

# MARGUERITE DURAS: LITERARY FICTION AND *CURRERE*

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Marguerite Duras, the French novelist, has not been written about much in curriculum studies. I would like to introduce curriculum studies scholars to her (1958/1965) novel titled *Moderato Cantabile* that broke ground not only for French intellectuals, but for women writers in particular.

The questions I ask turn on what Duras teaches about memory, history, and autobiography (namely, *currere*). This essay addresses issues of *currere* in the intersections of literary fiction, academic life, and my work as a chaplain in a trauma hospital. What interests me is the way in which literary fiction, memory and history, politics and the personal, intersect and intertwine.

Germaine Brée (1965) comments that Marguerite Duras's (1958/1965) novel *Moderato Cantabile* is written in a fragmented style whereby the "dialogue" is "picked up, repeated, broken, ambiguous" (p. ix). Three characters in the story are Anne, Chauvin, and a child. Here, we have the unholy trinity, the father, the son, and the holy spirit (and an extra, the sadistic piano teacher, Mademoiselle Giroud, as if in a Strindberg play). Anne is the (un)holy spirit, the specter. The son disappears in the end (another specter).

Anne says at the end of the story that she is dead. Because I am not a literary critic and have very little knowledge of Duras's *oeuvre*. I will approach this essay from a deconstructive reading, because I do have some familiarity with the work of Derrida (1994) and his notion of the specter. Of course, Derrida takes this idea of specter from Marx and Engels (1848/1978), as they say that communism is the specter that haunts Europe.

Derrida (1994) argues in his book, *Specters of Marx*, that Marx is a specter—not because of communism—but because of his unfortunate erasure. The interesting thing about Derrida's (1994) writings on the *Specters of Marx* is that what he seems to intimate is that specters—in a most Freudian sense—come back, that specters are to-come—as Derrida would put it; the more Marx is made to disappear, the stronger is his spirit (in a weird Hegelian sense perhaps?). This is what Freud would call the return of the repressed.

Through the male gaze—the misogynist male gaze, one might say—Anne, in Duras's (1958/1965) novel, would be considered little more than a hysterical woman. Of course, that Anne is hysterical is ridiculous. But that is the way women are portrayed if they show an ounce of emotion. Freud (1953) famously wrote about Dora—who suffered from hysteria: that unfortunate term. But what some readers might not know is that Freud argued elsewhere that hysteria is a problem to which both men and women (whatever those signifiers mean today?) are (both) subject.

The term hysteria—as it got handed down in the psychological literature(s)—is so woman-hating—so incredibly misogynist—that I do not see any way to resuscitate the term. Hysteria, as Freud conceptualized it, is also called conversion disorder—another unfortunate (medicalized) term that designates a psychosomatic defense mechanism whereby psyche transfers its disarray onto soma. But aren't *psychesoma* one thing? Joyce McDougall (1989) and other psychoanalysts seem to think so. Horrific repressed childhood memories—especially of sexual assault, incest, or rape—in cases of conversion disorder—get transferred onto the body in, for example, the loss of some

sense, like the inability to see or move an arm. In the case of Freud's (1953) Dora, fainting spells (syncopes? perhaps, see Nancy, 1991 p. 99), losing consciousness, or even "fits" resembling epileptic episodes have no detectable—physical—cause.

Freud was an MD, a neurologist, but became so disgusted by the narrowness of the field of neurology that he abandoned it for psychoanalysis, a field he invented. He entertained all kinds of strange phenomena and—given that he began his career using hypnotism only to drop it when he found that hypnosis was not systematic enough to explain complex psychic issues—he systematized psyche by using his psychoanalytic *method* (which became known as the talking cure).

Deconstruction is a kind of reading, for Derrida, that is *not* a method, but a form of textual renderings that upend, dismantle, turn upside down concepts that are taken-for-granted and perhaps even, as Adorno would put it, reified. It is important to clarify, however, that deconstruction is not destruction. It is the re-reading and reiteration of the old—turning the old into what is otherwise—if you will.

