

Re-thinking the Language of Pain in the Works of Marguerite Duras and Frida Kahlo

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Abstract

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(Under the direction of Dr. Martine Antle)

This dissertation is a cross-cultural examination of the creation and the socio-cultural implications of the languages of pain in the works of French author, Marguerite Duras and Mexican painter, Frida Kahlo. Recent studies have determined that discursive communication is insufficient in expressing one's pain. In particular, Elaine Scarry maintains that pain destroys language and that its victims must rely on the vocabulary of other cultural spheres in order to express their pain. The problem is that neither Scarry nor any other Western pain scholar can provide an alternative to discursive language to express pain. This study claims that both artists must work beyond their own cultural registers in order to give their pain a language. In the process of expressing their suffering, Duras and Kahlo subvert traditional literary and artistic conventions. Through challenging literary and artistic forms, they begin to re-think and ultimately re-define the way their readers and viewers understand feminine subjectivity, colonial and wartime occupation, personal tragedy, the female body, Christianity and Western hegemony.

To my Mom and Dad.

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1. Introduction to the Dissertation

I. General Introduction:

Recent criticism on pain acknowledges that it is an experience that is resistant to discursive expression. That is to say that coherent, articulate language fails to adequately exemplify and relate the meaning and feeling associated with pain. Studies reveal that pain is a phenomenon that is subject to individual interpretation because there is no fail safe empirical method that allows us to accurately replicate and test pain felt in others, nor can we, sufferers of pain, communicate in a way that precisely conveys the visceral experience of our affliction so that others may feel it in the same way. However, despite the insufficiency of a verbal language of pain, sufferers often are relegated to relying on this form of expression in order to manifest their pain, or silently bearing the burden of pain. For example, one may seek out the language of socio-cultural agencies such as the medical, legal, social-scientific, or artistic communities to attempt to objectify one's pain. While the language that these socio-cultural agencies provide may offer some relief from the insufficiency of communication that pain causes, the sufferer's socio-culturally prescribed language of pain remains at the mercy of a society or culture that may or may not accurately represent her/his individual experience of pain.

The hazard of a culturally prescribed language of pain for sufferers is that one risks disenfranchisement from her/his own ability to express pain. A goal of this project is to examine how French author, Marguerite Duras (1914-1996), and Mexican painter, Frida

Kahlo (1907-1954), defy the idea that one must rely on a culturally prescribed, discursive language of pain in order to express suffering. I suggest that both Duras' and Kahlo's language of pain resists conventional notions of discursive communication. How does an author such as Duras, who presumably uses discursive language as her medium, create a language of pain that challenges the accepted idea that language is the privileged medium for expressing pain? How do Kahlo's images come to represent her language of pain?

II. Defining Pain: Past and Present

In Western¹ culture, over a period of two and a half centuries, we have come to depend largely on the medical community of Western Europe and the U.S. to assess and establish our vocabulary to express our pain. Much of the way we understand pain is grounded in history. The 18th century, the age of Enlightenment, has influenced the character of pain as we know it today, a medical phenomenon. There was the discovery that pain and illness are a result of damaged tissues found in the organs as opposed to just the organs being damaged. Mental illness was linked with physiology and with emotion.² The 18th century is when the concept of medicine became organized as an official field of study. There was a more sophisticated understanding of the internal organs. Mystification of the body that existed centuries earlier was de-mystified by the advent of autopsy and surgery. The medical community recognized pain as a “beneficial bodily voice”³ that served to alert physicians to potential life-threatening problems. With the advancement of the scientific method and the focus on rationalism and empiricism, “the changed landscape of medicine proved inseparable from a new way of seeing and speaking.” (Morris, 226) Speaking about pain from the 18th century had become infused with medical terminology.

Throughout the 19th and early part of the 20th century, pain studies continued to be appropriated by the medical community. By the mid-20th century, healthcare providers were

¹ Throughout the study, the terms *Western* and the *West* will refer to European and U.S.-American cultures.

² David Morris, *The Culture of Pain* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991) 226-27. Morris says, “studies of mental illness [were] designed to reveal correlations between human passions and physiology;[there was a] systematic study of tissue, which altered medical thinking about internal organs and helped to found science of histology.”

³ Valerie Gray Hardcastle, *The Myth of Pain* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999) 4. Hardcastle states: “Though patients consistently tried to rid themselves of pain (in the eighteenth century) both the medical community and lay society understood it to be largely a beneficial bodily voice.”

beginning to view pain as a phenomenon that could be accepted as a condition with an unnamed antecedent, that is to say, that there are patients who are in chronic pain with no apparent illness. This idea that pain may be the result of something other than anatomical or physiological dysfunction sparked the interest of other disciplines outside of medicine, namely anthropology and the social sciences. The different fields share the idea that pain has no language of its own, that it can never be truly understood but can only be expressed in a vocabulary that is understood and developed by the people who study it. For example, around the mid part of the 20th century, American physicians, Dr. McGill and Dr. Melzack, developed the McGill-Melzack Pain Questionnaire, “which confronts the patient with a grid of pre-selected adjectives organized into groups describing sensory, affective, or evaluative response.”(Morris, 16) It was designed to aid patients in verbally expressing their pain as precisely as possible. The existence of this questionnaire suggests that pain eludes articulation and that the medical community has developed its own language to which we have become accustomed. When we “speak” pain, we are in fact speaking a language that has been pre-determined by a particular cultural sphere.

As the 20th century came to a close, and the new millennium approached, the painful repercussions of global events such as war, genocide, and terrorism have prompted pain scholars – medical doctors, social scientists and humanists – to question and explore the cultural, social and historical constraints and implications of the medically prescribed language of pain. These changes have made it necessary for pain scholars to include a cross-cultural, interdisciplinary approach when understanding and re-defining pain.

In response to the need for a re-evaluation of pain, the International Association for the Study of Pain (IASP), a multidisciplinary, international association dedicated to the study

and treatment of pain, emerged in the 1970s as a significant part of the new vanguard of pain studies. The IASP defines pain as

an unpleasant sensory and emotional experience associated with actual or potential tissue damage, or described in terms of such damage. Pain is always subjective. It is unquestionably a sensation in a part or parts of the body, but it is also always unpleasant and therefore an emotional experience. (249-252)⁴

The definition claims that pain is an emotional phenomenon that is experienced through the body. The IASP's explanation suggests that the relationship between body and emotion is inextricable in understanding and expressing pain; the experience of pain is neither exclusively corporeal nor solely emotional but a simultaneously bodily and emotional experience.

In support of the IASP's definition of pain, Jean E. Jackson, an anthropologist and author of *"Camp Pain": Talking with Chronic Pain Patients* (2000),⁵ offers commentary on the Association's claim. Jackson states

The definition of pain provided by the International Association for the Study of Pain requires that we think of pain as an emotional experience rather than a sensation that has an overlay of emotion. A model that postulates a linear, chronological process involving origin in either the body (e.g., pain resulting from a burn) or mind (e.g., psychological origin with subsequent peripheral physiological changes) does not account for pain; it is too simple. Memory, culture, previous experiences, speculation about the future are all part of any kind of pain. (144)

Jackson's explanation brings two important aspects of this study to the foreground. First, although Jackson's book is based on notions of Western medicine, the idea that one must account for socio-cultural and personal experiences in understanding pain are foundational

⁴ IASP, *Pain* 6 (1979): 249-252.

⁵ Jean E. Jackson, *"Camp Pain": Talking with Chronic Pain Patients* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000).

concepts in this study. This project examines the expression of pain in an author and painter who represent a cross-cultural experience of pain in cultures such as Mexico, France, colonial Indochina, and socio-political events such as war and occupation. A question this project addresses is: How do these socio-cultural experiences inform and manifest themselves in the artists' languages of pain? What are the implications?

The second important aspect is that pain “resists the kind of objectification provided by standard medical testing. The usual response to pain involves attempts to objectify it, to separate it from the self” (Jackson, 146-147). In her studies on chronic pain sufferers, Jackson illustrates how her patients describe their pain through what she terms “imaging pain” as an attempt to modify the debilitating effects of suffering. The patients “image” their pain through discursive descriptions that resemble metaphor. For example, one patient describes her spinal pain as “a long snake with scales and fangs and breathing fire” (152). The significance of Jackson’s study on the expression of pain is that she recognizes that despite the metaphoric language there is no satisfactory way for a pain sufferer to “speak” of their pain,

Despite our perception of language as communicating, clarifying, enhancing, and creating experience, everyday-world language is inadequate for conveying ongoing subjective experience because it objectifies, and so inevitably restricts, distorts, mystifies. (167)

According to Jackson’s assessment of the expression of pain, discursive language ultimately is insufficient and will likely misrepresent the reality of the painful experience. As a painter, Kahlo objectifies her language of pain largely through the staging of visual images, and Duras’ language of pain is a manipulation of literary language.⁶ If Duras and

⁶ An example of Duras manipulating literary conventions is that her narratives are often elliptical, and the syntax is altered. I will explore this notion in greater detail in the chapter dedicated to the author.

Kahlo are objectifying pain through literary and visual media, what are they distorting through their languages of pain and what are the potential implications of the distortions?

The notion that the expression of pain is resistant to discursive language is one that is echoed in David Morris' book, *The Culture of Pain* (1991). Morris presents pain, as represented in Western, Judeo-Christian tradition, not as a medical occurrence with reductive methods of treatment, but as a concept that requires socio-cultural as well as scientific interpretation. He encourages us to look to other disciplines such as literature and the visual arts, with an emphasis on the eighteenth through twentieth centuries, as other avenues in exploring our continuing search to understand pain as a phenomenon of the physical and spiritual body. He justifies his interest in promoting literature as a conduit for understanding pain because a writer accesses and expresses the language of pain in ways that in medical writings and doctors' evaluations do not.

Pain passes much of its time in utter inhuman silence, and writers who describe something so inherently resistant to language must inevitably shape and possibly falsify the experience they describe...Yet writers also offer a unique resource because they use language in ways that, paradoxically, acknowledge (without necessarily falsifying) the silences and inarticulate struggles we most often completely overlook. (43)

Morris' perspective brings to light the importance of a diverse approach (i.e.: using art and literature to interpret pain) to understanding suffering. Literature, and in a larger context, the arts, render descriptions of pain accessible to non-medical professional readers. Although Morris acknowledges artistic representations of pain throughout history, beginning with brief references to antiquity through the early modern period, he gives his most compelling literary and artistic interpretations of pain from examples beginning with the eighteenth century. He chooses this time because it is in this epoch where science and medicine have experienced

the most important and influential changes from earlier centuries. Morris asserts that the Marquis de Sade's "novels in their treatment of pain and sexuality represent a pornographic extension of the new clinical gaze." (226) That is to say that in the eighteenth century, the invention of autopsy allowed physicians and eventually lay people, like Sade, to "see" inside the body and thereby extend the "gaze" beyond the external body. Morris states that Sade, "...too, is probing beneath the layers of politeness, hypocrisy, and superstition" (226). Morris also claims that Sade exploits sexual taboos in graphic detail,

but violates far more than decorum...the eroticism he celebrates at such length embraces a horror that ordinarily deprives us of speech. Sade in effect refuses to let us suppress what we cannot speak or understand. (227)

Morris also chooses visual representations as a mode equally important in conveying and understanding pain. George Dergalis, a contemporary, American painter is the one Morris chooses to challenge, visually, the idea that pain exists in two realms, the physical, and the emotional. Dergalis' painting, *Anguish* (1989)⁷ (see fig.1), exhibited at the Headache Art Exhibition in the early 1990s, depicts a man's face grimacing in pain. The face is divided into three separate columns. Morris intimates that the chosen word for the title, anguish, is "really best understood as 'mental' pain" but the painting itself clearly conveys the man's physical distress" (10). Here, Morris is suggesting that the placing together of the visual (the painting) and the verbal (the title) aids in blurring the line that divides the concepts of physical and mental pain. Morris' concepts are important to my project in idea that literature and visual art are valid and helpful media in understanding pain justifies my choice of a writer and a painter to explore pain as a cultural phenomenon, showing how literature and art resist and challenge conventional ideas about pain. In this dissertation, I examine how Duras

⁷ George Dergalis, *Anguish*, Novartis Pharmaceuticals Corporation, 1991.

and Kahlo challenge established perceptions of pain by resisting and re-inventing the cultural phenomena of a hegemonic culture in their art.

The examination of pain, culture, and the body is the subject of Elaine Scarry's, book *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (1985)⁸. *The Body in Pain* is among the first most significant contributions to the study of pain in the Humanities. It is not a manifesto on pain, but reads more like a series of long, well-documented reflections on the effects of pain on the human body. Scarry's ideas are supported by a variety of theological, anthropological, and literary references.

[*The Body in Pain* has] been considered a mark of 'resistance to theory.' A glance at *The Body in Pain* reveals no reference to De Man, Foucault, Derrida, Barthes, Jameson, Benjamin, or Kristeva; their places are taken by von Clausewitz, Amnesty International, the Greek Colonel's Regime, and the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty. (206)⁹

Scarry does not approach pain from a medical perspective, but rather provides her readers with an in-depth study of the effects of pain on human bodies and language as they interact with cultural phenomena in Western, Judeo-Christian society. While her perspective on physical pain is thorough in its effect on Western, Judeo-Christian culture, she does not fully address pain in relation to illness, sexuality, gender, or non-Western perspectives on the subject.

Scarry's main argument is that physical pain destroys the ability to communicate with verbal language:

⁸ Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

⁹ Geoffrey Galt Harpham, "Elaine Scarry and the Dream of Pain," *Salmagundi* 130-131 (2001): 202-234.

Physical pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned. (4)

Throughout her study, as we will discover, Scarry implies that, in terms of the expression of pain, language is synonymous with discursive communication. She privileges it as the optimal mode of communicating pain. According to Scarry, after pain has destroyed one's ability to speak, the victim must then find an alternative form of expression. Scarry claims that when one person or a group has been silenced by pain, a *language of agency* is developed in order to speak for those who are without a voice. She writes that "agency...permits one person's body to be translated into another person's voice" (18). Scarry is suggesting that different cultural spheres, like the medical and legal communities, for example, has developed a vocabulary for their patients or clients (sufferers of pain) in order to facilitate and clarify expression. A goal of this study is to challenge Scarry's idea that the language of pain must be discursive. This study seeks to begin defining different languages of pain in Duras' texts and Kahlo's paintings.

Although pain destroys language, Scarry also views it as the impetus for creation. Pain, in this instance, can manifest itself not just as a bodily injury, but can also reveal itself through loss or a void. For example, hunger, being cold, desiring something or someone can be expressions of pain. Scarry claims that we create objects like food and winter clothes in order to alleviate that which is missing. In Scarry's estimation, pain has no referent, or rather, that it takes no object, creating a void in communication.

Hearing and touch are objects outside the boundaries of the body, as desire is desire of *x*, fear is fear of *y*, hunger is hunger for *z*; but pain is not "of" or "for" anything-it is itself alone. This objectlessness, the complete absence of referential

content, almost prevents it from being rendered in language.
(161-62)

There is an objectification of pain in both Duras' and Kahlo's works. Duras' objectifies the female body as the site on which the pain is inscribed. It is through the relationship between Duras' use of verbal language and representations of the body that the author enables a language of pain to emerge. Kahlo stages her self among images that in and of themselves are not necessarily representations of pain, but possess both personally and culturally painful meanings to the artist. The relationship between the representations of her body and these images defines Kahlo's pain as more than somatic. Duras' and Kahlo's language of pain, at this stage of the study, is emerging from a relationship between body and, in Kahlo's case, image and in Duras,' discursive expression.

The pertinence of Scarry's work ends here because she does not address issues of gender or non-Western influences.¹⁰ Such issues are vital to my project because both Duras and Kahlo share from multiple cultures, and also because they bring cross-cultural dimensions to their respective works. Throughout the course of the project, one of the aspects I explore is how they effect the language of pain. Gender is also a significant factor in my examination of the two artists. Both Kahlo and Duras, who were contemporaries, lived with the struggle in their lifetimes of becoming artists while contending with patriarchal systems in Mexico and France, respectively. Throughout the course of this project I will explore the dynamics of the relationship between a white, patriarchal culture and Duras' and Kahlo's

¹⁰ Both Morris and Scarry are important to the project because they share the basic idea that pain has no language. The subtle difference in their perception is that Morris claims that pain is only resistant to language. Scarry takes his idea a step beyond and suggests that pain not only resists language but that destroys it. They both appear to espouse the idea that the absence of language requires an external vocabulary (i.e.: literature) in order to express it. Morris and Scarry differ in that Morris' perspective encompasses issues of gender and pain.

artistic representations of pain in non-Western cultures (indigenous Mexico, colonial India, and colonial Vietnam) as literary and pictorial testimonies of pain.

This study undertakes the task of examining Duras' and Kahlo's works as testimonies of pain. As such, the examination of each artist will encompass a large swath of socio-cultural phenomena. This project tackles the subjects of the injustices of colonialism and war, personal tragedy, the representation of women in literature and art, the female body, Western vs. non-Western culture, Christianity in art. What unites these topics is that both Duras and Kahlo create their languages of pain within a Western hegemony¹¹ that, as we will see, imposes restrictions on its expression. A major goal of this study is to examine the means through which both artists re-negotiate the socio-cultural/political boundaries that Western culture has placed around the expression of pain. This study will also explore the implications and socio-cultural commentary that arise from re-thinking the restrictions on the language of pain.

¹¹ Carl Boggs, a professor of social science, pens an essay that critiques the Bush administration in their war on terror. While this study is unrelated to Boggs' research, he provides a definition of the term *hegemony*. Boggs explains hegemony in terms of a culture like the U.S., who has created an empire whose intention is to instill in its subjects "mass belief-systems (nationalism, religion, political ideologies) that justify burdensome adventures and deflect public attention away from the terrible costs, pain, and material hardships that inescapably accompany militarism"(4). In terms of this study, the notion of a Western hegemony does not necessarily refer uniquely to the U.S. As this project deals with former colonial empires such as the English, French and Spanish, the expression, Western hegemony will refer to both U.S.-American and Western European cultures. This project examines how both artists, through their languages of pain, work to reveal to their readers and viewers that which has been concealed by a Western hegemonic culture. Carl Boggs, "US Grand Strategy and its Contradictions," *The Politics of Empire: War, Terror and Hegemony* (London: Routledge, 2006) 3-23.

III. Pain and Testimony:

The genre of testimony situates our study within a framework that allows us to examine pain within an artistic context. As one of the goals of this project is defining and exploring the language of pain of Duras and Kahlo, establishing their respective work as an act of testifying will assist in creating a space in which the artists can represent their pain. I will first provide a general definition of testimony, then subsequently will specify how an author and a painter, respectively, testify to pain in the following subchapters.

The two aspects of testimony that are pertinent to this study are the notions 1) testimony must be performative, that is, the artist must intentionally create a piece of artwork that will engage the reader in re-creating a sense of immediacy and pain associated with the event; 2) that testimony functions on two levels: it reveals both personal and collective histories of pain.

Testimony or witnessing¹² is the subject that François-Charles Gaudard, examines in his essay, “Vérité et récit dans le témoignage chez Albert Camus” (2004).¹³ He explains that the need to testify comes from what he calls a disruption or break in quotidian life.

Il y a pertinence du “témoignage” lorsqu’il est situé dans le cadre d’une “affaire”, c’est-à-dire lorsque son contexte est celui d’une rupture ou d’une fracture dans l’organisation spatio-temporelle. (23)

The essence of Gaudard’s explanation is that testimony very often is a result of a painful experience, an event that disrupts daily life and merits “telling” its story. He then defines this need to tell of this painful experience in two ways:

¹² I will use the terms interchangeably throughout the chapter.

¹³ François-Charles Gaudard, “Vérité et récit dans le témoignage chez Albert Camus,” *Formes discursives du témoignage*, eds. François-Charles Gaudard et Modesta Suárez (Toulouse: Éditions Universitaires du Sud, 2004) 21-37.

Dans le premier cas, il signifie « certifier en déclarant qu'on a vu ou entendu » ou « attester la vérité ou la véracité de (ce dont il est question) » ; dans le second, il prend le sens de « parler, déposer en tant que témoin ».
« Témoigner » se définit donc comme un acte de langage, en principe performatif. (22)

Both definitions require that the witness « tell » what s/he has experienced. The former definition explains testimony as an act of telling that serves to verify an event(s) that has occurred. The latter definition suggests that the witness has experienced or lived through a particular experience. The “acte de langage”, in Gaudard’s definition, becomes a performance, as opposed to a simple act of verification as in the former. Gaudard calls this act of language “performative.” This means that the act of testifying is a reciprocal act of engagement for the witness with his/her testimony and the reader.

The intention to involve the reader in the witness’ testimony is an essential aspect of this kind of writing, and Marie Bornand, author of *Témoignage et fiction: Les récits de rescapés dans la littérature de langue française (1945-2000)* (2004),¹⁴ develops this idea in greater detail in her book. The author discusses how the testimonies of survivors from concentration camps during World War II are situated within the context of literature in the late twentieth century. One of her key arguments is that the transformative effect of testimony on the reader sets this genre apart from other literary forms. She calls this kind of literature a *littérature d’engagement* :

les bases d’une conception de l’engagement...consiste dans le travail d’écriture réalisé par l’auteur afin de transformer son expérience vécue en expérience pour le lecteur. (29)

¹⁴ Marie Bornand, *Témoignage et fiction: Les récits de rescapés dans la littérature de langue française (1945-2000)* (Geneva: Librairie Droz S.A., 2004).

The *engagement* that Bornand discusses is essential to understanding the notion of the performative aspect of testimonials. This is because the author suggests that in order for the reader to be involved, the witness must actively seek in her/his narration to elicit this response from her/his reader.

le récit est perçu comme un acte d'écriture "engagé" qui nécessite de la part de l'auteur-témoin une réflexion consciente sur l'acte de réception par le lecteur. (29)

The *réflexion consciente* charges the author/witness to create a narrative that elicits feelings of the disruption and pain s/he experienced, in this case, in the concentration camps. The intention of the author/witness is to bring the emotional experience of the torture of the camps to the reader. In the process of creating a literary experience that bears witness to the survivor's personal tragedy, s/he often reveals greater socio-cultural/political issues. In the case of concentration camp survivors, they not only express their own pain, but as *littérature d'engagement*, their testimonies often transcend their personal trials, and expose mass suffering on a collective, historical level.

La fonction du témoignage [est] relevant de questions de conscience collective et individuelle. (Gaudard, 23)

Gaudard indicates that testimony is not only meant to involve, but to be revelatory. The author/witness testifies to her/his pain, and simultaneously becomes the *porte-parole* for collective suffering. Is testimony always about a painful event?

IV. Presentation of the Artists: Literary and Pictorial Testimonials of Pain:

i. Marguerite Duras

In this chapter I draw on Veena Das' essay, "Language and Body: Transactions in the Construction of Pain"¹⁵ as a source of inspiration and guidance in my exploration of Duras' works. In this essay, Das examines the way in which the women who were affected in the Partition of 1947 by rape and/or abduction have come to re-exist and, as she phrases it, re-inhabit the world. According to Das, these women have come to be re-empowered through rituals of mourning and lamentation. It is a culture that often belongs uniquely to women, and what is most compelling is that these rituals require interactions between bodies and language in order to manifest their pain and grief. Here Das explains how these women come to terms with their pain:

In the genre of lamentation, women have control both through their bodies and through their language-grief is articulated through the body... making present the inner state, and is finally given a home in language. Thus the transactions between body and language lead to an articulation of the world in which the strangeness of the world revealed by death, by its non-inhabitability, can be transformed into a world in which one can dwell again, in full awareness of a life that has to be lived in loss. (68-69)

These women did not physically die, but the "death" to which she is referring is the death of knowledge of a kind of life that no longer exists. The women during this time were raped, abducted, or had family or friends who were, and experienced a spiritual death that must be expressed and acknowledged.

Das' exploration of the way in which the feminine subject expresses pain during and after the time of the Partition will serve as the foundation for my examination of Duras' works. I examine the way in which the negotiations between the female protagonists and

¹⁵ Veena Das, "Language and Body: Transactions in the Construction of Pain," *Social Suffering*, eds. Arthur Kleinman, Veena Das, and Margaret Lock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997) 67-91.

narrators come to express their pain in a world that has been altered by painful, disempowering experiences (i.e.: poverty due to colonial oppression, war, and personal tragedy). They re- inhabit their worlds that have been marred by pain through living it. The act of expressing pain is an empowering experience for the female protagonists. They achieve empowerment through a balance of seemingly opposing ideas: resistance and inclusion. These women find empowerment through resistance to relying uniquely on discursive language to express pain, and the inclusion of a variety of bodily and vocal methods to communicate it.

The idea that discursive language is not an advantaged mode in the expression of pain is a concept that Scarry alludes to in her book on pain. She claims that pain robs its victims of the ability to use language. After pain has destroyed one's ability to speak, the victim must find an alternative form of expression. Let us recall that Scarry claims that when one is silenced by pain, a *language of agency* is developed in order to speak for those who are without a voice. She writes that "agency...permits one person's body to be translated into another person's voice" (18). Scarry is suggesting that different cultural spheres like the medical community, for example, have developed a vocabulary for their patients (sufferers of pain) in order to facilitate and clarify expression.

Implicit in Scarry's claim is that the absence of a language of pain suggests that society marginalizes the victims' silence or non-discursive responses. My study challenges Scarry's implication that the "state anterior to language"(4) is a disadvantage for pain sufferers in their attempts to express themselves by arguing that Duras' texts re-define the notion of a language of pain. Bodily movements, screams, and fragmented, elliptical speech are the key elements in the discourse of pain. What makes what these movements and sounds

unique and valid in Duras' texts are that the characters who express pain are the central figures in the narratives. The idea that pain causes its victims to revert to expressing themselves in an incoherent manner is pertinent to my argument because it is precisely these seemingly unintelligible sounds that Duras uses to give an empowering, centralized voice to pain. The primal noises, movements of the body, and verbal language comprise the language of pain. Duras uses interactions between the body and language¹⁶ in order to express pain. The narrators and female characters she portrays are empowered because it is the interactions between their bodies and language that give voice to pain.¹⁷ They are expressing their own pain. Pain is expressed through non-verbal language: visual and auditory signs such as screams, cries, indiscriminant sounds, and body movements.

Scarry's notion of a *language of agency* is also pertinent to the study. Duras uses the medium of literature for the majority of works under examination in this chapter so verbal language must be a part of the inclusive nature of the language of pain. Duras uses verbal language as a way to both facilitate the interactions between voice and body in expressing pain, and as a way to limit them. The notion of language as agent in the expression of pain in Duras' texts depends on the way the author stages the roles of narrator and subject.

¹⁶ Language means vocal expression. This includes screams, silence, and indiscriminant noises. I will indicate discursive language by using the term expressly.

¹⁷ Julia Kristeva who published the only text, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia* (1989) that deals uniquely with Duras and the subject of pain suggest that the notion of expressing pain from a position of loss is not necessarily a manifestation of the process of lamentation or mourning but rather of narcissistic depression. "the treatment of narcissistic individuals has led modern analysts to understand another form of depression. Persons thus affected do not consider themselves wronged but afflicted with a fundamental flaw. Their sadness would be rather the most archaic expression of an unsymbolizable, unnameable narcissistic wound...sadness is really the sole object; more precisely it is a substitute object they become attached to, an object they tame and cherish for lack of another (12). In essence, Kristeva situates Duras among the post-apocalyptic, post-World War II writers whose writings on pain are self-reflective, vacant texts. This study takes on a different approach. The aim of this study is to determine how Duras creates her language of pain and what socio-cultural implications emerge from it. Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*. trans. Leon S. Roudiez. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989) 12.

In the five works under examination in this chapter, the sources of pain come from colonial oppression, war, and/or personal tragedy. The language of pain is determined by the narrative structure of the text. In the first three works in this chapter, *L'amant* (1984)¹⁸, “La douleur” (1985)¹⁹, and *India Song* (1973)²⁰, the de-centralization of the omniscient narrator, and fragmented temporality create a language of pain that resembles that of a testimonial. These texts as testimonials are important in my definition of the language of pain because, I suggest, the structure and narrative voice(s) of a testimonial is what confers ownership of a language of pain to the female protagonists/narrator(s). The need for purely discursive communication by an outside source (i.e. a third person, omniscient narrator) to speak on behalf of the women in pain in these texts is largely diminished as testimony. It is important to emphasize the provisional nature of calling all three of these texts testimonials. A testimonial, by definition, is told in first person :

Le témoignage est un acte de parole...un sujet *je* parle de ce qu'il a vécu, vu ou entendu en première position. (8) (Bornand's emphasis)

With the exception of “La douleur,” the two formerly mentioned texts have at least two voices telling the story of the female protagonist. Another structural aspect of testimony significant to this chapter is that the “telling” of these stories comes from life-altering, very often, painful experiences. We are reminded of François-Charles Gaudard's use of terms such as *fracture* and *rupture* to characterize the circumstances that lead to one giving testimony.

¹⁸ Marguerite Duras, *L'amant* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1984).

¹⁹ Marguerite Duras, *La douleur* (Paris: P.O.L., 1985).

²⁰ Marguerite Duras, *India Song*. *Duras: Romans, cinéma, théâtre, un parcours 1943-1993*. ed. Françoise Cibieli (Paris : Gallimard Quarto, 1997) 1203-1343.

Il y a pertinence du “témoignage” lorsqu’il est situé dans le cadre d’une “affaire”, c’est-à-dire lorsque son contexte est celui d’une rupture ou d’une fracture dans l’organisation spatio-temporelle. (23)

I would like to emphasize Gaudard’s choice of the expression, “spatio-temporal disruption, as grounds for testimony as particularly important because as I will develop later in the chapter,” the interruption in time and space – particularly time - in the narrative structure of the three texts is significant to the construction of the language of pain. The fragmentation mirrors this rupture in time and space. The *réflexion consciente* of the arrangement of narrative elements in the testimony is part of the language in that it identifies and mirrors the pain. The artistic assembly of the narrative elements in the testimony must, as Bornand states it, involve the reader stylistically so as to convey the feelings of the lived experience:

L’engagement qui consiste dans le travail d’écriture réalisé par l’auteur de transformer son expérience vécue en expérience pour le lecteur...le récit est perçu comme un acte d’écriture “engagé” qui nécessite de la part de l’auteur-témoin une réflexion consciente sur l’acte de réception par le lecteur. (29)

In *L’amant*, “La douleur,” and *India Song*, the – as Bornand states it - arrangement of the narrative elements, use of sound, image, and body create a narrative space that allows for a language of pain that empowers the largely non-discursive communication of pain among the female protagonists.

