’amour” and “la mort” contained in this image of “elle” casts desire as a sickness. The woman is at once a physical component of Swann and an isolated image, as if she is fundamentally a phantom construction of Swann’s own mind, the desire that accompanies him always.

The jarring non-resemblance and multiplicity of this image of the “maladie” echos Swann’s shock each time he sees Odette anew, for his affair becomes “un long oubli de l’image première qu’il avait reçue d’elle” (290). Swann’s affair is not a building jealousy, but a multiplicity of disconnected experiences, “une infinie d’amours successifs, de jalousies différentes et qui sont éphémères, mais par leur multitude interrompue donnent l’impression de la continuité, l’illusion de la unité” (278). In this otherwise reliable narrative, the destabilization at the center is not loss of faith in Marcel’s telling but in the inconsistency Swann’s perception, which is not exceptionally affected. Furthermore, if the narrative condensation of Swann’s love can create a false impression of the continuity of moments, readers are included in Swann’s

deception and disillusionment at each glance. Proust's notion of the discordance between object and the image one retains of it presents a characteristically modern conflict in which subjective impression furnishes an internal illusion mistaken for the truth. The sonata which resounds throughout the novella, literally becoming its motif, is thus a stand-in or a short cut for an unarticulated desire wrapped up in Swann's love for Odette. If there is an exterior reality that appears differently with each glance, the repeated motif of Swann's desire and jealousy raises the question of what precisely the sonata and Odette are reduplications of. The mysterious and unaccountable "déesse" of the sonata arrives as a finally perfected version, perhaps representing an ideal pinnacle of art. This "déesse" is the inverse double of Odette, who represents a perpetual disillusionment emphasized by Swann's final recognition of her: "Dire que j'ai gâché des années de ma vie que j'ai voulu mourir, que j'ai eu mon plus grand amour, pour une femme qui ne me plaisait pas, qui n'était pas mon genre!" (291). Odette's finally perceived wrongness stands in contrast to the idealized perfection of the "déesse." And yet the "déesse" is not a literal being, but another façade. She is the ideal crystalized from the image Swann continually seeks but does not find, a vision glimpsed in a moment and then lost.

Proust's *Un Amour de Swann* demonstrates how obsession overflows into narrative, driving both the novel's plot and melancholic tone, and furnishes a repeated unreliable glance, for Swann's interpretations of Odette are formed by his intense desire and jealousy. Repetition in narrative, such as Proust's image pattern of the elusive "elle," raises the question of what precisely is the original sought and which is the true version of Odette. In the case of repetitions of the unreliable narrator or the individual's subjective perception, however, it is challenging, if not impossible to find a precise origin or real object. In Tanner's analysis, of adultery similarly function to create a parallel life anew with each lover, and he points to the underlying confusion

of such repetition: “which is the dream—the life she left or the new life she entered? And in which, if indeed in either, does she experience her real being as a woman?” (Tanner 30). Whether the repeated re-imagining of life deals with multiple lovers or multiple visions of a single one, love has the potential to distort perception and supply a fantasy. Along with this sort of reconstruction of life anew, whether through a new lover or the obsessive revisiting of the existing lover, comes the effort to assert the reality of one’s current experience of love by producing a new narrative of love, which can be torn down just as easily as the last. I will now examine an example of the unmediated narrative told by the female subject rather than the doctors who interpret or men who desire her to demonstrate the function of unreliable narrative as it relates to the instability of identity and the speaker’s own psychology.

4. Jean Rhys’ *Good Morning, Midnight*: The Unreliable Interior

Jean Rhys wrote *Good Morning, Midnight* in 1938, having a familiarity with Freud (Moran 89), who by that point had become a dominating figure in psychoanalysis. Unlike Freud’s case studies and novelistic efforts to understand another’s madness, Rhys gives total narrative authority to Sasha herself, who many critics interpret as betraying the symptoms of psychological trauma, and seems to be a Modernist evocation of the hysteric. Rhys famously had an affair with Ford Madox Ford and was part of the same British Modernist literary circle. Like Marguerite Duras, Rhys comes from a place outside the dominant literary discourse, not only as a woman, but as a colonial subject.¹⁸ As I will examine in Chapter III, the position of being a woman writer brings the potential for feminist critique of novels written out of the tradition of

¹⁸ Rhys was of creole descent and grew up in Jamaica. Duras was French but grew up in a poor family in colonial Indochina.

the madwoman.¹⁹ Linett furthermore points out that, “As a colonial writer working in European capitals, Rhys worked to undermine dominant discourses with her disjointed narratives” (Linett 439). Writing from the perspective of psychological instability could therefore be seen as an intentional rupture of the traditional narrative. Like Linett, I believe that *Good Morning, Midnight* should not be read as purely a feminist critique of the representation of feminine madness or as symptomatic of Rhys’ own neurosis,²⁰ but rather a psychological realist portrayal of Sasha as the traumatized subject. *Good Morning, Midnight* serves as an illuminating example of how the unreliable first person narrative probes to the possibility of emptiness behind the mask of identity and examines the psychological interior, themes that are important in *The Good Soldier* and *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein*.

Good Morning, Midnight, like other twentieth century novels written from the stream-of-consciousness perspective, portrays the nonlinear manifestations of Sasha’s interior thoughts. Sasha’s narrative is noticeably fragmented, broken up by frequent ellipses, gaps in the story, and Sasha’s imprecise blending of space and time that provides an element of uncertainty to what is actually occurring. As Sasha roams the streets of Paris, Rhys explicitly compares physical wandering to mechanical and unconfined thoughts, for Sasha at one point directs herself to stop “trailing around aimlessly with cheap gramophone records starting up in your head” (15). While this taps the transgressive image of the wandering womb that pervades nineteenth century conceptions of hysteria, the overriding and deadening effect of the gramophone (for it replaces

¹⁹ In Chapter III, I will discuss the influence of later twentieth century feminism, including H  l  ne Cixous’ defense of *  criture feminine* in *The Laugh of the Medusa*.

²⁰ In the midst of writing *Good Morning, Midnight*, Rhys suddenly remembered an instance of sexual abuse from her own childhood, of which she wrote a detailed account. After this, the novel was wiped from her memory. For a detailed analysis of Rhys’ record of this experience, see Patricia Moran’s “When the Pervert Meets the Hysteric: Jean Rhys’ Black Exercise Book” from *Virginia Woolf, Jean Rhys, and the Aesthetics of Trauma*.

organic thought), also indicates Sasha's failure to find meaning or salvation in the pattern. The reductive mechanical nature of the "cheap gramophone" that forms her thoughts echoes Sasha's characterization of her mental state at the novel's beginning: "I'm a bit of an automaton, but sane, surely – dry, cold and sane" (10). While automatic, mechanical thought is not necessarily a product of textual madness, Sasha interestingly opposes it with her insistence that she is sane and dry (following a suicide attempt in the Seine). And yet there is also an element of mechanical repetition to her insistence on sanity, as if to reassure herself or perform it. Linett argues that the repetition built into *Good Morning, Midnight* is a symptom of associated with traumatic memory, and Sasha's ambiguous response to possible assault at the ending²¹ indicates her final acceptance of the traumatic repetition (Linett 457-8). Sasha demonstrates this compulsive repetition in her efforts to dull the pain of her past, continually seeking a bar where she will not be turned away or men who may or may not treat her cruelly. While this final scene perhaps serves as a moment of recognition, repetition structures much of Sasha's experience.

Rhys presents an image pattern of the interior and the façade.²² Most notably, Sasha's room emerges repeatedly in her thoughts. Sasha returns constantly to its description, at one point proclaiming, "This damned room – it's saturated with the past.... It's all the rooms I've ever slept in, all the streets I've ever walked in. Now the whole thing moves in ordered, undulating procession past my eyes. Rooms, streets, streets, rooms...." (109). Her life, essentially becomes the endless trauma of the clash of interior (rooms) and exterior (streets). Sasha is strongly aware

²¹ Rhys writes the novel's closing segment in particularly uncertain terms. Sasha's response to the intrusion of the man from the hall, "Then I put my arms round him and pulled him down on the bed, saying: 'Yes – yes – yes....'" (Rhys 190), has led to a variety of contradicting critical interpretations.

²² There is a tradition in literature portraying women's madness of connecting this madness to confinement in the domestic interior, for example in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) and Charlotte Perkins Gillman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892).

that the exterior of a person is nothing more than a performative mask. Her attention to her appearance as a “transformation act” (63) is really an effort to conceal her interior state. The exterior of others is, in Sasha’s view, a false signifier. When suddenly abandoned on the street by a man, Sasha informs the reader “If you think I minded, then you’ve never lived like that, plunged in a dream, when all the faces are masks and only the trees are alive and you can almost see the strings that are pulling the puppets” (90). The interior of a person is thus a place of unknowable darkness, and Sasha’s awareness of the façade functions as a sort of disillusionment regarding the readability of others, whose actions have lost all credibility in Sasha’s eyes. While the narrative is explicitly concerned with the divide between interior and exterior, the representation of interiority causes much anxiety, for despite Sasha’s focus on the room, the novel largely takes place on the streets, except for, most notably, the death of Sasha’s infant son in the hospital room and the final sequence of sexual assault.

The interior most at stake in *Good Morning, Midnight*, however, is Sasha’s own mind and sense of self. While the narrative reads as a record of her thoughts, isolating readers within Sasha’s perspective, Sasha continually attempts to alter and efface her own identity. In the case of stream-of-consciousness first person narrative, this functions as a textual erasure as well. Sasha informs readers early on that she no longer goes by her original name (which is a blank, never mentioned in the text). The details surrounding her name change are somewhat imprecise, as Sasha wonders, “Was it in 1923 or 1924 that we lived round the corner, in the Rue Victor-Cousin, and Enno bought me that Cossack cap and the imitation astrakhan coat? It was then that I started calling myself Sasha. I thought it might change my luck if I changed my name” (12). Sasha picks up her name from the surrounding signs (a Russian name to match the “Cossack cap and the *imitation* astrakhan coat”), making it more a reflection of the exterior than her interior.

She hopes that it will undo her current narrative by rewriting her future and making her identity re-signify. She periodically seeks this sort of exterior change to efface the interior, for example, dying her hair later in the novel. In her repetitive wandering works to erase distinctions between moments, as she at one point states, “there is no past, no future, there is only this blackness, changing faintly, slowly, but always the same” (172). Her overriding desire is to make the blackness she finds all around her a fixture of her interior, to annihilate her thoughts and individuality, and to do so would be to silence her narrative. The novel, perhaps, suggests this²³ as Sasha reinterprets her crying for René to return, “(Or did I cry like that because I’ll never sing again, because the light in my sale cerveau has gone out?)” (189). By calling her a “sale cerveau,” René cruelly reduces Sasha to her thoughts, and when Sasha adopts this term, she seeks to poison the interior, envisioning her ultimate silencing, a voiceless darkness.

To understand Sasha’s drive towards internal blankness, it is necessary to examine the origin of her trauma, which Rhys indicates is the failure of Sasha’s love for Enno. Rhys positions this original experience of love, even before its rupture, as a sort of internal death, for Sasha states that her love for Enno “was as if my heart turned over, and I knew that it was for always. [...] It’s like what death must be” (130). This sense of eternity, of course crumbles within a few pages in parallel with Sasha’s notion of memory, for she claims “Even the one moment that you thought was your eternity fades out and is forgotten and dies” (142), just before Rhys reveals the final collapse of the reliability of love: “Did I love Enno at the end? Did he ever love me? I don’t know. Only, it was after that that I began to go to pieces. Not all at once, of course. First this happened, and then that happened....” (143). The disillusioning unreliability of love thus, as in *Dora*, *The Good Soldier*, and *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein*, serves as a source of trauma and

²³ Rhys’s ending is ambiguous, however, as Sasha’s yeses indicate she has not been finally silenced.

madness. The dissolution of Sasha's relationship with Enno shortly followed by the death of her infant son indicates the complete rupture of the family and impossibility of achieving the traditionally prescribed dream of domestic order. And collapse of this possibility coincides with Sasha's psychological breakdown and inability to trust the exterior, for if love as the one thing that seemed eternal is suddenly revealed to be false, all signifiers become suspect. Sasha's narrative therefore continually seeks to erase this original failure of love by reduplicating the falseness and violence of encounters with others, as if to erase Enno by making him non-distinct. The preservation of Enno and her son's memory within her narrative hints at the inability to wipe them from her mind. Sasha's repositioning of love as the thing that is "forgotten and dies" rather than the source of traumatic betrayal it seems to be is an effort to end the effects of trauma by erasing it from the story. *Good Morning, Midnight* thus demonstrates how the collapse of love is tied to the unreliability of identity and destabilization of narrative, issues that I will further explore in the following chapters. Having provided a partial genealogy of the interrelation of madness, disillusioning love, and the unfulfilled desire to ascribe meaning in nineteenth and twentieth century British and French literature, I will now examine the compellingly similar ways in which these concepts underly the textual unreliability of Ford's *The Good Soldier* and Duras' *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein*.

Chapter II: *The Good Soldier* and the Unreliable Narrator

John Dowell, the narrator of *The Good Soldier* repeats endlessly that he is telling the "saddest story." His firm insistence upon this is clearly central novel since this was its original title. Ford Madox Ford published *The Good Soldier* in 1915, shortly following the outbreak of World War I, and yet despite its name, the novel has little to do with war or soldiering, Edward's real conquest being his serial adultery. Dowell's insistence that it is the "saddest story," seems

slightly ill-fitted as well. While the novel deals with sad topics such as suicide and madness, there is something off about the scale of this descriptor, particularly because of the proximity to the war. Ford explains in the novel's dedicatory letter, "since [the book] did not appear till the darkest days of the war were upon us, Mr. Lane importuned me with letters and telegrams...to change the title which he said at that date would render the book unsaleable" (5).²⁴ While both Ford's titles seem highly ironic, his misnaming of the book highlights the discordant unreliability of Dowell's perception. The troubling lack of credibility to Dowell's various extreme and contradictory claims as well as his repeated assertions of not knowing clearly distinguishes his rambling narrative from Ford's highly controlled novel. Dowell's continuous reworking of meaning at the level of language undermines the possibility of determining objective truths within his story, allowing this novel to explore the failure of production of meaning as connected to madness and the breakdown of social codes that stems from adultery. The novel ultimately illustrates the delusions that underlie love, marriage, and narrative meaning and the way that these are transferred and built through narrative production.