*Differance*, one of Derrida's (1976) major concepts, means the delayed and deferred meaning of text (everything is text for Derrida). *Differance*, a very Freudian concept, means several things at once. First, it suggests that a text's meaning is always already delayed—that which escapes understanding initially later comes back, perhaps to haunt. Simultaneously (or not) meaning gets deferred—that is, placed elsewhere or projected elsewhere or in utterly bizarre formations (i.e., reaction formation, parapraxis). Moreover, there is always already a remainder, a cinder, a hinge, something left over—as Derrida put it.

With the Derridean deconstructive in mind, I return to Duras's (1958/1965) novel, *Moderato Cantabile*. I have been pondering this story for some time and still can make little sense of it—and—it haunts me. First, because it is a haunting story, and second, perhaps, because I do not understand it. Maybe I never will.

It is this inability to grasp what this story means that intrigues; that it is haunting in some weird, indelible way unnerves.

Freud—much like Derrida—was more concerned with what it is that the analysand *does* with the material at hand than with remembering or understanding some kind of literal truth. That freely associated thought brings up from the unconscious—through dreamwork—patches of repressed childhood memories might remain murky still.

Like Freud, Derrida's deconstructive project was not an effort to destruct, but to take apart (analyze) and put together (synthesize that which is broken). However, the synthesis of that which is broken does not guarantee wholeness or even understanding. Perhaps, if anything, the synthesis remains fragmented, never to be wholly understood.

What Duras's (1958/1965) novel is about leaves me utterly baffled. Love and hate (eros and Thanatos as Freud would put it) have something to do with it. The story opens with a man strangling his wife in the open on the street for everyone to see. Romance gone bad is the story of many marriages where hate overpowers love. Freud once remarked that hate was stronger than love (exactly not the Christian sentimentality that most Austrians embraced). In fact, at the end of his life Freud came to the conclusion that people were (in a loose translation of the German) "pigs." As he ironically signed the papers to get out of Austria with his daughter, Anna, when he was at the age of 80 or so, he wrote: "The Nazis come highly recommended." The soldiers were so stupid that they had no idea that Freud was insulting them, and they let him go.

The pain of Duras's character, Anne, and her drinking, perhaps, covered over (psychologically) the lack of love in her life—or the complete inability to love. She

seemed rather cold and indifferent to her child. This, indeed, troubles. Anne all but completely ignores her child. Her son seems to be little more than a nuisance; she does not really want him around at all.

The lack of love or too much love—the impression Barthes (1977) leaves in his *Lover's Discourse*—are too much to bear. Somehow Barthes' is difficult to digest, just as Duras but for completely opposite reasons. Both texts, ironically, overflow the with impossible love.

One wonders how central a concept love has been or not in the history of philosophy. Jean-Luc Nancy (1991) is one of the few philosophers in the Western tradition who writes about love and yet ... so central is this a concept in literary history. Plato's (ca. 385 B.C.E./2008) Socrates—in the *Symposium*—is not shy to talk of his love for Alcibiades. But after Socrates, love gets dropped from the philosophical canon—as if it is too embarrassing a subject. Why is it, I wonder, that novelists seem so much more at home writing about love than philosophers? Philosophers miss the very thing that is right in front of them. Love and hate are every-day affairs. But they are not trivial—as Freud knew only too well.

When Derrida is asked in the film *Derrida* about the concept of love (Dick & Ziering, 2002), he is almost taken aback by the question; he seems almost blushing embarrassed. This is reminiscent of Derrida's (2008) admitting shame and embarrassment standing naked in front of his cat in *The Animal that therefore I Am*.