I have chosen to examine *L’amant*, “La douleur,” and *India Song* first because they exemplify the language of pain I am defining in this project. I begin with *L’amant* because of the novel’s emphasis on structure and the sexualized body. It is a novel in which the narrator expresses pain on two levels: through the structure of the novel itself and through the sexualized body. The principal plot is that of a young girl’s first sexual relationship with a Chinese man, however, the storyline is constantly interrupted by painful memories of the

past. The character of the narrator herself is also fragmented. She alternates between the pronouns “I” and “she” when telling the story. I suggest that the fragmented narrative and temporal structure mirrors the pain the narrator evinces throughout the novel. The young girl’s sexualized body is primary site for testifying to pain.

I follow this discussion of *L’amant* with an examination of “La douleur.” Both texts resemble each other in that the negotiations between fragmented temporal linearity, body, and voice are the language of pain. “La douleur” is a re-writing of a series of journal entries Duras made detailing the psychological torture she endured while waiting for news of her husband, who was in a concentration camp during the Occupation. The narrator tells the story in first-person. The narrative, like the one in *L’amant*, is temporally fragmented because the narrator inserts reflections of her deep emotional anguish while telling the story of the events leading up to her receiving news of her husband’s status. The difference between *L’amant* and this story is that the narrator’s body is non-existent in the face of the pain she is experiencing. She effaces the presence of her own body and she is identified by her voice. However, she expresses her pain by imagining the dead body of her husband, and that of her child, whom she lost in childbirth. She possesses control of her own expression of pain.

The importance of the voice within the text manifests itself as the language of pain in *India Song*. In Duras’ screenplay, *India Song*, the body and language are represented by two women. There is Anne-Marie, the wife of the French ambassador to India during the colonial period of the 1930s and *la mendiante* (the beggarwoman), a young Laotian woman who has left home and wanders throughout India. Both women have suffered pain in their lives for different reasons. When the screenplay begins, Anne-Marie is dead by suicide, and *la mendiante* emerges as the one who expresses and mourns both hers and Anne-Marie’s pain

through screams and laughter. *La mendiante* defies the conventional expression of pain and uses only non-articulate screams and cries. Her use of language permeates the screenplay.

The shift in narrative voice and temporal linearity is distinct in *Un barrage contre le Pacifique* (1950)²¹ and *Le ravisement de Lol V. Stein* (1964).²² The structure of both novels is more conventional in that time passes in each narrative in a relatively linear fashion and the narrator speaks in third person. In both novels, the narrator uses female bodies as either objects of humiliation (*Un barrage contre le Pacifique*) or as objects eclipsed by the narrative voice (*Le ravisement de Lol V. Stein*).

The sexualized body is the site on which the narrator in *Un barrage contre le Pacifique* expresses the adolescent Suzanne's pain. The difference between the sexualized body in *L'amant* and the one in this novel is that it is the object of deep humiliation. *Un barrage contre le Pacifique* is a more conventional novel than *L'amant* because there is a temporally linear plot and fleshed-out characters. The narrator in this novel relies on verbal language to express Suzanne's pain, however the body is the site on which her pain is written. While the narrator in this novel does not appear to have a sinister presence because her intention is to critique the oppressive colonial presence in Indochina, she does use discursive formations of narration that repress the young Suzanne's voice and humiliate her body.

The final work I examine is *Le ravisement de Lol V. Stein* which I have chosen this work because of its perspective on the silencing of the voice. The narrator of this story is Lol Stein's lover, Jacques Hold. We come to know Lol only through his perspective, while she is silent. He invents aspects of their relationship and takes on a particularly myopic view of Lol.

²¹ Marguerite Duras, *Un barrage contre le Pacifique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1950).

²² Marguerite Duras, *Le ravisement de Lol V. Stein* (Paris : Gallimard, 1964).

Hold represses Lol's voice and body, and uses her pain in order to empower his own narrative presence.

The intention of this chapter is not to refute Scarry's notion that pain relegates its victims to either silence or incoherent sounds, but rather to challenge the idea that discursive communication and a need for a specific language of agency are the only means to express pain in a way that empowers its victims. This suggests that it is important to examine exactly how Duras challenges this idea by re-defining a language of pain.²³ Duras' texts under examination re-define the concept of a language. The objective of each subchapter is to uncover the ways in which Duras brings these marginalized modes of communicating pain (screaming, body language) to the fore. Duras stages the expression of pain in a way that challenges the accepted notion that is valid and understood primarily through verbal language, and also re-enforces the idea that in some cases, one must rely on others to express pain. The inclusion of a variety of bodily and vocal sounds to express pain, or a variety of

²³ An aspect of Deborah Jenson's argument that the French Romantic period's attempt to express pain, they use wound imagery that is either written directly on or closely associated with painful bodily experiences. In this citation, Jenson discusses the way in which critics have interpreted the representations of pain during the Romantic period. "On a rhetorical level, Romantic wounds as a discourse of pain traditionally are *not* associated with a groundbreaking lexicon of mimesis. On the contrary, symbolic wounds are generally taken to represent Romantic narcissism and melodrama, *idealized* wounds, and they are implicated in the sometimes derogatory reputation of French Romanticism. In the use of wound imagery to denote a 'real' body with viscerally authentic experiences, Romanticism seems to draw attention to an ethos of mimetic literalism, in which representation is conflated with reality through the device of the authenticity of pain" (17). (Jenson's emphasis). Jenson also recognizes the impossibility of a true mimetic literary representation of bodily pain as she sites Scarry's claim that physical pain eludes representation. "Scarry holds that physical pain resists representation...Affective pain is more expressible than physical pain, according to Scarry, and therefore less revelatory...Physical pain...suggests an authenticity that is beyond language, and therefore represents the ultimate mimetic challenge. For Scarry, to witness the movement from pain to description 'is almost to have been permitted to be present at the birth of language itself.'" (22-23). This is pertinent to my project because, I refer to the body as a site for expressing pain. While I agree that pain, physical and affective are difficult to authenticate in a literary reproduction, it is possible to testify to it. We examine the language of pain in this study as an act of testimony. This act renders pain in language by the performance of testimony. The language of pain is not merely a static written or spoken articulation of pain, but rather is a performative act. Deborah Jenson, *Trauma and its Representations : The Social Life of Mimesis in Post-Revolutionary France* (Baltimore : Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).

perspectives in expressing pain, is the foundation of the language of pain Duras employs in the works I examine in this chapter.

Each work possesses a unique way of expressing the language of pain. All of them involve interactions between the body and the voice of the narrator. It is through this relationship that Duras's language of pain is born. What is different from Scarry's idea of pain and the need for agency is that when the line that divides the voice of the narrator and the subject is blurred, the expression of pain becomes more pronounced and is empowering for the one who is suffering in pain. The feminine voice participates in her own story of pain. She is not an inert, muted feminine subject, but a female protagonist. In works in which Duras clearly delineates between the narrative voice and the feminine subject, the woman's voice is silenced. These works put in to relief the power and resonance of the feminine narrative voice in the expression of pain in the three works, *L'amant*, "La douleur," and *India Song*, where the narrator – the *agent* in expressing pain – and the woman who is in pain are merged. She becomes her own agent in expressing the language of pain.

ii. Frida Kahlo

iii. The Pictorial Testimony:

The written word is a common forum for expressing personal and collective testimonies of pain. As a written medium, we are reminded of Marie Bornand's definition of testimony: "Le témoignage est un acte de parole" (8). Bornand defines testimony as an act of language, a language comprised of words. Although Duras' medium is literature, the author permits her reader to visualize the painful events by privileging the act of seeing throughout the texts under study. For example, Duras uses the motif of the never-taken-photograph in

L'amant as the way to allow her readers to envision the young girl's sexualized presence. The girl's sexualized body becomes the site on which Duras imposes pain. The fragmented temporal structure and narrative voices frame the visual description and serve to underscore the girl's pain. Although Duras' medium is literature, visual elements play a significant role in the way she testifies to pain. Kahlo's medium is painting and she must rely on images to "tell" her story. Roland Barthes provides an analysis of the subjectivity of the image in his essay "The Rhetoric of the Image" (1964).²⁴ Barthes explains the significance of the image by using what he calls a system of signs. He defines a sign in these terms: "By *typical sign* is meant the sign of a system insofar as it is adequately defined by its substance" (33-34) (Barthes' emphasis). This implies that the meaning of the image is recognizable by the viewer within a particular cultural context. The image must convey meaning and be subject to interpretation and analysis. Barthes explains that a sign will convey three messages: linguistic, coded and uncoded iconic messages. The linguistic message is a discursive message that specifies the meaning of an image. From this perspective we could say that, in *Henry Ford Hospital* (1932)²⁵ (see fig. 3), a painting Kahlo made after experiencing a miscarriage, the artist inscribes the date and location of the event orienting the viewer as to what s/he is seeing.

Barthes refers to the two iconic messages as icons because they exist without discursive language in a purely imagistic form that has symbolic significance. The coded message demands a specific cultural vantage point on the part of the viewer. For example, in

²⁴ Roland Barthes, "Rhetoric of the Image," *Image, Music, Text*. trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977).

²⁵ Frida Kahlo, *Henry Ford Hospital*, Collection Edgar Kaufman, Jr., New York.

Kahlo's *My Birth* (1932)²⁶ (see fig. 7), a depiction of a dead woman in the birthing position with a dead child emerging from her vagina lying in a pool of blood, the viewer is immediately struck by the horror of the images. What the viewer may not know, if s/he is unfamiliar with Mexican or Aztec culture, is that the depiction of the dead mother in parturition is a reference to *Tlazolteotl*, the Aztec goddess of birth and filth. The viewer must also be aware of the fact that Kahlo would have likely been familiar with the Aztec goddess as her husband, Diego Rivera owned an extensive collection of pre-Columbian sculpture. Barthes then goes on to describe a non-coded iconic message. This is a message that does not have a prescribed or intended meaning. Barthes refers to it as a "perceptual message" (36). It is an individualized message, one that carries an interpretation that has not been "coded" or prescribed by a particular culture. The three messages, particularly the two iconic ones, are very often, according to Barthes, interpreted all at the same time and it is frequently difficult to distinguish one from the other.

It is certain that the distinction between the two iconic messages is not made spontaneously in ordinary reading: the viewer of the image receives *at one and the same time* the perceptual message and the cultural message. The variation in readings depends on the different kinds of knowledge – practical, national, cultural, aesthetic (36, 46) (Barthes' emphasis).

Barthes theorizes that the subjectivity – the plurality of meanings based on individual knowledge and perspective - of the image's iconic messages is performative in nature. That is to say that the image demands communication with the viewer. Barthes postulates that the language of the image in contemporary culture requires a dialogic relationship between viewer and image.

The language of the image is not merely the totality of utterances emitted, it is also the totality of utterances received (47).

²⁶ Frida Kahlo, *My Birth*, Collection Edgar Kaufman, Jr., New York.

Barthes interpretation of the image provides a link between literary and pictorial testimonies. Barthes' contribution to this project rests with his ideas that the images are performative, that is, there is a dialogic relationship between the viewer and the image itself. This relationship exists because of the inherent cultural subjectivity of the image and the viewer's own personal and cultural experiences. In Kahlo's paintings, the viewer finds images that are unique to the artist's personal experiences and cultural background, yet we can identify them without knowing biographical history or Mexican culture. For example, in *Tree of Hope*²⁷ (see fig.6), in the background on the left side of the painting, Kahlo depicts her unconscious, post-operative self-image under a bright red and orange sun. One can interpret that as a simple choice in background, but it can be read as a reference to the Aztec belief that the sun feeds on human blood. What is important about the image in Kahlo's paintings is that they derive their meanings from the way in which they are staged. While the image of the sun is important, its significance comes from staging it in relation to Kahlo's self-image. Kahlo's testimony of pain emerges from the staging of the images. This study will address these questions: What are the collective results of examining the biography, cultural history and the viewer's experiences in the reading of the paintings? How does the staging of her images inform the meaning of the paintings? To what degree do the socio-cultural influences of the viewer shape the reading? Painting as a medium of testimony is a developing and varied area of critical interest. The genre of testimonial paintings varies from essays on German Evangelical art,²⁸ to a socio-psychiatric comparative study of the palliative effects of art.²⁹

²⁷ Frida Kahlo, *Tree of Hope*, Collection of Daniel Filipacchi, Paris.

²⁸ Noble argues that Cranach's *Weimar Altarpiece* re-defines the relationship between viewer and image by staging human and holy figures in close proximity in German evangelical art. Noble claims that the *Weimar Altarpiece* "connects the two-dimensional image and the experience of the viewer in radically new ways, marking the convergence of testimony and diadaticism which are the defining features of evangelical art."

There is also a recent study on British World War I modernist art that discusses how the evolution of the art produced during that time is testimony to the destruction and fragmentation during the war.³⁰ However, in the realm of women's painting, testimony, pain, there is a lone voice in art criticism who addresses this subject.

The leading critic on women, pain, testimony, and painting is Marie-Jo Bonnet. The content of her book, *Les femmes dans l'art: Qu'est-ce que les femmes ont apporté à l'art?* (2004),³¹ is an answer to the title question: what have women brought to art? The book is an extensive survey that examines primarily European and U.S.-American women artists from pre-history to contemporary art. Bonnet manages to provide a chronologically vast exploration of women artists while maintaining a consistent thematic focus throughout the book. The author presents women's art as testimonials to the feminine condition in visual

Bonnie Noble, "From Vision to Testimony: Cranach's *Weimar Altarpiece*," *Reformation and Renaissance Review* 5.2 (2003): 135-165.

²⁹ Further support of Kahlo's paintings as visual testimony comes from a recent article by Joerg Bose, a professor of psychiatry at Columbia University, who writes about Kahlo's paintings "as a kind of messenger between the areas of disassociated experience and consciousness" (52). He states that a victim of physical and psychic trauma, such as Kahlo, would be inclined to disassociate her/himself from the painful experience but instead Kahlo uses painting as a method of giving language to her pain. Bose also suggests that her paintings function as a "witnessing presence" to her pain, rejecting the idea that discursive processes express pain more successfully. "Also in going beyond the customary focus on verbal processes, I will examine the role and function of concreteness and the value of the art object as an external object, the artwork serves self-supporting and self-constitutive functions: as a *witnessing presence*...in its concreteness and analog presentational character, is optimal for conveying in an instant the sudden impact of trauma and has a strong *demonstrative and testimonial* quality for the viewer" (52). (my emphasis) Bose evaluates Kahlo's paintings as a method of communication in order to find another way to deal with witnessing to a traumatic event. This is relevant to my project in that Bose recognizes painting as a valid form of communication of pain, and further suggests that it serves as way to bear witness to a traumatic event. Bose views the production of these paintings as palliative and my project does not seek to examine the paintings in this way. This project will examine the aspects and function of the paintings as a language of pain. Joerg Bose, "Images of Trauma: Pain, Recognition, and Disavowal in the Works of Frida Kahlo and Francis Bacon," *Journal of The American Academy of Psychoanalysis and Dynamic Psychiatry* 33.1 (2005): 51-70. Joerg Bose is a Clinical Associate Professor of Psychiatry, College of Physicians and Surgeons, Columbia University, Director, Training and Supervising Analyst, William Alanson White Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology and Psychoanalysis.

³⁰ Sue Malvern, *Modern Art, Britain and the Great War: witnessing, testimony and remembrance* (New Haven: Yale University Press).

³¹ Marie-Jo Bonnet, *Les femmes dans l'art: Qu'est-ce que les femmes ont apporté à l'art?* (Paris : Éditions de La Martinière, 2004).

media (painting, sculpture, installation art, photography) within a socio-historical context. For example, in her chapter entitled “*Souffrir*” (suffering), Bonnet provides a salient example of the way in which women painters have come to bear witness to their personal pain, as well as to the tenuous position of the feminine subject in art throughout history, by arguing that the origin for representations of pain in Western³² culture is found in male-dominated, Christian art. The author views this inequality in the representation of gender as the source for the marginalization of the representation of women’s pain and suffering in painting because Christian art historically represents Christ as the central figure.

Dans l’Occident chrétien, la souffrance est au centre de l’enseignement religieux à travers la passion du Christ, qui se termine par la mort sur la croix puis par la Résurrection. C’est ainsi que dans l’art chrétien occidental la Crucifixion est devenue l’archétype même de la souffrance, avec sur la croix l’homme de douleur dont le culte avait commencé. Dans ce contexte, on ne s’étonnera pas que la souffrance des femmes soit absente de l’art chrétien, mis à part celle de Marie au pied de la croix. (197)

Here, the author is testifying to women’s historically limited role as sufferers in painting and sculpture by providing the reader with socio-cultural background in art history. She implies that representing women’s pain has been of lesser importance in the realm of art. These implications lay the groundwork for the remainder of her chapter where she renders a thorough presentation of women’s pain in art through historical periods dating from the Middle Ages to the present. Most notably, Bonnet names Frida Kahlo as the primary exemplar of a woman who testifies to her own pain through painting in her subchapter, “*Témoigner de la souffrance*,” (testifying to suffering). The author chooses to exemplify Kahlo for two reasons. Bonnet claims that Kahlo is the first among several women artists in the twentieth century who have represented their pain on their bodies.

³² In this context, Western refers to European and U.S.-American cultures.

Du côté des femmes, c'est certainement autour de l'image du corps propre que se développe au XXe siècle l'essentiel de la réflexion sur la souffrance. Ainsi en est-il de Frida Kahlo, qui est une des premières artistes à avoir construit son oeuvre sur l'expérience de la souffrance endurée dans son corps (215).

In this quotation, Bonnet suggests that representations of Kahlo's suffering body testify to the historical context that women's pain has been excluded or marginalized in art. However, Bonnet's analysis of Kahlo's painting, *The Broken Column*³³ (see fig.8), relies on biographical facts that inform her interpretation. Bonnet's reading of the painting through a biographical filter suggests that Kahlo is not only testifying to greater socio-cultural inequity, but also to her private pain. The author asserts that the production of self-images of her injured body functions as a way to survive her physical pain.

Pour échapper à la douleur, elle commence à peindre, créant au fil des tableaux une sorte de récit de son calvaire physique dans un combat pour la vie dont l'arme principale est le pinceau. (215)

In this instance, Bonnet establishes Kahlo's painting as a valid means of testifying to pain because she demonstrates that the artist is not only re-telling her own personal history, but that of a generation of women artists. It is also important to note that in this quotation, Bonnet refers to Kahlo's paintings as *récit* (narration). Specifically, a *récit* is a recounting of the events of a story. The act of re-telling of events is inherent in the definition of testimony. Here, Bonnet clearly implies that Kahlo's paintings are a forum for bearing witness to her pain.

Bonnet situates Kahlo's paintings as a pictorial language that "tells" of personal and cultural histories of women artists through their bodies. However, Bonnet places Kahlo's testimony within a historical context that is almost unique to Western art. In terms of pain

³³ Frida Kahlo, *The Broken Column*, Collection of Dolores Olmedo, Mexico City.

and suffering, Bonnet does not acknowledge the Mexican cultures that figure prominently in Kahlo's paintings as an aspect of her testimony. The scope of my study of Kahlo's pictorial testimony will encompass not only the artist's representations of the West, but also includes the Mexican cultures as a vital component of bearing witness to pain.

iiib. Frida Kahlo, The Painter:

Pain defined much of Frida Kahlo's short life and is the focus of the majority of her paintings. As a young child, she suffered from polio, which crippled one of her feet. At eighteen, a bus accident crushed Kahlo's leg, back, and pelvis and a handrail skewered her lower abdomen, exiting through her vagina. She spent the remaining twenty-nine years of her life in body casts and undergoing numerous surgeries. As a result of excessive physical damage and a congenital condition, she was unable to bear children. She had limited physical mobility, and later in her life became dependent on morphine and alcohol to dull her pain.

Kahlo once said,

I paint my own reality. The only thing I know is that I paint because I need to, and I paint always whatever passes through my head, without any other consideration (xi).³⁴

In Kahlo's paintings, the artist's reality consisted of depictions of her pain. Pain, let us recall, is an experience that often leaves its sufferers in silence. This study examines how Kahlo constructs her language of pain through the medium of painting and what implications emerge.

³⁴ A quote from Frida Kahlo as it appears in the preface of her biography by Hayden Herrera. Hayden Herrera, *Frida: A Biography of Frida Kahlo* (New York: Perennial, 1983) xi-xii.

Although pain mutes its victims, as Elaine Scarry posits, it is by no means without a language. The pain sufferer does not necessarily require discursive communication in order to express herself. I suggest that as pictorial testimonies, the images in the artist's paintings are her language of pain. The effectiveness of the testimonial manifests itself through the choice of images, the way in which the artist stages them and the socio-cultural histories they reveal.

Kahlo's decision to depict her self-image consistently as the focal point is significant on two levels in defining the paintings in this study as pictorial testimonies. A testimony, the recounting of an event, usually one that is painful, by the person who lived it. In a pictorial testimony, one must rely on the images to "tell" the story. In terms of the viewer's relationship to the painting, the presence of the foregrounded self-image indicates that Kahlo is the subject of the pictorial testimony. As the subject of her testimony, Kahlo's wounded or ailing self-image is the reference point of her language of pain. Kahlo's language of pain emerges from the way she stages the surrounding images in relation to her self-image. Kahlo stages the images in a way that the viewer is privy to deeply private, painful events in her life. The invitation to participate in the artist's pain through a careful depiction and choice of images is significant to the performance of testimony.

The performativity of Kahlo's paintings is best contextualized through Antonin Artaud's notion of *mise-en-scène*. In his manifesto, *The Theater and its Double*³⁵, Artaud defines the artistic language of *mise-en-scène* as the arrangement of theatrical elements such as objects, gesture, costume, masks, and music intended to elicit an emotional response from

³⁵Antonin Artaud, *The Theater and its Double*, trans. Mary Caroline Richards (New York: Grove Press, 1958).

the viewer/spectator.³⁶ The *mise-en-scène* in Kahlo's paintings transforms images into a theatrical language of pain. The composition of the theatricalized images emerges as the vocabulary of Kahlo's testimonial language of pain.

The other important function of a testimony is its ability to reveal socio-cultural histories that transcend the witness' personal tragedy. In his book, Artaud speaks of how the language of *mise-en-scène* reveals cultural practices and rituals from non-Western European societies to the viewers in ways that are frequently shocking. For example, Artaud cites the Balinese theater as the example of a spectacle that privileges a theater that is devoid of conventional playwrighting and performance techniques characteristic of Western theater. Instead, Artaud values the Balinese theater because its ritualistic, non-verbal performance reveals the essence of spiritual and emotional life. While these performances are often uncomfortable for the European spectator, the revelations of the Balinese's spectacles are revelatory in nature.

It [Balinese theater] is a theater which eliminates the author in favor of what we would call, in our Occidental theatrical jargon, the director; but a director who has become a kind of manager of magic, a master of sacred ceremonies...In a spectacle like that of Balinese theater there is something that has nothing to do with entertainment, the notion of useless, artificial amusement...The Balinese productions take shape at the very heart of matter, life, reality. (60)

Artaud claims that a radical break with Western concepts of theatricality is imperative in creating a performance that jars its European spectators into an unfamiliar and sometimes disturbing reality. Kahlo's paintings echo Artaud's performances as her depictions are graphic portrayals of her self-image that evoke feelings of horror and repulsion. For example, in *Henry Ford Hospital* (1932) she depicts her naked self-image lying on bloodied sheets

³⁶ I will develop *mise-en-scène* and Artaud's other theories on theatricality in greater detail later in the study.

experiencing a miscarriage. Kahlo stages this *retablo*³⁷ -like painting with images of medical objects, a reference to Mexican folklore, landscape art and failed motherhood that surround Kahlo's bleeding self-image, all serving as indicators of her painful experience. The relationship between the staging of the images of pain and Kahlo's self-image in this painting functions not only as gruesome testimony to the events of the miscarriage, but in the process of bearing witness to personal tragedy, the artist subverts through the traditional role of the mother the theatrical gesture of the tear. Kahlo references the Mexican folkloric figure, *La llorona*, a representation of the guilt of failed motherhood.

Artaud's conception of theatricality serves the examination of Kahlo's language of pain in two ways. It provides the critic with a tool for analyzing artist's vocabulary for expressing her pain and permits the viewer to interpret her paintings not only as a pictorial autobiography of suffering, but also as an act of cultural resistance. Kahlo expresses her language of pain through the relationship between the theatricalized elements and her wounded self-image in the five paintings: *Henry Ford Hospital*, *The Two Fridas* (1939) (see fig.4)³⁸, *Tree of Hope* (1946), *My Birth* (1932) and *The Broken Column* (1944). This project examines how Kahlo's language of pain resists the idea that pain breaks down any form of communication, as Scarry has suggested. The theatricalized images express Kahlo's language of pain as they are in relation and proximity to her wounded self-image. In the first four paintings under examination, *Henry Ford Hospital*, *The Two Fridas*, *Tree of Hope*, and *My Birth* Kahlo stages her self-image among elaborate depictions of theatricalized images of

³⁷ A *retablo* is a form belonging to sacred art, and literally means "altarpiece." The *retablo* is painted by an *ex-voto*, who has been commissioned by the family of one who has been gravely ill or injured in gratitude for saving the life of a loved-one. In a traditional *retablo*, there is an image of the savior-saint floating above the depiction of the ailing family member.

³⁸ Frida Kahlo, *The Two Fridas*, Museo del Arte Moderno, Mexico City.

pain, drawing the viewer's attention away from her wounded self-image, obliging the viewer to share her focus on the theatricalized elements. However, in the final painting, *The Broken Column*, the viewer's focus falls uniquely on the deceased and wounded self-images. In *My Birth*, there are few theatricalized elements and the viewer's attention is focused on the dead bodies. In *The Broken Column*, Kahlo stages her self-image in the foreground of a barren landscape, and the theatricalized elements penetrate her body, obliging the viewer to notice her wounded self-representation. How does the relationship between her wounded self-image and theatricalized images of pain subvert Scarry's idea that discursive communication is the privileged form of communication? What is the significance of the self-image in relation to the revelation of socio-cultural histories?

Artaud's theater, as we recall, is not designed merely for mindless entertainment, but must serve the greater cultural and social goal of revealing to its spectators the essence and spirituality of life through non-Western artistic practices in ways that challenge their European sensibilities. An examination of Kahlo's language of pain as a complex staging of pictorial theatrical elements inspired by Artaud's theories, begs the questions, what is Kahlo revealing in her paintings? What role does her non-Western, Mexican and European heritages play in these revelations? What socio-cultural conventions is she challenging?

In the first of the five paintings, *Henry Ford Hospital*, Kahlo stages the theatrical objects by surrounding her bleeding self-image with several objects, connected to her by a thin ribbon, a distant industrial skyline, and an institutional, hospital bed. The artist uses several elements, and they are in relative distance to her wounded body. The theatrical gesture of the single tear on her face conveys the guilt and sorrow of failed motherhood

because, in this instance, Kahlo is referring to the Mexican folkloric figure, *La llorona*,³⁹ a cultural icon of the guilt of failed motherhood. Kahlo stages this self-image on a *retablo*-like painting. In this painting, Kahlo is merging a form of Christian art with a secular, non-Western folkloric figure who has murdered her children. In this painting, she challenges the conventions of traditional Christian art while questioning the relationship of motherhood and womanhood.

In *The Two Fridas* Kahlo's figuratively broken heart is the inspiration for the painting, and she literally depicts it split between the two Fridas. Costuming, masks and objects are theatrical elements that, in Artaud's terms, are indicators of death. Through them Kahlo depicts the symbolic death of her marriage as well as indicating through the ruptured heart, an imminent physical death. Also through costuming, Kahlo calls attention to her European heritage as well as her indigenous Mexican roots. Through the staging of these two incarnations of Frida, the artist resists conventional representations of religious figures in Christian art by staging the Mother of Sorrows as a Tehuana and the Christ-figure as a woman.

Tree of Hope depicts a split image of a sick and a healthy Frida. Through the accumulation of objects, color and costume, Kahlo expresses the fragility of her physical condition. The artist demonstrates how the theatricalized images convey her perpetual struggle to maintain hope in the face of death.

In *My Birth* Kahlo employs significantly fewer theatrical elements, drawing the viewer's attention almost uniquely to the corporeal aspect of the self-image. The painting is a memorial to her recently dead mother, and the loss of her child she depicts in *Henry Ford*

³⁹ *La llorona* is the central figure in a Mexican folk tale of a woman who drowns her own children in an attempt to enrage her husband, who has left her for another woman. Mexican lore claims that if one passes by the river where she drowned her children, one can still hear her weeping.

Hospital. The only image of significance is a representation of the *Mater Dolorosa* that hangs above the images of the deceased mother and child. Kahlo depicts the Mother of Sorrow's image in deference to and removed from the bodies. However, the image of the dead mother in parturition makes reference to the sculpture of the Aztec goddess, *Tlazoteotl*, the goddess of birth and filth. Kahlo remembers her mother, who was of Spanish-indigenous heritage, as she inscribes the Aztec goddess on the image of the dead mother. The implications of this staging and choice of images are that Kahlo is, again, subverting the form of a *retablo*. *Tlazoteotl* is the pagan mother and the *Mater Dolorosa*, the Christian. The self-image as the dead child of the *Mater Dolorosa* is another incarnation of the Christ-figure lying in a pool of the Aztec mother's blood. Kahlo is once again making reference to herself as the Christ-figure as a dead baby.