Drawing influence from nineteenth century French literature,²⁵ Ford developed a theory of Impressionism²⁶ that relies upon the subjective first person limited narrative that essentially confines readers inside Dowell's unstable impressions. Ford's theory of Impressionist writing

²⁴ Mr. Lane was Ford's publisher.

²⁵ In his tracing of a literary genealogy in *The March of Literature*, Ford casts the nineteenth century Realist tradition, particularly Flaubert, as a key influence on the emergence of Impressionism.

²⁶ Literary Impressionism is a broadly defined style of writing that emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. It is associated with a diverse group of writers including Marcel Proust. It is in some cases the counterpart to Impressionist art, and can involve vivid, painting-like imagery, as well as the effort to capture the individual perspective and sensory perception at precise moments in time. For a thorough study of Literary Impressionism, see Jesse Matz's *Literary Impressionism and Modernist Aesthetics*. My discussion of Impressionism in this chapter is as it specifically relates to Ford Madox Ford's theory of Impressionism, which he outlines in *The March of Literature* and *On Impressionism*.

evolves out of the importance of psychological realism in the nineteenth century. By filtering the text through the subjective perception of the individual, Ford seeks a more accurate representation of individual psychology. Rather than depicting society “truthfully and without exaggeration” (*Impressionism* 36), an Impressionist novel, according to Ford, seeks the individual’s subjective perspective, portraying events through the filter of the memory and consciousness of the narrator. Ford explains that if the narrative, for example, reproduced a speech verbatim, “the reader would at once lose some of the illusion of the good faith of the narrator” (*Impressionism* 41). Ford’s intentional trapping of readers in the limitations of Dowell’s perspective reflects a Modernist tendency to purge any interpretive commentary from the author, for Ford insists “the main and perhaps most passionate tenet of impressionism was the suppression of the author from the pages of his books. He must not comment; he must not narrate; he must present his impressions of imaginary affairs as if he had been present at them” (*March of Literature* 767). Uncertainty is therefore stylistically built into the novel.

The Good Soldier is a particularly unsettling work of Impressionism because Dowell’s perception is remarkably unstable, even mad, as I will argue. Jesse Matz sees the unraveling of certainty in narrative as a characteristic of Literary Impressionism not limited to Ford’s writing. As Matz explains, “Wanting immediately to record reality’s impressions, the Impressionist book ends up featuring the limitations of our figures for aesthetic perception, and therefore becomes the record of its own undoing” (11). Matz’s characterization seems particularly fitting for *The Good Soldier* because so much of the novel’s unreliability stems from Dowell’s limitations. Todd Bender compares Ford’s Impressionism to Hume’s notions of modernist solipsism, a view that objects outside the interiority of the mind cannot be objectively known. Bender argues that Impressionism ends in a frightening subjectivity, for by offering no vision outside an individual’s

limited perspective, “the impressionist ends by locking us into our private mental prison houses, unable to see the world beyond our individual impressions” (66). In *The Good Soldier*, Bender’s concept of “mental prison houses” serves not only as a metaphor for the lack of perspective exterior to Dowell’s unreliable narrative, but also describes the site from which the narrative literally unfolds, for Dowell tells his story from within the isolation of the Ashburnham estate. Further entrapping readers within a troublesome subjectivity, Ford’s depiction of the isolated estate echos the resort at Nauheim where the characters initially gather, for both places serve to contain the mad and the sick. Ford thus produces an image of the insane asylum that resounds throughout the novel. Through the parallel between narrative containment within Dowell’s troubled perspective and confinement in the houses of the mad, Ford’s evocations of insanity extend beyond his characters. The unreliability of the text upon the page is itself a symptom of psychological instability.

Deterioration of narrative meaning in *The Good Soldier* runs parallel to a sense of collapse in the social order and breakdown of individual psychology. As Tanner argues, adultery perpetuates the instability of meaning in the novel,²⁷ and in *The Good Soldier*, it functions alongside insanity to undermine the possibility of finding a stable truth. Adultery and madness have both historically been subjects of social condemnation, as Foucault details the confinement of the mad, and the adulterous are socially stigmatized on a smaller scale. The characters in *The Good Soldier* do not face societal condemnation (with the exception of Edward’s briefly mentioned trial for sexual harassment), however Dowell supplies the voice of moral judgement. As the revelation of Florence’s adultery irrevocably shakes Dowell’s perspective, he attempts to recover from this disillusionment by establishing a new interpretive framework for society

²⁷ See Chapter I.

through the production of his narrative. One key guiding his interpretations seems to be religious morality. Dowell explains, for example, “Mind, I am not preaching anything contrary to the accepted morality. I am not advocating free love in this or any other case. Society must go on, I suppose, and society can only exist if the passionate, the headstrong, and the too-truthful are condemned to suicide and madness” (197), the “condemned” being Edward, Nancy, and perhaps Florence. According to Dowell, it is as if fate intervenes as a punishment for adultery. Dowell’s association of truth, madness, and condemnation is particularly interesting since Florence, Edward, and Nancy’s recognition of some truth (perhaps the insufficiency of love and marriage) is, according to Dowell, the catalyst for their undoing.

Dowell’s invocation of condemnation is, however, particularly unreliable because all of his claims surrounding morality collapse into contradiction. Dowell’s application of morality seems to echo Leonora’s sternly Catholic judgement, and yet he alternately calls Leonora the “villain” (187) and “The heroine—the perfectly normal and slightly deceitful heroine” (196), in addition to stating that “obviously Edward and the girl are villains” (196). While his statements about Leonora and society may serve as deeply ironic commentary on the bitter restraint imposed by society and religion, Dowell seems to uphold these values to a degree himself by invoking moral judgement for adultery. Dowell is not Catholic, and even claims “I cannot, myself help disliking this religion” (53) while alluding to his Quaker upbringing in Philadelphia, and yet he seems to subtly turn to Leonora’s Catholicism as a supplier of structure and meaning. Catholic ideology surrounding purity and confession underlies the novel, as I will discuss in more specific terms. Dowell furthermore implicitly invokes sexual morality in his bitter resentment of Florence’s adultery, and in the aftermath of her and Edward’s suicides, retreats to a purifying seclusion associated with the Catholic monastery. He says, regarding Nancy, who is devoutly

Catholic, “well, I guess that I was a sort of convent myself; it seemed fairly proper that she should make her vows to me” (102). Dowell taps moral, religious, and literary frameworks to assign a meaning to the chaos into which his life unravels following the initial breach of Florence’s adultery, yet he ultimately undermines this effort to reassign meaning and moral value through his repeated contradicting claims and suggestions of uncertainty.

Dowell’s application of religious and literary moral codes juxtaposed with his stated inability to read the actual the moral codes of his society reveals an overall unreliability of reading signs within the novel. Dowell obsessively focuses on interpreting Florence, Leonora, and Edward, yet his repeated assertion of not knowing shrouds his reading of the characters in uncertainty. Florence’s concealed adultery unsettles Dowell’s moral framework for understanding not only sexuality, but all human relations. Because of this, Dowell continually asserts his inability to accurately read other humans, stating for example, “I don’t know. And there is nothing to guide us. And if everything is so nebulous about a matter so elementary as the morals of sex, what is there to guide us in the more subtle morality of all other personal contacts, associations, and activities? or are we meant to act on impulse alone? Is it all darkness?” (19). Dowell’s narration of the story is an attempt to retrieve a system of social understanding that Florence undermined by breaching the social codes with her concealed adultery because Dowell interprets and categorizes the other characters through his telling. By narrating, he inevitably traces the patterns of these “personal contacts, associations, and activities” that he purports to not understand and therefore engages in a patterning from which he derives meaning, despite having already undermined his own ability to interpret.

Dowell thus imposes his own system of meaning upon the chaos of adultery, suicide, and insanity. To do so he must connect and classify repetitions in the text, establishing patterns and

significance in both major events and seemingly trivial occurrences. David Trotter understands Ford's Impressionism as "paranoia which breaks chronology, which discerns the pattern of consequence buried in the ostentatiously inconsequential" (211). While it is impossible to determine Ford's narrative perspective exterior to Dowell's because there is no other narrative voice, Trotter's analysis seems particularly appropriate to Dowell's production of his story. One example of Dowell's unreliable production of patterns that has attracted critical attention is his dwelling upon the 4th of August, a date that Florence superstitiously believes to cause major life events. Dowell undermines Florence's attribution of meaning to this arbitrary number, stating "There is the curious coincidence of dates, but I do not know whether that is one of those sinister, as if half jocular and altogether merciless proceedings on the part of a cruel Providence that we call coincidence" (67), his language ironically wavering between invoking divine fate and meaningless chance. Dowell upholds this pattern even as he dismisses it by cataloguing the instances in which Florence was correct, including her suicide that then occurs on the 4th of August, 1913 (83).²⁸ By suggesting even the possibility that this date has cosmic meaning, Dowell perpetuates this otherwise arbitrary interpretive framework. Dowell's haphazard categorization of hero and villain is a pattern no less arbitrary in the novel. It would provide an interpretive basis for readers, and yet Dowell fails to establish its validity. As Trotter argues, an obsessive pursuit of patterns and attribution of great importance to them is a paranoid response, and so Dowell's overproduction of inconsistent meaning becomes a form of madness. By assigning meaning within his story, Dowell tries to reclaim some of the power stripped away from him by Florence's betrayal, for now that she is gone, he is the one to tell her story, to define

²⁸ Saunders suggests the possibility of greater meaning underlying this date since Britain declared war on Germany on August 4, 1914. See *Ford Madox Ford: A Dual Life*, p. 434-438 for Saunders' complete discussion of this pattern.

her role within his tragedy. In the isolated telling of Dowell's story, Florence no longer has the power to upset his interpretive framework because she does not have a narrative voice.

Constructing a stable system of meaning requires asserting its validity beyond the subjective mind of the individual. Dowell invents a silent listener so that his story may bear meaning beyond himself. According to Brooks, the need for a listener underlies a novel. Brooks explains, "The motivation of plotting, I have argued, is intimately connected to the desire of narrating, the desire to tell, which in turn has much to do with the need for an interlocutor, a listener who enters into the narrative exchange" (216). Ford magnifies this need in *The Good Soldier*. Dowell's continual invocation of the "silent listener" produces an obsessive demand for an entity outside of himself who will draw meaning from his narrative. His construction of the listener is, however, pure fantasy, and may even be a symptom of madness, for it is unclear to what extent Dowell is convinced of this person's reality. Because Nancy has lost the ability to understand, she cannot serve as his ideal listener, although she is the only one there who could hear his story. While Dowell repeatedly claims a lack of knowledge, he states with certainty "I only know that I am alone – horribly alone" (16). Therefore the silence of the listener reveals not complicity in Dowell's production of a narrative, but a void into which Dowell projects the text. Dowell addresses his concerns of knowledge and narrative coherence to this absent listener, imploring, "Is all this digression or isn't it digression? Again I don't know. You, the listener, sit opposite me. But you are so silent. You don't tell me anything" (Ford 21). The suggestion of the novel as a digression calls into question the significance of everything Dowell says. Questioning an absent listener, Dowell seeks outside validation, as if he confesses in order to receive religious absolution from the underlying contamination of the novel or a cure for the madness of adultery. Through the image of the confessional, Dowell perhaps seeks a return to an interpretive

framework where the breach of order can be attributed to sin, and then forgiven, and there is a divine order to supply meaning, rather than the overarching lack of meaning he senses. By requesting knowledge from the silent listener that Dowell himself cannot access, Dowell produces a vacuum of meaning where gaps in his story are mirrored by silence.

Embedded within the narrative uncertainty of *The Good Soldier*, the heart serves as an extended metaphor of false meaning. From the first page, Ford places narrative emphasis on the symbolism of the heart, drawing a matrix of connections between the heart, the substance of an individual, destructive passion, and disease. Dowell premises his story with a vague reference to knowing “the depths of an English heart” (13), which casts the heart as the essence of a person or a society. Dowell repeats and transforms this metaphor, introducing both Florence and Edward as having “a heart” (13), a phrase he uses repeatedly to indicate a heart condition. From there, mention of the heart proliferates throughout the novel as it becomes a literal and metaphorical preoccupation of the characters. Dowell states that he and Leonora are connected by the shared profession of “keeping heart patients alive” (44), and the concept of tending to the hearts of Florence and Edward can be metaphorically extended to managing the aftermath of their adultery. The text centers around Nauheim, where the heart patients go to recover. From there, Ford extends the pattern of having “a heart” to minor characters including Florence’s uncle and Mrs. Maiden. Since Mrs. Maiden is the only character to have an authentic heart condition, the heart becomes a signifier of lies and fabricated stories. The false “heart’s” essential function is to conceal adultery. Florence lies about her heart to avoid consummating her marriage to Dowell while she has affairs with other men, and Edward employs the ruse of a heart condition to follow Mrs. Maiden to Nauheim and continue their affair. Due to the heart’s association of being at the core of something and its deep connection to love, by casting the heart as a center of adulterous

deception, Ford positions love as the central sham of the novel. Because the actual heart condition is often a lie, delusive love becomes the disease at the characters' core.

While both Edward and Florence assume heart conditions to perpetuate their adultery, Mr. Hurlbird's more innocuous false "heart" illustrates Ford's metaphorical application of the heart as a false signifier for another disease. In the aftermath of Florence's suicide, Dowell is ironically charged with managing the fortune of her uncle, who inspired her feigned heart condition. As Dowell reveals, "it had been discovered that Mr Hurlbird had had nothing whatever the matter with his heart. His lungs had been a little affected all through his life and he had dies of bronchitis" (157). The heart condition therefore serves as a façade giving way to another underlying sickness that proves fatal. While the fake sufferers do not die of their "hearts," they die of their passion, for even Mrs. Maiden's death seems connected to the trauma of Edward's excessive desire and Leonora's cruelty in response. Ford thus draws a parallel between suffering a transgressive passion and an underlying sickness of delusion.