And why, Derrida (2008) asks, would his cat make him feel shame and embarrassment? *The Animal that therefore I Am* surprisingly stirred much conversation—and even controversy. An entire issue of *Yale French Studies* (Senior et al., 2015) was devoted to Derrida's cat. I thought that this was rather humorous. And I also thought that only Derrida could get away with writing a philosophical treatise on his cat. If I had done a book like that, publishers would have certainly not taken me seriously—because I am not Derrida, and I am not famous—or male.

It is interesting that Donna Haraway criticized Derrida because he did not draw on literature(s) in human—animal studies. Perhaps she was angry because Derrida did not cite her. One of Haraway's latest books was about her dog. At any rate, the issue that Haraway raised turns on the politics of citation and the canon(s). American scholars—in my impression—are utterly anal about proper citation. The French do not seem to be so concerned with that. They seem to borrow from others without much concern about who said what first. Perhaps American scholars are anal because they come from a Puritan tradition; whereas, the French do not.

Nietzsche (1910/2004)—who never minced words, especially in his disdain for academia generally and the German education system specifically—stated in no uncertain terms that German public schools turned out “stupid” people (notably, a word he repeats throughout his work over and over, e.g., 1882/1974, 1878/1996, 1910/2004, 1908/2009). Is American public education much different from this? No. In fact, American public education was borne of the Germanic traditions. Public schools in the United States were built on German ideas. “Stupid” people come out of public schools in the United States not because of the teachers but because of state mandates that force teachers to teach to the test or risk losing their jobs. It is ironic, then, that American scholars—who came out of public schools—are forced—stupidly—to not think. Perhaps the politics of citation in the United States is what it is to keep American scholars from thinking at all. Being buried in citations is a hallmark of the way American intellectuals are trained. But it was not always this way. The piling up of citations seems to have increased since, say, the 1920s perhaps because numbers, impact factors and statistics—bean counting—are all. The reason I digress here is that there is no reason that Derrida should have had to

cite anyone he chose not to. But Haraway's kind of critique—the lack of citation—is an American-made phenomenon. Perhaps it is part of the “natureculture,” “oncomouse” culture, we have inherited—to, ironically, cite Haraway (1997). And to draw on Haraway, it is impossible to step outside of one's culture—to pretend a God's eye view as she puts it, (drawing on another scholar). Academe is a political game—a *Glass Bead Game*, indeed, as Hermann Hesse (1990) would have put it.

After this lengthy digression, let us look at what Derrida says about love—the least talked about subject in philosophy.

Derrida—reminiscent of the Hebrew prophets who declare “I cannot carry out Yahweh's commands” and then do anyway—when asked about love declares that he cannot talk about love. But after protesting too much—as Shakespeare would put it—he proceeds to give long and detailed monologue on love after all (Dick & Ziering, 2002).

Philosophical musing(s) on love—as Jean-Luc Nancy (1996) points out—seem to be mostly absent throughout the history of Western philosophy, as I mentioned earlier. Although students of Greek philosophy know that the love of wisdom comes from the *engendered* Greek concept (*Sophia*). But most (male) philosophers (again, this needs qualification because let us not forget that Judith Butler [2006] once famously said that gender is *performative*) ignore that fact that *Sophia* is wisdom and the beginning of philosophy.

Philosophy seems particularly problematic in its history because women have been erased from the canon. Not only that. Male philosophers tend to ignore the fact that concepts are engendered. And it is no accident that male Eurocentric philosophers have historically denigrated the body because anything connected to the body—that which is sensual, the senses—is associated with women, and most men are—let's face it—misogynist. It wasn't until Merleau-Ponty (1958) began a discussion on the body that this concept found a place in the Western philosophical tradition. But his notion of the body seemed so abstract that it seemed rather (post)human or not human at all. The body—whatever that means—is engendered (in all of the performative complexity of the word, as Judith Butler might put it). Merleau-Ponty's body was not only “without organs”—as Deleuze and Guattari (2000) might have said, drawing on Schreber and perhaps Artaud—Merleau-Ponty's body was without emotion, gender, sexuality, age, and so forth.