Kahlo's body becomes the center of theatricality in *The Broken Column*. This means that the theatrical objects that she uses to express her suffering in the previous paintings are now the instruments of pain as they violently penetrate her body. As in *My Birth*, the viewer is obliged to look solely at the self-image as there are no other externalized theatrical elements to distract from the body. The wounded self-image bears the unique burden of testifying to her deteriorating physical condition. In this painting challenges conventions of sacred art by referring to herself as a kind of Christ-figure. In contrast to *The Two Fridas* or *My Birth*, the reference to Christ is far more overt. In *The Broken Column*, Kahlo appears as the Christ-figure who will not find redemption.

In the chapter dedicated to Kahlo's work, I examine five of the artist's paintings *Henry Ford Hospital*, *Tree of Hope*, *The Two Fridas*, *My Birth*, and *The Broken Column*, as visual testimonies that serve to bear witness to her own pain while

simultaneously revealing deeper socio-cultural issues that have existed in the margins of hegemonic cultures.⁴⁰ These paintings express a language that does not rely uniquely on discursive language but rather utilizes images that serve to “speak” of the artist’s pain.

The staging of the self-image is in relation to Kahlo’s objects of pain is a recurrent image in the paintings analyzed. In this study, I will examine the social and artistic implications of Kahlo’s choice to express her language of pain by depicting her self-image in terms of both Western and non-Western incarnations of iconic maternal figures. I will also explore the significance of Kahlo’s self-references to the Christ-figure in three of her paintings. The language of pain transcends personal tragedy to question artistic conventions and the place of women in 20th century art as Kahlo’s theatricalized body is the focal point of the painting. A goal of this study is to discover what Kahlo reveals by staging her wounded self-image in relation to these socio-cultural histories. In terms of Kahlo’s paintings, how do these histories inform her language of pain? What are the implications of imposing cultural histories on Kahlo’s wounded self-image?

⁴⁰ The collective representations in Kahlo’s paintings very often involve images that refer to Mexican cultures. In order to better represent and understand Kahlo’s socio-cultural representations of Mexican cultures, it is important to cite co-authors, Oriana Baddeley and Valerie Fraser, Latin American art scholars in this study. In their book, *Drawing the Line: Art and Cultural Identity in Contemporary Latin America* (1989), they situate Latin American art in contemporary society as a body of work that is independent from the culturally dominant trends and theories in art that come from Western Europe and the U.S. I refer to Baddeley and Fraser’s ideas in order to situate Kahlo’s work culturally and politically. The idea of Kahlo’s paintings as an infusion of art, culture, politics, and autobiography is further supported by Baddeley and Fraser’s notion that Latin American art, here they discuss landscape art, and the cultural and political reality of the regions are inseparable.

The situation in Latin America...is...: it is impossible to divorce the art from the reality, the landscape from its history... Latin America – the place, the culture, the people – provides artists with endless subjects for pictures which are not only *of* Latin America but *about* Latin America (11). (Baddeley and Fraser’s emphasis)

Oriana Baddeley and Valerie Fraser, *Drawing the Line: Art and Cultural Identity in Contemporary Latin America* (London: Verso, 1989).

2. Marguerite Duras : The Expression of Pain and the Feminine Subject

I. The Young Girl/Old Woman in Marguerite Duras' *L'amant*:

i. Summary of the novel:

L'amant is an autobiographical novel in which Duras recounts the story of her emotionally turbulent childhood and adolescence in colonial Indochina in the 1920s. However, the Duras does not simply tell the story of her first sexual experience as a teenager in colonial Indochina, but writes in a language that privileges the act of visualizing the young girl's pain. Duras founds her language of pain in *L'amant* on the reference to the never-taken-photograph that represents the young girl's lost youth and painful past. The author permits her readers to visualize this photo by carefully constructing a sexualized description of the girl's body, making it the material site on which the narrator manifests the girl's suffering.⁴¹ By framing the never-taken-photo with an a-temporal narrative and inconsistent narrative voices, Duras underscores the sources of the young girl's pain: a severely depressed mother and abusive brother, and poverty under colonial oppression. The two narrative elements, the structure and the voice, are both fractured and appear somewhat chaotic throughout the text. The seemingly distorted qualities of novelistic convention (i.e. temporal

⁴¹ Marguerite Duras, *The Lover*. trans. Barbara Bray. (New York: Harper Perennial, 1985) 18-19, 29. « Je porte une robe de soie naturelle, elle est usée, presque transparente. Cette robe est sans manches, très décolletée. C'est une robe dont je me souviens. Je trouve qu'elle me va bien. J'ai mis une ceinture de cuir à la taille. Ce jour-là je dois porter cette fameuse paire de talons hauts en lamé or. Le corps est mince, presque chétif, des seins d'enfant encore, fardée en rose pâle et en rouge. » (« I'm wearing a dress of real silk, but it's threadbare, almost transparent... It's a sleeveless dress with a very low neck. It's a dress I remember. I think it suits me. I'm wearing a leather belt with it... This particular day I must be wearing the famous pair of gold lamé high heels. The body is thin, undersized almost, childish breasts still, red and pale-pink make-up. » Duras, *The Lover*. Bray trans. 11, 20.)

linearity and a single narrative voice) would seem to detract from the quality of the narrative but, instead, they serve to reveal and amplify the young girl's pain.⁴²

For example, one of the most striking aspects the novel is its shifting narrative voice. The narrative voice fluctuates between recounting the young girl's experiences in first and third person. The voice who speaks in first person recalls an event from her early childhood that was likely terrifying for her as a young child. She then offsets this highly painful experience with more pleasant memories of the first time she sees the man who is to become her first lover. For example, in one paragraph the narrator recalls when her mother learns of her – the narrator's- father's death. She recounts the experience in first person. In the following paragraph, she re-tells the moment when she first saw her lover. Here, she refers to herself in third-person.

Je me souviens d'un hurlement, d'un appel
Il regarde la jeune fille au feutre d'homme et aux chaussures d'or. Il vient vers
elle lentement. (48)⁴³

The reader is never sure as to who is telling the story. It begins with an old woman telling the story of a brief period in her childhood in first person. From that point on, the story continues in a narrative voice that alternates between the two voices.

The temporal structure of the novel does not follow a linear pattern either. The principal plotline is the narrator's first sexual relationship as an adolescent with a relatively

⁴² The language in Duras' texts do, in fact, resemble that of traumatic language, however, the question to ask is not how does Duras' language differ from traumatic language, but how does this kind of language serve the performance of pain? This kind of language, brought on by extreme pain, creates a kind of dissociated relationship between one's speech and body. Traumatic language in Duras' texts serve, according to Cathy Caruth is "an exploration of the relation between history and the body. The act of telling [one's history], in the very transmission of an understanding...erases the specificity of death" (26-7). This assessment of Duras' language is a significant tool in creating the performance of pain. Traumatic language allows the reader to understand chaos and disruption of extreme pain on the ability to communicate. Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

⁴³ Duras, *L'amant* 32. "I remember a shriek, a call"
"He looks at the girl in the man's fedora and the gold shoes. He slowly comes over to her..."

older, wealthy Chinese man. However, the plot is constantly interrupted by flashbacks to her early childhood, memories of the Occupation, and reflections on the difficult relationships with her mother and brothers. Like the pattern the narrative voice develops, the narrative structure alternates between the affection she shares with her lover and the cold, harsh times of the Occupation. For example, the narrator recalls intimate moments with her lover, then in the following paragraph, she remembers luncheons she attended in Paris during the Occupation.

Il me douche, il me lave, il me rince, il adore, il me farde et il m'habille, il m'adore. Je suis la préférée de sa vie.

Marie-Claude Carpenter était blonde. Elle était à peine fanée. Plutôt belle je crois. Les repas duraient peu de temps. On parlait beaucoup de la guerre...c'était à la fin de l'hiver 42. (79-80)⁴⁴

Pain emerges from the presence of a de-centered narrator, and the seemingly fragmented structure of the narrative.⁴⁵ Every interruption in the story she tells is filled with

⁴⁴ Duras, *The Lover*. Bray trans. 63-64. "He gives me my shower, washes me, rinses me, he adores that, he puts my make-up on and dresses me, he adores me. I'm the darling of his life... Marie-Claude Carpenter was fair. Scarcely faded. Quite good-looking. The meals never lasted long. We talked a lot about the war...the end of the winter of '42."

⁴⁵ Kristeva says that "the stylistic awkwardness in Duras is the discourse of blunted pain" (140). What Kristeva means by this is that the "stylistic awkwardness" is indicative of the non-cathartic, melancholic literature that has emerged in the post-apocalyptic era (post WWI). Kristeva suggests that many of Duras' texts are representative of this literary trend where death is pervasive and inevitable. However, she exempts *L'amant* from this category of literature. While she suggests that Duras maintains this "stylistic awkwardness," and acknowledges the persistent theme of death and ruin in *L'amant*, she claims that the combination of local color, its location in history, and the sexy young girl all serve to make *L'amant* a kind of literature that is erotic nostalgia written for the masses. "In *The Lover* (1984) erotic exoticism assists the beings and words exhausted by a tacit death. The novel displays the passion that is constant in Duras's work – painful and murderous, self-conscious and restrained...At the same time, the novel contains social and geographic realism, a journalistic account of colonial shabbiness and the malaise of the Occupation, and a naturalistic rendering of maternal failure and hatred. All this pervades the slick and unhealthy pleasure of the girl prostitute who yields to the tearful sensuality of a rich Chinese man...While remaining an impossible dream, feminine jouissance is anchored in local color and in a history that are certainly distant but that the third world realism of familial carnage make plausible, strangely close and intimate. With *The Lover*, pain attains a neoromantic social and historical harmony that ensured the book success in the media" (142). In this subchapter, I suggest that the "stylistic awkwardness" serves to create a space that allows for the expression of the narrator to have her own voice in expressing pain. Julia Kristeva, "The Pain of Sorrow in the Modern World: The Works of Marguerite Duras," trans. Katharine A. Jensen. *PMLA*, 102:2 (Mar., 1987), 138-152.

fractured, painful relationships, and experiences of loss. The seemingly disjointed style mirrors the broken relationships in the novel. For example, her mother is mad, her brother is a small-time hood, and her only good relationship is with the younger of the two brothers. The relationship with her lover is tenuous as well, and must be kept a secret. Since he is Chinese, both families bear prejudice towards the other. His father will not permit marriage between his son and a white girl, and her family is ungrateful and impolite to her lover because he is Chinese. All of the painful relationships have been exacerbated by the economic and social disparities created by the colonial presence. The young girl's family is all but destitute because they have lost their life's savings on worthless real estate that the French government sold the mother. In the end, the young girl and her lover must separate because she leaves for France for a better life.

The literary images (i.e. the fragmented narrative and the split narrator) that create a sense of loss and social oppression throughout the novel are only one aspect of the language of pain in this novel. The fragmented images serve to create a literary photographic image of this time period in the narrator's life. I use the expression photographic image intentionally for two reasons: as I develop later in this subchapter, the narrator suggests that the moment in time that his novel represents should have been captured in a photograph, but wasn't. The second reason is that the narrator takes care to explicitly describe herself in terms of the never-taken-photograph by using a highly visual vocabulary and in the process, creates a sexual image of the young girl.

The language of pain in *L'amant* emerges through the creation of a visual image by means of a fragmented narrative and an un-unified narrative voice. The most unified presence in the novel is the young girl's sexualized body. It – the sexualized body - emerges

from the fragmented narrative and de-centered narrator and bears the weight of testifying to the pain in this novel. For the young girl, sex serves to temporarily sublimate feelings of loss and depression; however, the reader is frequently reminded of her difficult life by interruptions in scenes with her lover with references to pain and death. The novel itself is the narrator's attempt to construct the image of the pain during a lost moment in her youth. Later I will demonstrate how the language of pain eventually evolves into a dialogic relationship between the fragmented structure of the novel and the image of the young girl's sexualized body.⁴⁶

ii. Sex and Death:

The novel begins with a conversation that the narrator has, as an old woman, with her former lover, who is also the title character of the novel. He tells her that, “j’aimais moins votre visage de jeune femme que celui que vous avez maintenant, dévasté »(9).⁴⁷ The reader comes to understand that the story s/he is about to read is about a life that has already been lived, and judging by the ravaged face of the old woman, she has

⁴⁶The importance of Tal's essay to this chapter is that s/he writes about the production and effects of trauma literature (trauma literature in Tal's sense is not just relegated to Vietnam veterans but victims of rape, incest, war). All of the works under examination in this chapter have characters who have at point or throughout the texts have been traumatized in some way, however, I resist the idea that Duras' texts in this chapter can be fully considered trauma literature. Tal argues that “Literature of trauma...is the product of three coincident factors: the experience of trauma, the urge to bear witness, and a sense of community” (218). While it is true that many, if not all, female protagonists in this chapter have at one time or another experienced trauma, and the texts – and they are part of the texts – bear witness to this pain, Tal suggests that “Each of these authors [of trauma literature] articulates the belief that he or she is a story-teller with a mission...Each also affirms the process of storytelling as a personally re-constitutive act and expresses the hope that [they are] changing the order of things as they are and working to prevent the enactment of similar horrors in the future (231).” None of Duras' characters possesses this quality of hope and desire to change things for the better (this also falls under Tal's sense of community in trauma literature). Another difference is that there is not just a singular voice telling the story (except in *La douleur*). Kali Tal, “Speaking the Language of Pain: Vietnam War Literature in the Context of a Literature of Trauma,” *Fourteen Landing Zones: Approaches to Vietnam War Literature*, ed. Philip K. Jason (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1991) 217-250.

⁴⁷ Marguerite Duras, *The Lover*, trans. Barbara Bray. (New York: Harper Perennial, 1985) 3. “I prefer your face as it is now. Ravaged.”

lived a difficult life. The narrator describes her aged and ruined face as the site for storytelling.

Ce vieillissement a été brutal. Je l'ai vu gagner mes traits un à un. Au contraire d'en être effrayée j'ai vu s'opérer ce vieillissement de mon visage avec l'intérêt que j'aurais pris par exemple au déroulement d'une lecture.
(10)⁴⁸

From the beginning, the reader understands that s/he is reading a novel that is a recounting of past events, and already has a sense of the protagonist's pain and loss. In a digression, she confirms the pain and loss that her aged face foreshadows at the beginning of the novel. She describes her story as "cette histoire de ruine et de mort." (34)⁴⁹ The narrator's story expresses how she has come to represent her world, one marked by great loss. In order to express the great pain of her loss she reflects on an image of herself as a young girl at the time she met her first lover. The narrator tells of the importance of this moment during her young life and seems to mourn the fact that it went largely invalidated. The image, as the narrator explains it, is a photograph of her that was never taken because no one thought to do it. A photograph would have given significance to this experience because it would have immortalized this time in her life. Now, this period of time is lost and the narrator, through telling her story in this novel, is piecing together the moments of her life to create this image and give it significance.

C'est au cours de ce voyage que l'image se serait détachée, qu'elle aurait été enlevée à la somme. Elle aurait pu exister, une photographie aurait pu être prise. Mais elle ne l'a pas été. Elle n'aurait pu être prise que si on avait pu préjuger de l'importance de cet événement dans ma vie. Or tandis que celle-ci s'opérait, on ignorait encore jusqu'à son existence. C'est pourquoi, cette

47 Duras, *The Lover*. Bray trans. 4. "My ageing was very sudden. I saw it spread over my features one by one... But instead of being dismayed I watched this process with the same sort of interest I might have taken in the reading of a book."

49 Duras, *The Lover*. Bray trans. 25 "in that history of ruin and death."

image,...n'existe pas.C'est à ce manque d'avoir été faite qu'elle doit sa vertu, celle de représenter un absolu, d'en être justement l'auteur. (17)⁵⁰

The narrator represents her pain and loss through a non-conventional, fragmented narrative structure and a de-centered narrative voice. The fragmented narrative style and the de-centered narrative voice are the techniques the narrative employs to “piece” together the significance of the story of her first love.

Alex Hughes, author of “Photography and Fetishism in *L'amant*,” (2000) also explores the significance of the never-taken-photo in *L'amant*.⁵¹ The importance of his/her interpretation of the photo image reference in *L'amant*, is that s/he also suggests that the image is a composite of fragments, however, s/he argues that these “pieces” of the bodily incarnation of the young girl in the never-taken-photo in the novel is a composite of various sexualized, fetishized objects.

The most striking things about the central, female, bodily entity ‘snapped’ by Duras’s after-the-fact, narrativized photo-take are its artificial aspect and its *morcellement*, or fragmentation. *L'amant*’s phantom-photo comes across less as an homogenous, seamless, natural being than as a kind of constructed composite, made up of a series of ‘pieces’. The sexually symbolic slant of the Durassian narrated photo-body represented in the incipit of *L'amant* is inescapable. It invites Duras’s reader to read the broader phenomenon of her ‘photographic’ self-narration in the context of fetishism, and through a consideration of the fetish object itself. (192-193)

While I share Hughes’ notion of the idea that the “phantom photo” is comprised of fragments and pieces that form a kind of composite image, and that the image the narrator

⁵⁰ Duras, *The Lover*. Bray trans. 10. “I think it was during this journey that the image became detached, removed from all the rest. It might have existed, a photograph might have been taken...But it wasn’t. The photograph could only have been taken if someone could have known in advance how important it was to be in my life...But while it was happening, no one even knew of its existence. And that’s why...the image doesn’t exist...And it’s to this, this failure to have been created, that the image owes its virtue: the virtue of representing, of being the creator of, absolute.”

⁵¹ Alex Hughes, “Photography and Fetishism in *L'amant*.” *Revisioning Duras: Film, Race, Sex*. ed. James S. Williams, with the assistance of Janet Sayers. (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000) 191-202.

creates of the young girl is highly sexualized through detailed descriptions of her physical appearance. I believe that the reference to the never-taken-photograph is symbolic of the narrator's attempt to express her pain. The narrative style serves to assemble the lost moments of her life when it alternates between the narratives of painful events with her family or during the war and time with her lover. The alternating narrative voice, between first- and third- person, creates a distance between the two. This division of narrative voice begins during the initial and subsequent encounters with her lover. By using third- person narration the first-person narrator – the dominant narrator- is able to create a separate image of herself that is juxtaposed to her “I” status. This separate, third-person image is the recorded memory of the time lost, of the image never taken. In this example, the narrator is speaking in first person about her distressed childhood through a photographic image. In the following paragraphs she recalls a meeting with her lover. The significance of using third person to describe her initial meeting is that it with him allows the reader to see and know about the importance of this moment that was never captured.

Je ne sais pas qui avait pris la photo du désespoir. Celle de la cour de la maison de Hanoi.
Il répète que c'est tout à fait extraordinaire de la voir sur ce bac. Si tôt le matin, une jeune fille belle comme elle l'est...une jeune fille blanche dans un car indigène. (41, 43)⁵²

The fact that the narrative and the narrator must be re-assembled in a narrative suggests something has either been broken or lost.

Pain in this novel is expressed in the way the narrator structures her stories and in the way that she recounts them. After the brief introduction of why she is going to tell this story,

⁵² Duras, *The Lover*. Bray trans. 31, 33. “I don't know who took the photo with the despair. The one in the courtyard of the house in Hanoi... He says again how strand it is to see her on this ferry. So early in the morning, a pretty girl like that...a white girl on a native bus.”

the narrative voice shifts from “je” (I) to “elle” (she) as the story unravels. The shape of the narrator’s identity is fluid, and the reader is left to question who is telling the story. For example, in the description of the lover and the young girl make love for the first time, the narrative voice changes from “je” to “elle” within the same scene. «Elle ne le regarde pas au visage. Elle ne le regarde pas. Elle le touche. Je ne savais pas que l’on saignait (49-50). » This is a technique that the narrator employs throughout the novel. The two narrative voices struggle to re-create the image of the young girl that has been lost to time and experience. The fractured identity of the narrator is an expression of her pain because she is speaking from a position of loss.

The narrator’s fragmented identity operates within an equally fragmented narrative structure. She not only recounts the story of her love affair with the Chinese man during her adolescence in colonial Vietnam, but also interrupts the narrative with memories of her early childhood and the Occupation during her young adult life. These moments in her life all share one thing – they are all centered on particularly painful times and events in her life. The disjointed qualities of the narrative, coupled with the fragmented identity of the narrator, seem to express the painful and often impossible familial relationships she details in the novel. The discord that existed in her family was a significant source of her pain. For example, she compares the dysfunctional relationship she has with the elder of her two brothers with the time she spent in Paris during the Occupation.

Je vois la guerre sous les mêmes couleurs que mon enfance. Je confonds le temps de la guerre avec le règne de mon frere aîné. C’est aussi sans doute parce que c’est pendant la guerre que mon petit frère est mort. (78)⁵³

⁵³ Duras, *The Lover*. Bray trans. 62. “I see the war as I see my childhood. I see wartime and the reign of my elder brother as one. Partly, no doubt, because it was during the war that my younger brother died...”

Here, the narrator is recalling how the oppressive relationship with the elder of her two brothers reminds her of her life during the Nazi Occupation of Paris. It was a particularly painful time in her life, because the younger of the two brothers died during this period.

In another moment, the narrator recalls when her depressive mother became abusive, with her older brother's encouragement, when she suspected that her daughter had lost her virginity to her Chinese lover.

Dans des crises ma mère se jette sur moi, elle m'enferme dans la chambre, elle me bat à coups de poing, elle me gifle, elle me déshabille, elle s'approche de moi, elle sent mon corps, mon linge, elle dit qu'elle trouve le parfum de l'homme chinois, elle va plus avant, elle regarde s'il y a des tâches suspectes sur le linge et elle hurle, la ville à l'entendre, que sa fille est une prostituée (73).⁵⁴

This example reveals the difficult relationship she – the young girl - had with her mother; a relationship that has caused her shame and suffering. However, she finds refuge in the private room in Chinatown where she goes with her lover. Even that relationship is strained because of a variety of external pressures, namely, economic and racial prejudices. But, when they are alone in the room in Chinatown, the young girl finds an escape through their sexualized bodies.

At this point, the language of pain manifests itself in the temporal and narrative disorder that the novel evinces. Painful experiences such as the Occupation, her mother's madness, and racial and economic prejudices are embedded within the fragments of the narrative. These sources of pain, arranged in a seemingly chaotic narrative structure, set the stage for the sexualized body to emerge as the site for bearing witness to her pain.

⁵⁴ Duras, *The Lover*. Bray trans. 58. "My mother has attacks during which she falls on me, locks me up in my room, punches me, undresses me, comes up to me and smells my body, my underwear, says she can smell the Chinese's scent, goes even further, looks for suspect stains on my underwear, and shouts, for the whole town to hear, that her daughter's a prostitute"

iii. The Sexualized Body: Pain and *Jouissance*:

The notion of the narrator's fragmented identity as an expression of pain also serves as a technique of forgetting. The narrator has an understanding of her own fragmented identity and of the world in which she lives that permits her to circumvent, if only fleetingly, a painful existence. The young girl explicitly reveals the dual nature of her own identity. She claims that she can be charming and attractive, while she simultaneously hides dark thoughts of death. This suggests that by creating another persona, she is able to mask pain.⁵⁵

The young girl is successful in temporarily escaping painful experiences because she has learned to how to hide them. Repressing pain permits her to navigate within her sexual relations, at least at the beginning of their affair, with relative ease, that is to say, painlessly. She hides emotion during their encounters by asking him to treat her as if she were any woman, not one he loves. Much to his dismay, and to her erotic pleasure, he complies with her wishes.

Elle lui dit: je préférerais que vous ne m'aimiez pas. Même si vous m'aimez je voudrais que vous fassiez comme d'habitude avec les femmes. Il la regarde comme épouvanté, il demande : c'est ce que vous voulez ? Elle dit oui. (48-49)⁵⁶

In fact, she goes so far as to ask him not to love her. When he treats her with the lack of emotion she desires, she begins to enjoy the sexual pleasure by focusing on the act of sex.

Elle le touche. Elle touche la douceur du sexe, de la peau, elle caresse la couleur dorée, l'inconnue nouveauté. D'abord il y a la douleur. Et puis après cette douleur est prise à son tour, elle est changée, lentement arrachée,

⁵⁵ Duras, *L'amant* 26. "en toute conscience je peux être charmante même si je suis hantée par la mise à mort de mon frère." (« And so I can be deliberately charming even though I'm haunted by the killing of my brother. » Duras, *The Lover*. Bray trans. 18.)

⁵⁶ Duras, *The Lover*. Bray trans. 37. "She says, I'd rather you didn't love me. But if you do, I'd like you to do as you do with women. He looks at her in horror, asks, Is that what you want? She says it is."

emportée vers la jouissance. La mer, sans forme, simplement incomparable.
(49-50)⁵⁷

However, one realizes the emotional proximity of her pain, and her need for escape, because during the same scene, after the young girl achieves *jouissance*, she interrupts the narrative about sex and sadly notes that her mother has never known the pleasure she has known. “La mère n’a pas connu la jouissance. (50)”⁵⁸

She then returns to the narrative about sex. The pattern of interrupting the sexual narrative with references to destruction and pain re-appears throughout the novel. For example, after they have spent an afternoon making love, and night has fallen, he asks her if she will remember the place where they go to be alone. It is particularly important to him and he asks her to look at the house and then asks for her response. Her reaction to the house is one of sadness. To her, it is a place of decadence and ruin.

les plantes sont mortes de chaleur. C’est un lieu de détresse, naufragé. Il me demande de lui dire à quoi je pense. Je dis que je pense à ma mère, qu’elle me tuera si elle apprend la vérité. (56)⁵⁹

The reference to the house in ruin symbolizes the inevitable end of their affair. The end of their affair proves to be a significant source of pain for the young girl by the end of the novel. The association with ruin and with her mother emphasizes the painful impact of their relationship on her life. The sexual body is a way for the young girl to escape her pain, but she never avoids it altogether.

⁵⁷ Duras, *The Lover*. Bray trans. 38. “She touches him. Touches the softness of his sex, his skin, caresses his goldenness, the strange novelty At first, pain. And then the pain is possessed in its turn, changed, slowly drawn away, borne toward pleasure, clasped to it...The sea, formless, simply beyond compare.”

⁵⁸ Duras, *The Lover*. Bray trans. 39. “Their mother never knew pleasure.”

⁵⁹ Duras, *The Lover*. Bray trans. 44. “-the plants are dead from the heat-It’s a place of distress, shipwrecked. He asks me to tell him what I’m thinking about. I say I’m thinking about my mother, she’ll kill me if she finds out the truth.”

The expression of pain in this novel is a struggle to preserve the image and the story of the young girl she refers to at the beginning of the novel. She is coming from a position of loss because the story is recounted in hindsight. Assembling the painful experiences that existed in her life at the time of the novel and those that followed is the only way she can achieve the creation of the image. One of the voices is the older, wiser woman who is telling the story after years of painful experiences that she brings to the narrative. She cannot avoid bringing other experiences, such as reflections of the war, to the narrative of the young girl's pain. The fragmentation gives resonance to the narrative because it is layered with years of experience. In this quote, the narrator is recounting the evenings when her lover would invite her family out to dinner and they would repay him with ingratitude. She then recalls the death of the younger of her two brothers.

Les rencontres avec la famille ont commencé avec les grands repas à Cholon. Ces soirées se passent toutes de la même façon. Mes frères dévorent et ne lui adressent jamais la parole. Il paye. Il compte l'argent. Pas de merci, de personne.

Le petit frère est mort en décembre 1942 sous l'occupation japonaise. (69-71)⁶⁰

This quote reveals how the fragmented narrative reflects the pain the narrator expresses throughout the novel. The effort to create the image through a subversion of a novelistic convention: a seemingly associative, illogical ordering of temporal events, establishes a forum for the author to eventually use the young girl's body as the site for testimony.

iv. Conclusion:

Personal loss and socio-political oppression are the sources of pain in *L'amant*. Duras reveals these sources of pain by allowing the reader to visualize them in scenes that involve

⁶⁰ Duras, *The Lover*. Bray trans. 50-1, 56. "The meetings with the family began with the big meals in Cholon. These evenings are all the same. My brothers gorge themselves without saying a word to him... He pays. He counts out the money. No one says thank you. My younger brother died in December 1942 during the Japanese occupation."

the young girl and her lover. The temporally disrupted narrative and the split voices of the narrator tell stories of the Occupation, illicit love, family violence, death, social and political injustices caused by the colonial presence in Indochina. The narrators' assembly of all of these painful events in the young girl's life is an attempt to re-create the photographic image that no one, the narrator claims, captured. The novel itself is a literary collage of images of these painful events. The language of pain in *L'amant* is expressed in the narrative structure of the novel. The temporal interruptions and disunity of the narrative voices in juxtaposition with the sexualized body serve as the foundation for creating the language of pain.⁶¹ This is most apparent in the moments when the girl meets her lover. During these erotic scenes, it is the girl's corporeal experience that is the focal point. The relationship between the lovers is the principal plotline of the novel. It is the sharp contrast of the intrusion of the painful past, present, and future of the narrative voices during these intimate scenes that put the girl's sexualized body in relief. The habitual interruption of painful images becomes a part of the sexual experience for the girl, and her body bears witness to it.

The language of pain in *L'amant* is found in the mutual relationship between the girl's body and the structure of the novel. Their relationship is mutual because the portrayal of the girl's body and the fragmented nature of the text are interdependent in the successful in expression of pain. The sexualized body gains importance in the language of pain based on

⁶¹ Duras 50. "L'image de la femme aux bas reprisés a traversé la chambre. Elle apparaît comme l'enfant. Ils ne parleront jamais de la mère ensemble, de cette connaissance qu'ils ont et qui les sépare d'elle, de cette connaissance décisive, dernière, celle de l'enfance de la mère. Je ne savais pas que l'on saignait. Il me demande si j'ai eu mal, je dis non, il dit qu'il est heureux. Il essuie le sang, il me lave. Je le regarde faire. Insensiblement il revient, il redevient désirable. » (Duras, *The Lover*. Bray trans. 39. "The image of the woman in darned stockings has crossed the room, and at last she emerges as a child. They'd never talk about the mother among themselves, about the knowledge of her which they both shared and which separated them from her: the final, decisive knowledge that their mother was a child I didn't know you bled. He asks me if it hurt, I say no, he says he's glad. He wipes the blood away, washes me. I watch him. Little by little he comes back, becomes desirable again.")

how it is placed within the structure of the novel. The disordered narrative depends on the young girl's sexualized body for continuity and significance.