The disease imagery that intrudes upon the story through the extended metaphor of the "heart" slips into insanity as Nauheim becomes an image of the insane asylum. Reversing a prior description comparing his encounter with the Ashburnhams at Nauheim to a minuet, which implies an aspect of order, Dowell re-characterizes Nauheim as "a prison – a prison full of screaming hysterics, tied down so that they might not outsound the rolling of our carriage wheels as we went along the shaded avenues of Taunus Wald" (15). This mention of hysteria gives Nauheim the subtext of an asylum for hysterics. Dowell at once evokes their violent repression as the "carriage wheels" of proper society overrun them, and yet the scream of hysteria erupts within the isolated confines, overpowering the interior. Madness is thus concentrated within the core. Ford's metaphor of the heart, by connecting insanity to an organ associated with desire,

bears a slight undertone of the medical tradition that considered hysteria a malady of the womb. Because Nancy's insanity is the most evident and debilitating, Ford feminizes hysteria in its purest form, however by making hysteria the subtext of the disease at Nauheim, it transcends a single character. Ford moves from gender specific associations of the disease to its relations to moral and sexual transgression and overabundant production of senseless language;²⁹ and through the interconnected indications of illness and madness that spread to nearly all Ford's characters, this image pattern establishes a subtext of contagion.

Social contagion and moral contamination become central anxieties underlying narrative production in *The Good Soldier*. As information regarding adultery is transmitted primarily through Leonora's gossip, a significant source of information for Dowell, critics have suggested that language bears an element of contagion. Tamar Katz argues that "talk in *The Good Soldier* is dangerous because it is contagious.... Thus the nightmare of Branshaw is the constantly circulating, boundary-breaking contagion of talk which guarantees that the sheer nightmare will continue, which makes it impossible to control" (121). Much of this talk runs through Leonora, who transmits her knowledge to Dowell, who is in turn compelled to catalogue this gossip for his "silent listener." Like Nauheim, Branshaw serves as an echo of the asylum, for the characters leave the institution of Nauheim for a greater isolation within the Ashburnham estate, which contains an intensified repetition of suicide and madness. According to Dowell, transmission by talk is not the only form of contagion, for all social relations seem to bear the potential of infection. He states, "Florence was a contaminating influence – she depressed and deteriorated poor Edward; she deteriorated, hopelessly, the miserable Leonora" (148), pointing to Florence's adultery and compromised morality as a force of contagious degeneration that spread to the

²⁹ See Chapter 1.

others. The language of deterioration and contamination builds upon the metaphor of the diseased heart and recaptures a motif of anxiety of defilement through social contact built throughout the novel. The novel's epigraph, which translates as "blessed are the undefiled,"³⁰ prefaces Dowell's story with a religious elevation of purity. This again restores the religious ideals that Florence violates as a potential interpretive framework and perhaps positions Dowell, who occasionally laments his "absolute chastity" (19), as the blessed. While the epigraph seems to reference sexual purity, any social contact within *The Good Soldier* has the potential to corrupt. Dowell demonstrates an anxiety of corruption through contact by recoiling with horror upon knowledge of Florence's adultery and ending the novel by isolating himself within the Bramshaw estate.

Due to Dowell's repeated assertions of not knowing, knowledge takes on a problematic stance within the novel as it relates to this corruption. Tamar Katz attributes a feminized contamination to knowledge within *The Good Soldier*, contrasting Dowell's repeated assertions of not knowing with the ready transmission of knowledge by female characters, particularly Leonora. Evoking Eve's temptation to consume the fruit of knowledge, Katz casts knowledge as a marker of fallen femininity, an association that "threatens the status of modernist narration, which is defined as the project of uncovering hidden truths, offering special knowledge of the human interior" (111). While Dowell may take the stance of uncertainty, thereby distancing himself from the feminized role of revealing corrupted knowledge, Katz argues that by assuming the role of narrator, Dowell perpetuates this corruption, for "no longer a distant observer of the fall, a modern narrator becomes complicit with it. And no matter how emphatically Ford's novel places corrupt women at the source of an imagined social downfall, the text also makes such

³⁰ Ford's epigraph, "Beati Immaculati," is from the Psalms of the Vulgate.

femininity the very basis for narrating a story” (129). Perhaps Katz critiques Ford too strongly for attributing “social downfall” to a feminized corruption since, as I will later argue, Edward’s masculine chivalry also serves as a corruptive model for Dowell’s delusion. Katz’s analysis, however, illuminates the ways in which Dowell’s anxiety of corruption is linked to the spread of knowledge of adultery, which infects the characters with disillusionment, that in turn provokes hysteria, a feminized madness. Knowledge in *The Good Soldier* does entail psychological damage, for as Max Saunders argues, awareness of Edward’s almost incestuous passion for Nancy drives both Leonora and Nancy to madness (424). The corruption that sparks the broader “social downfall” seems to stem not from knowledge of concrete social truths but from the awareness that truths as such do not exist.

The problem of contagious speech points to a larger anxiety around which the text centers, that narrative itself transmits madness. In the “prison full of screaming hysterics” (15) at Nauheim, the screams of madness overpower all other production of sound. Merging with the narrative voice, these screams inject an element of insanity into Dowell’s narration. Nancy’s reading of the news story about an adultery case presents a condensed illustration of how knowledge from text causes psychological instability: “And yet the whole effect of that reading upon Nancy was mysterious, terrifying, and evil. She felt a sickness – a sickness that grew as she read. Her heart beat painfully; she began to cry” (173). This case of adultery serves as an uncanny double for Nancy’s own life, a *mise-en-abyme* of the repeated adultery that drives the plot of *The Good Soldier*. The news article transmits to her a sickening knowledge of sin and condemnation derived from transgressive love. This knowledge shakes her world view derived from her strictly Catholic upbringing. The news story troubles Nancy not only because it reveals to her a facet of immorality, but because of its direct bearing on her own growing love for

Edward. The idea that a text could contain this “evil,” transmitting a literal “sickness” onto Nancy has larger implications in this novel, for Dowell’s story is a magnified version of the content of the newspaper article.

Narrating in *The Good Soldier* not only spreads madness, but becomes an act of insanity itself. Bender notes that *The Good Soldier* “is about people who are physically and mentally sick, and Dowell is the sickest of the lot” (33). Because the suggestion of madness extends to all of the characters including Dowell himself, who notes, for example, that Leonora considers him an invalid (34), Ford introduces the possibility that the entire narrative is a product of Dowell’s madness. Dowell’s usage of the word “mad” proliferates within the text, as he applies it to nearly every character. The characters’ degeneration into insanity furthermore runs parallel to the destabilization of the meaning in Dowell’s language. The overflow of madness in the novel is evident, for example, in Dowell’s description of Leonora’s degeneration: “All the world was mad around her and she herself, agonized, took on the complexion of a mad woman; of a woman very wicked; of the villain of the piece” (187). While Ford presents insanity as partly a social contagion, Dowell’s extensive use of “mad” reaches a point at which Dowell projects it onto “all the world,” and in turn, the madness transfers onto Leonora from the world she observes. Dowell casts madness as a sinister force by placing Leonora’s “complexion of a mad woman” syntactically parallel to “a woman very wicked” and “the villain of the piece.” He thus condemns in her what he does not recognize within himself.³¹ As I previously argued, Dowell’s over-applies his terms of moral coding, “hero” and “villain.” His attribution of meaning becomes a madness of indistinguishability, for his words take on too many conflicting meanings to the point where his language loses the ability to maintain any of these meanings.

³¹ Dowell, of course, never states that he is mad.

In order to understand how a narrative produced out of an underlying insanity affects its reading, I turn to an examination of what is transferred from the unreliable narrator to the reader. Kahane argues that Dowell's denial of certainty places a greater interpretive burden upon the reader, for "Dowell's repeated 'I don't know,' the classic psychoanalytic signifier of repression that punctuates his discourse, transmits his not knowing to the reader who wants to know, even demands that the reader as ear supplies the knowledge the narrator does not have" (141).³² The reader, though unrecognized by Dowell, must fill the role of the silent listener, deciphering Dowell's narrative gaps and ascribing meaning to Dowell's incoherence, thus taking on the same symptoms that Trotter defines as paranoia. To take Kahane's explanation of uncertainty a step further, Brooks, who argues that narrative is produced through the interplay of the speaker's and the listener's desires,³³ examines how a story can become an object of contagion that extends to the reader. According to Brooks, upon completing a novel, "The reader is finally left with a story on his hands, a story he doesn't know what to do with, except perhaps eventually to retell it. In this sense, the movement of reference is one of 'contamination': the passing-on of the virus of narrative, the creation of the fevered need to retell" (220-221). Knowledge of a narrative, no matter how diseased, entails a sort of compulsion to passing it on. Dowell demonstrates this by obsessively transmitting Leonora's corrupting account and Edward's diseased confessions. As the contagion is transmitted through telling, it raises the question of what Dowell's "silent listener" or the reader of *The Good Soldier* might catch. Ford's continued production of uncertainty entraps readers in a chaotic narrative and produces a desire to understand parallel to Dowell's own desire to assign meaning. Dowell has a personal investment in the story that the

³² In the next chapter I will discuss the repeated use of "rien" and denial of knowledge by the narrator of *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein*, which produces a narrative void to a similar effect.

³³ See Chapter 1.

reader does not, which informs his interpretation of events and injects subjectivity and unreliability, however by making interpretation in the narrative suspect and providing no outside truth to understand Dowell's contradictions, Ford draws particular attention to the uncertainty of any reading.

In addition to the contradictions and overabundant application of terms that make interpretation of Dowell's story precarious, the narrative also follows a pattern of character doubling and repetition of events, and this repetition goes to an extreme in which everything in the text could be an echo of something else. Characters take on parallel roles and the plot regenerates repeated motifs. Much of the literary criticism on *The Good Soldier* focuses specifically on the doubling of Dowell and Edward³⁴ at the expense of other character doubles and repeated motifs produced throughout the narrative. Ford provides several less explicit character doubles, such as Nancy and Mrs Maiden, who occupy the same position, as exceptionally innocent figures to whom Edward becomes both a sort of parent and a lover, creating undertones of incestuous desire.³⁵ Plot elements emerge through doubleness and proliferation as Nauheim and the Ashburnham estate double as figures of the asylum, and adultery is repeated as the unifying link between the two sets of couples, then reverberates through Nancy's trauma. Suicide as well transfers from Florence to Edward and is in both cases linked to their adultery. Furthermore, the narrative's contradictions and ambivalence produces a doubled personality in Ford's characters, for, as Max Saunders argues "[Edward] is 'the good soldier' both martially and maritally; both an honorable, admirable—even loveable—romance

³⁴ Bender, for example, argues that "Ashburnham and Dowell have a startling inverse correspondence as if they were mirror images of each other or opposite numbers" (34).

³⁵ Max Saunders provides a more detailed analysis of the novel's incestuous undertones in *Ford Madox Ford: A Dual Life*.

hero, and also a philanderer. Every aspect of the book is implicated in such “doubleness” (Saunders 407). The novel thus plays with the significance of patterning and doubling while maintaining contradictory meanings that are difficult to resolve.

Doubled meaning and character parallels are particularly evident through the novel’s overdetermined metaphor of shuttlecocks,³⁶ one of only two phrases that Nancy repeats after she has lost her sanity. Dowell provides a multiplicity of interpretations for this term:

I know what was passing in her mind, if she can be said to have a mind, for Leonora has told me that, once, the poor girl said she felt like a shuttlecock being tossed backwards and forwards between the violent personalities of Edward and his wife.... And the odd thing was that Edward himself considered that those two women used *him* like a shuttlecock.... And Leonora also imagined that Edward and Nancy picked her up and threw her down as suited their purely vagrant moods. (196)

While “shuttlecocks” initially seems an explicit sign of Nancy’s trauma, this term becomes overdetermined through Dowell’s inability to settle on a single interpretation. Every character is both an agent, manipulating the others as in a game, and victim, cruelly “tossed backwards and forwards” by the others. As they become all things at once, distinctions between the seemingly discrete roles of Edward, Nancy, and Leonora collapse, as does the meaning of Dowell’s language. Furthermore, Ford suggests an implicit double meaning of “shuttlecocks” in reference to the figure of the absent listener or the reader attempting to piece together the narrative.

According to Ford’s theory of Impressionism, to properly develop a character, “You must first get him in with a strong impression, and then work backwards and forwards over his past” (Ford quoted in Trotter 211).³⁷ While Ford’s narrative model points to a careful reworking of detail rather than a violent game of tossing, Dowell applies this technique, describing his act of telling

³⁶ It is particularly important to Ford’s symbolism that this term references badminton, in which the shuttlecock is hit back and forth for purposes of amusement.

³⁷ From *Joseph Conrad: A Personal Remembrance*. Ford developed his theory of Impressionism in part through collaboration with Conrad.

a story in very similar terms, “one goes back, one goes forward” (147). Somewhere in the transfer between Ford’s novel and Dowell’s narrative, the Impressionist technique of character development devolves into the violent flailing of Dowell’s story, for he draws the listener along like a shuttlecock through his fluctuating language that arrives at no solid truth.

Literary criticism often associates doubling in literature with Freud’s concept of the uncanny, which he defines as “something repressed which *recurs*...in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression” (*Uncanny* 833). While it seems reductive to read the doubleness as a direct manifestation of Dowell’s repressed anxieties, the novel overall takes on an uncanny structure through Dowell’s ambiguous allusions to the “saddest story” at the beginning while burying the central trauma, Florence’s affair with Edward, until the middle of the novel, at which point adultery extends to multiple characters and becomes another form of socially transmitted contagion. The novel’s unsettling doubling reveals another threat buried within the text, that the tendency to fall into a pattern in fact undermines significance.

The doubling in the narrative thus functions alongside adultery to undermine production of social and linguistic meaning. According to Tanner, adultery destabilizes the individual by undermining distinctions and subverting conceptions of the self as having an original identity. Tanner quotes Lévi-Strauss on the interchangeability of women to illustrate how individuals are made distinct through societal relations such as marriage. As Tanner explains, “If the wife transgresses the contract that gives her social identity, she may find herself involved in a nightmare of *undifferentiations*” (82). While individuals clearly have identity independent of such contracts, marriage can work to redefine a person’s identity in terms of their role in the

family. By violating the marriage contract, the wife rejects a contractually constructed identity that makes her “without substitute” (Tanner 82) in the sense that in relation to her spouse, she is distinct from all other women. Serial adultery furthermore undermines concepts of individuality by replacing the spouse with a multiplicity of lovers, indicating that, in a sense, each fills the same role and they are interchangeable. Narrative doubling in *The Good Soldier*, such as that of Mrs Maiden and Nancy, is thus a symptom of the indistinctness of identity that stems from pervasive adultery.