Hannah Arendt—perhaps the most well-known philosopher of her generation—is nowhere to be found in what are considered definitive histories of philosophy (see Bertrand Russell, 1972, and A.C. Grayling, 2019, for example). And if one Googles American philosophers—it is odd and perhaps not surprising to note—what comes up are images of mostly white men—and one woman. Of course, there are many philosophers who are women but even Google is sexist. Can an algorithm be sexist?

It is notable that postmodern philosopher of science, Michel Serres (1998), tells us in his conversations with Bruno Latour that it was Simone Weil—a woman of great intellectual stature who is totally ignored in both academic theology and philosophy—who changed his life. It was Simone Weil, Serres says, who changed the direction of his intellectual career: he gave up his career as a scientist and became philosopher-poet (Serres & Latour, 1998). I cannot recall any other male philosopher—ever—mentioning that a woman—an intellectual and theologian at that—had made any great impact on him. In fact, it is well known that some male philosophers, like John Dewey, appropriated the work of Jane Addams (and his wife) without giving either of them credit. It is also the scandal that some argue that it was Simone de Beauvoir who actually wrote Sartre's (1943/1993) *Being and Nothingness*. I do not know if this is true, but this has been discussed in the literature by well-respected scholars.

It is refreshing, then, to study what I would consider to be the *philosophical fiction* of Marguerite Duras. In my field—curriculum studies (see Pinar, 1994)—the late Maxine Greene (1967, 2000, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c)—well known professor at Teachers College, Columbia—*dared* to integrate fiction into philosophy in the 1940s—while her male colleagues were probably horrified.

Maxine Greene—over time—became the most prominent woman philosopher at Teachers College, Columbia, setting the stage for many women in the field of education to do the kind of work we do today. Generally speaking, neither educationists nor American philosophers are comfortable integrating fiction with philosophy—still today. One of the writers Greene never integrated into her work is Marguerite Duras.

It is time for philosophers to begin this important conversation on why Duras has been excluded (with a few exceptions) from the canon(s) of literatures taught in American schools and universities. Duras’s work—something I had never been introduced to in university—is new to me. Her novel, *Moderato Cantabile*, is of major importance to many canons and literatures. Perhaps when this book was first written, her work was widely read in the United States, but I was born in 1962, so I wouldn’t know.

When a book stays in one’s psyche—builds a place in the psyche, if you will—there is something to it. Duras’s book puzzles. It intrigues and raises philosophical and psychoanalytic questions. What is love? What is hate? Why is murder wrong? What is it to fantasize about a murder or even one’s own murder? What is drinking really about? Why numb the psyche? A mother’s love or lack thereof for her own child? Julia Kristeva could perhaps address this better than most. Melanie Klein might wonder what the child thought of his mother. The mother-son relationship is something in which Freud would have been interested. Martin Buber might have written about the “narrow ridge” between the I-Thou, especially when a child’s mother abandons him—whether literally or figuratively. (Buber’s mother did abandon him as a small child). It seems to me that (psychologically) Anne, Duras’s troubling protagonist—had abandoned her child. The sadistic piano lessons were certainly a form of abandonment in a cruel sense. Abandonment can be sadistic and cruel.

Duras’s (1958/1965) novel, *Moderato Cantabile*, haunts me still because I keep ruminating over it, asking myself all of the kinds of questions I mentioned above. And strangely, I am still trying to figure out if—in fact—any of the characters were really alive to begin with. Were they all really dead? Were they ghosts, or as Derrida would put it, *Revenants*?

At the end of Duras’s novel, Anne’s son—who is but a child—disappears. Startlingly, Anne proclaims that she is dead. And that is where the novel ends. Was this character, Anne, always already dead psychically? (psychic deadness is something about which Michael Eigen [1999] has written in *Toxic Nourishment*). Her ever-present drinking habits suggested that she wanted to wash away her aliveness. She so wanted to become continually, comfortably numb (as Pink Floyd would put it). Or was she going to be murdered by her husband too in the future to-come (as Derrida might put it)? Was that her worry? Readers are left without an answer. And isn’t that what philosophy should be? Questions without answers?