Les baisers sur le corps font pleurer. On dirait qu'ils consolent. Dans la famille je ne pleure pas. Ce jour-là dans cette chambre les larmes consolent du passé et de l'avenir aussi. (58)⁶²

This arrangement of the two elements, the fragmented narrative and the young girl's sexualized body, is the source of the expression of pain. In this novel, Duras uses an inclusive language of literary technique (i.e. the unconventional temporal configuration of the novel and the de-centered narrator) and an image of the female body as a way to express pain.

⁶² Duras, *The Lover*. Bray trans. 46. "Kisses on the body bring tears. Almost like a consolation. At home I don't cry. But that day in that room, tears console both for the past and for the future."

II. Madame L. in Marguerite Duras' « La douleur »

i. Summary of the Text :

As in *L'amant*, Duras constructs “La douleur” as an a-temporal narrative, but instead of two narrators, a single voice prevails throughout the text. The relationship between the visual and the female body as an expression of pain in “La douleur” manifests itself in the distinct absence of the narrator’s physical presence. Duras virtually suppresses the narrator’s body throughout the text giving Mme. L’s (the narrator) voice sole reign. Mme. L’s rhetoric is one that by turns reveals profound sorrow because of her numerous losses, and anger and helplessness because she and her fellow countrymen are at the mercy of Nazi oppressors. By rendering her body invisible, the narrator turns the reader’s attention away from herself, and instead presents us with the recurring image of her husband’s imagined decaying body in a ditch. The graphic visual descriptions reveal the narrator’s personal pain, but also shed light on the horrors of the death camps during the war. The imagined dead body intersects the narrator’s voice and her personal and political revelations. The narrator offers the image of her dead husband to the reader as the symbolic representation of her suffering and that of an entire continent. In this text, Mme. L. is mourning the loss of a life she had planned to live. The advent of war had decimated her identity as wife, mother, and sister. The only identity that remains is that of a narrator. In this story, Mme. L is responsible for testifying to her own pain.

As author of her painful experiences, she creates a seemingly chaotic narrative. She constructs the apparent disorder through a repetition of images of her husband’s imagined dead body, and frequent references to her own physical and emotional suffering.

Mon visage se défait, il change. Je me défais, je me dépie, je change. Il n’y a personne dans la chambre où je suis. Je ne sens plus mon cœur. L’horreur

monte lentement dans une inondation, je me noie. Je n'attends plus tellement j'ai peur. C'est fini, c'est fini ? Où es-tu? Comment savoir? (46)⁶³

Although the text does progress in chronological order, it is not always apparent. This is the case because the narrative is interwoven with digressions and interruptions of fragmented thoughts about her personal neurosis and anxiety, creating a vortex of pain. The structure of the text itself mirrors the chaos and disorder the narrator is experiencing as a result of the Nazi Occupation.

Qui est ce Robert L. A-t-il jamais existé ? Qu'est-ce qui fait ce Robert L. ? Qu'est-ce qui fait qu'il soit attendu, lui et pas un autre. Qu'est-ce qu'elle attend en vérité ? Quelle autre attente attend-elle ?(46)⁶⁴

Through this frenetic narrative emerges her narrative voice without a body. This means that in her testimony of pain, Mme. L characterizes her physical appearance as almost non-existent.

D. me dit: "Vous êtes une malade. Regardez-vous, vous ne ressemblez plus à rien. » (30)⁶⁵

Her voice expresses the profound sense of loss of identity because of the overwhelmingly painful events that have occurred during the war years, and destroyed the life she had known. She replaces images of her own body with those of the imagined dead body of Robert L, the body of her brother, and the body of her stillborn child, all lost as a result of the war. Without

⁶³ Marguerite Duras, *The War: A Memoir*. Barbara Bray trans. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986) 37. "My face falls apart, changes. I fall apart, come undone, change. There's no one in the room where I am. I can't feel my heart any more. Horror mounts in a slow flood, I'm drowning. I'm so afraid, I'm not waiting any more. Is it all over? Is it? Where are you? How can I tell?"

⁶⁴ Duras, *The War: A Memoir*. Bray trans. 37. "Who is this Robert L.? Has he ever existed? What is it that makes him Robert L.? Why should he be waited for, he rather than another? What is she really waiting for? What other waiting?"

⁶⁵ Duras, *The War: A Memoir*. Bray trans. 22. "He often tells me, 'You're sick...Look at yourself – you look like nothing on earth.'"

references to her bodily presence and repeated images of the real (her child and brother) and imagined (Robert L.) death of her loved ones, the reader is assailed with images and words of despair. The narrative voice becomes all-powerful in the text because it is the focal point. The narrator has eliminated all possible perspectives except her own when recounting the events of her life during the war.

Despite the omnipresence of the Nazis during the occupation, the narrator manages to suppress their rhetoric by denying them a voice in her narrative during a time when it would seem nearly impossible. “La douleur” testifies to the power of Mme. L’s narrative voice in the face of political oppression and personal tragedy. In the face of extreme political turmoil and personal loss, Mme. L is able to re-construct her identity through the fragmented nature of the text and a single narrative voice freely expressing her pain by the end of the narrative.⁶⁶

ii. Madame L. and the *fossé noir*⁶⁷ :

The war serves as the antagonistic force that impels her – the narrator - to express her own pain, and in the process, she begins re-constructing her identity after enduring events that have occurred in her life as a result of the war. The most salient feature of this text is Mme. L’s raw expression of pain and grief in reaction to losing her husband.

⁶⁶ Kristeva’s reading of *La douleur* suggests that the pain of tragedy in war serves as a transformative experience in the lives of its victims. “[*La douleur*]...reveals one of the essential biographical and historical sources of this pain. It is the human struggle against death in the face of the Nazi extermination and the survivors’ struggle with his cadaverous body to rediscover the vital forces of life” (144). She also claims that the narrator “revives her dead love” for Robert L. through images of death. While I agree that the war had a transformative effect on the narrator’s life, I suggest that the images and references to her husband’s dead body do not revive dead love but rather serve as a kind of memorial to a love that died long before his return. Kristeva does not address the fact that the narrator had a lover throughout the entire text and knew she would divorce her husband should he return alive. Kristeva, Jensen trans. “The Pain of Sorrow in the Modern World: The Works of Marguerite Duras,” 144.

⁶⁷ black ditch

The war has ruptured, and in some cases ended, her most valued relationships. Mme. L refers to three major events throughout the story that have contributed to her profound feeling of loss. A few years prior to Robert L's arrest, she delivered a stillborn baby. It was a difficult delivery and she and the baby required medical attention. She attributes his death to the war because, "les docteurs se déplaçaient rarement la nuit pendant la guerre, ils n'avaient pas assez d'essence" (30-31)⁶⁸ The next was her favorite brother who died from influenza in Japan due to lack of sufficient access to medicine. Robert L's arrest and pending death appears to be the final wartime event that leads her to her broken identity as wife, mother, and sister.

The violent change the war has brought has irrevocably altered her life. This disrupted, purgatorial state has led her to question her own sense of identity.⁶⁹ Her husband, child, and brother have all been taken from her, and the war has left her in a temporary state of suspension. Early in the text she places herself, alongside her husband, in the shallow grave she has imagined for him, symbolically confirming her own wish for death. Imagining the *fossé noir* is a way for Mme. L to displace the pain she experiences because of the losses. The *fossé noir* most often represents a symbolic gravesite for all who have died in her life by the violence of the war. The recurrent images of her husband's decaying body in the *fossé noir* appear from the beginning of the story so the reader cannot help but associate the image of his dead body with the *fossé noir*.

⁶⁸ Duras, *The War : A Memoir*. Bray trans. 23. « doctors didn't usually go out at night during the war, they hadn't enough gas. »

⁶⁹Kaplan examines the possibility of *La douleur* as a piece of testimonial literature due to the impact of the trauma Duras endured during the wait for her husband. She suggests that "La Douleur illustrates how trauma produces a new subjectivity" (48). This is applicable to my argument that the narrator's identity before the war has been destroyed. E. Ann Kaplan, "Memory as Testimony in World War II: Freud, Duras, and Kofman," *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature*. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005).

Dans un fossé, la tête tournée contre terre, les jambes repliées, les bras étendus, il se meurt. Il est mort (14).⁷⁰

Often, Mme. L will refer to the child she lost at birth in close reference to her husband's images in the ditch.

Moi, l'enfant que nous avons eu avec Robert L., il est mort à la naissance – de la guerre lui aussi - Je lutte contre les images du fossé noir. (30-31)⁷¹

She implicates herself in this gruesome imagery of death. The images of the *fossé noir* give Mme. L a temporary refuge from her pain.

J'ai hâte de rentrer, de m'enfermer avec le téléphone, de retrouver le fossé noir. (30)⁷²

This image becomes a place that provides a numbing sort of comfort for Mme. L.

Quand j'ai perdu mon petit frère et mon petit enfant, j'avais perdu aussi la douleur, elle était pour ainsi dire sans objet. (74)⁷³

Marriage has been a significant part of how Mme. L has defined herself. Now that it has been taken from her, she feels lost.

Qui c'est ça, Robert L? Plus de douleur. Je suis sur le point de comprendre qu'il n'y a plus rien de commun entre cet homme et moi. Autant en attendre un autre. Je n'existe plus. Alors du moment que je n'existe plus, pourquoi attendre Robert L ? (46)⁷⁴

⁷⁰ Duras, *The War: A Memoir*. Bray trans. 7. "In a ditch, face down, legs drawn up, arms outstretched, he's dying. Dead.

⁷¹ Duras, *The War: A Memoir*. Bray trans. 23. "The child we had, Robert L. and I, was born dead, he died in the war too..."

⁷² Duras, *The War: A Memoir*. Bray trans. 22. « I can't wait to get back, to shut myself up with the telephone, be back again in the black ditch. »

⁷³ Duras, *The War: A Memoir*. Bray trans. 63. "When I lost my younger brother and my baby I lost pain too. It was without an object so to speak."

⁷⁴ Duras, *The War: A Memoir*. Bray trans. 37. « Robert L., who is he ? No more pain. I'm on the point of realizing there's no longer anything in common between this man and me. I might just as well be waiting for another. I no longer exist. So, if I no longer exist, why wait for Robert L. ? »

When she desires to go home and think about the image of the ditch, the Mme. L uses the verb “m’enfermer.” The sense of this verb is to close oneself off, to shut out. In this instance, Mme. L closes herself off in the images of her husband in the ditch. She is literally and figuratively confining herself to the images of her husband. At this point, the image of his dead body is all that she has left. She displaces her own missing identity in the image of her dead husband.

On s’assied pour manger. Aussitôt l’envie de vomir revient. Le pain est celui qu’il n’a mangé, celui dont le manque l’a fait mourir. Je vais lentement pour gagner du temps, ne pas remuer les choses dans ma tête. Si ne fais pas attention, je ne dormirai pas. Je m’endors près de lui tous les soirs, dans le fossé noir, près de lui mort. (17)⁷⁵

In the beginning of the text, she places herself in the ditch with her husband’s body, symbolizing her own spiritual death. When Robert L returns to his wife, her pain does not cease because she knows she must confront the end of her marriage.

The narrator’s pain manifests itself through repetitive images of her husband’s body in a ditch. Her own body has virtually disappeared, leaving her only a voice to articulate her pain. The identity of Mme. L has virtually merged with that of images of her dead husband. Her painful testimony is all she possesses in order to remember her husband. The narrator’s choice to virtually eliminate all other speech except for her own in this narrative renders her readers her only audience. As Mme.L portrays herself as a non-omniscient narrator, she relinquishes the control that an omniscient presence possesses when guiding her/his readers through a text. The effect of the narrator’s non-omniscient status on the readers is that we are as unaware of future events as Mme. L appears to be.

⁷⁵ Duras, *The War: A Memoir*. Bray trans. 10. « We sit down to eat. But at once I want to throw up again. The bread is bread he hasn’t eaten, the bread for lack of which he died...I go slowly so as to gain time, so as not to stir up the things in my head. If I’m not careful I won’t sleep...I fall asleep beside him every night, in the black ditch, beside him as he lies dead.”

iii. The Return of Robert L.:

Robert L's return and the Liberation signal a bittersweet change in Mme L's life. It is a painful re-awakening of Mme. L's status as a wife. She suffers because she knows the marriage must end, and that life will never return to its previous state. Mme. L literally embodies these changes. In her testimony⁷⁶, her physical presence is strengthening, despite the pain she continues to feel. She no longer suspends her grief by retreating into the images of the *fossé noir*. When she grieves for the death of her marriage and to the profound changes in Robert L, she mourns with tears.⁷⁷ Prior to this time, she claims to have become numb to her pain, hence the retreat to the images of death in the black ditch. But when he returns, the numbed pain disappears and is replaced with an outward expression of it.

Quand j'ai perdu mon petit frère et mon petit enfant, j'avais perdu aussi la douleur, elle était pour ainsi dire sans objet, elle bâtissait sur le passé. Ici l'espoir est entier, la douleur est implantée dans l'espoir. (74)⁷⁸

She claims that hope for a renewed life with Robert L brings pain to the surface. It is painful for her because she knows she must face the end of the marriage. Although her identity seems to be commingled with his, there is a rupture that has occurred. The rupture in

⁷⁶ Agamben writes of bearing witness to the Holocaust in his book, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive* (1999). He defines witnessing as follows, "In Latin there are two words for 'witness.' The first word, *testis*, from which our word 'testimony' derives, etymologically signifies the person who, in a trial or lawsuit between two rival parties, is in the position of a third party (**terstis*). The second word, *superstes*, designates a person who has lived through something, who has experienced an event from beginning to end and can therefore bear witness to it (17)." In this instance, the narrator has lived through the Occupation and the tortuous wait for news of the status of her husband. While she did not endure the torture her husband did in the camp, she nonetheless experienced tremendous pain and her text is testament to that fact. Duras, the narrator, belongs to the latter of Agamben's definitions. Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*. (New York: Zone Books, 1999) 17.

⁷⁷ Duras, *La douleur* 80. "Dès ce nom, Robert L., je pleure. » (« At the name Robert L., I weep." Duras, *The War: A Memoir*, Bray trans. 67.)

⁷⁸ Duras, *The War: A Memoir*. Bray trans. 63. "When I lost my younger brother and my baby I lost pain, too. It was without an object, so to speak: it was built on the past. But now there is hope, and pain is implanted in hope."

her identity as Robert L's wife leads to the beginning of another relationship with their mutual friend, D. The break in the relationship with her husband reveals changes in her identity. The way she stages her body changes, too. Her body begins to gain strength and it actually appears in her descriptions. During his absence, her body is nearly depleted of energy. But upon his return, she repeats the expression, "les forces reviennent. (74)"⁷⁹ She says she is eating and sleeping but not very well. Although she claims to be performing daily functions, she appears to be damaged by the war.

je recommence à manger, je recommence à dormir. Je reprends du poids.
Nous allons vivre. Je m'endors partout. Je me réveille dans l'épouvante. (74)
80

After Robert L's return, Mme. L's narrative voice begins to slowly incorporate her body into the text. Her identity as a narrative voice without a body has changed. The reader sees Mme. L with a weak, but recovering body. The narrative structure is still fragmented. The disrupted nature of the text continues to remind the reader of the pain that still and will always exist in Mme. L.

The possibility of Mme. L's testimony is based on the perceived death of her husband. The language of pain, at this point in the analysis, reveals itself in the shift from Mme. L's corporeal absence to presence. Until Robert L's return, the narrator chooses to diminish her bodily presence in favor of making her voice prominent throughout the text. Upon her husband's return, and his health begins to improve, the narrator's bodily presence begins to emerge. Eventually, as her voice dwindles and her body is pronounced, her story ends.

⁷⁹ strength is returning

⁸⁰ Duras, *The War: The Memoir*. Bray trans. 62. « I start to eat again too, and to sleep. I put on some weight. We're going to live I fall asleep anywhere. And wake in terror. »

iv. Conclusion:

The structure of “La douleur” resembles that of *L’amant* in that there is a disordered narrative structure that mirrors the devastating effects of the pain of war. However, instead of the body coming to represent the site of testimony as it appears in *L’amant*, the narrator’s voice in “La douleur” emerges as the unique expression of pain. She diminishes images of her own body and amplifies the vocal presence in order to make her pain the only recognizable emotion throughout the text.

Je vais me rasseoir sur le divan près du téléphone. C’est la fin de la guerre. Je ne sais pas si j’ai sommeil. Depuis quelque temps déjà je n’éprouve plus le sommeil. Je sais seulement qu’il a eu faim pendant des mois et qu’il n’a pas revu un morceau de pain avant de mourir. (34)⁸¹

While the narrator is able to reconstruct her identity from the ruins of war and silence the voices of her oppressors (the Nazis), she emerges permanently damaged from the experience. Realizing that her marriage to Robert L is over, she signals this end by referring to images of Robert L.’s dead body throughout the text by using the motif of the *fossé noir*.

Dans un fossé, la tête tournée contre terre, les jambes repliées, les bras étendus, il se meurt. Il est mort. À travers les squelettes de Buchenwald, le sien. (14)⁸²

As her body re-appears, weak from depression but beginning to gain strength, her voice conveys sadness due to the inevitable divorce from her husband: “Dès ce nom, Robert L., je

⁸¹ Duras, *The War: The Memoir*. Bray trans. 26. “I go and sit down again on the divan by the telephone. It’s the end of the war. I don’t know if I feel sleepy or not. For some time now I haven’t known what sleep is...All I know is that he was hungry for months and didn’t see another scrap of bread until he died...”

⁸² Duras, *The War: The Memoir*. Bray trans. 7. “In a ditch, face down, legs drawn up, arms outstretched, he’s dying. Dead. Beyond the skeletons of Buchenwald.”

pleure. Je pleure encore. Je pleurerai toute ma vie. » (80)⁸³ The narrator's identity goes through a transformation throughout the text and she expresses it through an interaction between her body and voice.

Mme. L places her body and voice in “La douleur” at the mercy of a seemingly chaotic text that functions to mimic the disorienting effects of pain. The foundation of the language of pain is built on the construction of the text: the repetition of the images of the *fossé noir*, the disrupted temporality, the elliptical and frantic way in which the narrator speaks, the obvious absence of the narrator's physical presence, and the subtle reminders that Mme. L has taken a lover in the absence of her husband. The pain the structure of the novel evinces infuses itself in Mme. L's body and voice. While the body's physical presence is inconsistent, the voice is perpetually present in the face of the structural chaos of the text. The consistency of Mme. L's voice throughout her re-telling of this time in her life suggests that she is the creator of her language of pain. She is the only voice who speaks within the text and chooses to diminish her own body as way to magnify the meaning of her words. The language of pain in “La douleur” resembles that of *L'amant* in that the image of the body (whether it is present or not) and voice work in conjunction with the narrative in order to create a language of pain that seeks to express itself in a way that avoids conventional discursive communication.

⁸³ Duras, *The War: The Memoir*. Bray trans. 67. “At the name Robert L., I weep. I still weep. I shall weep all my life.”

III. Anne-Marie Stretter and *La Mendiante* in Marguerite Duras' *India Song*:

i. Summary of the Screenplay/Film :

India Song is a film/screenplay that defies literary, filmic, and dramatic classification. On the title page, Duras refers to the *India Song* as *texte, théâtre, film*. She assembles devices from each of these artistic genres to create a visual, auditory, and narrative experience. In the textual version, the reader's very sense of how one is to approach reading the text is in question. When one reads *India Song*, the reader must shift between the voices that are recounting the story and the author's descriptions of the scenes within the play. The visual version is equally as challenging to experience. The viewer must contend with reconciling the visual images with the music and voices off-screen.

In *India Song*, Anne-Marie Stretter is the wife of the French ambassador to India during the colonial period in the 1930s. She is the object of the vice-counsel's unrequited love. Anne-Marie appears as an ethereal figure throughout the film, but rarely speaks. We are made aware of the details of her life by four voices that can be heard off-screen. In the end, Anne-Marie commits suicide, presumably due to an unfulfilled life. Another important character in the film is *la mendiante* (the beggar woman). She is a wandering, young Laotian woman who gives birth to a child who eventually dies. What is most striking about her presence is her voice. Off screen, we hear her screams but learn details of her life from the other characters.

ii. Introduction to the Examination of *India Song*:

In both *L'amant* and "La douleur," images of the body are the sites on which the Duras materially manifests her language of pain. In *India Song*, the image of the body and non-verbal, vocal expression work in conjunction to create a language of pain. Duras

achieves this by complex interactions between the voices and bodies of the two leading female protagonists, Anne-Marie and *la mendiante*, who represent both the difference and disparity of the colonial culture. Anne-Marie is the central character. She is a pale, blond woman who hardly speaks, but dominates the visual screen. She is wealthy and lives in luxury. Anne-Marie represents the white colonial presence in India.

La mendiante is set in opposition to Anne-Marie because she is a poor young Laotian woman who is forced to abandon her dying child. Duras characterizes the young Laotian woman through screams and chants, and minimizes her physical presence on-screen.⁸⁴ Screaming as a language for communicating pain is a dominant motif in *India Song*. *La mendiante*, a character who by description is the weakest, least likely to be heard, is the prevailing force throughout the screenplay.

What distinguishes this study of the language of pain from that of Elaine Scarry's is that it asserts that a non-discursive language of pain – screaming - confers power on the afflicted instead of marginalizing them (pain victims). What both women have in common is that they have suffered in pain as a result of the customs of a society that privileges and defers to a Eurocentric, masculine culture. Duras' unique use of sound for *la mendiante* is what allows this character to assume this role. Sound is pervasive throughout the film, and it dominates the visual images and the articulate speech of the characters and disembodied voices. The role of *la mendiante* obliterates, through her cries, discursive language as the preferred method of communication of pain and suffering.

⁸⁴ Duras 1220. "Cris au loin appels dans cette langue inconnue: l'hindoustani. Tout à coup, cris plus précis, plus près, de femme. Rires de la même femme. »

iii. Anne-Marie and *La mendiante*: Situating Vision and Voice in the Language of Pain:

Both women, Anne-Marie and *la mendiante*, have experienced pain, and Duras represents their suffering through their corporeal presences.⁸⁵ *La mendiante* is a poor, young Laotian woman who is at a financial and educational disadvantage because she belongs to the subordinate class in colonized Indochina. The reader/viewer meets her as she has wandered from her native Laos (in what was then called Indochina) to India. We learn little about her identity through a brief recounting of the traumatic events of her young life. *La mendiante*'s story is that of a young woman who is expelled from her mother's house in Laos because her unexpected pregnancy has shamed her family. *La mendiante*'s life has been one of pain.⁸⁶ In the course of her ten years of wandering, she has either sold, forgotten, or lost her children to death. She is relegated to begging for food and drink and lives on the street. As the reader learns, *la mendiante* is a recognizable figure among the whites who are attending Anne-Marie and her husband's party. *La mendiante* is known among her colonial oppressors

⁸⁵ Duras chooses to represent the female body and voice as unsynchronized in the film/screenplay *India Song*. In Duras' estimation, according to Michel Chion, the body and voice in cinema are unnaturally matched when synchronized together. Duras believes that the "grafting" of the voice and body together produces an effect that, while trying to mimic "reality," in fact, is forcibly placing together two phenomena that do not necessarily belong to the same visual representation. "[the] grafting of non-localized voice onto a particular body that is assigned symbolically to the voice... This operation leaves a scar, and the talking film marks the palce of that scar, since by presenting itself as a reconstituted totality, it places all the greater emphasis on the original non-coincidence" (126). Michel Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*. Trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press) 126.

⁸⁶ Delvaux consecrates a chapter of her book to testimony as a literary act of mourning. "Être témoin, n'est-ce pas, dans tous les cas, faire parler les morts, faire parler la mort? » (101). She uses the autobiographical writing of Annie Ernaux who recounts the details of the time surrounding a secret abortion she obtained as a young woman. What Delvaux hopes to achieve is to bring a subject such as abortion out of the shadows of the taboo and silent pain and give a voice to women's expression of grief. "Ces récits refusent la loi tacite qui dicte l'effacement de la mort, l'oubli de la douleur et l'accomplissement de ce travail impossible qu'est le deuil » (101-102). The significance of this part of Delvaux's book is that *la mendiante* is not only grieving the death of Anne-Marie but her own losses as well. As a non-white woman in a colonial culture, her story, her pain is likely to go unheard, but through her screams in this text, she brings her pain as well as that of Anne-Marie's to the forefront. Martine Delvaux, *Histoires de fantômes: Spectralité et témoignage dans les récits de femmes contemporains* (Montréal: Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 2005).

because of her life of wandering from one region to another and for her voice.⁸⁷ At the time set in the screenplay, she is currently living behind a bush outside of Anne-Marie's home.

Anne-Marie is a white woman in colonial India, where she belongs to the educated class and is afforded the opportunities available to the upper class.⁸⁸ Despite the advantages her race and class allow her, she is unable to express her dissatisfaction with her existence through words.

On entend toujours la 14^e Variation de Beethoven sur le thème de Diabelli. À travers la musique, les rumeurs de Calcutta augmentent d'intensité à mesure que monte la lumière. Anne-Marie Stretter a la tête renversée, de côté, sur le bras d'un fauteuil. Elle pourrait paraître endormie si ses yeux n'étaient pas ouverts. Michael Richardson est près d'elle, à moitié allongé sur un fauteuil bas. (1298)

⁸⁷ Duras, *India Song* 1317. « George Crawn.- Elle ne sait pas un mot d'hindoustani. Invité.- Pas un. Si elle vient de Savannakhet elle a dû traverser le Laos, le Cambodge, le Siam, la Birmanie, et commencer à descendre, sans doute par la vallée de l'Irraouaddi » (George Crawn.- She does not know a word of hindi. Guest.- Not a one. If she comes from Savannakhet she must cross Laos, Cambodia, Siam, Birmania, and start down, without a doubt by the Irraouaddi valley) (my translation)

⁸⁸ Duras, *India Song* 1234-1235. In the proceeding quote, I will indicate Duras' stage directions in italics and the dialogue between "voice 1" and "voice 2" in standard print. I have chosen this particular scene in order to give the reader a notion of the juxtaposition between voice and image. In this scene Anne-Marie's prostrate, sleeping body is the focus of the scene. There are her two lovers who are also lying next to her. "*Les trois corps aux yeux fermés dormant. Les voix entrelacées, d'une douceur culminante, vont changer la légende d'Anne-Marie Stretter*

Voix 1 – De Venise. Elle était de Venise

Voix 2 – Oui. La musique, c'était à Venise. Un espoir de la musique.

Voix 1 - temps. – N'a jamais cessé d'en faire?

Voix 2 – Jamais

Voix 1 – très lent. – Anna Maria Guardi

Voix 2 – Oui.

Voix 1 – Le premier mariage, le premier poste?

Voix 2 – Savannakhet, Laos. Mariée à un administrateur colonial français. Elle a dix-huit ans. “

(The three bodies with their eyes closed are sleeping. The intertwined voices build to a culminating tenderness that will change the legend of Anne-Marie Stretter.

Voice 1: From Venice. She was from Venice

Voice 2 – Yes. The musique, it was Venice. A hope that music

Voice 1, time passes – Never ceased doing it?

Voice 2 – Never.

Voice 1 – very slow – Anna-Marie Guardi

Voice 2 – Yes.

Voice 1 – The first marriage, the first job?

Voice 2 – Savannakhet, Laos. Married a French colonial administrator. She is eighteen years old). (my translation)

Duras portrays Anne-Marie, in this scene, as a rather lifeless-looking visual image without a voice. In the movie still, it looks as if she has surrendered her body to the desires of the men who claim to love her. Despite their admiration, she feels dissatisfied with the attention. The viewer's intimate and discursive knowledge of Anne-Marie's identity is at the mercy of a set of off-voices.

In relation to the language of pain, the off-voices and biographical narration from secondary characters have a disempowering effect on both Anne-Marie and *la mendiante*. The third-person narration leaves the responsibility of their stories of pain to others. Anne-Marie never escapes the passivity of a narrator telling her story because the reader/spectator virtually never hears significant dialogue from her. Her visual images persist in supporting what the off-voices and narrators say about her. However, *la mendiante* is able to break from her role as subordinate through her screams. They – the screams – are not part of either Anne-Marie's or her stories and take on an a-temporal place in the screenplay/film. This means that the sounds that *la mendiante* makes seem to have no apparent narrative bearing or place in the principal focus of the screenplay/film, Anne-Marie's life. The screams emerge from the visual and narrative (off-voices) techniques of *India Song* as *la mendiante*'s language of pain.⁸⁹

Anne-Marie has made her final home in India but, like *la mendiante*, she has led a life that has taken her many places.⁹⁰ In this regard, Anne-Marie is a white, privileged wanderer

⁸⁹ In an essay on mourning in the collective works of Georges Perec, Warren Motte acknowledges that the extreme sadness expressed in mourning eludes discursive language, "Perec saw his mother for the final time, one might expect that it would provide information about her death. Perec has never been able to find any such information; and what he puts in its place, escaping language as it does and is suspended as it is, clearly points toward something that remains well beyond language" (62). What is important about Motte's citation in this subchapter is that it acknowledges that profound pain eludes discursive language and in Perec's case, he expresses it through silence. Warren Motte, "The Work of Mourning," *Yale French Studies*. 105 (2004) 56-71.

who is culturally displaced. From the beginning of the screenplay, the voices characterize Anne-Marie as a woman who has a vague background, but has lived in various parts of the world. She is from Venice, but left at eighteen when she married a colonial administrator who takes her to Indochina, specifically to Savannakhet; the birthplace of *la mendiante*. She then marries her current husband, the French ambassador to India. In the interim, she has spent time in Europe. We discover this because of the relationship with one of her lovers, Michael Richardson. She meets him at a dance and runs away to India to be with him. Party guests portray Anne-Marie as a woman who is generous and who maintains a spotless social façade.