Serial adultery in *The Good Soldier* becomes a compulsion of Ford’s characters, stemming from their deluded misreading of love. While the novel’s pervasive adultery points to an undercurrent of transgressive sexuality, Dowell engages in an effort to re-inscribe romantic relations with chivalric ideals of pure love.³⁸ As Katz argues, “where passion entered the text as a falsifying infidelity, the novel takes pains to redefine it as the subject’s deepest and most honorable truth” (118). The illusion of love thus serves to glorify both Dowell and Edward. In contrast to his anxiety of contamination through sexual contact, Dowell maintains a deluded notion of love through his idealization of Edward’s adultery and obsessive devotion to Nancy. Ford casts Edward’s serial adultery as a repeated delusion of pure love at odds with his transgressive desire through Mrs Maiden’s name, which casts her as the unattainable maiden of chivalric romance. Edward’s serial adultery rests upon an effort to maintain a shattered illusion of the absolute purity of women, of his ability to be the “good soldier” (an ironic revision of the knight in chivalric romance) to his vision of the perfect woman. Edward’s delusional quest takes root in unfulfilled desire that becomes itself a type of madness. Dowell asserts Edward’s lack of self-control in his originating transgression, forcibly kissing a servant on the train, by explaining

³⁸ In the literary tradition of chivalric romance, courtly love is presented as the knight’s unwavering devotion to the unattainable lady, a notion of love that is primarily non-sexual.

“I daresay he was driven to it, by the mad passion to find an ultimately satisfying woman” (46). Edward’s first eruption of transgressive desire therefore takes the form of violence in which he is entirely blind to the feelings of the other person, for he convinces himself in the case of the servant, as well as with his lovers, that he is paying a service through his devotion.

The illusion of pure love and its collapse is central to the madness of Dowell’s narrative, for both Edward and Dowell are modern figures of Don Quixote, investing their relations with an idealized vision in a violent attempt to overthrow the banality of life. Trotter argues that Ford’s characters betray the symptoms of “a criss-cross pattern which relates feelings of grandeur to feelings of persecution”(216). Trotter tracks the characters’ embellishment of their dissatisfaction with their respective marriages, juxtaposed with fantasies of ideal love. As Trotter states, because the novel obsessively reframes the banality of sexuality as a glorified vision of love, “sexual experience is thus constructed as a delusion of grandeur. Squeezed into ‘odd moments’ in the routine of a normal life, Edward’s adulteries are his parallel universe” (Trotter 218).

Disillusionment only serves to intensify the madness. Apart from the blankness of Nancy’s insanity, Ford provides one of the most direct illustrations of psychological instability in the aftermath of Edward’s affair with La Dolciquita: “Edward went mad; his world stood on its head; the palms in front of the blue sea danced grotesque dances. You see, he believed in the virtue, tenderness and moral support of women” (130). Insanity within the novel is tied not only to the failure of the idealization of love, but to unfulfilled desire. While Nancy explicitly loses her reason upon discovering the sordid passion underlying her relationship with Edward, she is not insane until his suicide makes their love permanently unrealized. Dowell’s mad obsession seems derived from his disillusioning discovery of Florence and Edward’s adulteries, yet a major component of Dowell’s anger is Florence’s sexual refusal of him.

Dowell's delusion goes beyond the fallacy of idealized love, however, for his fantasy of telling a story that imparts meaning beyond himself is parallel to Edward's vision of honorable love. Engaging in a fantasy is a form of narrative production, and Dowell copies Edward on a larger scale by telling a story that builds upon the aura of Edward's love, to the extent in which Dowell takes his place as the devotee of Nancy. Dowell seeks to take on Edward's glorified image, claiming, "I love [Edward] because he was just myself" (197). As *Don Quixote* warns of the dangerous psychological contamination that stems from reading chivalric romance, Dowell's narrative engages in a similar deluded reading of Edward. Ford's revision of *Don Quixote*, however, presents a doubled narrative delusion, for rather than conveying the fantasy through the ironic detachment of Cervantes' narrator, Ford provide no perspective exterior to Dowell's madness.

Repetition within *The Good Soldier*, by virtue of the narrative's continued replay of events, becomes an evocation of the past which demonstrates memory as a source of both meaning and absence. Freud's uncanny is tied to a concept of haunting in the sense that it is an unsettlingly familiar reemergence of the repressed. While memory is not necessarily frightening, it may take the form of haunting obsessions. Rather than turn away from this haunting, Dowell pursues it through his preservation of the ghostly Ashburnham estate, seeking meaning through memory's continual return. While the narrative structure mimics religious confession, it could also be compared to the monologue of a patient of psychoanalysis, anticipating Freud's methods of therapy.³⁹ Dowell's statement that people write, "If you please, just to get the sight out of their heads" (14) suggests he hopes telling will lead to some sort of psychological cure. Unlike the

³⁹ Freud developed a method of listening to the patients' detailed accounts of their symptoms, dreams, and experiences with minimal interference, and then using these narratives to analyze their mechanisms of repression. Freud's *Dora*, a case study examining hysteria through his use of this methodology, was first published in 1905, not long before *The Good Soldier*'s publication in 1915.

situation of psychoanalytic dialogues or confession, however, there is no listener to fit his monologue into a framework of meaning. The role of “the silent listener” then falls to the reader, who may interpret but cannot restore order to Dowell’s mind.

While Nancy could present an alternative to the silent listener, her madness undermines the potential for the transmission of Dowell’s narrative. It is unclear whether Dowell actually tells Nancy his story. Her presence, however, adds an ironic dimension to his ideal of the silent listener, for Nancy is the listener who speaks but does not comprehend. She serves as an indicator of illegibility at the site of narrative production, for Nancy presents a blank to whom nothing can be transmitted. Nancy both intrudes upon Dowell’s narration through her repetitive speech and demonstrates the failure to produce meaning from memory by presenting a narrative of the past that Dowell insists is “without meaning” (197).

The characters of Dowell’s story become like haunting apparitions, as Dowell obsessively probes their actions and devotes himself to recapturing their absences produced through death, insanity, or in Leonora’s case, remarriage. Ford explains that the Impressionist involves producing the irrepressible manifestations of haunting memories:

Impressionism should give a sense of two, of three, of as many as you will, places, persons, emotions, all going on simultaneously in the emotions of the writer. It is, I mean, perfectly possible for a sensitised person, be he poet or prose writer, to have the sense, when he is in one room, that he is in another, or when he is speaking to one person he may be so intensely haunted by the memory or the desire for another person that he may be absent-minded or distraught. And there is nothing in the canons of Impressionism to stop the attempt to render those superimposed emotions. (*Impressionism* 40-41)

In Ford’s vision, memory functions as a disruption, a haunting desire that draws the writer outside of himself. It is this uncontrollable longing for the past that forms the Impressionist voice, which focuses on the experiences most vividly imprinted upon the mind. Ford thus positions narrative as the production of a haunting obsession, and Dowell, like the Impressionist,

is so intensely “distraught” by echoes of the past that his narrative becomes a fixated effort at preserving them. While Ford does not allow Dowell full narrative authority due to his unreliability, he becomes an unsettling figure of the Impressionist imprisoned by a haunting memory, writing entirely from that other “room” of the past.

Nancy’s repetitions serve as an ironic double to Dowell’s story, revealing the senselessness of his fixation on the past. Like Dowell’s story, Nancy’s words repeatedly evoke moments of the characters’ past trauma, the failure of religious ideals of purity and the horror of being ill-used by others. Dowell, however insists that her insanity effaces any meaning from her speech:

I sit here in Edward’s gunroom, all day and all day in a house that is absolutely quiet.... I shall return to dine and Nancy will sit opposite me with the old nurse standing behind her. Enigmatic, silent, utterly well-behaved as far as her knife and fork go, Nancy will stare in front of her with the blue eyes that have over them strained, stretched brows. Once, or perhaps twice, during the meal her knife and fork will be suspended in mid-air as if she were trying to think of something that she had forgotten. Then she will say that she believes in an Omnipotent Deity or she will utter the one word ‘shuttlecocks,’ perhaps.... – and to think that it all means nothing – that it is a picture without a meaning. (197)

Literally positioned “opposite” Dowell, Nancy mirrors his artistic production. She is a “picture without meaning,” a work of art that fails to achieve a reliable representation. Ironically Nancy’s language is more stable and consistent than Dowell’s. Although Dowell previously indicates a multiplicity of contradictory interpretations for “shuttlecocks,” this term seems to have a stable meaning to Nancy, as does her belief in an “Omnipotent Deity,” which the text seemingly associates with an effort to rebuild her traumatically lost illusion of a society structured by Catholic morality. God would have the power to supply meaning to the world, and yet the sense of a void of such meaning throughout Dowell’s narrative suggests the absence of God as an

authorial voice. Nancy's broken narrative, like Dowell's, thus emerges out of a destabilization of societal order and social relations.

Dowell's reproduction of the past reduces it to meaningless signs that physically contain him. By isolating himself and Nancy within the Ashburnham estate, Dowell intentionally symbolically recaptures the characters' trauma. It is as if Dowell desires to be perpetually contained within the reverberations of the adultery, suicide, and madness that he repetitively reproduces. By positioning himself within "Edward's gunroom," Dowell isolates himself with the vestige of "the good soldier," taking up Edward's weapons as if to maintain his violent passion that drives him to sexual assault, then suicide. Dowell inherits the Ashburnham estate, which echoes his management of Mr Hurlbird's fortune. The family structures unsettled by adultery end in Dowell being drawn into a new legal contract (through a will or the deed to an estate) that replaces the marriage. Dowell is thereby wedded to the preservation of adultery's ruins. Nancy herself is the last vestige of Edward as the object of his ultimate devotion. In relation to Dowell, she becomes a double for Florence as the object of his chaste love, for Nancy is a true invalid, and therefore sexually inaccessible. By assuming the dual position of guardian and unfulfilled lover to Nancy, it is as if Dowell is metaphorically embodied by Edward's ghost, taking on his inheritance. The isolated estate that is "absolutely quiet" becomes a void or second asylum in which there is no echo, no sound of the "screaming hysterics" to produce or undermine meaning. Although Dowell does have limited contact with Nancy and the outside world, he largely withdraws to this isolation to dwell on the past. Nancy's pause, in which "her knife and fork will be suspended in mid-air as if she were trying to think of something that she had forgotten," illustrates the limitations memory, for it provides a narrative ridden with the gaps of what has already been effaced. While Nancy's insanity might make her memory less reliable

than Dowell's, this episode demonstrates that in reconstructing a story of the past, something will inevitably be lost. Impressionism seeks the full revelation of the interior of a mind, yet through the slipping of memory into a void, Ford indicates that what passes through an individual's consciousness cannot be fully known.

As "enigmatic, silent, utterly well-behaved," Nancy becomes an unknowable phantom of the ideal woman obsessively loved, and the narrative seeks to probe her mystery. By keeping Nancy with him in the Ashburnham estate, Dowell demonstrates his desire to possess her as an emblem of the lost past, and also out of his own love for her. While her she remains silent or talks incoherently, Dowell fills her silence with his own telling of her story. Yet his attempt to capture Nancy through narrative production ends in the inability to fully do so, for "Nancy's madness frustrates Dowell's desire to identify with her, to hear her telling him what it is like to be her. His story is told, as the novel is written, *out of* this kind of bafflement, rather than simply being 'about' it. Writing desires this identity, but speaks to its perpetual frustration" (Saunders 459). As the only remaining character caught up in the repeated adultery that Dowell is never able to understand and the double of Florence onto whom he transfers his chaste love, Nancy is the ultimate idol and cipher. She emerges, in a sense, undefiled by the madness of sexual passion, for she never engages in adultery, and yet, in her eyes, meaning has been permanently destroyed. She becomes a barely readable sign of both transcendent purity, which takes the form of madness in resistance to corrupting knowledge, and the destruction of this purity, for her mind is irreparably marred by the passion of others.

In his analysis of *Heart of Darkness*⁴⁰, Brooks examines the pattern of Modernist narrators who “attach their narratives to someone else’s,” which in many cases stems from obsession with another character’s story. According to Brooks,

It may be the implicit conviction that there are no new plots, no primary stories left, only the possibility of repeating others...But yet again, the impossibility of original story, the need to retell places the primary emphasis of the tale on the plane of narration itself, calls attention to the attempt to repeat, reconstruct, retell. In the act of narration, the narrators often end up telling a different story from that they imagined they were telling. (262)

While *Heart of Darkness* presents a frame narrative in which Marlowe seeks the original truth of Kurtz’s story, *The Good Soldier* obscures the existence of an original meaning, for the meaning of Dowell’s language continually shifts so that the essential truth of his narrative cannot be found. Because there is no alternative to Dowell’s troublingly limited perspective, the truth of the other characters cannot be known. Instead of reconstructing their essence, Dowell can only filter his own psychology through their images. In the case of Dowell, Brooks is correct that this probing of another’s story results in one different from what the narrators “imagined they were telling.” While Dowell reads and understands the other characters, such a reading will always be filtered by his own madness and reveal his own psychology. By telling their stories, he reveals his delusions, his anxiety of loss of narrative control.

Dowell’s love for Nancy is not only an imitation of Edward and an instance of the compulsion to repeat unfulfilled love for an unattainable woman, but an indication of his inability to re-inscribe meaning onto love and marriage. While Dowell recognizes the impossibility of doing so, he states, “I should marry Nancy if her reason were ever sufficiently restored to let her appreciate the meaning of the Anglican marriage service” (185). Dowell’s

⁴⁰ There was extensive collaboration and exchange between Joseph Conrad and Ford Madox Ford, including several co-authored novels.

futile desire for reason to be “restored” resulting in appreciating “the meaning of the Anglican marriage service” has a dual signification: on one level it indicates his wish for Nancy to be clinically sane enough to legally marry, and on another it references the past failures of Florence and Edward to “appreciate the meaning of the Anglican marriage service” by violating its vows through adultery. The effects of the collapse of these vows are thus concentrated and preserved in Nancy, so that it is as if by containing and possessing her, Dowell could have re-mastered the marriage contract, the rupture of which has shaken his ability to find meaning in a broader system of social relations. By indulging in the fantasy of overtaking Nancy’s failed narrative of “shuttlecocks” and the “Omnipotent Deity” and casting himself as the one to manage her memory, Dowell attempts to have authority in assigning the signification of the past. The futility of his attempts to transmit a system of meaning beyond himself indicates a larger lack of narrative authority. There is nothing in the novel to reestablish either the religious or social significance of the “Anglican marriage service,” and Leonora’s remarriage seems more a cold calculation than allowing for the possibility of restoring the illusions of love or morality.