Anne obsesses about the murder scene that begins the novel. The repeated questions she either mutters to herself or directs at Chauvin seem almost disturbing. It seems as if she does not really address Chauvin at all; she uses him as just someone to bounce thoughts off of. It is as if Chauvin is not really there to Anne. Anne is not really present—psychologically—to anyone either; she is absently numb in her wine glass. It seems almost as if she is completely dissociated.

**FICTION AND AUTOBIOGRAPHY: CURRICULUM STUDIES AND (AUTO)PHILOSOPHY**

Recently I attended a workshop titled “Autophilosophy.” This is a major move for philosophers because autobiography in philosophy seems to still be a taboo subject. In curriculum studies, autobiography as a genre has been well established since the 1970s. The Reconceptualization of Curriculum Studies occurred after the Kent State nightmare, one of the first major shootings on a college campus in the United States. In discussion with William F. Pinar—the Father of the Reconceptualization—I had asked him why he got a PhD in Education and not in English, since he had been a high school English teacher. He told me that when Kent State occurred he knew that the problems that faced us had more to do with our educational system than with most anything else. I suppose Pinar felt a calling to get a PhD in Education because he knew that there was something seriously wrong with our educational system. And in education, the work still needs to be done. School shootings have only increased since Kent State as we know. And now on some college campuses students are even allowed to carry guns into classrooms—a recipe for disaster and grade inflation, no doubt. Pinar’s (1994) groundbreaking book, *Autobiography, Sexuality and Politics*, set the stage for many in the Reconceptualization; Pinar opened the door to doing autobiographical work in the field of education.

*Currere*—the Latin root of the word curriculum—translates loosely as the Husserlian word *erlebnis* or lived experience. Lived experience in any form of education, whether it is in formal institutions or on the street education—as it were—from the Gramscian position of the organic intellectual—forms the groundless ground (in the deconstructive sense) of the work that I have been doing for the last 25 or so years. But still, academic journals and publishing houses are not exactly friendly to work in autobiography or narratives that seem too personal. I find this utterly ridiculous in the year 2021. I do think that there is a gendered nature to writing in a more personal style and that male editors in particular do not like the fact that the *personal is the political* and do not like personal narrative of any sort.

To hear a white male academic suggest that the personal is not political or that everything is NOT political is rather shocking to me, for everything *is* political. It is easy for a white male to say that everything is NOT political because being a white male is a positionality of privilege.

To speak or not to speak is political. To write or not to write is also political. Sustained silence is simply not an option; it is hardly ethical. Sustained silence in the face of oppression (or things gone wrong) is completely untenable. If not now when? The famous Rabbi once said. Now is the time to speak. All of us in academe are under fire from the right, and many of our jobs are on the line because of the increasing fascism that is invading state run universities in Republican strongholds. Tenure has been yanked out from under us; many have lost their jobs because of speaking out against non-mask and non-vaccine mandates. Those of us who are immune-compromised fear dying from COVID because of being forced to work in emotionally damaging and downright deadly face to face situations (teaching in overcrowded classrooms).

Autobiography is not only an interesting genre; *it is political*. More than ever, we need to speak and not remain silent. Book burnings on campuses, book banning in schools, professors being fired for speaking out or being forced to teach while being sick, being threatened with termination if we are not aligned with right wing ideologies are real horrors happening right now across the United States. It has never been more imperative that we tell our stories.

I am currently working on an autobiography about chaplaincy, philosophy, and curriculum studies, theology and literary criticism, and the story that I tell in this short

essay is just a small part of the kinds of life and death experiences I deal with every time I step into the hospital as a chaplain. The stakes at the hospital are high. The stakes at the university are high as well, but in very different ways.