The cultural displacement that both women experience is a result of traditional Eurocentric, masculine customs. *La mendiante* is the victim of colonial oppression. She has been rendered invisible by the colonizers.⁹¹ Anne-Marie has been displaced through conventional marriage, and dissatisfying romantic infidelities. Anne-Marie appears to submit to her role as the attractive, yet silent, wife of the French colonial ambassador. *La*

⁹¹Though the subject of Mohanty's essay questions the position of scholarship and feminism in relation to colonial studies, she explicitly suggests that the study of the female colonial subject has been rendered all but invisible by a hegemonic culture. "I argue that assumptions of privilege and ethnocentric universality on the one hand, and inadequate self-consciousness about the effect of Western scholarship on the 'third world' in the context of a world system dominated by the West on the other, characterize a sizeable extent of Western feminist work on women in the third world. An analysis of 'sexual difference' in the form of a cross-culturally singular, monolithic notion of patriarchy or male dominance leads to the construction of a similarly reductive and homogenous notion of what I call the 'Third World Difference' – that stable, ahistorical something that apparently oppresses most if not all the women in these countries" (260). In colonial discourses such as Mohanty's *la mendiante* would qualify as one of what Mohanty terms' a woman "in the third world." *La mendiante* has been oppressed by the white colonial presence in both Indochina (she is from Laos) and in India, where she is at the time of the screenplay/film. Both countries at the time the screenplay/film was set, were under colonial rule. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses," *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, eds. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin (London: Routledge, 1995) 259-263.

mendiantes challenges her status as the invisible colonial subject, not by attempting to be seen, but by amplifying the sound of her voice.⁹²

iv. Rituals of Mourning:

From the beginning, the screenplay/film assumes a funereal tone as the reader/viewer is almost immediately aware of the death of Anne-Marie. Later, the reader comes to learn of *la mendiante's* tragic life. *La mendiante's* screams throughout the film are an extended gesture of mourning,⁹³ a lament, for the pain and suffering both women have endured. An ethnographic study of Greek mourning rituals conducted by Nadia Seremetakis, a Greek anthropologist, entitled, *The Last Word: Women, Death, and Divination in Inner Mani* (1991)⁹⁴, explains the role of women in mourning rituals. The pertinence of the culture of mourning to this project is that, according to Seremetakis' study, the role of the female

⁹² In this subchapter I suggest that *la mendiante's* pervasive cry is her only way to make herself heard in a world where she, under most circumstances, would go unheard and unseen. While she is still unseen throughout most of the screenplay/film, she is most often recognized by the colonizers by her voice. As a reader/spectator, we, along with the colonizers in the text, can not avoid her voice. Spivak asks the question "can the subaltern speak?" I do not propose an answer, however, the compelling nature of *la mendiante's* strong and unique vocal presence evokes Spivak's question. I use Spivak's essay as a kind of sounding board for my argument that *la mendiante* is challenging her role as the invisible colonial subject by making herself heard. Spivak ends the essay, "in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow" (28). Perhaps *la mendiante* cannot speak but she is working toward moving out of the shadow by making herself heard. I Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" *The post-colonial studies reader*. eds. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. (London: Routledge, 1995) 24-28.

⁹³ I will refer to Sigmund Freud's essay, "Mourning and Melancholia" in order to define what I mean by mourning in this subchapter. Freud distinguishes between the two phenomena in this way, "the patient is aware of the loss which has given rise to his melancholia, but only in the sense that he knows *whom* he has lost but not *what* he has lost in him. This would suggest that melancholia is in some way related to an object-loss which is withdrawn from consciousness, in contradistinction to mourning, in which there is nothing about the loss that is unconscious" (245). In *India Song*, *la mendiante* is not only mourning the death of her white counterpart, Anne-Marie, but to all that they both have lost or in some cases never had. *La mendiante's* cries are an outward expression of extreme sadness and nothing is hidden or "unconscious" about her pain. Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia." *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*. 14 (1914-1916): 243-258.

⁹⁴ Nadia Seremetakis, *The Last Word: Women, Death, and Divination in Inner Mani*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991). Seremetakis conducted ethnographic research on the mourning and divination rituals of Greek women of the Inner Mani. The Inner Mani is a region located on one of Greece's southern peninsulas.

mourner is one of autonomy and power within a hegemonic culture. The mourner's crying and screaming are salient characteristics of the ritual. Moreover, the role of the mourner is one of autonomy and gendered cultural resistance.⁹⁵ *La mendiante* garners power as a mourner within a culture that does not privilege her status as a non-white woman.

Seremetakis' findings on women and Greek mourning rituals are particularly relevant to this subchapter because they support my claim that *la mendiante's* screams represent the dominant feminine force in a society that is ruled by men through mourning rituals. The primary point of Seremetakis' study is that the act of mourning is a phenomenon that belongs uniquely to the feminine space and as a result asserts socio-political resistance in a culture where masculine customs are dominant. The women's role as witnesses to the death rites of its inhabitants is not only part of the regional tradition but is an integral and necessary part of the legal system. My interest in Seremetakis' study is in the way in which the women communicate the expression of suffering as official witnesses to death rites. I will explore the

94 Clifton Spargo examines melancholia as the "asocial extreme in which the mourner might become alienated from those structures of symbolism or idealism that nourish identity and maintain the social order...(11)." In his book, he argues that contemporary critics of mourning in elegiac literature do not account for the myriad of ethical concerns a melancholic mourner, one who is fixated on the absence of the dead person (other, as Spargo calls it) brings to the meaning of mourning. In my project, I do not believe that *la mendiante* is necessarily fixated uniquely on the memory of Anne-Marie, but is mourning her own losses, as well, but I agree that mourning/melancholia does place her "outside" cultural norms. Spargo goes on to make two points that are particularly pertinent to my argument that *la mendiante's* screams, an expression of mourning, challenge the social constructs that have silenced her. First, in his definition of mourning, he states that "...mourning traces the gaps, aporias, or chasms of language (11)." *La mendiante's* screams qualify as a exploring the "gap" in discursive language. Although Spargo does not explicitly define "language" as verbal, his study on mourning is centered on elegiac literary texts. The mourner's grief, in this case, *la mendiante's* screams, serve to ethically evaluate the social structures that devalue the meaning of the one who is being mourned. "Even when it seems to emanate from the esoteric subjective grievances of a specific mourner, melancholia interrogates the symbolic social structures that contain and reduce the meaning of the other who is being lamented. Thus it is on the threshold of symbolic meaning that every melancholic mourner stands again as for the first time when she refuses the consolations of language (11)." Here Spargo is suggesting that the ethics of the role of the melancholic mourner, who in elegiac literature, according to the author, is often overlooked. Spargo argues that the melancholia the mourner experiences is important in examining the ethics of the social constructs surrounding why one mourning is melancholic. While I do not claim that *India Song* is an elegy, it possesses elegiac qualities. I borrow from Spargo his notion that the mourner challenges social constructs surrounding the memory of the dead, in this case, the social constructs being the colonial period in Indochina as well as the pain caused by societal norms of the day. *La mendiante*, through her screams of mourning, force the reader/spectator to evaluate social and personal inequities. R. Clifton Spargo, *The Ethics of Mourning: Grief and Responsibility in Elegiac Literature* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004).

ways in which the non-verbal elements of suffering in mourning rituals resonate and manifest themselves in *la mendiante's* role in *India Song* as valid and privileged expressions of language and pain.

For Seremetakis, to witness as mourner in the instance of Maniat mourning rituals is “to suffer for,” or “to come out as representative for.”(102) This suggests that the act of witnessing requires a performance (outward expression) of feeling and a recorder of the experience. Seremetakis also employs the term “antiphony” throughout the study as a way of characterizing Maniat rituals of lamentation. A vital part of the extended definition of antiphony⁹⁶ is that it is “a prescribed technique for witnessing...and for the cultural construction of truth”(100).⁹⁷ An important expression of witnessing in this culture is that discursive language plays little to no role in the expression of pain.⁹⁸ Women mediate the violence of pain vocally. Seremetakis explains that bearing witness to death in this culture is expressed through screaming.

Seremetakis' study focuses on the privileged position of mourning rituals women who are usually marginalized within a hegemonic culture. Seremetakis' findings provide acultural background to the study of the language of pain, and give significance to *la mendiante's* identity and situate the auditory technique of screaming as a position of cultural resistance and power.

⁹⁶ Seremetakis 100. Seremetakis defines antiphony as follows: it is “(1) the social structure of mortuary ritual; (2) the internal acoustic organization of lament singing; (3) a prescribed technique for witnessing, for the production/reception of jural discourse, and for the cultural construction of truth; (4) a political strategy that organizes the relation of women to male-dominated institutions.”

⁹⁷ According to Seremetakis, the term has its origins in antiquity and is still used in present day. It has been recognized by those who studied the tradition as an aesthetic device and a literary genre. Although Seremetakis does not necessarily see the term as such, the idea of mourning as performance, whether it is literary or vocal/corporeal, is the principle idea.

⁹⁸ Seremetakis 102. “truth lies in the dramatization and ritualization of gestures and discourse that establish the authority of the witness as a guarantor”

v. Conclusion:

The narrators in this screenplay/film assume a very unconventional role. There are off-screen voices who tell the stories of both Anne-Marie and *la mendiante*. The absence of the bodies that correspond to the off-screen voices causes the viewer/reader to question the veracity of the stories of off-voices. Their voices seem to appear from nowhere and we have no way to identify what role they play in the text. We must rely on who and what we do see. There is a visual narrator in the film version, and there is also some conventional dialogue throughout the screenplay/film. The narrative presence is fragmented in that it rejects conventional story-telling techniques. The disorder that narration creates permits the voice of *la mendiante* to emerge. Neither woman belonged to one particular place. Anne-Marie's silenced pain eventually consumed her. *La mendiante* mourned her pain and that of Anne-Marie's through screaming. The sound, image, and text come together to serve as a forum for *la mendiante* to be empowered as the central figure in the expression of pain.

India Song, *L'amant* and *La douleur* resemble each other in that they all possess an unconventional narrative structure. *L'amant*'s fragmented temporality and de-centered narrative voices are in juxtaposition to the sexualized female body that emerges from the narrative as the bearer of the language of pain. *La douleur* creates a similar effect in that temporality and narrative voice challenge narrative conventions. Images of dead bodies set in opposition to an elliptical, frantic voice create a language of pain. In *India Song*, there, too, is a challenge to the visual and literary sensibilities because the reader/spectator is at once challenged by the off-voices, visual images, and painful screams that emanate throughout the text. The language of pain is in the scream of *la mendiante* because it emerges outside the visual and literary narrative as a motif that both empowers the subordinate and conveys a

sense of pain. The language of pain in the three texts is created out of a negotiation between experimentation with discursive formations, images of bodies, a multiplicity of narrative voices, temporal fragmentation and sound (only in *India Song*). What these texts share is that none possesses an omniscient narrator. There are two in *L'amant*. In *La douleur*, there is only one person recounting the days of her husband's absence, but she does so in the literary present. This gives the impression that she does not seem to know what action or event follows the next. If she were omniscient, and could predict the outcome of her husband's fate, she could not write the text. *India Song* has multiple voices telling Anne-Marie's story. The seeming instability of the narrative voices coupled with a disrupted timeline create a narrative space for an alternative to discursive language to emerge. The alternative language of pain in *L'amant* is the young girl's sexualized body. It appears as the site for the language of pain to be inscribed. In *La douleur*, the images of the absent body and the testimonial voice create the language of pain. In *India Song*, it is the screams of *la mendiante*.

IV. Suzanne in Marguerite Duras' *Un barrage contre le Pacifique*

i. A Summary of the Novel:

Un barrage contre le Pacifique is a semi-autobiographical account of a colonial family's struggle to exist in rural Cambodia in the 1920s. The language of pain in this novel, like the other texts in this study, is created from the relationship between the visual image and the female body with the intention of revealing both personal and socio-cultural injustices. What distinguishes *Le barrage* from the other texts in this study is that it is the first to employ an omniscient narrator. The significance of the omniscient narrator is that, unlike the three previously studied texts, Suzanne, the female protagonist, is silent and subject to the narrator's personal and political agenda. The narrator chooses to appropriate Suzanne's body as the object of humiliation as the young woman is often the focus of the gaze of those who wish to either possess her sexually or remind her that she is poor.

The narrator establishes the young woman's family's bleak economic situation by explaining that the family attempted to erect a seawall around a piece of swampland in order to stave off the Pacific Ocean's inevitable, encroaching high tide. The widowed mother purchased this land in hopes of providing for her family by cultivating it and living off of the crops. However, she was unaware that one had to bribe the French colonial government officials in order to obtain fertile land. The mother never accepts the family's impossible situation and becomes consumed with her anger. She inflicts her frustration and madness on her adolescent children. The financial difficulties lead the mother to compromise her young daughter, Suzanne. She is of marriageable age and the mother hopes to marry her off for the benefit of the family. On a trip to the nearest town, Ram, the family encounters Monsieur Jo, the lackluster son of a wealthy Chinese businessman. He evinces an interest in the adolescent

Suzanne and begins to court her, with the mother's encouragement. He lavishes her and the family with gifts in hopes of winning her over. When he finally discovers his efforts are in vain, he gives Suzanne a diamond and ceases his pursuit. The mother takes the diamond and brings her family back to Ram in order to try and sell the piece of jewelry. During the extended stay, Suzanne wanders through the upper-class, white neighborhood, and discovers that she does not belong among the wealthy colonizers and is stricken with feelings of shame, and self-deprecation. As Suzanne's body is the object of the gaze within a status-conscious, colonial context, the narrator inscribes her/his critique of the injustices of the French colonial government on the young woman's body.

At this time the brother, Joseph, has left Suzanne and her mother in Ram in order to pursue a married, older woman. When he finally returns, he brings Suzanne and the mother back to their home in rural Cambodia. The family returns from this trip in precisely the same financial situation they were in before the attempted sale of the diamond. Upon their return, their life as a family begins to unravel. The mother begins her descent into madness because she is consumed with anger, due to the repeated financial and personal losses she has suffered over the years. Joseph plans on leaving the family for his lover, and Suzanne is left to her own devices. In the end, the mother dies of madness, Joseph leaves, and Suzanne seems to develop a level of autonomy and independence after her family life changes.

iii. Suzanne's Encounters:

ii a. Introduction to the encounters:

The narrator in *Un barrage contre le Pacifique*⁹⁹ bears witness¹⁰⁰ to Suzanne's pain. In the two scenes I will examine in this section, Suzanne suffers in silence and is dependent on the narrator to express her pain. Suzanne's body becomes the site on which the narrator situates her pain and Suzanne's discursive language is almost uniquely spoken by the narrator's voice. The notion of using Suzanne's body as the site for bearing witness to painful experiences induced by socio-economic disparities suggests a relationship between this young woman's body and the colonial culture in which she lives. I assert that the socio-cultural/economic disparities created by the colonial presence in Indochina are embedded in Suzanne's personal, and social interactions, and her body is the focal point of these encounters.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ From this point on I will refer to this novel as *Le barrage*.

¹⁰⁰ I use the expression "bearing witness" here and at various points in this chapter as a way to talk about expressing pain. I am keeping with Veena Das' notion that the women about whom she writes bear witness to their painful experiences through complex interactions between voice and body. However, because the narrator expresses the subject's pain in this novel, I feel it necessary to include an alternative theory of testimony and witnessing to my examination of this novel. Dori Laub, M.D., a psychoanalyst, co-authored with Shoshana Felman, a trauma theory scholar, a book on testimony and witnessing. In the book, Laub explains the dynamics and importance of witness and listener: "The victim's narrative – the very process of bearing witness to massive trauma – does indeed begin with someone who testifies to an absence, to an event that has not yet come into existence, in spite of the overwhelming and compelling nature of the reality of its occurrence. While historical evidence to the event which constitutes the trauma may be abundant...the trauma...has not been truly witnessed yet...The listener...is party to the creation of knowledge *de novo*...The listener...through his simultaneous awareness of the continuous flow of those inner hazards both in the trauma witness and in himself, that he can become the enabler of the testimony – the one who triggers its initiation, as well as the guardian of its process and of its momentum" (57-58). Laub writes about Holocaust survivors bearing witness to their experience. I am in no way comparing the pain Suzanne experiences in this text to that of a Holocaust survivor, but I seek to draw parallels between the relationship between the witness and listener to that of the narrator and subject. In this novel, Suzanne rarely speaks and the narrator serves as both the "listener" and the bearer of Suzanne's painful testimony in this novel. Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, M.D. *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*. (New York: Routledge, 1992) 57-58.

¹⁰¹ In this Foucauldian-Deleuzian reading of the novel, Antle argues that the humiliating gazes the young, white colonizers impose on Suzanne has a normalizing, self-monitoring effect that she transposes on her body. « Cette instance marque précisément le passage de Suzanne de la micro-structure du pouvoir imposée par la mère à l'organisation hiérarchique de la ville...le dispositif de contrôle assure une visibilité constante sur

The narrator employs the testimonial language of Suzanne's pain in two ways. First, she - the narrator - reveals it through verbal language. For example, when Suzanne is visiting the *haut quartier*¹⁰² for the first time and realizes she is an obvious outcast in the new environment because of her lack of material wealth, the narrator discursively describes her pain: "C'était venu insensiblement, depuis qu'elle s'était engagée dans l'avenue...une impardonnable réalité: elle était ridicule et cela se voyait." (186)¹⁰³ The narrator relies on discursive language as a way to facilitate the expression¹⁰⁴ of Suzanne's pain. One becomes aware of the magnitude and depth of Suzanne's suffering as the narrator inscribes the discursive language in her body. For example, in the same scene in the *haut quartier*, the

territoire...cette visite régulière impose une hiérarchie qui surveille »(87). I concur with Antle in that the inequities of colonialism are inscribed in Suzanne's body. However in this study I examine Suzanne's body and the role of the narrator as the site for the expression of pain. Martine Antle, "Panoptisme et bureaucratie coloniale dans *Un barrage contre le Pacifique*." *L'Esprit Créateur* 34 :1(1994) 83-91.

¹⁰² A loose translation for *haut quartier* is "uptown." In the novel, it is the wealthy, white neighborhood where Suzanne and her family visit.

¹⁰³ Marguerite Duras, *The Sea Wall*. Faber and Faber trans. (London: Faber and Faber, 1986) 150. "Insensibly a feeling had come over her from the very moment she had entered the avenue...it was an unpardonable reality: she was ridiculous and everyone saw it."

¹⁰⁴ The notion of discursive language serving as a translation of deeply embedded emotional pain, comes from Veena Das' essay, "The Act of Witnessing: Violence, Knowledge, and Subjectivity" (2000). In the example I have chosen, Das discusses her research in Punjabi families who were affected either directly or indirectly by the events of the Partition of 1947. She began her research by studying how the Partition effected kinship relations by attending family functions such as weddings, funerals, and listening to people speak in their native languages, Hindi and Punjabi, about such subjects as family betrayals, and reconciliations that occurred around the time of the Partition. Das claims that discussions about the Partition were in no way concealed in conversation. However, she remarked that when they discussed this event, the discursive language they spoke never seemed to adequately express the pain that the Partition had caused. Das explains that there seemed to be a subtext or a meaning that was deeper than what discursive language was able to express. "Yet the personal violence endured or the betrayals of which I was to be made aware slowly seemed to be always on the edges of conversation. There was a delicate aesthetic of what could be proclaimed as betrayal and what could only be molded into a silence. The memories of the Partition were not in the nature of something...repressed...In one way these memories were very much on the surface. Yet there was a foreign tinge to it, as if the Punjabi or Hindi in which it was spoken was some kind of translation from some other unknown language" (209). The relevant factor of this citation are that Das indicates that the events of the Partition seem to have weaved themselves in to family relationships and that the families who suffered seem not to be able to adequately express their pain. They must use discursive language as a kind of translator to express pain. This is pertinent to my examination of the role of narrator/witness as translator because s/he relies on discursive language to recount Suzanne's pain as well as the inequities of governmental practices in colonial Indochina. The narrator/witness uses discursive descriptions of Suzanne's body in order to communicate both the visceral component to pain and to the articulate one.

narrator focuses the reader's gaze on to Suzanne's body as she – the narrator – continues to describe her pain, “À cause de ces bras de plomb, ces ordures, à cause de ce coeur, une bête indécente, de ces jambes incapables.” (187)¹⁰⁵ The narrator literally embodies Suzanne's pain because she inscribes painful words on Suzanne's body.

I have chosen two scenes that will reveal how inscribing the socio-cultural/economic differences in Suzanne's body comes to shape her feminine subjectivity. The first scene I examine is when her wealthy suitor, Monsieur Jo, promises her a phonograph in return for a glimpse of her naked body. Suzanne's body is the source of humiliation and sexual disempowerment because Monsieur Jo treats her body as if it were a commodity for trade. He asks to see her naked body in return for a phonograph. This scene reveals how the narrator comes to identify herself as she is entering womanhood because it is her first sexual experience. I follow this analysis with an examination of Suzanne's experience in the upscale, white neighborhood where she is assailed with feelings of shame, and inadequacy because of her poverty. In this scene, I explore how the narrator presents Suzanne as she internalizes these painful feelings as the narrator inscribes the pain in her body. In the same scene, the narrator reveals how Suzanne transfers these feelings on to white, western European culture.

ii b. Monsieur Jo and the phonograph:

Although the body is the primary site on which the narrator inscribes Suzanne's shame, she draws on descriptions of the economic status and familial relations of both Suzanne's, and Monsieur Jo's families. This part of the narrator's testimony serves to

¹⁰⁵ Duras, *The Sea Wall*. Faber and Faber trans. 151. “These heavy and awful arms, this heart, fluttering like an indecent caged beast, these legs that were too weak to bear her along.”

illustrate and emphasize the adverse influence of wealth and power on the formation of Suzanne's feminine identity.

The colonial presence in Indochina at the time of *Le barrage* privileged a culture of economic power.¹⁰⁶ Unfortunately, Suzanne and her family did not benefit as other colonial French families had from this enterprise. Suzanne and her family were impoverished because of corrupt governmental practices. Colonial government officials sold Suzanne's mother infertile land in rural Cambodia. She was unaware that one had to bribe the colonial city planners in order to obtain a viable parcel of land. The mother had spent her life's savings on the land and made many attempts to cultivate it. As a result of her ignorance of the dishonesty of the French government, the family's means of earning money were limited and they always struggled to exist. As a consequence, familial relations and friendships were motivated by financial need.

La mère proclamait : Il n'y a que la richesse pour faire le bonheur. Il n'y a que des imbéciles qu'elle ne fasse pas le bonheur (45).¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ Nicola Cooper, *France in Indochina: Colonial Encounters*. (Oxford: Berg, 2001). The information in this footnote is derived from this book. France's official occupation of this region (Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos) spanned less than a century. French rule began around the early 1860s and ended violently in 1945. The primary reasons for France's eventual interest in possessing Indochina were to revive a decadent empire and to keep up with the British Empire in the nineteenth century. In order to re-invent their national identity, the French envisioned and promoted this colonial undertaking as a "humanitarian" project. Earlier the nineteenth century, there had been battles between the landed government and the European missionaries in Vietnam. The French government "officially" entered in to the disputes, they claimed, as "peace-keepers." They began their political, social, and cultural stronghold under this guise. Because of the region's natural resources, Vietnam had also been attractive to explorers who were also involved in these civil disputes. After France had established colonial rule in Indochina, they had to legitimize their conquest. This led to the invention of the name "Indo-Chine." Prior to France's presence in the region, they were seen as separate countries. France created a "nation" that eliminated the identity of the native cultures. Because of its natural resources, Vietnam had also been attractive to the French. The colonial French government indoctrinated the indigenous and the colonial French with ideas of the superiority of French culture and intelligence. The result of this enterprise of colonial domination was that the French eclipsed indigenous cultures and languages in the name of humanitarian peace-keeping, national pride, and economic gain.

¹⁰⁷ Duras, *The Sea Wall*. Faber and Faber trans. 35. "Money's the only thing necessary for happiness," said Ma loudly. "It's only imbeciles that can't be happy with money."

Since Suzanne's family's monetary situation is bleak, and there are few work opportunities, marriage is an economic goal. Since Suzanne is an attractive, young, unmarried woman, she is a financial asset to her mother.¹⁰⁸

Quand il but une gorgée de pernod ils virent à son doigt un magnifique diamant, que la mère se mit à regarder en silence, interdite. Il regardait Suzanne. La mère vit qu'il la regardait. La mère à son tour regarda sa fille. 'Pourquoi tu fais une tête d'enterrement ?' dit la mère. Tu ne peux pas avoir une fois l'air aimable ?' Suzanne sourit au planteur du Nord. (42)

Emotional attachment in marriage is, at best, a secondary consideration. The mother is encouraged in her desire to marry her daughter to a wealthy man when the family meets Monsieur Jo, the son of a wealthy Chinese businessman, at a café on a trip to the nearest town. Monsieur Jo evinces an interest in Suzanne early in the novel, and with the mother's encouragement, he begins to court the young woman.

After several visits to the family's home to see Suzanne, Monsieur Jo asks her if he may watch her in the shower, promising that he would only look. The moment when Monsieur Jo offers Suzanne the phonograph in return for a view of her naked body is a pivotal experience in the formation of Suzanne's sexual identity. As a sexually inexperienced teenager, Suzanne is reticent, but intrigued by revealing her naked body to her suitor. Initially, the narrator tells the reader that Suzanne understands this experience as her initial foray into womanhood. She is about to be appreciated as a sexual being in a man's world. The narrator explains that she sees this experience as a rite of passage.

Elle, elle était là aussi, bonne à être vue, il n'y avait que la porte à ouvrir. Et aucun homme au monde n'avait encore vu celle qui se tenait la derrière cette porte. Ce n'était pas fait pour être caché mais au contraire pour être vu et faire son chemin

¹⁰⁸ Duras, *The Sea Wall*. Faber and Faber trans. 33. "When he lifted his glass of Pernod, they could see a magnificent diamond on one of his fingers. Ma gazed in silence, open-mouthed...he was looking at Suzanne. Ma noticed the direction of his gaze and she, too, looked at her daughter... 'Why do you look as if you were at a funeral?' said Ma. 'Can't you look pleasant for once?' Suzanne smiled at the planter from the North."

par le monde, le monde auquel appartenait quand même celui-
là, ce M. Jo. (73)¹⁰⁹

However, the scenario changes when Monsieur Jo offers her an electric phonograph in exchange for a glimpse of her naked body. He mistakes her hesitance for a lack of interest. Suzanne then understands his gesture as exploitative, as the narrator describes. The experience of revealing her body to a man was no longer about an awareness of possession of feminine sexual power, but rather about the transformation the female body into an object for trade.

Mais lorsqu'elle fût sur le point d'ouvrir la porte de la cabine obscure pour que pénétre le regard de M. Jo et que la lumière se fasse enfin sur le mystère, que M. Jo parla du phonographe. C'est ainsi qu'au moment où elle allait ouvrir et se donner à voir au monde, le monde la prostitua. (73)¹¹⁰

When the narrator says, "le monde la prostitua," s/he is signaling an abrupt and permanent change in the way Suzanne sees herself as a young woman. The narrator is suggesting that Suzanne's body is a site for exploitation and shame, not just on the personal level with Monsieur Jo, but also on a larger, socio-cultural scale by using the word "le monde" instead of the pronoun "il" (he). This painful experience sets the tone for subsequent experiences young Suzanne has in the novel. The pain attached to this interaction with Monsieur Jo indicates that her youthful nakedness has marked her as shameful and exploitable to the world. The notion that Suzanne's body is now just an inanimate object is a de-humanizing, humiliating experience. It is disempowering for Suzanne. The omniscient narrator in this

¹⁰⁹ Duras, *The Sea Wall*. Faber and Faber trans. 57. "And there she was, worth seeing. There was only that door to open. And no man in the world had yet seen this body of hers that was hidden by the door. It was not made to be hidden but, on the contrary, to be seen and to make its way in the world, that world to which belonged, after all, this Monsieur Jo."

¹¹⁰ Duras, *The Sea Wall*. Faber and Faber trans. 57. "So then, it was just when she was going to open the door to let the world see her that the world prostituted her."

novel permits the reader to understand Suzanne, as well as the others, only through her perspective. Suzanne is all but silent throughout the novel. The narrator's oppressive presence suggests that Suzanne's sexualized body is not a site for pleasure and discovery but one of prostitution.

ii c. Suzanne in the *haut quartier*:

A short time after the encounter in the shower, Suzanne and her family have traveled to the nearest town, Ram, where they try to sell the flawed diamond that Monsieur Jo has given Suzanne. One afternoon during their prolonged stay, Suzanne decides to go to the movies in the *haut quartier*. On the trip to the *haut quartier*, the narrator reveals that Suzanne has absorbed these feelings of degradation she experienced in her encounter with Monsieur Jo, and has now turned them violently inward. Not once does the narrator testify to what the wealthy inhabitants of the *haut quartier* have said about Suzanne. The narrator explains how it is Suzanne who has convinced herself that the people she encounters find her appearance ridiculous.

Plus on la remarquait, plus elle se persuadait qu'elle était scandaleuse, un objet de laideur et de bêtise intégrales. (186)¹¹¹

Once Suzanne discovers that she does not belong, the narrator expresses Suzanne's pain by turning the seemingly public humiliation onto her body. She soon discovers that poverty renders her an object of humiliation and causes immense personal shame. As a result, the narrator reveals that Suzanne metaphorically cripples and de-humanizes her youthful body.

¹¹¹ Duras, *The Sea Wall*. Faber and Faber trans. 150. "The more they looked at her the more she was convinced that she was something scandalous, an object of complete ugliness and stupidity."

Suzanne ends her walk through the *haut quartier* by going into a darkened movie theater. Suzanne finds herself there just as the film is about to begin. She expresses her relief by weeping in the comforting anonymity of the obscured theater.

Le piano commença à jouer. La lumière s'éteignit. Suzanne se sentit désormais invisible, invincible et se mit à pleurer de bonheur. C'était l'oasis, la salle noire de l'après-midi...la grande nuit égalitaire. (188)¹¹²

The narrator describes in great detail what Suzanne is watching on the screen. In the paragraph that precedes the film description, the narrator suggests that the experience of going to the cinema is one that makes everyone equal to each other, that there are no cultural disparities that cause the pain and humiliation Suzanne has just experienced in her walk through the neighborhood.