Through Dowell, Ford represents the confinement of the individual in the madness of subjectivity following the disintegration of ideals upon which the social order is built. While adultery provides the direct violation of societal organization, madness in *The Good Soldier* stems from the interplay of delusion and disillusionment surrounding love, sexuality, and ultimately human relations. The effects of adultery are so shattering because they breach an illusion of sanctified love. Without the fantasy of a moral system by which to codify all human relations, the novel suggests, as Dowell states, everything could be “darkness.” More troubling than the lack of a larger order by which meaning can be determined, however, is the trap of faulty signification, whether it is Florence’s lies or the insanity of obsessive patterning. The

madness that ensues from the inability to fully accept a failure of moral codes is what condemns Ford's characters, rather than uncertainty. Doubt merely unsettles; investment in an illusion destroys.

Chapter III: The Madness of Lol V. Stein

In a 1964 television interview with Pierre Dumayet, Marguerite Duras explained that *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein* was the first novel she had written after stopping drinking,⁴¹ and therefore, she stated, “la folie devenait plus familière sans alcool.” This sober madness infiltrates the novel as Lol’s non-specific “maladie” characterized by her psychological blankness, becomes the source of the narrator Jaques Hold’s obsession, and is manifested through the narrative gaps, confusion, and unreliability. As in Ford’s *The Good Soldier*, *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein* is limited to the questionable perception of the narrator, who probes the cause of Lol’s madness out of his own self-proclaimed love for her and believes that her insanity is rooted in an instance of adultery. Duras indicated in response to Dumayet’s questioning that *Le Ravissement* is a novel “de la dépersonne, ... de l’impersonnalité,” and her characters’ loss of identity, as well as the loss of meaning of the language itself, makes this a novel that continually verges on the void. The word “rien” resounds throughout the text, for example, when Hold states “je ne sais rien. [...] ne rien savoir de Lol était la connaître déjà” (81). This suggests not only the blankness underlying Duras’ characters, but also that in his rambling, Hold is saying nothing of value at all. Names in the novel are, furthermore fragmented abbreviations. Many critics have pointed out the reductive abbreviation of Lol’s name (Lola Valérie Stein) as well as the shortening of place names, S. Thala⁴² and T. Beach,⁴³ locales invented by Duras that lack any defining characteristics. This maddening absence at the center of *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein*, around which characters and

⁴¹ Marguerite Duras struggled with alcoholism during much of her adult life.

⁴² According to biographer Laure Adler, S. Thala “is in fact Thalassa (the Greek for sea) the other way round. Duras said it took twenty years before she realized it. S Thala doesn’t exist; Duras invented it” (281)

⁴³ In the interview with Dumayet, Duras indicated that T. Beach was “en angleterre,” however nothing in the novel indicates any culture or particularities that would situate the places.

language both circle, is ultimately a source of desire. Both obsessive madness and desire for the void are contagiously transmitted from Lol to Hold, and finally to language as the novel suggests the inadequacy of words.

A discussion of female madness and how it is portrayed by the male narrator would not be complete without addressing twentieth century French feminist critiques of madness and women's writing. Critics have approached Duras' repeated representation of women's madness throughout her works through the lens of Hélène Cixous' concept of *écriture féminine*. Udris, for example, draws a parallel between the madness in Duras' writing style and *écriture féminine*, stating "from the reader's point of view, Duras' writing, which includes so many ruptures, omissions, 'blanc' spaces and syntactic holes, can also be configured as the translation of female language which verges on madness" (Udris 31). Cixous defines *écriture féminine* as not only female authorship, but a feminine style of writing that defies the institutional insistence upon logic and reason, which is a product of a patriarchal society and often functions to condemn women to silence. In *The Laugh of the Medusa*, Cixous states "I maintain that there is such a thing as *marked* writing; that, until now, far more extensively and repressively than is ever suspected or admitted, writing has been run by a libidinal and cultural—hence political, typically masculine economy" (Cixous 1945). Because the expression of women's voices often occurs from outside this discourse, it does not rely upon a masculine centered notion of logic, and instead may work to subvert it. Thus Cixous argues "A feminine centered text cannot fail to be subversive" (Cixous 1954). While Cixous does not necessarily characterize *écriture féminine* as a form of madness, its intentional defiance of the patriarchal order of logic serves to reclaim language from outside this discourse as a political strategy rather than meaninglessness. Shoshana Felman, in her analysis of madness in *La Folie et la chose littéraire* specifically aligns

madness with women's expression, stating for example "la folie et la femme se révèlent ici être les deux refoulés de l'institution du lisible" (Felman 144). Like the mad, Felman argues, women are circumscribed and silenced by the discourse of reason, and therefore their unrestrained expression can be an affront to the established order.

While critics may have the tendency to read Duras' works as evident of *écriture féminine*, taking on the language of madness in order to challenge the logocentric discourse that excludes women, to do so without a consideration of the actual nature of her characters' madness and Duras' troubling suggestion of the failure of all language in *Le Ravissement* would be reductive. Twentieth century French Feminist theory does not necessarily map easily onto Duras' writing. The original French publication of Cixous' *Le Rire de la méduse* was in 1975, a decade after Duras wrote *Le Ravissement*. Furthermore, Duras was in some ways ambivalent to the feminist movement. According to her biographer, Laure Adler, she did not get along well with Simone de Beauvoir, and "it wasn't until the militant feminism of the seventies that she had female friends and discovered 'sisterhood'" (195). Furthermore, Duras' psychologically complex representation of Lol and Hold should not be discounted. As she explained in the interview with Dumayet, Lol's character was based in part on a woman she met who was institutionalized in Paris, which suggests that Duras was interested in probing actual madness, not solely making a political and stylistic statement. It would be reductive as well to read Duras' novel as solely staging a critique of Hold's patriarchal misreading and silencing of Lol because, as Tara Collington argues, "the effacement of female identity in the text has as its corollary the effacement of narrative identity" (137). The text seems fundamentally concerned with the problem of reading and producing a coherent narrative on multiple levels alongside the problem and the allure of madness.

Nevertheless, for Duras, the act of writing seems to approach madness, whether her writing is about madness or appears to stylistically take on its characteristics. In her autobiographical novel, *L'Amant*,⁴⁴ the unnamed narrator, who is a fictionalized version of Duras, states in a passage that probes her writing, “L’histoire de ma vie n’existe pas. Ça n’existe pas. Il n’y a jamais de centre. Pas de chemin, pas de ligne. Il y a de vastes endroits où l’on fait croire qu’il y avait quelqu’un, ce n’est pas vrai il n’y avait personne” (Duras 14). While the narrator is not mad herself, the text and her story becomes a sort of madness, unable to be told in a coherent, unified form. The narrator affirms the non-existence of the story of her life, a move that situates the novel as paradoxically impossible. Furthermore, Duras positions the text told from memory as a source of falseness and lies, for the narrator’s existence is only an illusion in the story she tells. In the sentence, “ce n’est pas vrai il n’y avait personne,” as if resulting from loss of narrative coherence following the narrator’s self-erasure, the grammar of the text begins to fall apart as one sentence slips into the next without punctuation. Madness, while not a predominant focus of *L'Amant*, exists on its margins, for example in Duras’ portrayal of the mother’s depression.

Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein and *Le Vice-Consul*, grouped together as part of the *Cycle Indien*,⁴⁵ make the connection between writing and madness more explicit. As Cohen puts it, the

⁴⁴ Published in 1984, *L'Amant* tells the story of the French narrator’s affair as a teenager with an older Chinese man.

⁴⁵ Published in 1966, *Le Vice Consul* is the second novel in Duras’ *Cycle Indien*. This set of works features recurring characters and expands or rewrite their stories. The *Cycle Indien* also includes the novels *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein* (1964) and *L'Amour* (1971), as well as films that expand upon or revise the written works.

subplot of *Le Vice-Consul* in which Peter Morgan is writing the novel of *la mendiante*'s⁴⁶ madness "contains all of *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein*" (Cohen 34). The first sentence, "Elle marche, écrit Peter Morgan" (Duras, *Vice-Consul* 9) positions her as a double of Lol, whose journey from Indochina to Calcutta is a magnified version of Lol's mad wanderings. While Lol never faces the starvation and homelessness that the *mendiante* does, her wandering is similarly compulsive and aimless, for Hold says of Lol, "elle était devenue un désert dans lequel une faculté nomade l'avait lancée dans la poursuite interminable de quoi?" (24). As with Sasha's wandering in Jean Rhys' *Good Morning, Midnight*, Lol's repeated abandonment of her home and family for her walks and the *mendiante*'s literal crossing of political borders groups madness with transgressive mobility. While Peter Morgan seems more psychologically stable than Jacques Hold, he too is caught up in the pursuit of knowing madness, for he says of *la mendiante*, "Je l'abandonnerai avant la folie ... ça c'est sûr, mais j'ai quand même besoin de connaître cette folie" (Duras 179). Both novels position madness as a source of narrative inspiration and unsettling fascination, as well as a contagion that can be transferred through social contact or contained within a text.

The madness of the *Vice-Consul* is clearly a product of colonialism, rooted in *la mendiante*'s poverty and exile as well as the colonial society's fear of the other. Colonialism features heavily in the works of Duras, who grew up in French Indochina, and yet it seems

⁴⁶ *Le Vice-Consul* begins with Peter Morgan's novel of an unnamed woman often referred to as *la mendiante*. She is partly the fictional creation of Peter Morgan and partly real within the novel (Peter Morgan, Anne-Marie Stretter, and Charles Rossett see her on the beach of Calcutta at the end). She is a young woman from Indochina turned out of her home by her mother after she becomes pregnant to face starvation, the death of her child, and eventually madness. The second plot concerns the society of colonial administrators in Calcutta and focuses on socialite Anne-Marie Stretter as well as the Vice-Consul of Lahore who has come to Calcutta after firing shots onto a group of lepers in an episode of madness. Anne-Marie Stretter provides a link between this novel and *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein* since she is the woman Lol's fiancé, Michael Richardson, left her for. In *Le Vice-Consul*, Duras shortens Michael's last name to Richard.

remarkably absent from *Le Ravissement*, particularly since *Le Vice-Consul* is its companion novel. Jane Bradley Winston, however, sees Lol's madness as the result of the same colonial control and exclusion that contributes to the madness of the *mendiante*:

Le Ravissement bears witness to the efficacy of France's 1950's modernization efforts — their elision of (colonial) cultural difference, domestic containment of women, silencing of nonpatriarchal forms of desire, division among class and especially race lines, and construction and circulation of a French colonial object of desire linked to Indochina and capable of maintaining the psychic structures of the French colonial subject. (137)

Lol's maddening domestic leisure, the "febrilité ménagère" (Duras *Ravissement* 44) that provokes her wandering thoughts and physical roaming is a product of the circumscription of women's lives (Winston 138) and a continuation of the nineteenth century link between hysteria and domesticity. Udris distinguishes between the madness driven by sexual desire in *Le Ravissement* and the sort of madness that occurs in *Le Vice-Consul*, which she rightly characterizes as madness that is "no longer situated outside but becomes society itself" (201) and a part of Duras' "vision of a doomed civilization, a 'fisured' social world" (203). Winston, however, is correct to link the seemingly disparate madnnesses of the two novels. The infection of the center by its repressed margins that occurs in *Le Vice-Consul* is a larger-scale reduplication of the transfer of madness that occurs in *Lol*, indicating that the madnnesses of these novels are not unrelated, and Lol's individual madness is linked to that of the political order.

Madness in *Le Vice-Consul* is not confined to the *mendiante*. It infects the European society whose fear of their colonial subjects, particularly the lepers, approaches madness. Excluded from the circle of the colonial administrators and the subject of their fascinated horror, the *mendiante*, whose madness is a product of her extreme poverty, occupies a position parallel to the lepers, who never enter the novel as actual characters, yet are often the subject of the Europeans' conversation. Foucault begins *History of Madness* with a discussion of the

marginalization of lepers in the middle ages, arguing that madness eventually took the place of leprosy: “But only after a long latency period did that new obsession [madness] take the place of the fear that leprosy had instilled in the masses, and elicit similar reactions of division, exclusion, and purification, which are akin to madness itself” (Foucault 8). As Foucault connects the paranoid response to leprosy with madness’ symptoms, Duras similarly draws a parallel between the European society’s fear of the lepers and contagious madness. At the party, the colonial society talks about “la femme d’un secrétaire, chez nous, au consulat d’Espagne, elle devenait folle, elle croyait qu’elle avait attrapé la lèpre, il a fallu la renvoyer, impossible de lui enlever cette idée de la tête” (108). This is only a small form of the madness caught by the vice-consul, who has been relieved of his post in Lahore and brought to Calcutta because “Il tirait la nuit sur les jardins de Shalimar où se réfugient les lépreux et les chiens” (90). The Europeans’ conflation of lepers and dogs blatantly indicates that the colonial society regards the poorest of its subjects as an abstract, non-human source of fear and disease, and yet the vice-consul himself has the novel’s most chilling form of madness. The members of the European society are both appalled and intrigued by the “abstinence terrifiante de l’homme de Lahore, de Lahore martyr, lépreuse” (119), conflating the preexisting peculiarity of the vice-consul’s virginity with his horrible acts in Lahore. By associating him, “l’homme de Lahore,” with Lahore’s leprosy, it is as if he has caught the dual disease and madness. The vice-consul presents an enigmatic case study to the administrators who search for every deviance in his past. His virginity points to a troubling extreme of purity, as if his ultimate fear is a broader social contagion, similar to Dowell’s anxiety of defilement in *The Good Soldier*. While the vice-consul’s virginity is never explained, only feared and condemned by the European society, the problem of social contact offers a double bind of madness where one either catches the horrible disease of others or decays in the isolation

of one's own mind. To take this individual anxiety of contact a step further, the madness of the colonial society is its paranoid response to contact with its subjects, which is ultimately a fear of social permeability.

Duras repeats this suggestion that madness is contracted like a disease in *L'Amant*. Leading up to a discussion of the beggar women she encountered in Indochina, the narrator explains her fear of catching madness from another woman: "Le souvenir est celui d'une peur centrale.... à savoir que si la femme me touche, même légèrement, de la main, je passerai à mon tour dans un état bien pire que celui de la mort, l'état de la folie" (100). The extreme horror of madness repeated in Duras' works demonstrates the level to which it is contagious, for obsessive fear of the mad can become a state of madness in itself. Madness is both transmitted through individuals and embedded in larger social systems, as the Europeans in *Le Vice-Consul* simultaneously develop an obsession with the threat of those they exclude. Madness in *Le Vice-Consul* and *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein* functions as a disease of the imagination, contracted through fascination with the mad subject. Hold similarly catches this disease from Lol, and it is further transmitted through the unreliability and breakdown of the narrative. By confining the narrative of *Le Ravissement* to Hold's subjectivity, told through his stream-of consciousness narrative, Duras filters readers knowledge of Lol's madness through Hold's own psychological instability, making it impossible to isolate truth in the novel from that which Hold "invents."