We need to learn from history—namely 1933 Germany—state-run universities and the dangers of alignment with right wing governments. Alignment in Germany meant the Final Solution, the genocide of 6 million Jews, 6 million others who were Catholic, gypsies, those with disabilities, political activists against Hitler (e.g., Dietrich Bonhoeffer).

“The Fear of Writing”—something about which Derrida speaks on *youtube*—is the fear of taking a stand, the fear of speaking truth to power. The fear to do philosophy—at all—or do curriculum theorizing at all—in the face of increasing pressure of the right is real (felt) and present (precarious) danger. Judith Butler (2020) writes about the *precarious life*. Those of us working in state run institutions in right wing strong-holds are living in precarious states—both literally and figuratively. If not now when? Fear can hold us back and stifle us or empower us to go to what Freud called *The Mystic Writing Pad*.

In my book on the Holocaust (Morris, 2001), I argued that autobiography, psychoanalysis, fiction, history, and philosophy informed different perspectives on writing about the Holocaust from the position of a third generation American Jew. I also suggested in that text that fiction and history are related but that history follows rules whereas fiction does not. That the Holocaust was not a fiction is obvious. Thus, literary fictions about the Holocaust as expressions of horror and not lies or revisionism are Kantian categorical imperatives, if you will. As I like to read just about everything and anything, doing inter-disciplinary studies has always been attractive to me. Before entering college, I read a lot of poetry and a lot of fiction. But then that abruptly stopped upon entering college. I have taken up reading fiction and poetry again now at the age of 60. My love is for that which is poetic—whether it is literally poetry or literary fiction or philosophy or the poetics of educational writing (yes, and there is such a thing)—without reducing things to quantification and what Derrida called “vulgar empiricism.”

I think the reason that fiction affects us more so than, say, historiography, is that it, in some ways, speaks emotionally. Historical writing tends to be flat and even boring. Historians’ methodologies restrict what it is they can and cannot say, how they say what they say, and so forth. But historiography did not always read this way. Herodotus embellished. He was a poet-philosopher-historian. But after neo-positivism, historians are wedded to a method that erases any trace of emotion or embellishment. Historical writing is hardly poetic. Historical writing also erases the writer’s autobiography. Fiction does not. Fiction is not bound by rules or methods. Fiction writers often hide themselves in their novels. Much of fiction is coded-autobiography. Camus’ (1995) *The First Man* is fiction; however, it is the most autobiographical work he had ever written. Proust’s work is partly autobiographical—and partly cover-ups according to Saul Friedländer (2020). Thomas Wolfe’s (2006) novel, *Look Homeward Angel*, is highly autobiographical. Virginia Woolf’s (1989) novel, *To the Lighthouse*, is also highly autobiographical—coded of course because it deals with her own experiences, some think, of incest. Nietzsche once commented that philosophers read to find themselves in others’ texts. He also said that whatever one writes is probably autobiographical, even if that is not the writer’s intention.

The reader’s relation to the writer is often complicated by transference, repression, and forgetting—or even mimesis. It is no accident that we read who we do. Nietzsche once remarked that we look for ourselves in the books we read. We look to make identifications with writers. That is probably—unconsciously—the case. Perhaps our

attractions to certain writers are unconscious, but still Freud (in a way like Nietzsche) would say that there is probably an unconscious relation to what one chooses to read.

### MARGUERITE DURAS: MIMESIS AND THE CHAPLAIN

Perhaps one of the reasons that Duras's novel struck me is that, upon further reflection, the story reminded me of an incident that happened in my own life and brought up memories that I would have rather forgotten. Duras's (1958/1965) novel allowed me to freely associate. I chalk this uncanny experience between reading Duras and a specific event that occurred at the hospital to mimesis or even transference. Duras's novel hit me like a ton of bricks. Upon finishing the novel, I was stunned, but I could not figure out why.