La nuit choisie, ouverte à tous, offerte à tous, plus généreuse, plus dispensatrice de bienfaits que toutes les institutions de charité et que toutes les églises, la nuit où se consolent toutes les hontes, où vont se perdre tous les désespoirs, et où se lave toute la jeunesse de l'affreuse crasse d'adolescence. (188)¹¹³

However, the “egalitarian” nature of the cinema that the narrator describes is tinged with irony. The film is a romantic period piece that is either a U.S.-American or Western European production. There are two levels of irony happening in the narrator’s description of Suzanne’s experience there. First, the narrator’s rendering of the film is that the romantic content and beautiful people in the movie are presumably what young girls like Suzanne aspire to in their adolescent lives. It is ironic because Suzanne, who has come into the theater looking for solace from the humiliation of her experience in the upper-class, white, European

¹¹² Duras, *The Sea Wall*. Faber and Faber trans. 151. “The piano began to play. The lights went out. From then on Suzanne felt invisible, invincible, and she began to cry in sheer relief. It was an oasis, this dark vast room in the afternoon...the great equalitarian night of the cinema.”

¹¹³ Duras, *The Sea Wall*. Faber and Faber trans. 152. “It was the chosen night, open to all, offered to all, more generous and charitable than all the charitable institutions, than all the churches, it was a night in which to console yourself for all your shames, in which to lose all your despair, in which to wash youth clean of all the frightful filth of adolescence.”

neighborhood is lulled into idealizing the Western European culture that has caused her pain. One realizes the full impact of the irony after Suzanne leaves the movie house. She leaves the theater and walks back into the neighborhood where she felt oppressed and humiliated, and the narrator says that Suzanne is “calm and reassured.”

La nuit était venue pendant la séance et c'était comme si ç'avait été la nuit de la salle qui continuait, la nuit amoureuse du film. Elle se sentait calme et rassurée. (190)¹¹⁴

What makes Suzanne's reaction to watching the film particularly ironic is the narrator's depiction of the film. She -the narrator- begins the characterization of the film as an idealized, romantic period piece where the handsome nobleman and the beautiful lady presumably fall in love and live happily ever after. However, as the description unravels, the narration turns violent and grotesque. Instead of tenderly kissing each other, as is expected in this kind of movie, the beautiful, idealized couple turns into mauling cannibals who violently devour each other.

Leurs corps s'enlacent. Leurs bouches s'approchent, avec la lenteur du cauchemar. Une fois qu'elles sont proches à se toucher, on les mutile de leurs corps. Alors dans leurs têtes décapités, on voit ce qu'on ne saurait voir, leurs lèvres les unes en face des autres s'entrouvrir, s'entrouvrir, encore, leurs mâchoires se défaire comme dans la mort et dans un relâchement brusque et fatal des têtes leurs lèvres se joindre comme des poulpes, s'écraser, essayer dans un délire d'affamés de manger de se faire disparaître jusqu'à l'absorption réciproque et totale. (189)¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ Duras, *The Sea Wall*. Faber and Faber trans. 153. “Night had come during the show and it was as if it were the night in the theatre which went on, the amorous night of the moving-picture. She felt calm and reassured.”

¹¹⁵ Duras, *The Sea Wall*. Faber and Faber trans. 152. “Their bodies entwined, their lips approach with nightmare slowness. And when their two pairs of lips are close together, their bodies become cut off, and you see their decapitated heads, what would be impossible to see in real life, you see their lips facing, half open, open still more, and their jaws falling apart as if in death and then suddenly...in a brusque and fatal release, their lips join and suck like octopuses in a crushing kiss, as if trying with the delirious hunger of starvation to devour, to absorb each other and bring about a total and reciprocal disappearance and absorption.”

The narrator points to the underlying violence and hypocrisy of the Western European/U.S.-American culture that is represented in this film. In this instance, the narrator is mocking the culture that is intended to be idealized in the minds of its Western viewers. This perspective of the film underscores the narrator's critique of the colonial government, that sanctions and promotes these films. It is particularly ironic because, it is the same culture that causes Suzanne profound pain, and yet she is still mesmerized by its superficial content. Her sexual identity as a young woman is being shaped by instilling in her these cultural and economic disparities.

The goal of the narrator is to critique the oppressive and destructive acts of the colonial government in Indochina. One of the ways the narrator is able to unmask the inequities of the colonial government is to use Suzanne's shame and humiliation she feels about her body in order to achieve this goal. The language of pain in *Le barrage* manifests itself through the narration of Suzanne's body, thoughts, and movements.

iii. Conclusion:

The language of pain in this novel is found in the relationship between the narrative voice and Suzanne. The narrator imposes her/his critique of the colonial government on Suzanne's body by making a site for humiliation and shame and silencing her voice. The narrator silences Suzanne's voice and symbolically disfigures her body in order to vilify the colonial government. Suzanne is subject not only to the colonial culture of Indochina but to the voice of the narrator. The narrator uses Suzanne's story and her body in order to expose the injustices and prejudices that already exist in the young girl's world. She- the narrator – reveals that Suzanne's identity as a young woman has been marred by her – Suzanne's – cultural and social displacement. The conventional narrative structure, in this novel, mirrors

the oppressive nature of the colonial government the narrator is critiquing. The language of pain has evolved into a language of oppression. It is particularly evident in the scene when Suzanne is in the *haut quartier*. She first feels shame, then she is lulled into a false sense of reality when she emerges from the movie.

The narrator skillfully mocks and mimics the role of the colonial oppressors in order to expose their injustices. For example, the nature of the narrative is “omniscient.” This suggests that the narrator “knows all,” mocking the oppressive presence of the colonial government. One might question, if the narrator knows all, why does she not portray Suzanne in a more empowered situation? I suggest that the narrator does not wish to do so because making Suzanne vocal would diminish her determination to expose and critique the corruption and destructiveness of the colonial government in Indochina.

In the scene in the movie house, the narrator reveals how U.S./Western European culture is really one that is detrimental and superficial, particularly in the culture of Indochina in the 1920s. It is moments like this in the novel when the reader understands that the narrator may have other intentions than suppressing Suzanne’s voice just for the sake of doing so. This balance between mockery and mimicry permits the reader to understand that the narrator is winking at us (the readers) and the colonial government when she poses as a narrator who “knows all.”

V. Jacques Hold in Marguerite Duras' *Le rapt de Lol V. Stein* :

i. Summary of the Novel :

Le rapt de Lol V. Stein is a novel whose narrator, Jacques Hold, tells the story of an affair with his married lover, Lol Stein. As in *Le barrage*, *Le rapt de Lol V. Stein* is narrator is omniscient. The language of pain in this novel, as in the previously studied texts, manifests itself in the relationship between the female body and visibility. Throughout the novel, the reader is privy only to Hold's perspective of the developing romance and of Lol herself. Hold is able to create his own testimony of their relationship by suppressing her pain. Hold succeeds in hiding Lol's pain by characterizing a woman who is devoid of qualities that render her a healthy, emotionally sentient human being. First, Hold begins the novel by describing Lol's character. He establishes her from adolescence as an attractive, intelligent girl who was emotionally vacant.¹¹⁶ Hold also recalls a comment her best friend from childhood, Tatiana Karl, made regarding Lol's lack of emotion as a young girl. She recalls, "jamais, elle n'avait paru souffrir ou être peinée, jamais on ne lui avait vu une larme de jeune fille" (12).¹¹⁷ Hold characterizes Lol as void of emotion, and physically, she is pale and almost corpse-like. He goes so far as to describe her as "cette dormeuse debout" (33).¹¹⁸ This comment suggests that Lol exists in Hold's world as the living dead, that she appears to be alive but in reality she lacks qualities that render her human. The empty space that he creates in Lol's character permits him to create his own narrative about their story.

¹¹⁶ Duras, *Le rapt de Lol V. Stein* 12-13. « Lol V. Stein était jolie, qu'au collège on se la disputait bien qu'elle vous fût dans les mains comme l'eau. Lol était drôle, moqueuse impénitente et très fine bien qu'une part d'elle-même eût été toujours en allée loin de vous et de l'instant. » (Lol V. Stein was pretty, and sought after although she slipped through your fingers like water. Lol was funny, quick-witted, and refined although she always gave the impression of evading you, and the present moment.) (my translation)

¹¹⁷ "She never seemed to suffer or be troubled, she never shed a young girl's tear." (my translation)

¹¹⁸ an upright sleeping woman

In her adult life, Hold attributes her vacuous nature to a painful event; her fiancé, Michael Richardson, leaves her at a local dance in Town Beach for an older woman, Anne-Marie Stretter.¹¹⁹ She presumably never recovers from the public humiliation and loss of love. Throughout the novel, Hold incorporates Lol's past, painful experience of losing her fiancé as a part of their own romantic story. In Hold's mind, this is the only way he is able to have access to a relationship with the emotionally robotic Lol. Hold stages encounters with Lol and Hold's other lover and Lol's childhood friend, Tatiana Karl, by describing them with a sexual, voyeuristic gaze. Hold possesses Lol through the gaze. He ends the story with Hold and Lol on a pilgrimage to Town Beach, the site of Lol's past pain. For Hold it is a way to seal his love for Lol.

ii. Jacques Hold's Role as Witness:

The responsibility of bearing witness in *Le ravisement de Lol V. Stein* rests with its narrator, Jacques Hold. Recent theories, as presented by Dori Laub, a scholar of testimony, suggest that in order for a testimony to exist, there must be a witness; the one who has lived through the event and the listener, the one who often transmits the testimony of s/he who has suffered.¹²⁰ Laub warns of the damage that can be done by a listener who is not empathetic. "The absence of an empathetic listener...an other who can hear the anguish of one's memories and thus affirm and recognize their realness, annihilates the story (68)." Since Hold is the narrator, he bears the responsibility of the listener and must transmit the experience in his narrative and as a "bad listener" he destroys the essence of the Lol's testimony. Hold "annihilates" Lol's story because he has used her pain in order to create his

¹¹⁹ Michael Richardson and Anne-Marie Stretter appear in Duras' screenplay and film, *India Song*, as the same characters in *Le ravisement de Lol V. Stein*.

¹²⁰ Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, M.D. *Testimony : Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

own testimony. He achieves status as a witness to Lol's pain, or rather her absence of pain, through acts of voyeurism and openly admitting to inventing aspects of their relationship. At various points in the novel, Hold will begin part of his narrative by saying, "j'invente." He then proceeds to tell of encounters that involve Lol. The characters involved in these scenes rarely speak their own lines. We learn about the encounters only through Hold's narration. Also, Hold never precisely indicates when the "inventing" ends.

What distinguishes Hold from the narrative presence in *Le barrage* is that Hold is not only the sole narrative voice, but also he does not allow others to speak, and frequently guesses at what they are thinking. The reader only hears from him, and the other characters rarely speak.

Hold does not initially reveal his identity. The reader is unsure of who is telling Lol's story. He appears to know her intimately, supplying the reader with insights into Lol's mind and descriptions of her body. One has the impression that s/he is an omniscient narrator, but the reader soon discovers that he has a name, Jacques Hold. As the story progresses, the reader learns that Hold has a vested interest in the title character.

At this point, the narration takes on a different perspective. The narrator has a role beyond that of a witness; he claims to be Lol's lover. The reader has no other point of reference than Hold's point of view. For example, during a dinner party Lol is hosting, Hold begins speculating about what Lol's husband feels about his wife. While Hold is only speculating, John Bedford, Lol's husband, never speaks.¹²¹ The reader only knows what Hold thinks Lol's husband knows.

¹²¹ Duras, *Le ravissement de Lol V. Stein* 143-144. « Je ne crois pas qu'il la connaisse autrement que par le oui-dire de sa folie ancienne, il doit croire avoir une femme pleine de charmes inattendus » (I don't think that he knows his wife other than by stories of her past insanity, he must think his wife is full of expected charms) (my translation).

Hold's role as a witness to his relationship with Lol reveals an egocentric narrator. Hold permits the reader to know Lol only through his narration. While the content of the novel centers on Lol's life and affair with Hold, it is his voice that permeates the novel while Lol's voice and physical presence are all but eclipsed. Lol's hauntingly diminished physical and emotional presence creates a narrative space that allows Hold to invent a fiction at the expense of his lover's painful experiences. In order to testify to their romance, Hold makes Lol an empty shell of a human being. According to him, she has no memory and no emotional response. « Elle ne dispose d'aucun souvenir même imaginaire, elle n'a aucune idée sur cet inconnu » (47-48).¹²² Lol's lack of memory and emotions leaves an enormous space for Hold to invent a love story. Hold appropriates Lol's painful experience in Town Beach in order to enhance his narrative of their romance. Lol's past pain becomes infused with Hold's present narrative of their affair, and the only way he can "know" Lol is through love. « Je connais Lol V. Stein de la seule façon que je puisse, d'amour. » (46)¹²³ This love comes from an acknowledgement of her suffering.

The notion of acquiring intimate knowledge of someone through their pain and suffering is one that Veena Das has examined. In her essay, "Violence, Knowledge, and Subjectivity," Das speaks of how one bears witness to a painful experience through what she terms, "poisonous knowledge." which means that one's past, painful experience exists in present consciousness as a past event, but is identified by the way it affects and mediates the present. Das' studies of families that were affected by the Partition of 1947 studied the ways in which families interacted with each other before and after the event, and how evidence of

¹²² Duras, *Le ravissement de Lol V. Stein* 47-48. (She has no memory, not even an imaginary one, she has no idea, even about the unknown.) (my translation)

¹²³ Duras, *Le ravissement de Lol V. Stein* 46. (I know Lol V. Stein in the only way I can, through love.) (my translation)

a painful experience manifests itself in those interactions. The study suggests the effects of the trauma reveal qualities and dimensions of the people that may have gone unexposed or unknown before the trauma occurred.

I am not asking how the events of the Partition were present to consciousness as past event but how they came to be incorporated in to the temporal structure of relationships...the traumatic memory ...cannot be understood...as a direct possession of the past. It is constantly mediated by the manner in which the world is being presently inhabited. Even when it appears that some women were relatively lucky because they escaped direct bodily harm, the bodily memory of being- with –others makes that past encircle the present as atmosphere. This is what I mean by the importance of finding ways to speak about the experience of witnessing: that if one’s way of being-with-others was brutally injured, then the past enters the present not necessarily as traumatic memory but as poisonous knowledge. (221)¹²⁴

In *Le ravissement de Lol V. Stein*, Lol’s “being-with-others,” the traumatic end to her engagement, created a highly painful experience that Hold appropriates and uses in “mediating,” suppressing her voice and creating his own fiction, their relationship. Although this is a loose interpretation of Das’ concept, it is important to articulate because Hold’s narrative would not exist if it were not for Lol’s past pain. We only know Lol through him and how he interprets their relationship.

The role of Hold as a solipsistic narrator who feeds on Lol’s past pain in order to create his narrative of their romance is but one interpretation of this subject. Trista Selous, also analyzes Hold in the role of narrator in her book *The Other Woman*, but takes a different critical perspective. Instead of exploring the notion that Hold keeps Lol in silence, she studies the relationship between Hold and Lol as a discourse of desire. Selous begins her examination of the novel by suggesting that Lol is unknowable.

Lol is constructed as the focal point of the text because the questions the text asks are: who is Lol? and what does she want? These questions, as is clear from the beginning, are answerable. (110)

¹²⁴ Das, *Violence and Subjectivity* 221.

While I agree that Lol's character remains elusive in the text, I challenge Selous' notion that it is Lol herself who keeps Hold and the reader at a distance by studying this novel as a discourse of pain. From the vantage point of desire, Selous characterizes Hold's role as narrator as a helpless guide through his ill-fated romance with the unattainable Lol.

In the case of *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein*, the text is not a third person narration. Jacques Hold, the first person narrator, apparently 'invents' much of their story, infers motives for behaviour on the part of the other figures, and interprets their actions. However, his account of Lol is largely in terms of what he can see, even if what he sees is not what one might expect to be put in to the category of the visible.(132)

any peculiarities of style can be put down to momentary wanderings on the part of Jacques Hold's desire Lol whose desire is entirely bound up in the night of the ball at T. Beach is forever fixed, beyond the grasp of Jacques Hold, or of anyone else. (183)

Selous appears to place the responsibility of Lol's silence on Lol herself, with Hold as just a very observant, love-struck narrator. But when one examines this novel as a discourse of pain, Hold is anything but an innocent bystander. The personal knowledge through love that Hold claims to have for Lol only adds to his solipsistic vision of this narrative. His perspective of knowledge through love suggests a myopic view of Lol. In the novel, Hold repeatedly demonstrates his myopia through the act of gazing. Hold possesses Lol and the story of their affair through his gaze. He "holds" her image and movements through visually oriented descriptions. He controls Lol's every move, even imagines what she is seeing. Hold testifies to the relationship with Lol by framing her movement and presumed thoughts around visual descriptions. He monitors Lol by watching her, and inventing what she may be thinking and feeling. He suppresses her pain and replaces it with his narrative of their story. The only moment in the novel when the reader "hears" Lol is at the dance when her fiancé abandons her. She screams in pain, then collapses unconscious.

Lol cria pour la première fois. Lol avait crié sans discontinuer des choses sensées. Quand elle ne les vit plus [Michael Richardson and Anne-Marie Stretter], elle tomba par terre, évanouie. (22)¹²⁵

This moment comes at the beginning of the novel and the reader never hears from Lol again.

The dance where she loses her fiancé is the event that Hold claims to be the source of her pain. Hold allows the reader to see that Lol does have the capacity to think and openly express feelings through both screams and discursive language, however, in the moments following her outburst, he permanently silences her. Hold gains power as narrator through her pain. In this novel, the expression of the language of pain is a source of power that rests uniquely in the hands of the narrator. As in *Le barrage*, the narrator uses discursive novelistic conventions (i.e. omniscient narration and linear temporality) in order to empower himself as narrator. The omniscient narration permits Hold to monitor the dissemination of information about Lol. The linear timeline allows the narrator to control the order of the events and construct the story in a way that suits him.

iii. Gazing and Inventing:

Hold achieves this sense of power as the novel's narrator through a combined effort of invention and a stultifying, voyeuristic gaze.¹²⁶ In this instance, Hold's invention is

¹²⁵ Duras, *The Ravishing of Lol Stein*, Seaver trans. 12. Lol cried out for the first time... Lol had gone on screaming all sorts of things that made perfect sense... When she could no longer see them, she slumped to the floor, unconscious.

¹²⁶ Edson views Hold's role as voyeur as a way for Duras to challenge the notion that the way to knowledge and truth is through visual objectification. "By creating a male character whose basis for knowledge depends on vision and objectification of a female character and whose resulting knowledge remains so glaringly inadequate, Duras calls in to question the objectivist epistemological models on which Western culture has relied" (18). While I agree with Edson's claim that Duras is obliging her readers to examine alternative methods of understanding knowledge and truth other than through a visual culture, she does not address the destructive effects of effacing Lol as subject. Laurie Edson, *Reading Relationally : Postmodern Perspectives on Literature and Art*. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000)18.

equivalent to possession. As previously stated, Hold tells his reader that he is inventing his story of Lol, so there is no question that he is the author of his own romance. What contributes to the insidiousness of Hold's invention is his gaze on Lol. The gaze physically locates him in close proximity to her. If he were merely fantasizing about an imaginary woman, one could call him a narrator. In this case, though, Hold exceeds the bounds of creative, wishful thinking and crosses into the world of voyeurism. The act of seeing, the gaze, is not only how Hold bears witness to his self-proclaimed intimacy with Lol, but also the physical closeness that he must have to observe her make him her oppressor. Because of his gaze, Lol never has the chance to transcend her status as an object in Hold's megalomaniacal perspective. He attempts to suggest that Lol does, indeed, care for him because in his rendering of their story, he and Lol both participate in the performance of the gaze, thus lamely intimating that she might actually return his affection.

In the first scene I discuss, the reader has not yet officially met Hold. He is narrating in the third person as he is explaining how Lol is following "a man" (i.e. Hold) across town to a hotel where he will meet his lover. As Lol nears the Forest Hotel, the site of the tryst, she spots Tatiana Karl. Hold describes the scene in voyeuristic detail as Lol is watching while Tatiana and her lover interact in the window of the hotel.

Tatiana Karl, à son tour, nue dans sa chevelure noire, traverse la scène de lumière. C'est peut-être dans le rectangle de vision de Lol qu'elle s'arrête. Elle se tourne vers le fond où l'homme doit être. La fenêtre est petite et Lol ne doit voir des amants que le buste coupe à la hauteur du ventre. À cette distance, quand ils parlent, elle n'entend pas. Elle ne voit que le mouvement d'une partie du corps. (64)¹²⁷

¹²⁷ Duras, *Le ravissement de Lol V. Stein*, Seaver trans. 64. naked in her black hair, crosses the stage of light, slowly. It is perhaps in Lol's rectangle of vision that she pauses. She turns back to the room where the man presumably is. The window is small, and no doubt Lol can see only the upper part of the lovers' bodies, from the waist up... From this distance she cannot hear them when they talk. All she can see is their facial expressions-coinciding with the movements of part of their bodies" This translation is from; Marguerite Duras, *The Ravishing of Lol Stein*. trans. Richard Seaver. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986) 55.

Hold and Tatiana become the performers as Lol is watching this scene. However, one must not forget that it is Hold who is manipulating the scene. He imbues the scene with his own sense of sexuality. Lol is an object of lascivious pleasure in Hold's "eyes." Lol is feeling the rye beneath her loins, and is rolling around erotically in the field watching them make love. Nowhere in this scene does he ever mention how Lol feels or what she might have said.

To heighten his power and erotic pleasure, he alludes to Lol's damaged past as a part of this scene in front of the hotel window. He likens the seat she takes in front of the hotel window to the one she took while watching her fiancé leave with his lover.¹²⁸

Une place est à prendre, qu'elle n'a pas réussi à avoir à T. Beach, il y a dix ans. Où ? Elle ne vaut pas cette place d'opéra de T. Beach. Laquelle ? Il faudra bien se contenter de celle-ci pour arriver enfin à frayer un passage, à avancer un peu plus vers cette rive lointaine.(60-61)

Hold derives pleasure from inserting this piece of her past in to the narrative because this was an event that victimized Lol. This increases Hold's sense of heroism in that he will save her from her past pain. Although Hold claims that what she is watching while she is in front of the hotel window cannot be compared to the one in Town Beach where she experienced the loss. He can only possess her through gazing and inventing her. The implied violence of negating someone's existence for your own sexual gratification is where the pain exists in this novel.

¹²⁸ Duras, *The Ravishing of Lol Stein*. trans. Seaver, 52. "There is a choice seat waiting to be taken, a seat which she failed to have ten years before in Town Beach. But where? It can't be compared to that opera seat in Town Beach. But what seat then? She will have to be content with this one so that, at last, she can make her way, move a step or two toward that distant bank"

iv. Conclusion:

Like Suzanne in *Le barrage*, Lol shares the burden of silence. Her lone scream becomes Hold's excuse for keeping her silent. He suggests that her broken heart has erased her memory and feelings. However, in this novel as opposed to *Le barrage*, Lol's tacit character does not serve as a foil in order to exploit the injustices of colonial oppression. The narrator suppresses her voice and takes center stage as protagonist and narrator. Lol is merely a vehicle for his own desire for power and control. For example, when Hold signals to the reader that he is inventing their story, Hold himself becomes the central figure in his own tale, making Lol the object of his narrative. As Hold invents their story, he objectifies her and assumes the role of protagonist in his own stories about them.

J'invente: À cette distance il ne peut même pas entendre son pas sur le trottoir. Lorsqu'il s'arrête sur la place à laquelle aboutit le boulevard, elle enlève son manteau. Il s'arrête près d'un arrêt de cars. Il alluma une cigarette. Il regarda sa montre. (56-57)¹²⁹

The conventional role of narrator facilitates the insidiousness of Hold's perspective. He constructs his narrative in traditional style and assumes the role of a first-person, omniscient narrator, leaving Lol at his mercy. Here, the language of pain is not one that privileges a reciprocal relationship between unconventional narrative structure and representations of the female body, as it does in *L'amant*, "La douleur", and *India Song*, but instead uses conventional narrative structure to oppress the voice and body of Lol Stein. Hold uses the language of pain to eliminate Lol's human qualities and empower his own voice as her oppressor. Hold establishes his language when he is actively gazing at Lol, creating a voyeuristic world to which he and we, the readers, are privy. At a dinner party, Hold has

¹²⁹ Duras, *The Ravishing of Lol Stein*. trans. Seaver, 46-47. "I invent: At that distance, he can't even hear the sound of her footsteps on the sidewalk. When he stops on the square where the boulevard ends, she takes off her coat. He paused beside a bus stop. He lighted a cigarette. He glanced at his watch."

been describing the event as if it were staged. He strategically places himself in the room where he can monitor Lol's and Tatiana's movements.

Elle [Lol] se rapproche de Tatiana, et caresse légèrement ses cheveux. Lol caresse toujours les cheveux de Tatiana. Je me tiens à l'angle de la maison. Ainsi, je les entends. Tout à coup, voici leurs voix entrelacées, tendres, dans la dilution nocturne, d'une fémininité pareillement rejointe en moi. Je les entends. C'est ce que Lol désirait. Je retourne à la baie d'où je les vois. Je les entends et je les vois. (92)

The voyeuristic world Hold creates in his narrative enables him to fictionalize Lol. The act of creating a fiction about Lol is the role Hold plays in her pain. As the author of his story involving Lol, he strips her of her humanity creating a woman who, according to Hold, feels no pain. The act of writing about watching Lol in this novel is Hold's language of pain. In the previous citation, Hold demonstrates to his readers that Lol is a mere fantasy. The only sign of humanity that we find in the text is when Lol screams. Hold is quick to muffle her cry by making her a fiction, someone who is incapable of feeling or remembering. The language of pain in this novel is the way Hold describes her as an example of a seeming absence of pain.

3. Frida Kahlo: Images of Pain

I. Background:

Kahlo's identity as a woman and artist play an important role in my analysis of her paintings. While these aspects are not the main focus of this study, it is important to know of the artist's life because the painful events of miscarriage, divorce, and physical injury have been the inspiration for most of her work. Biographical information in the analysis of the paintings is to establish the potential sources of her pain.

Although Kahlo came from an upper-middle class family of primarily European origin, she lived in a time of great social and cultural changes in Mexico.¹³⁰

Her father, Guillermo (né Wilhelm) was born in Germany of Hungarian Jewish parents and her mother, Mathilde was of Spanish and Mexican heritage. Kahlo was born in 1907, three years prior to the Mexican revolution, when peasants overthrew Porfirio Diaz's dictatorship. At this moment in history Mexican artists and intellectuals, like Diego Rivera (Kahlo's husband), championed the cause of the peasant worker in Mexico, and there was a renewed interest in Aztec culture that Rivera and his contemporaries represented in their work. Kahlo, who was significantly younger than her husband, was greatly influenced by his political and artistic leanings. She adopted the trend of the day by donning traditional Mexican attire:

¹³⁰ This article discusses the detailed aspects of cinematography in the making of the biographical movie, *Frida* (2002). However, the author interviewed the director of the film, Julie Taymor, and quoted her as saying that she felt inspired to film animated canvases of Kahlo's work in the film because of the paintings' narrative qualities. "Like many people, I found her paintings frighteningly gruesome and revealing, but as a film director, they appealed to me because of their narrative content. I thought that using photography and visual effects to make them unfold before your eyes would be a great addition to what might otherwise be a normal biopic." Rachael K. Bosley, "A Dynamic Portrait," *American Cinematographer* 83.10(October, 2002): 34-38, 40-42, 44-47.

“Frida chose to dress as a Tehuana for the same reason she adopted Mexicanism: to please Diego.” (Herrera, 111) Much of her persona was a construction that had political and cultural implications, but it was nonetheless a cultural trend. “[The Mexican Revolution] educated women like Frida Kahlo and men like Diego Rivera, making them realize all that they had forgotten, all that they wanted to become”(9).¹³¹ The political and cultural implications of the Mexicanist movement was a radical separation from the U.S.- American and French systems that Mexico had adopted to structure their country politically and culturally. However, it was the Mexican intelligentsia, educated, non-indigenous people, like Rivera, who championed this idea. Women of Kahlo’s time and social class wore traditional Mexican dress because “the costume was a primitive mask, releasing them from the strictures of bourgeois mores.” (Herrera 111).

The social realities of Kahlo’s life were a significant source of pain. She married, and repeatedly and unsuccessfully tried to have children, despite her frail physical condition. The conflicting cultural expectations of marriage, motherhood, and career were aspects of Kahlo’s life that often caused her pain. Kahlo’s lifetime spanned the decades when Mexican society was undergoing profound cultural, political, and scientific changes as a result of the 1910 Revolution. For example, there were agrarian and educational reforms, and attempts at a stabilized government. The Revolution allowed women only a limited amount of real social mobility. For the most part, women became teachers if they were not acting in their traditional role as mother. This phenomenon happened because the post-Revolutionary government used women to promote their educational reforms. There was a significant movement to recruit women for teaching in rural areas, where there was a high rate of illiteracy. Working as teachers gave women a newfound social authority, however, this

¹³¹ Carlos Fuentes, introduction, *The Diary of Frida Kahlo* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 1995) 9.

function served to support the male-dominated political and social structure by re-enforcing its values of maternity and motherhood.

The shift to a predominantly female population in the education field lent “it a more maternal image,” according to Jean Franco, a Latin Americanist and author of *Plotting Women: Gender and Representation in Mexico* (1989).¹³² Even after the Revolution, maternity and womanhood were still inextricably linked. Women who were not involved in teaching, most often, were wives and mothers. They, too, were subject to the “natural superiority of the father” in that they were relegated to a life that was dedicated to serving their husbands and educating their male children to be productive members of the new political order (Franco 84).

Despite the limited roles available to most women, there was a relatively small, emerging group of women artists and intellectuals in the Mexican, post-Revolutionary period who were developing a unique style in a community where men’s presence and influence were pervasive. Frida Kahlo was one of these women. Her upper-middle class education and upbringing allowed her the opportunity to participate in socio-cultural movements, and the time and financial means to support her art.