Hold, ironically, begins *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein* by making readers acutely aware of his own unreliability. He seems to have no actual knowledge of Lol's past, for a significant portion of his story is engineered from what Tatiana, Lol's childhood friend, has told him. Both his and Tatiana's competing interpretations of Lol are framed in terms of belief: "Tatiana ne croit pas au rôle prépondérant de ce fameux bal de T. Beach dans la maladie de Lol V. Stein" (12), to

which Hold responds, “Je ne crois plus à rien de ce que dit Tatiana, je ne suis convaincu de rien” (14). Such questions make textual interpretation an act of uninformed faith, and by Hold’s refusal to believe Tatiana, his only source for Lol’s past, Duras indicates that there is no a single truth to Lol’s story. Tatiana’s alternate story seems more credible and undermines the validity of Hold’s, yet as Suzanne Dow argues, she is no more an authoritative source, for “Tatiana reads Lol herself in much the same way [as Hold], on the basis of her own preconceptions about the nature of desire... not once has Tatiana ever altered her perspective on Lol, even when she is invited to do so by the ‘text’ she is reading” (75). Hold’s presentation of the story, “Voici, tout au long, mêlés, à la fois, ce faux semblant que raconte Tatiana Karl et ce que j’invente sur la nuit du Casino de T.Beach. A partir de quoi je raconterai mon histoire de Lol V. Stein” (14), makes it clear that any statement in the novel is uncertain, for it is made up of Tatiana’s false impressions, unreliably retold by Hold, who repeats throughout the novel that when lacking knowledge, he invents.

Duras’ set up of a self-consciously unreliable narrative furthermore transmits unreliability to any effort at interpretation. The novel creates an interpretive struggle for the readers, frustrating their desires for knowledge. Dow considers the reader’s effort to create an interpretive framework “a desire to ‘cure’ the text” (82). *Le Ravissement* stages “not simply the deconstruction of such readerly fantasies, but also the persistence of the nostalgia for origins, sources, stability, interpretive ‘keys’ that would furnish the secret of the text’s ‘madness,’ and thus would furnish its ‘cure’” (Dow 83). According to Dow’s reading, much as psychoanalytic interpretation is driven by the hopes that understanding will provide a cure to neurosis, Duras invites readers to seek such a key to Lol’s madness. By examining the madness of Hold’s own pursuit, we realize that there is no key, and the madness of the text remains an enigma at its core.

While interpreting the text might ease the problem of the madness of its language, this effort could never “cure” the neuroses of the characters or fully resolve the text’s unreliability. Dow’s analysis illuminates the ways in which madness in *Le Ravissement* is related to the problem of wanting to read or interpret something that cannot be known. Hold’s obsessive unreliable interpretation of Lol is at the root of the instability of his narrative, and this calls upon readers to consider their own efforts to ascribe meaning. The interpretive question upon which the novel hinges is thus not the source of Lol’s madness, but rather the implications of Hold’s unreliability and the multiple constructed narratives.

While very little is certain about Lol’s character, Hold’s representation of her is clearly driven by his desires, for he later explains, “Je connais Lol V. Stein de la seule façon que je puisse, d’amour” (46). Hold’s knowledge is therefore filtered through his obsessive love, based on subjective perception rather than recognition of objective facts. While Hold declares his love for Lol, he obsessively pursues Lol’s madness at her expense, for as Susan Cohen argues, “Hold has no thought of helping Lol out of neurosis” (37). He enables Lol’s final relapse by taking her back to T. Beach, and though he talks of helping her, he seems instead to coax her into deeper madness. He states, for example, “Je la tiens toujours dans mes bras. Quelqu’un qui vomit, on le tient tendrement. Je me mets à regarder moi aussi ces lieux indestructibles qui en ce moment deviennent ceux de mon avènement. Voici venue l’heure de mon accès à la mémoire de Lol V. Stein” (174-5). He relishes in Lol’s sickness, viewing the return to T. Beach as a source of attainment for him as well. By positioning this moment as gaining “access” to her memory, Hold constructs Lol’s madness as a means to take possession of her mind, and in doing so he becomes infected with her “maladie” and obsession. It is from this point of infected obsession that he retrospectively narrates the novel. Madness embodied in Lol thus becomes a central desired

pursuit throughout the novel. In parallel to Hold, Lol's husband, Jean Bedford falls in love with her madness. Lol's psychological brokenness draws Bedford, for "on soupçonna Jean Bedford de n'aimer que les femmes au coeur déchiré, on le suspecta aussi, plus gravement, d'avoir étranges inclinations pour les jeunes filles délaissées, par d'autres rendues folles" (30-31). Lol's torn up heart and her precarious psychological state both indicate incompleteness, insufficiency, or emptiness of meaning (as well as her being like a "jeune fille"), and this sense of lack is what makes her the subject of narrative intrigue. Lol's character could be a female revision of the trend of detached and alienated heroes in twentieth century Modernism, such as Meursault in Albert Camus' *L'Étranger*,⁴⁷ whose extreme detachment could be considered pathological, particularly as it relates to his senseless murder of another man. While the detached protagonist may unsettle readers, this type of character also becomes extremely appealing in the twentieth century. Like Hold and Bedford, readers are drawn to the elusive, broken and incomplete characters because the inability to fully know sparks interpretive desire.

Lol's madness is best characterized as a form of blankness. While Tatiana and Hold disagree on the source of her "maladie," the one consistency is her extreme detachment from the world around her. Not much can be said of Lol exterior to her madness, as Tatiana believes she had this condition "depuis toujours" (13), and this combined with her characteristic absence essentially makes Lol's identity a void at the center of the novel. According to Tatiana's characterization, Lol is eternally blank:

Au collège, dit-elle [Tatiana], et elle n'était pas la seule à le penser, il manquait déjà quelque chose à Lol pour être – elle dit : là. Elle donnait l'impression d'endurer dans un ennui tranquille une personne qu'elle se devait de paraître mais dont elle perdait la mémoire à la moindre occasion (12)

⁴⁷ French writer Albert Camus grew up in colonial Algeria, where he set his novel, *L'Étranger* (1942). It is narrated in first person by Meursault, a French man who murders an Algerian without much justification.

Lol's tendency to lose her memory, which reemerges in her madness following the ball, indicates a larger loss of identity and narrative of herself. The repeated erasure of her memory is analogous to the erasure of her story. Collington argues that the other characters also silence her story. Her family tries to delete Michael Richardson's abandonment from her mind by keeping Lol quiet on the subject and suppressing anything that would evoke her memory (including not inviting Tatiana to Lol's wedding). Collington believes that Lol's repeated self-erasure results from this imposed silence:

[The actions of Lol's parents] constitute the first in a series of betrayals by the people around Lol—her new husband moves the family away from S. Tahla; when they return, the townspeople ignore her; Jaques Hold manipulates her—actions that prevent her story from confronting her past. In short, no one wants to tell, or to let Lol tell, her story. (Collington 131)

Lol's also seems to suffer from an inability to form a reliable narrative as a condition of her madness, for "the real tragedy of the novel lies in the inability of those around her to recognize the seriousness of her illness: that Lol has lost her sense of self" (Collington 132). While the other characters contribute to Lol's erasure by silencing her, Duras indicates through Tatiana and Hold's rival interpretations that Lol's absence is also a feature of her madness that cannot fully be attributed to any cause. It is not solely her sense of identity that collapses, but also the ability to convey any form of meaning. Following the ball, her language fails:

Elle ne parla que pour dire qu'il lui était impossible d'exprimer combien c'était ennuyeux et long, long d'être Lol V. Stein. On lui demandait de faire un effort. Elle ne comprenait pas pourquoi, disait-elle. Sa difficulté devant la recherche d'un seul mot paraissait insurmontable. Elle parut n'attendre plus rien (24)

While Lol talks endlessly of the difficulty of being herself, she is entirely unable to formulate responses to the others questions. Hold characterizes her pursuits as "waiting for nothing," repeating the "rien" that continually defines his own language to indicate the void of meaning

underlying her efforts. Hold's narrative study of Lol and her madness continually returns to her silence and absence, making erasure a central element of the text.

Duras' infusion of madness and language uncovers an uncertainty in writing and reading, for Lol and Hold are doubles both in their creation of narratives and their tendency to become unreadable. Though Lol presents a blank, and her memory is repeatedly wiped, she paradoxically fixates on the Ball at T. Beach and preserves that scene in her memory, continually rewriting it. Hold repeatedly reminds readers of Lol's obsession with the ball, explaining that she wanders "pour mieux penser au bal," and "Lol progresse chaque jour dans la reconstitution de cet instant" (46). Like the ball in *Madame Bovary* which furnishes Emma with an illusion of idealized romance that she repeatedly revisits, while at the same time revealing the insufficiency of her marriage, Lol's ball at once ruptures the ideal of love and provides a scene of endless return and reinterpretation. Dow links Lol's obsessive remembering and interpretation of the ball to the role of a reader:

The novel positions Lol as a reader, the effects of whose acts of reading are profoundly uncertain.... As such, this madness comes to no longer represent a woman's acts of transgressive story telling, but rather the troubling relationship of readers to authors through the literary object.... It is the reader, and not the writer, who is finally forced to confront a 'madness.' (Dow 56)

While Dow is right to emphasize the maddening uncertainty the reader must confront, Lol's efforts to recapture and reattribute meaning to the ball are also parallel to those of Hold to know and represent her madness. Thus Lol's and Hold's interpretative readings become an acts of writing and rewriting. Hold's wandering narrative is the textual equivalent to Lol's walks, which he specifically casts in terms of novelistic creation parallel to his own, "C'est peu de temps après qu'elle invente – elle qui paraissait n'inventer rien – de sortir dans les rues. [...] Lol sortit dans les rues, elle apprit à marcher au hasard" (39). While her walking appears random and

disordered, it is particularly interesting that Hold speaks of it as Lol “inventing” because he frequently uses this term to describe his creation of her story. Hold’s own narrative rambles and retraces scenes. As Collington demonstrates (138-139), Hold’s sense of chronology begins to go awry: he repeats himself, conflates days, jumbles events. He leaves sentences unfinished and when arriving at his character’s intrusion into the story, refers to himself in third person, which leads Cohen to argue that “The text, then, recounts two phantasms, but has only one narrator. The narrating voice belongs to Jacques Hold. Yet, if the narrator and the male protagonist are the same “human being,” they do not coincide” (39). Cohen insists too strongly perhaps on the split perspective of Hold the narrator and Hold the character, however Hold’s narrative confusion and inconsistency of pronouns presents a symptomatic inability to maintain a stable identity and a tendency towards self-detachment that is similar to the effects of Lol’s madness.

The narrative wandering of *Le Ravissement* is symptomatic of a contagious madness transferred between Lol, Hold, and the novel’s language. When describing Lol’s remaining of the ball, Hold connects it back to himself, explicitly stating that her dream contaminates him: “Lol rêve d’un autre temps où la même chose qui va se produire se produirait différemment. Autrement. Mille fois. Partout. Ailleurs. Entre d’autres, des milliers qui, de même que nous, rêvent de ce temps obligatoirement. Ce rêve me contamine” (187). The effect of Lol’s imagining is to achieve the endless repetition and reworking of the ball, which Hold’s narrative replicates in its retelling. Hold’s use of “obligatoirement” makes such repetition function as psychological compulsion. He extends the dream across an infinite future confuses tenses, the future proche of “produire” shifting to conditional to indicate at once the expansion and constraint of Lol’s dream. Through his suggestion that the repetitions apply to “d’autres, des milliers” and cover all space, “Partout. Ailleurs,” Hold projects the maddening dream onto a phantom universe of others who

could become caught in the same madness, making it a psychological epidemic of society. The disease seems to be a generalized sense of failure and disillusionment regarding love, identity, and ultimately meaning.

Madness in Duras' novel destabilizes narration, as Duras indicates the characters' struggle to coherently tell their story, and at the same time it perpetuates language that repeatedly approaches a loss of meaning. This contagious narrative wandering poses an interesting threat to the integrity of language, for as Shoshona Felman explains in *La Folie et la chose littéraire*, in narratives structured by madness, "Tout roman contient à la fois la tentation de la folie et la négation de celle-ci, par un système réflexif au sein duquel, d'une façon ou d'une autre, c'est la folie même qui s'acuse et se dénonce comme telle. Structure schizophrénique, qui se construit pour se détruire, et dont le mode de fonctionnement est celui de sa propre négation" (Felman 126). While Felman specifically discusses nineteenth century literature, this statement seems highly applicable to *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein*. Duras' focus on madness serves to denounce Hold's language, which forms the novel; the narrative, as it is told, works to undermine itself.

In order to better understand the transfer and contagion at work in Duras' novel, I turn to an examination of mimetic desire and Lol's intentional replication of the adulterous love triangle of herself, Michael, and Anne-Marie by enacting her replacement of Tatiana as Hold's lover. In *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, René Girard argues that one person's desire for another person or object is often mediated by another person that they unconsciously imitate and double, and thus desire can spread from one person to another. The mediator could be a romantic rival or a more distant model, such as the protagonist of Don Quixote's chivalric romances.⁴⁸ Furthermore,

⁴⁸ Girard develops his analysis through a reading of novels including *Don Quixote*, *Madame Bovary*, and *À la Recherche du temps perdu*, which I have argued are also aligned with *The Good Soldier* and *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein* in their portrayal of obsession, delusion, and disillusionment (see Chapter I).

desiring rivals may be caught up in a feedback loop where both produce and reflect the other, obscuring an original, for “each imitates the other while claiming that his own desire is prior and previous” (100). The fallacy of mimetic desire, according to Girard, is a belief in individual uniqueness. Like the rivals, lovers as well constitute each other's desires through the same mimetic process so that they may become “a line by line and point by point opposition of two symmetrical figures” (106). Doubled mediation could easily extend to a larger group of individuals mimicking and producing one another's desires, for “From being double, reciprocal mediation could become triple, quadruple, multiple, until finally it infects the whole of society” (104). While at a glance *Le Ravissement* seems remarkably devoid of jealous rivalry for a novel of adultery, lacking for example Dowell's obsessive identification with Edward as his rival, Lol implicitly marks the other women as her rivals and adopts their desires. Lol catches her attraction to Hold after spying on his tryst with Tatiana and metaphorically takes the place of her rival for Michael, Anne-Marie, by drawing Hold away from Tatiana. It is clear that even Lol's most mundane desires, such as the upkeep of her house are caught from others: “Lol imitait, mais qui? les autres, tous les autres, le plus grand nombre possible d'autres personnes” (34). Hold frequently points out the functioning of mimetic desire in Lol, but fitting with Girard's theory, his blind spot is his own mediated desire for some transcendent knowledge, some elusive void, that he catches from Lol and which drives his pursuit of her. Lol mediates Hold's desires as well as being their object.