Although I am primarily an academic, I also work at a level one trauma hospital as a chaplain. My training was in both religious studies and psychodynamic psychotherapy. As a hospital chaplain, one of my duties is to take care of patients and their families, especially when family members are dying or on the edge of death. I have seen so much death, so much suffering. I have seen things no one should ever see. Sometimes, a particular case stands out more so than others because the details are overwhelmingly horrible and, in fact, haunting.

Duras's novel brought up one particular case I worked on. I sometimes work with detectives when a murder occurs. In this particular case, I was assigned to meet a woman and her boyfriend in the trauma bay. I noticed that detectives were hovering nearby.

A child was taken to pediatric ICU, while the mother and her boyfriend were standing in the trauma bay speaking with the physicians. I soon learned that the child had been shot in the head while playing outside of his house. That was the story I was initially told. When I was called in to take care of the mother, while the surgeons broke the bad news that the child more than likely would die, I consulted the detectives in the hallway.

I secretly played the part of chaplain-detective—deconstructive critic—trying to figure out who did it. I asked the detective if the mother or the boyfriend was a person of interest. I knew from my previous experiences that usually the ones who seemed least likely to commit such crimes were the very people who, in fact, often did. The detective said, no, that the mother and boyfriend were not persons of interest. Stupidly, I believed him (see for instance, Avital Ronnell's [2002] book on *Stupidity*). That was my first mistake.

I sat with the mother for some three hours in the family room, while the medical team readied the child for surgery (which was hopeless). I noticed that the mother seemed a bit off—psychologically—perhaps she suffered from some kind of schizo-affective disorder. I didn't know for certain because I am not a psychologist.

So, of course, I felt bad that she seemed not to be making sense of things, but then again she did seem to be making sense of things; while she seemed lucid, she seemed kind of crazy too. When she started talking about devils, I knew she wasn't exactly sane.

In the middle of the madness of talking about devils, the mother (whose child had been shot in the head) was busy making at least 20 phone calls or thereabouts on her cell phone repeating the same story over and over again to all of her friends. She said something to the effect that the child was playing in the yard while she was in the house sleeping. The child, she said, was shot in the head by a drive-by shooter—something common in her neighborhood. She kept saying that something like this had happened just weeks before to someone else's child. She repeated the story *verbatim about 20 times*, in every single phone call. I thought, well, if she could repeat the same story verbatim 20 times, maybe she wasn't so crazy after all. I offered to buy her a soda

while the medical team waited on the surgeons to take her son to the operating theater. Three hours had gone by. As a chaplain, my job is to sit and wait and to be patient, to be there for the person who is suffering. Waiting is not easy. I kept watching the clock, and it never seemed to move. It was 10:00 pm when the nurses called the mother into the child's room. I walked with the mother to the child's room, and upon entering the pediatric ICU, once again, I saw detectives hovering nearby. I began wondering why they were there if the mother was not a person of interest, but I did not think about it too much. The mother tearfully said goodbye to her little boy as they wheeled him away. I said goodbye to the mother, charted, and went home.

As a chaplain, we never find out the end of the story. We just move on to the next trauma. But several days later, I just happened to read in the newspaper that two people were charged with the murder of a child. Their photos—the mother's and the boyfriend's mugshots—were in the paper. This was the mother with whom I was sitting for three hours out of my chaplaincy duties—who murdered her own child, who shot her own child in the head, who lied to every one of her friends on the phone, who lied to me, who lied to the doctors.

"She did do it. She killed her own child. Oh my God!" I thought. I sat with a murderer for three hours. I was totally duped. If I had known all along that this woman murdered her child, would I still have stayed with her for three hours in my capacity as hospital chaplain? I thought, after all there are chaplains who work with murderers in prison. I wondered, however, had I known that this woman murdered her child, would I have been able to be a chaplain for her? I couldn't answer that question, even to myself.