¹³² Jean Franco, *Plotting Women: Gender and Representation in Mexico*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989) 103.

II. Painting and Theatricality:

i. Artaud: Painting, Theatricality, and Cruelty:

My readings of Kahlo's paintings are indebted to Antonin Artaud's theories of the intellectual and artistic influences of non-Western theater on modern European theatrical performances. Representations of non-Western Mexican cultures play a significant role in Kahlo's language of pain. Artaud's commitment to an artistic language that is based on the rejection of Western conventions supports the idea in this study that Kahlo looked to cultures other than the one that had been established by European or U.S.-American standards. The application of Artaud's theories will assist in shaping the vocabulary and critical approach to Kahlo's paintings as pictorial testimonies.

An essential aspect of testimony is the emotional involvement with the reader/viewer through the artistic construction of the text/painting. A study of theatricality will provide the critical support for the qualities of engagement in pictorial testimony.¹³³ In his manifesto on

¹³³ Recent criticism on theatricality and painting has been varied and ambiguous. In many of my findings, I discovered that art critics employ the term theatricality in a way that reflects the subjectivity of its definition. For example, art critics will use the term in a number of contexts and it is very often nuanced. That is to say, they write with the assumption that the reader has foreknowledge about the subject, and insert the term without any clear definition or referent. However, there are some articles that have clearly outlined the term theatricality and its relationship to painting. For example, Keith Christiansen examines Giambattista Tiepolo's technique and style in relation to stage work. He provides a definition of theatricality that reflects Western European notions of theatricality. "Key to any analysis of the potential intersection of painting with theater practice—sceneography, costume, and the means by which expression is conveyed—and the larger theoretical issue of verisimilitude...lay at the center of critical debates..." The importance of this article is to provide an example of notions of conventional theatricality that Artaud was attempting to revise. Christiansen refers to the representation of the theater in Tiepolo's paintings as quite literal. That is to say Tiepolo's frescoes were theatrical because their staging was particularly influenced by the theatricality of costume, illusionism, sceneography, and verisimilitude. The notion of verisimilitude in Artaud's vision of the theater is an illusion and he seeks to destroy Western European theater's practices that sought to stage plays that were believed to "reflect" daily life and conversation. Keith Christiansen, "Tiepolo, Theater, and the Notion of Theatricality," *The Art Bulletin* 81.4 (1999): 665-692. Gevork Hartoonian writes an essay that addresses theatricality in the modern/postmodern world. The article examines the relationship among theatricality, the culture of spectacle, and their relationship to architecture. In order to provide background for his argument, the author renders solid definitions of theatricality in terms of poetry and painting. Both of his explanations are pertinent to a contemporary reading of Kahlo's paintings. Hartoonian first explains theatricality as a "communicative" phenomenon within a specific space; that a goal of theatricality is to understand it as a relational art. "...Theatricality is important...because of the communicative dimension...the way a person relates to

the theater, *The Theater and its Double* (1958), Antonin Artaud manages to connect theatricality and painting by means of emphasizing the importance of the staging of images in a way that is both designed to emotionally shock and move the viewer/spectator.

Artaud details his vision of a theater that destroys all the conventions of Occidental theatrical representations by proposing what he terms, a “theater of cruelty.”¹³⁴ This type of theater does not necessarily suggest physical harm or psychological torture, but rather is an artistic technique that distills theatrical conventions such as acting, lighting, and props, down to their basic physical properties of communication.

This Cruelty is a matter of neither sadism nor bloodshed, at least not in any exclusive way. The word “cruelty” must be taken in a broad sense, and not in the rapacious physical sense that it is customarily given. And I claim, in doing this, the right to break with the usual sense of language...to return to the etymological origins of speech which, in the midst of abstract concepts, always evoke a concrete element...From the point of view of the mind, cruelty signifies rigor, implacable intention and decision, irreversible and absolute determinism.(101)

architecture by experiencing a building’s space...” He extends this aspect of the definition to the theatricality of painting. Modern theatricality is defined by absorption, theatricality, and embodiment. He defines the term “absorption” as being an aspect of theatricality that completely engages the viewer in content of the painting. He attributes Courbet’s “realist” paintings as the first to achieve this notion of absorption, embodiment, and theatricality. The paintings must depict everyday life with a particular focus on the body. “First, a change in the subject matter of painting, that is, a move from historical subjects and court people to simple human beings on various aspects of everyday lifelike peasants...Second an awareness of the sense of embodiment and its effect of perception enticed the body to emerge in the field of painting a unique dialogue between absorption and theatricality.” Gevork Hartoonian, “Gottfried Semper: The Structure of Theatricality,” *Art Criticism* 18.2 (2003): 6-21.

¹³⁴ Postlewait and Davis suggest that Artaud’s theater is an attempt to destroy the falsely mimetic qualities of the European theater and re-create the mass spectacle in hopes of engendering a true theater. Ultimately, though, Postlewait and Davis claim that Artaud’s project fails. “If theatre and life are inseparable, our behavior is a series of roles. And if we are merely playing roles, there is no ‘original’ to the mimesis; we are caught in an inescapable condition of imitating a false ideal...consider Artaud’s apocalyptic struggle to unmask theatre and society...His torments...committed him to an impossible mission to purify the theatre of its falseness, of its theatricality” (10-11). Artaud’s success or failure to create the “total theatre” is not necessarily important to this project, but it is to take the notion that the elements of the theater of cruelty serve to create the language of pain in Kahlo’s paintings. Thomas Postlewait and Tracy C. Davis, “Theatricality: an introduction,” *Theatricality* eds. Tracy C. Davis and Thomas Postlewait (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003)1-39.

To better illustrate the philosophy of cruelty, the author use the example of the theatricality of Balinese theater. Artaud claims that “one senses in the Balinese theater a state prior to language and which can choose its own: music, gestures, movements, words” (62). Artaud’s phrase “ a state prior to language” closely resembles Scarry’s claim that pain reduces its victims to a “state anterior to language”(4) . What is different about Artaud is that in the Balinese theater (and his own vision of a theater of cruelty), physical language (gestures, movements, etc.) is the “true” mode of communicating in the theater instead of privileging discursive communication as the optimal way to express pain, as Scarry does. A spatial language of gestures, movements, sounds, and costuming is the purest and most evocative form of expression.¹³⁵ Artaud perceives the beauty of the Balinese performance in that it does not seek to mimic daily gestures and speech but evokes an other-worldly, non-human theatrical expression. The Balinese express theatricality in the form of a ritualized spectacle of movement, costuming, and sound.

Everything is thus regulated and impersonal; not a movement of the muscles, not the rolling of an eye but seem to belong to a kind of reflective mathematics which controls everything and by means of which everything happens... in these purely muscular facial expressions, applied to the features like masks, everything produces a significance, everything affords the maximum effect. Over and beyond the music’s broad overpowering rhythm there is another extremely fragile, hesitant, and sustained music in which, it seems, the most precious metals are being pulverized...and long processions of insects file through the plants, with a sound like that of light itself, in which the noises of deep solitudes seem to be distilled. An impression of inhumanity, of the divine, of miraculous revelation is further provided by the exquisite beauty of the women’s headdress: made from combinations of multicolored feathers or from pearls...their combination has a quality of revelation. (58-9)

¹³⁵ In Scarry’s estimation, the pre-verbal state of the pain victim is what she terms a “reversion.” This suggests that incomprehensible sounds, and physical gestures of pain are not “language” per se. In the *Body in Pain*, language is understood to be discursive.

The Balinese's rejection of mimetic representation serves as the inspiration for Artaud's theater of cruelty. A particularly salient aspect to Artaud's theater is that he all but suppresses the use of discursive language. He vehemently rejects the notion that discursive language is the most significant feature of the theatrical experience. He states that "dialogue" functions as just one aspect of the theater. For Artaud, conventional theater, expresses itself primarily through a "well-crafted" relationship between dialogue and stage directions, and limits itself to organized chatter. Dialogue by itself fails to elicit the emotions and the poetry that exist in the art of theater. Artaud raises this issue in the form of a question in his book.

How does it happen that in the theater, at least in the theater as we know it in Europe, or better in the Occident, everything specifically theatrical, i.e., everything that cannot be expressed in speech, in words, or, if you prefer, everything that is not contained in the dialogue...is left in the background?
(37)

That which is left in the "background" in European theater are elements such as music, movement, dance, and sound. In Artaud's estimation, in order to achieve the true expression of the poetry of the theater, all of these elements must be assembled in a way that they work in conjunction and have equal importance. His theater is a kind of living canvas on which he paints his spectacles.

This very difficult and complex poetry assumes many aspects: especially the aspects of the means of expression utilizable on the stage, such as music, dance, plastic art, pantomime, mimicry, gesticulation, intonation, architecture, lighting, and scenery. (39)

The crafted assembly of these various components of stage work is called the *mise-en scène*. The effects of the *mise-en- scène* result in the expression of emotions through this stylized theatrical poetry. Artaud defines this assembly of elements as a language.

For me the theater is identical with its possibilities for realization when the most extreme poetic results are derived from them; the possibilities for

realization in the theater relate entirely to the *mise-en-scène* considered as a language in space and in movement. (45)¹³⁶

Artaud's notion of theatricality is not just applicable to the theater, but can be achieved in other media as well. This term can be applied to painting, for example. He begins his chapter on the language and metaphysics of the theater by using the painting, *The Daughters of Lot* (c.1520)¹³⁷ by Lucas van den Leyden (1494-1533) as an example of the power and the autonomy of artistic language.

It seems as if the painter possessed certain secrets of linear harmony, certain means of making that harmony affect the brain directly, like a physical agent. In any case this impression of intelligence prevailing in external nature and especially in the manner of its representation is apparent in several other details of the canvas...I say...that this painting is what the theater should be, if it knew how to speak the language that belongs to it. (36-37)

By using a painting to illustrate his notion of the language of the poetry of theater, Artaud implies that artistic language exists in each genre or art form by its own *mise-en-scène*.

He suggests that it is possible for visual art to possess and express an artistic language that is meant to convey feelings that exceed the bounds of discursive language.

Artaud suggests that a theatrical language – *the mise-en-scène* - serves to express emotions that “are beyond the reach of the spoken language.”(37) An important component

¹³⁶ Art critic Whitney Chadwick writes of the performative aspect of self-portraiture of English women. In this quote, she is defining what she means by “photographic *mise-en-scène*.” She defines it as enabling artists to create a dramatic affect in a photograph through an act of “staging” various objects within a scene. She follows the definition by claiming that painting is amenable to the function of *mise-en-scène* by what she refers to as “legible signs.” She does not clearly define what she means by “signs” as she is speaking primarily of photography. The importance of Chadwick's definition is that first, she lends support to the idea that *mise-en-scène* lends a dramatic quality to visual art. However Chadwick's intention in the essay is to explore the relationship between the static image of the self and evolving notions of female subjectivity whereas in my project, my interest is to explore and define the way in which Kahlo “tells” her stories of pain in her paintings. *Mise-en-scène*, in this project, is used to help define Kahlo's language of pain. “Photographic *mise-en-scène*, the staging of a scene for the camera, encourages the production of intricate fictions, diverse selves, dramas of fantasy and desire. Painting also encourages self-construction through a reiteration of legible signs...”(14). Whitney Chadwick, “How Do I Look?” *Mirror, Mirror: Self-Portraits by Women Artists*, ed. Liz Rideal (New York: Watson-Guipill Publications, 2000) 8-21.

¹³⁷ Lucas van den Leyden, *The Daughters of Lot*, Collection of the Musée du Louvre, Paris.

of theatrical language is of a visual nature, and Artaud claims that composition of this visual assembly creates a kind of “alphabet” within the theatrical language:

The visual language of objects, movements, attitudes, and gestures, but on the condition of their meanings, their physiognomies, their combinations be carried to the point of becoming signs, making a kind of alphabet out of these signs. Once aware of this language in space, language of sounds, cries, lights, onomatopoeia, the theater must organize it into veritable hieroglyphs, with the help of characters and objects, and make use of their symbolism and interconnections in relation to all organs and on all levels. (90)

Each of the “signs” in a theater of cruelty achieves an iconic status and acquires a significance that supercedes discursive communication. These “signs” comprise theatrical elements such as objects, masks, lighting, and gestures. For example, in *Henry Ford Hospital*, the self-image of her bleeding body is surrounded by various objects floating over her bed: an autoclave, a fetus, a lotus flower, a snail, and models of a human pelvis. All of these objects are disproportionately large, and are staged seemingly out of a recognizable context. Among the “signs” Artaud identifies, disproportionately-sized objects as important as verbal signs: “objects of strange proportions will appear with the same sanction as verbal images, will enforce the concrete aspect of every image and every expression” (97). Artaud’s theory suggests that the pictorial objects in Kahlo’s painting form a language that communicates her pain and the theatricality of having suffered a miscarriage with minimal use of discursive language.

The alphabet of hieroglyphs (or signs) to which Artaud refers not only serves to communicate, but also suggests that each of these elements requires deciphering and are open to multiple meanings, not only on artistic but also on socio-cultural levels:

The Theater of Cruelty will choose subjects and themes corresponding to the agitation and unrest characteristic of our epoch. (122)

The images Kahlo uses within the space of the paintings require interpretation on a personal and cultural level. For example, in *My Birth*, Kahlo paints an image of a woman in parturition. The woman is presumably dead, because there is a sheet covering the upper half of her body. Emerging from her vagina is the head of a dead child, whose features resemble those of the artists', lying in a pool of the mother's blood. On a biographical level, Kahlo is referring to the death of her mother that occurred just months after the artist suffered a miscarriage.

The conflation of painful experiences in these images is not merely autobiographical, but also adds a religious dimension to the painting. Above the bed is a picture of the *Mater Dolorosa*, the mother of sorrows, a well-known figure in Christian iconography. Like *Henry Ford Hospital*, *My Birth* is painted in the form of a *retablo*. The presiding saint in this *retablo* is the grieving mother of Christ. The *Mater Dolorosa* sits above the bed covered by pristine white sheets that have been stained with the blood of the dead mother. The identity of the dead mother is very possibly Kahlo's own recently deceased mother. In place of her own mother, Kahlo chooses the *Mater Dolorosa* to grieve for the losses of her mother and child. However, the dead child in this painting is not in the image of the unformed fetus she portrays in *Henry Ford Hospital*. Instead, Kahlo clearly imposes her own likeness on the face of the baby. The relationship between the image of the *Mater Dolorosa* and Kahlo as the dead child suggests that the artist is assuming a Christ-like identity.

The importance of understanding Kahlo is resemblance to the Christ figure is not to suggest that the artist is literally drawing a parallel between her life and that of Christ, but rather to underscore the subject of failed motherhood. By likening herself to Christ, Kahlo revolutionizes the representation of failed motherhood in the sense that she must break with a

hegemonic culture in order to give her pain a language. In this painting, Kahlo must re-inscribe depictions of the pain of the loss of an unborn child through the subversion of conventional representations of Christianity and motherhood because the artist lacked sufficient language within her own culture to express her suffering. This was a topic that was unspeakable and unrepresented in art during her lifetime. By staging this gruesome scene in the form of a *retablo*, a recognizable and respected form, Kahlo brings attention to the taboo experience of failed motherhood.

ii. Conclusion:

In this study, the recognition of Kahlo's pictorial language of pain is predicated on the idea that the infliction of pain causes its victims to lose the ability to articulate their suffering in a coherent, discursive manner. Artaud's vision of a non-discursive theatrical language serves as the critical apparatus to develop and interpret Kahlo's pictorial language. The *mise-en-scène*, the term for Artaud's artistic language, serves as both the vocabulary for identifying the socio-cultural significance of Kahlo's paintings and for imbuing the socio-cultural revelations that each theatrical element brings to the paintings. Artaud's notion of revelation comes from his idea that artists must strip their work of the repressive and overly-intellectualized conventions of Western theater. One of the ways Artaud attempted to revolutionize Western theater was by importing traditions from artistic cultures such as the Balinese. Artaud was compelled to look outside of his own culture to stage a theater of cruelty because European customs, according to Artaud, were restrictive and conservative. In a similar vein, Kahlo was forced to seek expression for her pain by stepping beyond the boundaries of Western artistic motifs and conventions because they lacked sufficient

vocabulary to express her suffering. By reaching outside of her own cultural register, she challenged the conventions of Christian art, resisted the accepted idea that motherhood defined womanhood, and brought Aztec culture to the attention of the Western viewer.

III. Henry Ford Hospital:

i.Cultural and Biographical Background:

The source of Kahlo's pain is unquestionable in *Henry Ford Hospital*. She painted it in 1932 after suffering a miscarriage. This painting not only represents Kahlo's own personal suffering, but also underscores the societal expectations of the post-revolutionary period through cultural images and personal letters that enhance the artist's suffering as a result of a failed pregnancy.

During Kahlo's lifetime, Mexico underwent drastic social and political changes that allowed women of her socio-economic position (a formally educated woman of the upper-middle class) to participate in society. Yet, in the artistic arena, men were the dominant force. Despite great social changes, Mexico was still steeped in a traditional Catholic culture where women's primary responsibility was to their families. According to Franco:

The Revolution with its promise of social transformation encouraged...a discourse that associated virility with social transformation in a way that marginalized women at the very moment when they were supposedly liberated. (102)

Kahlo was exposed to both the public culture of politics and art and the private realm of the home and motherhood. While she participated in the artistic community of Mexico City, she made efforts to adhere to traditional values. Kahlo was still influenced by lingering cultural alliances with more traditional conceptions of womanhood, that linked womanhood to motherhood and to the education of children as productive citizens, and maintaining the preeminence of man. Despite the egalitarian intentions for the two sexes of the post-revolutionary period, achieving motherhood was still the mark of a "true" woman.

Motherhood was still regarded as woman's supreme fulfillment...woman's only reason for existing was motherhood, which united the material and the

spiritual. Women who could not become mothers could only devote themselves to the spiritual. (Franco 103)

While Kahlo purportedly wanted to give Rivera a son, she was aware that her physical condition would inhibit an easy or successful pregnancy. However, her injured body was not the only reason Kahlo was hesitant about bearing children. Through the artist's correspondence, she reveals feelings of ambivalence about having a child. I suggest that Kahlo's conflicted feelings about the state of her health and her unstable marriage contributed to the pain she reveals in her paintings. Kahlo's biographer, Hayden Herrera, asserts that Kahlo desired to be a mother and never truly reconciled the reality that her physical condition contributed to her inability to bear children. Herrera portrays Kahlo as the motherless mother. However, if one examines Kahlo's letters to her doctor and confidant, Dr. Eloesser, it is evident that the artist was much more ambivalent about having children than Herrera has suggested.

I am two months pregnant; for this reason I saw Dr. Pratt again, he told me that he knew my general condition...Given the state of my health, I thought that it would be better to abort, I told him so, and he gave me a dose of "quinine" and a very strong purge of castor oil. The day after I took this I had a very light hemorrhage almost nothing...In any case I thought I had aborted and I went to see Dr. Pratt again. (138)

Kahlo's lack of emotion in the letter to her doctor-friend reveals her to be less-than-enthusiastic about her pregnancy. As she continues in the letter to Dr. Eloesser, Kahlo conveys extreme doubt regarding maintaining the pregnancy, despite her American doctor's advice to have the child. Her physical condition is her first concern. She says:

Given the state of my health, I thought that it would be better to abort...with this heredity in my blood I do not think that the child could come out very healthy. In the second place I am not strong and the pregnancy will weaken me more. (138)

She also feels that having a child would be a burden on her husband's busy schedule after it is born.

If Diego finishes later it would be best if I waited for the child to be born here, and anyway, afterward there would be terrible difficulties in traveling with a newborn child. Here I have no one in my family who could take care of me during and after the pregnancy, since poor little Diego, no matter how much he wants to take care of me, he cannot, since he has in addition the problem of work and thousands of things. So that I would not count on him for anything. (138)

In this quote she indicates that Rivera's needs and desires strongly contribute to her ambivalence having a child. Later in the letter she plainly states that she does not believe that Diego wants another child (he has four from three different women) and this seems to be the driving force behind her desire to abort the pregnancy.

I do not think that Diego would be very interested in having a child since what preoccupies him most is his work and he is absolutely right. From my point of view, I do not know whether it would be good or not to have a child, since Diego is continually traveling and for no reason would I want to leave him alone... and that I did not need to explain to him (Dr. Pratt, her doctor in Detroit) again the question of the accident, heredity, etc., etc., Given the state of my health. (138)

Upon her American doctor's advice, she decided to have the child. However, she did not follow the doctor's orders for bed rest and a healthy diet. She continued with a physically active life. About three months into the pregnancy she suffered a prolonged and highly painful miscarriage. Despite her letters, which indicate that she was resistant to having this child, she was nonetheless devastated by such a traumatic experience. In the hospital, she insisted on drawing the incident. She asked the doctors if she might see the actual fetus she lost. When they refused, Rivera informed the doctors that Kahlo would greatly appreciate

seeing the fetus, they provided her with one so that she could “draw” the miscarriage. This drawing eventually became the inspiration for her painting, *Henry Ford Hospital*.

ii. Henry Ford Hospital:

David Lomas’ essay, “Body languages: Kahlo and medical imagery,” (1993)¹³⁸ discusses the place in painting of a feminine vocabulary of childbirth, particularly miscarriage. In the portion of the essay to which I refer, he deals uniquely with the paintings *Henry Ford Hospital* and *My Birth*. He addresses the subject of the exclusion of women’s issues, such as miscarriage, in art and explains how Kahlo’s use of medical imagery and motifs challenged Western artistic traditions by including this type of imagery in her artwork.

Kahlo uses medical imagery in a disruptive way as a foreign intrusion that forces one to question the boundaries and exclusions enforced by art. (9)

Lomas argues that subjects like miscarriage have been routinely excluded from the public realm of art, and that there is no language available in order to express the pain associated with this event. According to his analysis, Kahlo resists the set of norms that a male-dominated world has established. He asserts that Kahlo employs, a “hybrid language” as the way to breach the rules of modern, Western art. By hybrid, he means Kahlo fuses medical imagery and art genres to create this new language.

By speaking out, she articulates the previously unspeakable in a hybrid language partly derived from artistic traditions but also drawn from textbooks of anatomy and obstetrics. (11)

¹³⁸ David Lomas, “Body languages: Kahlo and medical imagery,” *The body imaged: The human form and visual culture since the Renaissance*, eds. Kathleen Adler and Marcia Pointon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) 5-21.

Lomas acknowledges Kahlo's ability to actively "speak out" about the unrepresented subject of miscarriage in Western art through her ostensible knowledge of anatomy¹³⁹ and painting. Lomas suggests that Kahlo is speaking from the margins of artistic culture because she has had to assemble a make-shift language from different male-dominated cultural spheres such as medicine, religion, and art. While Lomas' argument is a valid and solid reading of Kahlo's painting, *Henry Ford Hospital*, I suggest that the artist's language of pain is not merely a composite of visual depictions borrowed from various cultural and scientific spheres, but a theatrical one comprised of gestures and objects. Examining Kahlo's images as theatrical depictions of pain permits a reading whose goal is not merely identifying the lack of an established language of failed motherhood. Instead, the application of Artaud's theories on theatricality allows for an interpretation of a language of pain that reveals a palimpsest of cultural meanings and re-thinking embedded in its images.

Kahlo's language of pain manifests itself through the way she stages the objects in size and relation to her ailing body. In the painting, Kahlo's bleeding self-image is in the foreground, as it is traditional in a *retablo* for the sick or wounded person to occupy that same place. The bed upon which she lies indicates that she is in a hospital as there are inscriptions around the frame of the bed that read, "Henry Ford Hospital" and the date of the miscarriage, as if to commemorate the event.¹⁴⁰ The inscription orients the viewer as to where and when the scene of the painting takes place, and simultaneously reveals the unfamiliar, institutional quality of the hospital bed. Surrounding the bed are six floating

¹³⁹ "The iconographic formulae...can be seen from a textbook of obstetrics by Ramsbotham [a 19th century physician] which was published in numerous editions...Kahlo owned a copy of the Ramsbotham text and evidently culled various motifs from it." Lomas 7.

¹⁴⁰ Barthes would call Kahlo's inscription the linguistic message, and it serves to orient the viewer as to what s/he is seeing. He calls this "anchoring." The importance of the anchored message is that there is a clearly denoted meaning associated with it. In *Henry Ford Hospital*, the viewer is aware of the location of the action of the painting, and could further suggest that it is an actual biographical event.

objects representing different aspects of the experience of her miscarriage: a medical model of a side view of a woman's pelvic region, a fetus of a male child, a snail, an autoclave, a lotus flower, and the skeleton of a woman's pelvis. The self-image of Kahlo is holding on to each object by a thin, red ribbon. Each object is disproportionately large and is connected to Kahlo's self-image in close, but tenuous, relation. The physical prominence and arrangement of the six objects call attention to themselves and demand interpretation. The objects are representations of the pain and loneliness of the experience of loss. Despite the diverse interpretations of the images, they are united thematically as objects of pain, as Kahlo stages them in relation to her suffering self-image. The medical model of a pelvis, and the skeletal pelvis are references to the corporeal location of the failure of the pregnancy. The lotus flower is what Rivera gave her at the hospital after the miscarriage. The snail represents the painful slowness of her experience, and the autoclave is a representation of the sanitary aspect of the hospital. Perhaps the most compelling of all of the objects is the aborted fetus that floats directly above her in the air. Ironically, instead of a saint floating above the sick person, as in a conventional *retablo*, Kahlo paints the dead fetus in that place. Kahlo's wounded self-image lies directly underneath the miscarried fetus and is the focal point of the painting.

In a conventional *retablo*, let us recall, the savior-saint is the intended focal point of the painting, not s/he who is suffering. In *Henry Ford Hospital*, Kahlo draws the viewer's initial attention to her pubic region and bloodied white sheets, the site of the miscarriage. The shift in focus from the savior to the victim in *Henry Ford Hospital* suggests an alternate understanding of the *retablo*-like painting. Kahlo is not giving thanks to a saint, but rather is testifying to the viewer in horrific detail the pain of losing an unborn child. Kahlo uses her

naked self-image as the site on which she exposes the unmentionable subject of failed motherhood. In this instance, we are reminded of Bonnet's perspective on women in twentieth century art.¹⁴¹ The author indicates that by the twentieth-century, women artists, particularly Kahlo, inscribe their pain on depictions of their bodies. What Bonnet is addressing here is particularly important to *Henry Ford Hospital* because by placing the focus on the female self-image in miscarriage on a form that traditionally privileges a holy figure, Kahlo gives significance to the act of failed motherhood.¹⁴² As we have previously seen in this subchapter, the ability to bear children was a cultural imperative for women of Kahlo's time. The failure to reproduce was observed as a defect. By testifying to her miscarriage in painting, Kahlo brings the difficulties of the culturally ingrained notion that motherhood defined womanhood to the attention of the viewer. One particular point that Kahlo raises in this painting is the socially unacceptable reaction of ambivalence towards a pregnancy.¹⁴³

¹⁴¹ In her book, Bonnet addresses the subject of maternity in art and specifically cites Kahlo as an example. However, Bonnet chooses paintings -*My Nurse and I* (1937) and *The Love Embrace of the Universe, the Earth (Mexico), Diego, Me and Señor Xolotl* (1949) - that depict motherhood as a process that connects women with earthly and celestial nature as opposed to the alienating effects of its failure. "L'enfant est encore toute petite, mais, à mesure qu'elle boit du lait, le sein fleurit, nouant une relation intime avec la végétation, symbole d'une vie nouvelle, cycle éternel de la nature. Chez Frida Kahlo, la maternité symbolique ouvre les portes d'une cosmogonie nouvelle, associant le soleil et la lune, l'homme et la femme, la vie et la mort» (143-144).

¹⁴² Challenging artistic/cultural norms is something that Artaud suggest when discussing notion of a theater of cruelty when he states, "The Theater of Cruelty will choose subjects and themes corresponding to the agitation and unrest characteristic of our epoch" (122). In this instance, the "unrest" is the gender inequity that exists in the art world.

¹⁴³ Anne Levallois claims that one testifies to a socio-historic perspective unconsciously and that analysis (in this instance the author is referring to psychoanalysis) reveals how it has been internalized. In the case of Frida Kahlo, I suggest that in *Henry Ford Hospital*, she bears witness to her own personal tragedy but makes reference to socio-cultural histories such as women in art, U.S.-American culture, and Western medicine. « Chaque individu témoigne inconsciemment du champ socio-historique dans lequel il s'est construit l'analyse ne peut faire l'économie de la façon dont il l'a intériorisé. » Anne Levallois, "Témoignage et Histoire. Une Approche de la Singularité Contemporaine," *Témoignage et écriture de l'histoire, Décade de Cerisy 21-31 juillet 2001*, eds. Jean-François Chiantaretto and Régine Robin (Paris : Harmattan, 2003) 33-45.

The viewer will notice that Kahlo depicts a single tear on her self-image's face. While one can interpret the tear as a gesture of sorrow, it can also be understood in terms of her guilt over the failed pregnancy. Kahlo references the cultural icon of the guilt of failed motherhood: Mexican folkloric figure, *La llorona*.¹⁴⁴ With the gesture of the tear, she creates the possibility of a reading that would suggest that she, too, is an iconic figure of failed motherhood.¹⁴⁵ Gannit Ankori, a Kahlo scholar and author of *Imaging Her Selves: Frida Kahlo's Poetics of Identity and Fragmentation* (2002),¹⁴⁶ identifies Kahlo's image as *La Llorona*. Ankori briefly recounts the tale of the Mexican folkloric figure.

In Mexican folklore *La Llorona* is a popular archetype of an evil woman...two elements dominate...her tales: she is first and foremost a woman abandoned by her lover; loss of love leads her to the brutal act of killing her own children in a rage of frenzy. Consequently she has become the epitome of grief, childlessness, remorse, and madness. (157)

In this painting, Kahlo evinces elements of this tale in the representation of her own body. The word *llorona* means weeping woman. The most evident indication that suggests a relationship between Kahlo and *La llorona* is the single tear running down her face. In

¹⁴⁴ *La llorona* is a Mexican folkloric figure whose story resembles that of Medea. After discovering that her husband left her for another woman, *la llorona* drowns her children in the river in a fit of jealous rage. She feels remorse and, according to legend, one can still hear her weeping by the river over her murdered children.