The dual love triangles of *Le Ravissement* subsume the possibility of the lovers' uniqueness, for Holds' desires (as well as his reading of Lol's) results in depersonalization, fitting well with Tanner's argument that serial adultery undermines individual identity by making the

lovers interchangeable. During a love scene, Hold's desire for Lol is tangled with his prior desire for Tatiana:

Tatiana est là, comme une autre, Tatiana par exemple, enlisée en nous, celle d'hier et celle de demain, quelle qu'elle soit. Son corps chaud et bâillonné je m'y enfonce, heure creuse pour Lol, heure éblouissant de son oubli, je me greffe, je pompe le sang de Tatiana. Tatiana est là, pour que j'y oublie Lol V. Stein. Sous moi, elle devient lentement exsangue. (167)

Hold's desire for Lol seems to require Tatiana as the third term, for she is embedded in them. He envisions his affair with Tatiana as predatory transfer that erases individuality, figuratively draining her blood to fill his own veins and reciprocally grafting himself onto her. Cohen confirms the interrelation of Hold's desires for Lol and Tatiana, arguing that Hold casts them as "opposite poles of the virgin/whore dichotomy" (38) to finally attain both through "Lol's personality split" (39). While Cohen may insist too strongly on these binaries, the women become complimentary replacements of each other, the desire for one fueled by the desire for the last, as do the other doubled lovers in the novel. Hold furthermore engineers his own doubling with Michael. He suggests that Lol sought an affair with him to replace her lost fiancée, explaining (while referring to himself in third person) "Dès que Lol le vit, elle le reconnut. [...] Ressemblait-il à son fiancé de T. Beach? Non, il ne lui ressemblait en rien. Avait-il quelque chose dans les manières de cet amant disparu? Sans doute, oui, dans les regards qu'il avait pour les femmes" (52). While this points to Lol's compulsive repetition of the ball, perhaps an effort to erase the distinctness of Michael and soften the blow of his abandonment of her by finding another man likely to cheat, this parallel stems primarily from Hold's own interpretation. Lol later denies any resemblance between Hold and Michael. By replicating Michael, Hold gains by making himself a facsimile of the object of Lol's eternal desire.

As lovers become doubles of those they replace, the desire for the repetition of adultery becomes as well a tendency towards self erasure. As Girard explains, those caught up in mimetic desire may secretly hate themselves (thus they must imitate the rival whom they imagine possesses what they lack), for “the wish to be absorbed into the substance of the Other implies an insuperable revulsion for one’s own substance” (54). In Lol’s fascination with the scene of the ball, she must repeatedly encounter her own erasure from Michael’s mind. She connects Anne-Marie’s presence with her own destruction, for “dans une progression rigoureusement parallèle et inverse, Lol aurait été remplacé par elle auprès de l’homme de T. Beach. [...] à mesure que le corps de la femme apparaît à cet homme, le sien s’efface, s’efface, volupté, du monde” (49-50). At her final relapse, Lol’s inability to distinguish herself from Tatiana presents a key symptom of insanity. Hold, in what seems a compulsive move to mimic Lol and cast the lovers as doubles, is guilty of the same failure to distinguish. He states, “il n’y a plus eu de différence entre elle et Tatiana Karl sauf dans la désignation qu’elle faisait d’elle même – Tatiana ne se nomme pas, elle – et dans les deux noms qu’elle se donnait : Tatiana Karl et Lol V. Stein” (189). Lol’s interchange of her name and Tatiana’s points to the completion of her self effacement. She has returned to the casino where Michael left her and emerged no longer the Lol that was abandoned but a hybrid of the abandoned and desired. As a result, she becomes immersed in madness and finally loses her sense of identity.

Adultery is just one source of deception within *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein*, for lying and betrayal is built into the novel’s language. While Hold dismisses his own false narrative as a feature of his investigation into Lol, he and Tatiana view Lol’s untrue account of herself as symptomatic of madness:

Pour nous, cette femme ment sur T. Beach, sur S. Tahla, sur cette soirée, pour moi, pour nous, elle mentira tout à l’heure sur notre rencontre, je le prévois, elle ment sur elle aussi,

pour nous elle ment parce que le divorce dans lequel nous sommes elle et nous, c'est elle seule qui l'a prononcé – mais en silence – dans un rêve si fort qu'il lui a échappé et qu'elle ignore l'avoir eu. (106)

It is interesting that Hold uses the term “divorce” to distinguish Lol’s unreliable narrative from his and Tatiana’s perspective, as if her breach of truth also ruptures social relations. Hold presents Lol’s failed as concrete evidence of madness, stating “Elle rit un peu trop, donne trop d’explications [...]. Lol se tait. Tatiana est confirmée sans doute dans sa version de la distraction. Lol V. Stein est encore malade” (146). Lol’s noticeable lying, however, is only one layer of the underlying lies that the narrative is built upon. Since Hold interprets Lol’s deception as a symptom of her “maladie” caught from Michael Richardson’s adultery, which invalidated the possibility of love, unreliability seems to jump from one source to another, ultimately infiltrating the narrative structure. Any excess in language makes this falseness more evident, undermining narrative authority. Similarly according to Hold, because Lol loved Michael “d’un amour trop grand, rien de plus,” the natural consequence of this love is her betrayal, leaving love “mort jusqu’à son odeur d’amour mort” (50). Overabundant production seems to indicate either underlying falseness or the failure of an illusion, and so the narrative turns to apathy and nothingness to avoid this repeated betrayal.

Hold therefore turns to the insufficiency of language as the source of narrative impossibility. Behind Duras’ unreliable novel is the suggestion that words themselves are inadequate or false signifiers, and Hold positions this as another cause of Lol’s symptoms:

J’aime à croire comme je l’aime, que si Lol est silencieuse dans la vie c’est qu’elle a cru, l’espace d’une éclair, que ce mot pouvait exister. Faute de son existence, elle se tait. Ç’aurait été un mot-absence, un mot-trou, creusé en son centre d’un trou, de ce trou où tous les autres mots auraient été enterrés. On n’aurait pas pu le dire mais on aurait pu le faire résonner. Immense, sans fin, un gong vide [...]. Manquant, ce mot, il gâche tous les autres, les contamine, c’est aussi le chien mort de la plage en plein midi, ce trou de chair. [...] ce mot, qui n’existe pas, pourtant est là : il vous attend au tournant du langage. (48)

Critics have variously interpreted the meaning of this “mot-trou” as a key to their reading of the novel,⁴⁹ but in all cases, this insufficient sign stands in for some unfulfilled desire or underlying absence that Lol perceives. Duras’ use of the past conditional indicates the impossibility of finding this “mot-trou” and whatever else it would point to that Lol believed could have existed. I propose that the missing word need not be a new revolutionary concept, but does reveal the insufficiency of the already existing concepts that frame our understanding of society, such as love. This passage almost echoes Addie’s section in William Faulkner’s *As I Lay Dying*⁵⁰, in which Addie views words as façades that fail to fully convey the concepts they represent. Addie explains how her marriage to Anse was engineered around this empty language: “He had a word, too. Love, he called it. But I had been used to words for a long time. I knew that that word was like the others: just a shape to fill a lack; that when the right time came, you wouldn’t need a word for that anymore than pride and fear” (Faulkner 172).⁵¹ In Duras’ investigation of failed language, Hold does not specifically name love as an empty word, but whatever the intended meaning of the “mot-trou,” its absence points to the lack of meaning behind every other statement and signifier. Hold claims that in its absence this word “gâche tous les autres, les contamine,” again posing the failure of meaning as disease and contagiously transferred from word to word.

⁴⁹ For example, Collington claims it “would perfectly convey Lol’s sense of simultaneous identification/joy and abandonment/grief” (137), Udris, arguing that Lol wants to be included in Michael and Anne-Marie’s love, reads it as “a new concept” for “another relation to love and desire” (77), and Winston associates it with political revolution, “the newness that would emerge in the instant that bourgeois divisions—of rational, and nonrational, mind and body, thought and emotion, sane and insane, for instance are overcome” (142).

⁵⁰ *As I Lay Dying* was published in the United States in 1930. Marguerite Duras was familiar with Faulkner’s works. According to Laure Adler, Duras read works by Faulkner as a student (77), and some critics, dismissive of her first novels, claimed they were too heavily influenced by Faulkner (97-98, 137, 185). That is not to say, however, that this passage in *Le Ravissement* was directly influenced by him.

⁵¹ Notably, Addie’s recognition of the emptiness behind language and the hollowness of “love” leads her to commit adultery. The novel furthermore ends with Darl’s institutionalization in the state mental asylum.

By positioning the “mot-trou” at Lol’s core, “creusé en son centre d’un trou,” Duras indicates a hollowness at the core of Lol, or any person. Hold’s explanation of the “mot-trou,” which seems particularly close to Duras’ voice, given the novel’s self-conscious interrogation of the reliability of language, is totalizing in that it encompasses the failure of all language. Hold’s use of the pronoun “vous” seems to extend this word’s effects far beyond Lol to include the reader. The image of the hole at the center echoes Tatiana’s argument at the novel’s opening that Lol’s “maladie” is derived from the deficiency of her heart. As in *The Good Soldier*, the heart serves as a metaphorical indicator of falseness and emptiness at the core, for “Tatiana aurait tendance à croire que c’était peut-être en effet le cœur de Lol V. Stein qui n’était pas – elle dit : là – [...] Oui, il semblait que c’était cette région du sentiment qui, chez Lol, n’était pas pareille” (13). Because Lol has a “cœur inachevé” (13), in Tatiana’s version, Lol’s marriage is already doomed to fail. As the meaning of words collapses, individual identity becomes a façade, and all that one person can reach in another person is the void, like in Rhys’ *Good Morning, Midnight*. Duras’ characters fixate on each other yet fail to definitively know one another or establish a cohesive sense of self. While it is easy to connect Lol’s madness her disillusionment upon realizing that Michael’s love was a false promise (as Hold does), Tatiana’s more unsettling suggestion that Lol was already insufficiently equipped to love Michael indicates that perhaps concepts such as love were always already mirages, and therefore did not need adultery to be revealed as false.

By undermining the meaning of language on the scale of contaminating every other word and then continuing to produce a narrative from this linguistic destruction, Hold injects a form of madness into the linguistic makeup of the novel. Felman argues that the obsessive reproduction of language without meaning can be a symptom of madness, for when there is a disconnect

between signifier and signified, “la folie prend forme dans le discours comme une passion du signifiant, comme la reproduction des signes—sans rapport à leurs signifiés” (131). Felman furthermore casts madness as narrative desire arising from the impossibility of language, stating “La folie, c’est à la fois l’ineffable et le désir de *nommer* l’ineffable” (Felman 173). It seems that Hold’s entire narrative springs from this desire to say the absent word and is bound to the impossibility of doing so, a desire he transfers to readers as evidenced by the multiple critical interpretations of this word. Hold fails to provide a reliable narrative in which readers can accept the meanings he ascribes precisely because he continues to reproduce language while undermining its meaning.

Duras’ unsettling image of the “mot-trou” as “chien mort de la plage en pleine midi” recurs in a literal form in *L’Amour*.⁵² Though the characters of *L’Amour* are unnamed, critics often read this novel as a continuation or revision of *Le Ravissement*. The woman in *L’Amour* seems to be Lol,⁵³ and Cohen argues that readers could match the other characters with those of *Le Ravissement*.⁵⁴ While the characters languish on the stagnant beaches of S. Thala, haunted by repeated fires and the omnipresent prison (50-51), a dog wanders across the beach and then repeatedly reemerges as dead, for example, “Le chien mort est face aux piliers d’un casino bombardé” (*L’Amour* 32). The beach of S. Thala has become the wasteland of *Le Ravissement*’s T. Beach, and the casino of Lol’s ball has decayed into a place of horror where the music evokes

⁵² See note 45.

⁵³ The woman’s back story in *L’Amour* is a clear summary of Lol’s. According to the traveler, she became “malade” “après un bal,” to which she adds “après j’ai été mariée avec un musicien, j’ai eu deux enfants,” and that she was “malade une deuxième fois” (*L’Amour* 104-105). While it is not necessarily the critical tradition to do so, I will refer to her as Lol for the clarity of my argument.

⁵⁴ “The single toponym S. Thala and one or two other markers such as ‘black hair’ suffice to ‘recognize’ Tatiana, Lol, perhaps Jaques Hold, and Michael Richardson. ‘Remembering’ unnamed figures in *L’Amour* as hyper-named figures in other texts, one reconstructs legends, making links Duras does not, despite discrepancies” (Cohen 193).

“Une danse lente, de bals morts, de fêtes sanglantes” (*L'Amour* 37). As Urdis claims, this wasteland seems to be a direct product of Lol's continued pursuit of the scene of T. Beach in *Le Ravissement* and the resulting emptiness:

One can say that the true inhabitants of *L'Amour* are the voices coming from the sand rather than the ghost-like inhabitants of S. Thala. The depersonalization process in which characters are reduced to voice points, in *L'Amour*, to a dematerialized world and to the actualization of the imaginary world of *Le Ravissement*. (Udris 181)

In a sense, the ruined landscape of *L'Amour* reflects the void around which *Le Ravissement* circles. The S. Thala of *L'Amour* becomes synonymous with nothingness. Lol designates the traveller (likely Michael Richardson) as “S. Thala,” and in response to his asking “S. Thala, c'est mon nom,” she responds “tout, ici, tout c'est S. Thala” (62). While the “mot-trou” contaminates all language by illuminating its failure to name, “S. Thala,” becomes the all-encompassing replacement, the word that names everything and means only absence and decay. Notably, the novel's name, *L'Amour*, associates love with this bleak landscape of nothingness. Love itself figures very little in the novel, except for in the unraveling of relationships. The traveler, who has returned to S. Thala to kill himself, forcefully severs all ties to his wife and family. When his wife finds him at the hotel, her futile pursuit results in the dissolution of any possibility of love. She says to him “Vous avez cessé de...” then “Je me demande même si... si même au début... vous m'avez jamais” (83). The endings to the sentences she cannot finish seem to be “m'aimer” in the first case and “aimé” in the second, and the traveler's response, “Sans doute pas” (83) indicates that their love never was. Rather than decaying alongside the dead dog, love in *L'Amour* never existed.