I was embarrassed and ashamed that I did not go with my gut feeling—I knew right off that the mother murdered her child, but the detective lied to me. Usually, detectives will confide in chaplains and tell the truth. But these detectives did not do that. Being duped—by the detectives and the mother—was not a good feeling. And of course, I was horrified that a mother would shoot her son in the head and kill him. The child had died on the operating table.

So when I read Duras's (1958/1965) story, I read it as a detective-deconstructionist and wondered whether Anne and her child were dead to begin with? I began to wonder if they were just specters? Was it that Anne had already been murdered by Chauvin who was also a ghost? Maybe before they all died and became ghosts, Chauvin—who could have been her husband in real life—strangled her? And where was the child at the end of the story? Perhaps the child never existed to begin with? Perhaps it was all just a bad dream. Perhaps my experience at the hospital waiting for three hours with the mother/murderer was just a bad dream as well.

I think Duras's point in this story was to leave it intentionally weird and vague. Duras was trying to put some kind of specter in the heads of readers—to leave them with that remainder that Derrida wrote about, that un-nameable Beckettian thing that one cannot get a handle on. A story without a clear plot or clear ending, or clear anything, does in fact leave one wondering. The story was in no way logical; it did not seem to really have a trajectory other than the continual sadistic piano lessons and the continual drinking.

My convoluted interpretation(s) of Duras's (1958/1965) story are probably way off the mark. But does that matter? Freud would say no. Derrida would say no. Derrida (1976) would also say that the deferred and delayed meaning—through the deconstructive project—the fact that this story has been bothering me for a month, that it allowed me to freely associate a horror in my own life, an embarrassment and shame—not about a cat in the bathroom where I am standing naked, but about being duped by a murderer—is what matters.

On one last note—as it were—the title of Duras’s (1958/1965) story, *Moderato Cantabile*, made little sense to me. “Moderately and singingly” is the loose (and probably stupid) Wikipedia translation.

The sadism of the piano teacher bothered me because I, too, had many sadistic piano teachers who banged rulers on the piano. In fact—and indeed weirdly—I had a piano teacher at X university who I couldn’t stand. He would literally bang a ruler on the piano while smoking cigarettes, making me play the left hand first and then the right hand, over and over and over again. I thought, this is not how one learns to play the piano. I thought the man insanely sadistic. Ironically and perhaps strangely he kept calling me Anne. My name is not Anne, note even close. I kept telling him that, but he never seemed to hear me. That the protagonist of Duras’s story is named Anne brought back the horrors of sadistic piano teachers and all the reasons I got out of the business of classical music.

Oh my God, I thought, I truly am haunted by specters, not only of a murderer, but of a sadistic piano teacher who called me Anne; that piano teacher never did learn my name. So Duras’s (1958/1965) story haunts me on several different levels.

I learned from a seminar I took with Elie During on *The Form of Chance* (at the European Graduate School) the wisdom of the French poet Mallarme who famously said: “Never rule out chance with the throw of the dice.” Is this all chance? Are all these ghostly/ghastly coincidences between Duras’s story and my own autobiography chance? Jung might call these chance coincidences *synchronicities*. Yet, I don’t know what to make of any of this. My story ends like Duras’s novel—without closure, without logical sequence, without sense. Is that not the heart of philosophy? As Jean-Luc Nancy (1997) suggested, we can no longer make sense of the world. It is the what-does-not-make-sense that makes for philosophical discussion. If the world were a place where things were as Descartes dreamt up—the indubitable *Cogito*—wouldn’t everything be boring, neat, and tidy—no surprises? A world where this is a Leibnizian pre-established harmony would be a pretty boring place.

I’d rather live in a world of weirdness and non-understanding, a world that puzzles and surprises, even if the specters haunt indelibly. We live in a Kafkaesque (1915) world where gatekeepers of memory hide behind more gatekeepers who hide behind more gatekeepers. Ever unpeeling the onion of memory is a continual mystery and one must unpeel the onion ever so slowly—*Moderato Cantabile*.

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