Le Ravissement stages Lol and Hold's pursuit of an end, which is ultimately destruction. As Hold states, while she re-envisioning the ball, “Ce qu'elle rebâtit c'est la fin du monde” (47). This apocalypse paradoxically preserves her in the triangle of her abandonment by Michael for Anne-

Marie, for “Elle se voit, et c’est là sa pensée véritable, à la même place, dans cette fin, toujours, au centre d’une triangulation dont l’aurore et eux deux sont les termes éternels”(47). Hold presents her re-attainment of the ball as the end of everything for Lol: her sole objective and the final destruction of her mind. As Tatiana thinks “rien ne pouvait plus arriver à cette femme... plus rien, plus rien. Que sa fin” (16) upon seeing Anne-Marie right before the ball, the progression of Hold’s narrative suggests the same is true for Lol. When he accompanies her to visit T. Beach, Hold states, “Le bal sera au bout du voyage, il tombera comme château de cartes comme en ce moment le voyage lui-même. Elle revoit sa mémoire-ci pour la dernière fois de sa vie, elle l’enterre” (175). The end of the ball that destroys all else also puts an end to Lol’s repeated revision of it, imprisoning her in this final moment. Upon revisiting the casino, Hold claims that Lol “aurait voulu que tout recommence et qu’elle trouvait qu’il ne fallait pas” (189). Since Lol creates a sort of narrative by re-imagining the story of the ball, her desire for the end functions like a reader’s (and author’s) desire for the end of a novel. Brooks argues that the reader desires the novel’s end as the moment of textual death or undoing, for he states “the desire of the text is ultimately the desire for the end, for that recognition which is also the moment of death of the reader in the text” (108).⁵⁵ While this analysis might not apply to all scenarios of reading, it seems particularly apt for Lol because in her repeated re-envisioning of the ball, she longs for the end or its ultimate evocation. Lol’s final return to the casino releases her from her repeated desire to return and relive the scene, and thereby puts an end to her imagined narrative.

What comes out of Lol’s end at casino is rather bleak. The last sentence of *Le Ravissement* leaves Lol sleeping alone in a field of rye (191) while Hold meets Tatiana. Since this mirrors the

⁵⁵ Brooks establishes a comparison between reader’s desire for the ending and Freud’s analysis of the death drive as the desire for a satisfying state of release or undoing. Brooks also argues that the end is what enables meaning to be ascribed. See Chapter I.

scene in which first watched the couple, it “constitutes less a final episode than another instance of the same scene ceaselessly repeated, opening on yet another immobile series enclosed within the walls of the phantasmal ballroom where time does not advance” (Cohen 43). If we pursue Lol’s story into *L’Amour*, the aftereffects of *Le Ravissement* seem to transform the beach at S. Thala from a resort by the sea into a repeatedly burning apocalyptic world. *L’Amour* suggests that Lol’s end is permanent insanity, for she is institutionalized “A la prison de S. Thala” (73). The novel leaves her “seule allongée sur le sable au soleil, pourrissant, chien mort de l’idée, sa main est restée enterrée près du sac blanc” (115). Significantly, her bag is empty except for the mirror that was a gift from her former lover (104), a sign of the reduplicating void that has replaced love, that Lol obsessively preserves. While she pursues her own undoing in *Le Ravissement*, in *L’Amour* Lol has finally become analogous to the “mot-trou” or the “chien mort,” a sign of the void.

In tension with the novel’s progression to a destructive end is the characters tendency to infinitely reproduce illusions. Rather than disillusionment, the original instance of adultery plunges Lol and Hold into this repeated reproduction to mitigate the loss. The novel’s cinematic descriptions have a phantasmal quality because there is nothing underlying them other than the already broken mirages of love and eternity. As Felman explains, “Le processus de la désillusion n’est d’emblée que l’échafaudage d’une illusion nouvelle” (Felman 135), and so Lol’s imagining is a repeated quest to enter this illusory world. Hold states, “Je crois qu’elle devait trouver là, dans la monotonie de la pluie, cet ailleurs, uniforme, fade et sublime, plus adorable à son âme qu’aucun autre moment de sa vie présente, cet ailleurs qu’elle cherchait depuis son retour à S. Tahla” (44). While the resounding message of *Madame Bovary* is that this sublime elsewhere to the monotony of daily life does not exist, Lol finds it in her madness. This elsewhere is also what

Hold seeks in his pursuit of Lol, for Cohen argues, “The continual textual repetitions issue not from Lol but from the narrator, who as speaker, is already caught in the phantasmal world he constructed as a character” (42). While Lol may repeatedly fixate on the ball, Hold chooses to linger on her fixation and return to it because it fuels his own obsession. Girard claims that “desire projects a dream universe around the hero” (18), and Hold lives in his fantasy of Lol parallel to her dream of the ball. Novels in general furnish readers’ desires for fantasy and fictional productions, and therefore readers are taken in along with Lol and Hold by the pursuit of this sublime elsewhere to mundane life and its disillusionment. According to Girard, the object of desire is often given illusory value through the process of mediation, and once the veil has been lifted, the desiring person transfers their fantasy rather than succumbing to a total disillusionment, for “Every mediation projects its mirage; the mirages follow one another like so many ‘truths’ which take the place of former truths by a veritable murdering of the living memory and which protect themselves from future truths by an implacable censure of daily experience” (90). The desiring subject sacrifices memory of prior disillusionment in order to guard the new illusions. While Michael’s abandonment breaks the original illusion of his and Lol’s love, Lol formulates a fantasy of the ball to mitigate this original betrayal and periodically loses her memory instead of succumbing to total disillusionment. Hold too perpetuates his own mirage of Lol as an alternative to the mundane. In taking this process of constructing repeated mirages to an extreme, Lol and Hold’s sacrifice is their sanity.

And so T. Beach becomes a mirage populated by phantom duplications of the characters. Hold lingers on Lol’s desire to replay the ball through their journey to T. Beach, envisioning her as continually self-replicating and reproducing the façade:

Elle veut, je le comprends clairement, être rencontrée par moi et vue par moi dans un certain espace qu’elle aménage en ce moment. Lequel? Est-il peuplé des fantômes de T.

Beach, de la seule survivante Tatiana, piégé de faux semblantes, de vingt femmes aux noms de Lol? Est-il autrement? (105)

These fictions of T. Beach, the illusions that trap Tatiana, are productions of Lol and Hold's madness and fascination. While madness is beyond individual control, it enables Lol and Hold to live in the "faux semblante." While Hold's fantasies are products of his desire, Lol's repetition could also be read as an effect of traumatic memory that traps her in her moment of abandonment. Tanner explains that "memory can act as a faculty that denies the possibility of any radically new future by preempting the present with the admonishment and perceptual patterns of the past" (69). By remembering, the characters replicate what has already been and fall into the same patterns: adultery, abandonment, and the sense of nothingness behind love and individual identity. Paradoxically, Lol's madness is characterized by her forgetting and the dullness of her memory, for at the end, Hold states "Je n'essaie pas de lutter contre la mortelle fadeur de la mémoire de Lol V. Stein. Je dors" (182). His departure to sleep positions him parallel to Lol's final state. While Lol's memory fades, she remains locked in the story she has repeated, returning again to the ball to fully regain the "maladie." Hold too preserves the fantasy he repeatedly pursues in Lol, for he records it through his narrative.

Narrative production ultimately preserves the past, creating an eternal copy to be infinitely revisited of what time has otherwise erased. In *L'Amour*, the traveler suggests the guilt of the woman who seems to be Lol for setting the fire by stating "Ils vont vous tuer," to which she responds, "Je ne peux pas mourir," and he agrees, "C'est vrai" (96). In a sense, Lol is right that she cannot die, for the reproductions of her madness seek to superimpose her immortality over the void she encounters. While the meaning behind language may be destroyed and the novel reveals the hollowness behind words and social systems such as love and marriage, the eternal sign of madness offers the illusion of transcendence. In his own imagining of the ball, Hold

states that Michael “chercha dans la salle quelque signe d'éternité. Le sourire de Lol. V. Stein, alors en était un, mais il ne le vit pas” (21). Lol's smile in this case seems a preliminary indicator of her madness, and it is precisely her detachment from the world around her that momentarily sublimates and immortalizes her in Hold's eyes. In the illusory production of her own eternal narrative, Lol finds a framework of something she perceives as eternal to negate her abandonment and the failure of love to be permanently real.

While it would be extreme to say that the reader catches the madness and delusion of *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein*, Duras' novel does provoke interpretive confusion and demonstrates how psychological symptoms can be contained within language. Hold's desire and delusion destabilize the meaning behind his language, continually undermining the truth of his statements, as they also perpetuates his narration. The novel's overall sense of the unreliability and insufficiency of meaning that leads to madness comes without a compelling source. While Michael's adultery is a betrayal, it does not fit the scale of Lol's madness or the ensuing narrative void. Preceding her madness, Duras leaves no suggestion that there is anything wrong with Lol's world. Lol had a seemingly normal childhood without, for example, the suicide and manipulation that traumatized Ford's Nancy. The novel's suggestion that this sense of a void and the ensuing madness could spontaneously arise, or was perhaps inexplicably already there, is itself the source of the collapse of order within the narrative.

Conclusion

Although Ford Madox Ford and Marguerite Duras are both innovative writers who created unique and highly complex novels, the lines of madness, adultery, disillusionment, and narrative uncertainty that run through both *The Good Soldier* and *Le Ravisement de Lol V. Stein* are nothing new. The striking similarities of these novels therefore, points to an important phenomenon in literature: a metafictional interrogation of falseness and illusion. These novels unveil the societal fictions to which the characters ascribe and expose them as no less illusory than a fictional story. They demonstrate how social ideals are also narratives that get passed from person to person, telling the story of how life should be but often is not.

While *The Good Soldier* and *Le Ravisement de Lol V. Stein* have much in common, these works do have nuanced differences. Ford's "saddest story" is largely the crumbling of an older social order alongside Dowell's desperate attempt to gain an authoritative voice. The troubling failure of language at the center of Duras' novel spontaneously undermines the pursuit of meaning, indicating an arbitrariness that Ford does not fully probe. Perhaps these differences fit with standard distinctions made between Modernist and Post-Modernist literature, however an understanding of these novels need not tie them to specific categories which their authors may not have ascribed to. Despite their stylistic innovation that was, in a sense, part of a rupture from what came before, Ford and Duras both develop themes already prevalent in literature throughout the nineteenth century and earlier. There is, of course, a long tradition of taking adultery and madness as novelistic subjects, as well as presenting fictional stories as dangerous and deceitful objects, posing a threat to the psychology or morality of the listener. This thesis therefore argues against viewing twentieth century literature as something radically distinct from previous writing.

These novels, however are unique in their specific conflation of these themes to probe the very structure of narrative and the production of illusion that occurs not only within a novel but through individuals' creation of their own internal narratives by which they understand their lives. The unreliable narratives constructed by Duras and Ford perhaps suggest that narrative production, and more broadly, the investment in illusions can be a form of madness, and the narrator's obsession with telling the story can transfer to the reader in the form of fascination with the unreliability and the desire to interpret. These novels both make readers conscious of the dazzling illusions that narratives provide and the absence that can often lie behind their words, whether the narrative is a traditional ideal upheld by society, an individual's construction of their own identity, or the text of a novel. This intensely self aware unreliability that did not occur widely in literature until the twentieth century is so fascinating and appealing to readers because it makes meaning and knowledge elusive. It has a doubly metafictional effect by calling attention to the artificiality of fiction and calling upon readers to produce their own form of fiction in the effort to interpret. In a text where no meaning is certain, where each word could be a mirage masking nothing, the act of reading demands interpretive faith and invention akin to Hold's repeated "j'invente" and "je crois." The unreliable narrator thus produces unreliable readers by demanding this highly subjective interpretation. The longstanding trend in literature of fascination with and fetishization of madness as both opposite to reasoned narrative and source of special insight is a product of an anxiety surrounding a lack of reliability. Dowell and Hold make compelling characters not because they are verifiably mad and therefore different from us, but because of the fear that we might become them. Our own interpretations, though not mad, may not be far from the unreliability of theirs, and therefore the narrative transfer of madness finally extends to the reader.

Adultery, of course, is quite different from madness in that it produces an intentional lie and it constitutes an external social disruption rather than internal psychological destabilization. Adultery, however, is key as well to understanding the particular functioning of narrative unreliability in these novels, not only because it is so prevalent in the texts, but because it undermines the traditional social narrative that positions marriage as key to happiness, and it also provides a study of the intentional production of lies and deceptive narrative by the cheating spouse. Hold's and Dowell's narratives are not intentionally deceptive, unlike the lies of the adulterous, however both novels demonstrate how knowledge of adultery undermines the characters ability to have faith in the reality of what they are told. Following Michael's abandonment which shatters her belief in love, Lol loses faith in the meaning of language, much as Dowell's repeated "I don't know" stems from the fact that his original understanding of his and Florence's marriage was a fiction based on her lies. Adultery therefore reveals a broader uncertainty behind any effort to understand something beyond oneself. If a lover is deceptive, then what other lies are we being told? These novels therefore place doubt upon every narrative exchange by forcing readers to examine the speakers psychology and motives rather than the story itself.

It is not the case that there is no true story in *The Good Soldier* or *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein*, but rather that the story is not what we may initially think it is. Readers can say nothing that is entirely certain about Lol, Edward, or any of the other characters. What Ford and Duras provide instead is a complex psychological representation of Dowell and Hold as well as a subjective, yet compelling reading of the other characters. The stories Dowell and Hold tell are not objective accounts, yet they capture a more nuanced fragment of human understanding than such an account could provide. The unreliability and incompleteness of these narratives points us

back to what, if any, alternative voices exist, and there we realize that isolation within the perspective of Hold or Dowell hinges upon the silencing of other characters, whose voices we can never wholly reclaim through interpretation. By confronting this narrative impossibility, which is in a sense inherent in nearly every novel, through perhaps less prominent, we again approach the inadequacy of fiction, at which point we return to construct our own new narrative of interpretation.

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