¹⁴⁵ Chadwick explores the relationship between the static image of the self-portrait and female subjectivity. While she does not directly address at length the politics of the female nude in art, she implies that through the performance of self-portraiture, the woman artist has the potential to empower herself because it is left to the artist to stage her own self-image. This is pertinent to this project in that Kahlo is empowering herself as a woman and artist through unorthodox and rarely seen ways of representing herself, that is, as the focus of religious painting depicting pain. This is a subject that is usually depicted for and about men. "The self-portrait turns on the staging of the self (the model) for the self (the artist). For the woman artist, the difficulty and paradox of being both active, creative subject – a maker of meaning – and passive object – a site of meaning – can only be resolved through performing the self" (14).

¹⁴⁶ In this book, Ankori examines Kahlo's paintings as fragmentation of the self. In this particular chapter, she uses *Henry Ford Hospital* to demonstrate her – Kahlo's – inability to accept her "self" as a childless woman. Gannit Ankori, *Imaging Her Selves: Frida Kahlo's Poetics of Identity and Fragmentation* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2002) 157.

further support of this claim, Ankori cites that in early letters to Kahlo's first boyfriend after her accident, Kahlo refers to herself as a young woman who expresses herself through tears.

Although in her youthful letters, especially those to Gomez Arias (Kahlo's first boyfriend), Kahlo often drew portraits of herself crying and labeled herself *lagrimilla* (cry-baby) or *Virgen Lacrimorum*. (tearful virgin)(157)

The reference *la llorona* is a testimony to her own feelings of sorrow and guilt for having feelings of ambivalence before losing the child. However, if one examines her tear as a theatrical gesture, the comparison of Kahlo to *la llorona* suggests a profound cultural statement about the role of motherhood during the artist's lifetime. Artaud, let us recall, defines theatrical gestures as an indicator of spiritual unrest "these gestures always have as their final goal the elucidation of a spiritual state or problem" (61). The gesture of Kahlo's *la llorona*'s tear implicates her own feelings of inadequacy regarding her desire for children, but also comments on the social condition of the woman and motherhood during post-revolutionary Mexico. The notion of motherhood was a defining role of womanhood, and Kahlo clearly had conflicted feelings about bringing Rivera's child in to the world. The desire to appease Rivera, who did not want children, the fragility of her health, coupled with the social pressure to reproduce, created the frantic indecision that appears in her letters to Dr. Eloesser. As *la llorona*, a figure who is an integral part of the Mexican folkloric tradition, the gesture of her tear gives resonance to Kahlo's pain regarding the implicit cultural imperative to bear children during the artist's lifetime. While Kahlo does not necessarily challenge the gendered inequities of motherhood in this painting, her gesture brings it to the attention of the viewer.

At this point, the language of pain has evolved into a plurality of socio-cultural meanings and re-thinking. The gestures and objects have come to reflect social inequities of

the role of the mother in Mexico during Kahlo's lifetime. They also resist the notion that women's pain is absent from Christian art. The language of pain is testimony to her pain and is expressed on her body. This is evident not only through her wounded body, but her gestures, and the objects that surround her self-image. Through this staging of objects, gestures, and body, the viewer comes to interpret the elements of the painting as reflective of social and cultural issues that caused Kahlo personal pain.

iii. Conclusion:

The source of the language of pain in *Henry Ford Hospital* is Kahlo's self-image in miscarriage. The body as the site of a plurality of personal and socio-cultural meanings, in this instance, possesses the power of transformation.¹⁴⁷ It changes daily objects into an intimate language of suffering. Staging the failed mother self-image as the focal point of the *retablo*-inspired form serves as a forum for Kahlo to raise questions about the definitions of motherhood and womanhood. Through the wounded self-image as *La llorona*, Kahlo is not merely a woman who has failed at motherhood in an era when maternity defined the woman, but establishes a place for herself in Mexican culture as a modern-day *llorona*.

¹⁴⁷ The viewer is reminded of Barthes' notion that both coded and uncoded iconic messages are not understood by the viewer as mutually exclusive experiences, they often occur simultaneously. The plurality of meanings attached to the images in this painting invites engagement and interpretation on the part of the viewer.

IV. *The Two Fridas and Tree of Hope:*

The theatricality of *The Two Fridas* and *Tree of Hope* is, as in *Henry Ford Hospital*, rests with the dramatic images that surround and are embedded on Kahlo's self-representations. The commonality with *Henry Ford Hospital* is that the non-verbal images that populate the tableaux draw the viewer's attention in multiple directions. In this case, the importance of the self-image is offset by sharing the pictorial stage with non-verbal images that represent Spanish, Aztec, and mestizo cultures, creating a palimpsest of meaning. On one level, the artist uses non-verbal images such as scissors, a Tehuana dress, blood, or tears, for example, as instruments that inflict or reflect her personal pain. However, the layers of socio-cultural significance attached to these non-verbal depictions elevate the paintings from merely biographical representations, to commentary on socio-cultural/political issues.

The cultural motif that *The Two Fridas* and *Tree of Hope* share is the use of the double. The motif of the split or doubled image is one that Gannit Ankori examines in her recent book on Kahlo. She suggests that through Kahlo's paintings, the artist seeks to create multiple images of her "selves." Most of these representations of the artist's "selves" come from painful experiences. For example, in *Henry Ford Hospital* she terms the image in that painting as Kahlo's "maternal self." In her writings on the double, or as Ankori calls it, "the second Self," the author suggests that Kahlo chooses to represent herself in this way because she is searching for profound self-knowledge and seeking to define her identity. If we read Kahlo's paintings as testimonies, the idea of self-definition is relevant in the *The Two Fridas* because her personal, painful experiences are inextricably connected to the inspiration and production of the painting. We examine the way in which Kahlo creates a pictorial language of pain as testimony to her separation and eventual divorce from Rivera. Kahlo testifies to a

spiritual, and eventually a physical death in this painting through the depictions of the Victorian and Tehuana¹⁴⁸ costumes.

The language of pain in *The Two Fridas* is depicted on the costumed body through the use of objects. Here, costumes are inextricably linked to the notion of the double. In theatrical terms, as we will understand shortly, the double signifies death. The Victorian and Tehuana costumes in *The Two Fridas* signal the death of Kahlo's and Rivera's marriage and foreshadow the artist's own demise. In Kahlo's attempt to express her pain through costumes that represent both Western Europe and non-Western Mexico, she resists the religious conservatism of a Catholic culture that prefers to keep subjects like divorce concealed. Kahlo also subverts the iconic figure of the Mother of Sorrows by incarnating her as a Tehuana.

Costumes are an important aspect of the *mise-en-scène* in Artaud's conception of the theater. In the language of the theater, costumes have two functions they serve to reveal histories and signify death.

Where costumes are concerned, modern dress will be avoided as much as possible without at the same time assuming a uniform theatrical costuming that would be the same for every play – not from a fetishist and superstitious reverence for the past, but because it seems absolutely evident that certain age-old costumes, of ritual intent, though they existed at a given moment of time, preserve a beauty and a *revelational* appearance from their closeness to the traditions that gave them birth. (96) (my emphasis)

Artaud indicates that evoking the past through period or unconventional costuming is dramatic. The spectator is engaged to imagine stories of the past. Artaud's vision of costuming is not relegated to an evocation of the past, but indicates that the costumes themselves are actual doubles of the actor's body.

¹⁴⁸ Traditional Mexican dress.

Artaud elaborates on this idea in his explanation of the Balinese theater in which he explains how the actors are dressed in stylized costumes. The costumes possess the same importance as the actor her/himself. Artaud elevates the costume's/actor's significance to a divine level. The costume and the body achieve parallel status. Artaud explains the costume as the actor's "double."

It has the solemnity of a sacred rite – the hieratic quality of the costumes gives each actor a double body and a double set of limbs – and the dancer bundled into his costume seems to be nothing more than his own effigy. (58)

In Artaud's estimation, the costume/double is a death rite. In *The Two Fridas*, the doubled self-images embody through their distinctive costumes the relationship between revelations of the past and death. Kahlo draws a clear distinction between the two Fridas by choosing to represent one dressed in Victorian clothing and the other in Tehuana garb. Each of the costumes represents European and Mexican cultures and politics. The Frida on the left, the Victorian Frida, makes reference to European culture of the nineteenth century. Nineteenth-century Europe, particularly Spain, recalls the colonial period in Mexico. The reference to colonial Mexico is particularly important because during Kahlo's lifetime, European culture was the artistic influence that artists like her husband rejected. Rivera took part in the Mexicanist movement and Frida also participated, largely to please her husband. This costume has a negative connotation for Kahlo because participants of the Mexicanist movement, like Rivera, sought to recognize and empower the indigenous Mexican cultures in both art and politics. The Victorian Frida would have been the antithesis of what Kahlo perceived Rivera to find attractive and loveable.

The Victorian Frida reveals an exposed heart that appears to have been split in half; her Tehuana counterpart possesses the other half. Next to her heart, on her left breast is a

vaginal-looking slit in the fabric of the dress. Here, she fuses sexuality and emotion. This imagery re-enforces the idea that the Victorian Frida is not sexually desirable to Rivera because the slit is not staged near the vagina but closer to her broken heart. On her lap, she is holding a pair of scissors that appears to have cut the vein that connects the two Fridas. The shared red vein reminds the viewer of the thin, red ribbons that connect Frida to the objects from her miscarriage in *Henry Ford Hospital*. In *The Two Fridas*, the vein does not connect Frida to her counterpart, but is an object that will eventually lead to their deaths. The cut vein is leaking onto the Victorian's pristine, white gown. The splotches of blood against her white dress recall images of the bloodied sheets in *Henry Ford Hospital*. The bloodstains in both paintings represent sacrifice. In *Henry Ford Hospital*, it was the sacrifice of her child, and in *The Two Fridas*, the blood in both paintings is a marker of death.

In the analysis of the Victorian Frida's counterpart, the Tehuana Frida, Kahlo reveals a recurrent theme; Kahlo depicts the Tehuana self as an Aztec incarnation of the Christian figure, the Mother of Sorrows. Kahlo often depicts herself as a Tehuana when she wants to represent health and happiness, but in this painting the Tehuana assumes a distinctly maternal role.¹⁴⁹ In this depiction, Kahlo suggests that Christianity has failed to provide the comfort and spiritual guidance that it proclaims. Kahlo is also resisting the idea that the Mother of Sorrows must be depicted as a white woman. This Frida is holding a cameo of Diego as a baby in her lap. Ankori says that after Rivera and Kahlo's reconciliation the following year, Kahlo became more of mother figure to her husband than a wifely one.

¹⁴⁹ The Tehuana dress references Aztec culture, but reminds the viewer of her alliance with the Mexicanist movement. This was a movement of artists and intellectuals, like Kahlo and Rivera, who sought to bring indigenous Mexican cultures, like the Aztecs, to the attention of the general public. This occurred as a reaction to the Mexican Revolution of 1910, when Mexican peasants incited violence and overthrew the Porfirian dictatorship.

Giving up her initial expectations to follow the conventional track of bride, wife, and mother, she learned to mother Rivera, realizing that becoming his mother-rather than his wife and the mother of his child-was her only option for remaining by his side. (162)

The Tehuana Frida appears to have a larger, presumably stronger frame than the Victorian one. Ankori suggests that the Tehuana Frida possesses “ ‘motherly’ contours.” Like depictions of the *Mater Dolorosa*, the Tehuana Frida’s “child” rests between her legs. As a maternal figure, the Tehuana Frida’s body resembles that of the mother of Christ in the sculpture by Michelangelo (1475-1564), *la Pietà* (c.1498-99) (see fig.5).¹⁵⁰ Like the Tehuana, the mother of Christ’s body is depicted seated in a similar position and is significantly larger than that of her martyred son’s. In this instance, the depiction of Rivera does not necessarily represent the Christ-figure. However, the Victorian counterpart bears a greater resemblance to the *Mater Dolorosa*’s child. Kahlo is not likening her life to that of Christ’s, but she is using Christianity’s ultimate archetypal figure of suffering in order to express her pain. In the process of creating a language of pain, she is re-defining the role and representation of woman in painting. As we recall, the Victorian Frida is covered in a white dress that is stained with the sacrificial blood of her broken heart. The Tehuana suggests that the “pleasing” Frida is vulnerable to death, too. In this instance, it is the death of her conjugal relationship.

The costumes in *The Two Fridas* give Kahlo an artistic language for the unmentionable subject of divorce; the costumes reveal to the viewer Kahlo’s pain from a broken marriage. Because her pain has no prescribed language, Kahlo draws her inspiration from cultural phenomena such as Tehuana and Victorian cultures, anatomy and everyday objects that are familiar to her. It is important to recognize that Kahlo produced *The Two*

¹⁵⁰ Michelangelo, *La Pietà*, Basilica of St. Peter, Vatican.

Fridas in a predominantly Catholic, conservative culture that did not openly condone divorce. By expressing her pain through the unconventional representations of iconic Christian figures, Kahlo challenges the cultural traditions, perhaps inadvertently, that cause her pain.

The costume/double in *Tree of Hope* represents a darker expression of Kahlo's pain. In *Tree of Hope*, the Tehuana costume does not necessarily reveal the socio-cultural tensions that plagued Kahlo during her lifetime, but rather shows the viewer that without the benefit of the language of the costume, she is relegated to silence and possible death. We recall that the theatricalized language provides the vocabulary for Kahlo's pain. In *Tree of Hope*, Kahlo presents the viewer with a Tehuana-costumed and an exposed Frida. The viewer sees both the articulation of Kahlo's theatricalized language through the costume and the constant threat of the silencing effects of pain. *Tree of Hope* expresses Kahlo's struggle with health problems to remain hopeful in the face of a bleak future. The weak Frida lies exposed with no costume to veil her nearly-dead body. The absence of the costume in *Tree of Hope* presents the viewer with a Frida who has virtually no hope of survival. Let us recall that in theatrical terms the costume functions as the actor's double, signifying death. In *Tree of Hope*, the costumed and hopeful Frida sits beside her nearly deceased counterpart, suggesting that the image of the hopeful Frida is practically the effigy of her dead self. The Tehuana Frida's role as the hopeful, protector/mother figure is undermined as she is depicted as a memorial. The red Tehuana costume itself embodies her struggle between life and death. As a theatrical gesture, the color red signifies life, but with the acknowledgment that in order for one person to have life, someone else must die.

It [cruelty] is consciousness that gives to the exercise of every act of life its blood-red color, its cruel nuance, since it is understood that life is always someone's death. (Artaud 102)

The sick Frida's blood-red wounds and the white sheet recall the bloodstains on the Victorian's white dress in *The Two Fridas*. In *Tree of Hope*, the sickly, near-dead Frida's blood represents sacrifice so that the healthy Frida may remain alive. The red dress is a reminder to the healthy Frida that her hope will always be overshadowed by the imminence of her death. Even in her gestures of hope, the image of the pink corset and the banner she holds in her hands, the viewer understands that the Tehuana is still plagued by pain. She is unable to speak as a result of her suffering, and must hold up a sign that reads, "Tree of Hope, Hold Firm."

Another reminder that the Tehuana Frida is perpetually teetering on the brink of death is the reddish sun that shines above the sick Frida. Kahlo may be referring to her knowledge of Aztec culture, because it is believed in this culture that the sun feeds on human blood.¹⁵¹ In this instance, we can understand the presence of the reddish sun and Frida's bloody wounds as the source that gives the healthy Frida hope.

i. Conclusion:

Hope is a tenuous proposition in *Tree of Hope*. The costumed, Tehuana Frida is dressed to express her pain. The costume and objects she holds in her hands (the pink corset and the inscribed banner) are the images Kahlo uses to indicate to the viewer that she has hope. The Tehuana costume suggests that Frida is vibrant and free of medical constraints. However, the nearly naked body of her sick counterpart is the ominous reminder that her death is inevitable. The costumes and objects are the means to give a language to her pain. In

¹⁵¹ Herrera 356. "The sun, here (in *Tree of Hope*) a huge reddish orb, is nourished, according to Aztec belief by human blood."

this painting, the language of costumes is indicative of hope; the ability to express a language of pain is tantamount to the possession of hope.

The relationship between personal and cultural testimony is blurred in *The Two Fridas*. Kahlo's expresses personal language of pain as dresses her self-images with the costumes. Costumes have the dual purpose of signifying death and revealing histories such as divorce, Christianity, male hegemony, and Aztec culture. The role of costumes is significant in Kahlo's language of pain in *The Two Fridas* because it allows for an interpretation that will explain the source of her personal pain. It also provides insight into the social, political and religious histories that are embedded in the images in this painting. Kahlo draws distinctions between two Mexican cultures through costuming, reflecting both her personal and political histories. One of the most significant influences in this painting aside from Kahlo's knowledge of Aztec culture and politics, is her religious background. Kahlo creates a fusion of Christian and Aztec figures in order to express her pain. The Frida who is presumably stronger, the Tehuana, embodies both the Mother of Sorrows and an Aztec woman. The Victorian counterpart appears to be the figure that will be sacrificed first. We can interpret the Victorian as the dying child of the Mother of Sorrows: Christ. In this instance we are reminded of the words of David Lomas and Marie-Jo Bonnet. The idea that Kahlo borrows from different cultural spheres in order to create a language for her pain is essential here. Kahlo is not necessarily likening her image to Christ's because she views herself as a kind of martyred savior, but because both the Mother of Sorrows and Christ are archetypal figures of pain that were an engrained part of Kahlo's life. However, it is important to remember, according to Bonnet, that a woman artist staging herself as the Christ-figure was not practiced in art. Regardless of Kahlo's intentions, a woman making

reference to herself as Christ in a painting during the early part of the 20th century merits attention.

V. *My Birth: Tlazoteotl, and the Mater Dolorosa:*

Like *Henry Ford Hospital*, *My Birth* is modeled after the *retablo*, however, *My Birth* signals a shift in the viewer's focus. Kahlo draws the viewer's attention to the bodies of the dead mother and child and the depiction of the *Mater Dolorosa* that hangs above the deathbed. Unlike the preceding paintings studied, the weight of Kahlo's own history of having lost her child and mother during the same year, and that of her Christian heritage sits uniquely on the dead bodies. In the previous paintings in this study, the artist displaces the burden of personal and socio-cultural histories from the body, sharing the pictorial stage with images that carry meanings that exceed Kahlo's own personal tragedies. The decreased number of non-verbal images in *My Birth* not only places the burden of private and public histories on the body, but underscores the silence and chaos of her pain.

The non-verbal language Kahlo chooses to depict the scene is morbid. The viewer sees the uncovered half of a woman's body in the birthing position. Emerging from her vagina is the head of a dead baby – whose features resemble that of the artist – in a small pool of blood. The top half of the woman's body is covered with a sheet, suggesting that the mother is dead, too. The feeling of disruption and chaos becomes clearer as the viewer has knowledge of the personal history behind this painting.¹⁵² This picture is Kahlo's testimony to the conflation of the death of her mother with the miscarriage she suffered just months before.¹⁵³ In this painting, the testimony is particularly theatrical because chaos and

¹⁵² The images of the mother and child are denoted messages, that is to say, that in order to understand the full meaning of the painting, the viewer must have foreknowledge of the artist's life. However, it is not necessary in order to appreciate the horror of the images of a dead mother and child.

¹⁵³ This conflation of feelings of loss of a family member and a stillborn child resembles the moment in Marguerite Duras' novel, *L'amant*. In the novel, the narrator recalls the moment when she received a telegram announcing her brother's unexpected death, and she conflates these feelings of pain with those that she felt after she delivered a stillborn child.

disruption are inherent in its definition. I reiterate Francois-Charles Gaudard's explanation that a testimony is rendered as a result of a disruption of spatio-temporal activity.

Il y a pertinence du "témoignage" lorsqu'il est situé dans le cadre d'une "affaire", c'est-à-dire lorsque son contexte est celui d'une rupture ou d'une fracture dans l'organisation spatio-temporelle. (23)

Kahlo conveys the disorienting effects of pain by depicting them atemporally, and by staging them in an unspecified setting. Viewers have virtually no temporal or spatial frame of reference except that the figures are possibly in a bedroom. They are confronted with the gruesome events of the deaths of both mother and child.

The language of pain in this painting expresses the chaos of death through the sparse and disorienting effects of the *mise-en-scène*. While Kahlo's other paintings in this chapter, except for *Henry Ford Hospital*, appear to defy temporality, *My Birth* distinguishes itself from these paintings by the almost complete absence of theatrical objects external to her corporeal self-images. The language of pain manifests itself uniquely on the bodies of the mother and child.

The only identifiable object of significance is a picture of the *Mater Dolorosa* that hangs above the bed. The image of the Mother of Sorrows serves as the sole "verbal image"(Artaud 38) that expresses pain in the painting. The importance of the image of the *Mater Dolorosa* is that she represents failed motherhood, but that the image is staged above the bed, in a gesture of worship. By contrast, the way the artist depicts the bodies of the mother and child recalls a subtle reference to the Aztec goddess, *Tlazolteotl*, the goddess of birth and filth.¹⁵⁴ In Aztec culture, birthing and excreting were viewed as similar functions

¹⁵⁴ Dina Mirkin, a Kahlo scholar, suggests that Tlazolteotl is the goddess of birth and filth because the position she takes in the sculpture was one that some pre-Colombian indigenous Mexican women would take to give

because during the process of natural childbirth, a woman is likely to excrete. As in *The Two Fridas*, in *My Birth* Kahlo is bringing the attention of European and Aztec cultures to the viewer. The *Mater Dolorosa* is elevated and removed from the corporeal reality of these deaths, while Kahlo inscribes *Tlazolteotl* on the deceased self-images. This cross-cultural depiction encourages the viewer to re-assess the role the iconic figure of Christianity, the *Mater Dolorosa*, plays in the culture of motherhood during Kahlo's lifetime. Kahlo challenges the notion that the Mother of Christ is viewed as the ultimate figure of motherhood as she is merely a two-dimensional figure who appears to impotently watch over the death scene. The Aztec goddess emerges as the figure that can bear the gruesome reality of both deaths. By bringing the Aztec goddess to the foreground of the painting and staging her in a way that she, quite literally, embodies birth and death, Kahlo reveals that pain in a conventional Christian-inspired painting is insufficient to express pain. In order to convey the visceral nature of her pain, she must go outside of her own cultural register so that she may express suffering.

i. Conclusion:

In *My Birth*, the viewer focuses specifically on the bodies of the mother and child, and they bear the unique burden of testifying to pain. They testify to Kahlo's personal tragedies, but they also reveal the ways in which the artist has subverted conventional artistic forms. *My Birth* challenges the culture of motherhood as defined by Christianity. By staging the Aztec goddess in the foreground of this painting, Kahlo is re-thinking notions of motherhood. In the *retablo*-like painting, the *Mater Dolorosa*'s presence is not entirely traditional in a *retablo*-like painting because in a conventional *retablo*, the holy figure is

birth and excrete. Dina Cominsarenco Mirkin, "Images of Childbirth in Modern Mexican Art," *Woman's Art Journal* 20.1 (Spring-Summer 1999): 18-24.

usually a representation of relief or joy. In this instance, she is announcing two deaths. The reference to *Tlazolteotl* presents the viewer with unconventional choices of form (*retablo*) and image (*Tlazolteotl*). The presence of *Tlazolteotl* subverts the traditional meaning of the form because a pagan goddess does not usually appear in a *retablo*. The language of pain resists the conventions found in a typical *retablo* as Kahlo merges traditional Christian art with a reference to an Aztec goddess.

VI. The Broken Column:

In the *Broken Column*, most of the non-verbal images are violently imposed on the self-image. Like *My Birth*, the viewer has little recourse except to look at the body. As the non-verbal images are focused on the foreground and Kahlo's self-image is the most prominent of these images, the body is the site on which the artist depicts her personal and cultural histories. Similar to *My Birth*, sole gaze on the body highlights the silence of pain, but in *The Broken Column*, Kahlo outrightly tells the viewer that her pain has rendered her silent. Her upper body and face are in the foreground and they are pierced with nails, her torso is ruptured by a broken column that has been driven through it, pelvis to throat. The column, modeled after an ancient ruin, appears to begin at her pelvis, possibly referring to the handrail that skewered her lower abdomen at the time of the accident. The column goes all the way up, rupturing her throat, voice box, and vocal chords, and finally stops just under her chin. In this instance, she is expressing the "unspeakable" nature of her pain. We are reminded of Scarry's claim that pain breaks down discursive communication. However, Kahlo's painting resists the idea that it breaks down any form of communication. Kahlo's theatricalized body subverts Scarry's notion that pain eludes discursive expression. As a theatrical object, the broken column that pierces the self-image's throat is transformed from a column in to an element of theatrical visual expression that characterizes Kahlo's language of pain.

Let us recall that Artaud claims that the importance of a theatrical language rests in its ability to express what he believes discursive language cannot.

There are other languages in the world besides our...language which has decided in favor of the despoiling and desiccation of ideas, presenting them

inert and unable to stir up in their course a whole system of natural analogies.
(108)

A “system of natural analogies” suggests that theatrical language communicates deep sentiment and ideas that exist beyond the power of discursive formations. Kahlo’s theatricalized body – one that is ruptured by a column, a face pierced by nails, and tears streaming down her face, - is the site of analogy in *The Broken Column*. The personal and socio-cultural implications are depicted uniquely on Kahlo’s theatricalized body.

There is a socio-cultural reference to *la llorona* as Kahlo depicts herself in a gesture of weeping. The viewer is reminded of *Henry Ford Hospital*’s reference to *La llorona*. Although thematically *The Broken Column* is different from *Henry Ford Hospital*, the sorrow of her painful condition is comparable. Kahlo’s tears theatricalize the language of pain “These concrete gestures must have an efficacy strong enough to make us forget the very necessity of speech” (Artaud, 108). The movement of tears, and the impeded vocal area in the context of theatricality are transformed into Kahlo’s language of pain.

In *The Broken Column*, the gesture is not merely drawing attention to her personal tragedy by theatricalizing her corporeal self-image. As she does in *Henry Ford Hospital*, but also the artist calls into question the place of the representation of women and suffering in art. Kahlo’s self-representation in this painting is a convergence of the previously mentioned iconic figures we have seen in the other paintings. Kahlo’s body is pierced with nails and a white cloth is draped around her hips, making reference to the Christ-figure. The tears make reference to *la llorona*. Her ruptured pelvic area implicates the source of failed motherhood, making reference to the *Mater Dolorosa*. The implications of these references reveal Kahlo as a significant presence in 20th century art. One is reminded of Bonnet’s claim that Kahlo is

among the first women who uses her body as the site on which she inscribes and testifies to her pain.

Ainsi en est-il de Frida Kahlo, qui est une des premières artistes à avoir construit son oeuvre sur l'expérience de la souffrance endurée dans son corps.
(215)

The Broken Column is the example of how Kahlo is among the first women in the twentieth century to bring the wounded female body to the attention of critics and viewers. What makes Kahlo's work unique is that she not only reveals the exposed and wounded female body as the focal point of her paintings, but the socio-cultural references inscribed on her body engages her viewers to examine contemporary issues such as female identity, motherhood, illness, death and Western hegemony.

i.Conclusion:

In the first four paintings, *Henry Ford Hospital*, *Tree of Hope*, and *The Two Fridas*, and *My Birth*, the language of pain manifests itself primarily through the relationship between self-image and theatrical elements, such as objects, masks, and costuming. The theatrical elements in these four paintings somewhat distract the viewer from the wounded self-image. The onus of testifying to pain is shared among the body and the theatrical objects, costumes, masks, and scenery. The self-image and the theatricalized elements in *The Broken Column* are merged in to one expression of pain. The theatricalized body is the sole focus of the painting and bears the unique burden of bearing witness to personal and collective pain. *The Broken Column* distinguishes itself from the four previously mentioned paintings because the theatricalized elements are staged in a way that obligates the viewer to look at the source of the suffering: Kahlo's body. The body is staged alone in the foreground of a desolate background. Her torso and throat are split by a broken column, nails pierce her

body, tears stream down her face and a medical corset holds her broken body together. In *The Broken Column* Kahlo draws our attention to the female body as the primary image of pain. The artist reminds the viewer that her body always bears the burden of her pain, but also reminds the viewer that the female body in general is often the locus of suffering. We are reminded once again of Bonnet's claim, that the suffering female body has been all but unrepresented in art. *The Broken Column* brings the deficit of the representation of women's suffering in art to the viewer's attention.

In the four other paintings mentioned, Kahlo depicts theatricalized elements that surround or are in close proximity to her body, in order to express her pain. In this instance, the viewer's gaze is directed to different places in the painting. Kahlo asks her viewer to focus attention on the scene comprised of cultural, social and political images as they are in relation to the self-image. The way she stages her wounded body transforms the images, such as a lotus flower or a dress, into her language of pain. For example, in *Henry Ford Hospital*, the Detroit skyline is in the distant background, creating a sense of alienation and loneliness as Kahlo lies in the foreground alone in a hospital bed. In *Tree of Hope*, the divided earth upon which the two Fridas are staged is not a mere geological phenomenon, but conveys the fragility of hope for good health. In *The Two Fridas*, the Victorian dress that is staged on one of the Fridas becomes an image of pain as it represents the loss of love Kahlo experienced during her divorce. In *My Birth*, there is a slight shift in the way the theatrical elements function in the language of pain. The bed upon which the dead mother and child lie is transformed in to a deathbed. However, the *Mater Dolorosa* hangs over the bed, re-enforcing the pain over the lost child and mother.

In *The Broken Column*, the elements violate her body. Kahlo's body and the theatrical elements are synonymous. The viewer interprets her body as a theatricalized image of pain. In *The Broken Column* the viewer is reminded of her physical ailments. The column that pierces her body is indicative of her damaged physical frame. Since the column also pierces her lower torso, we can also read that as a reference to her inability to bear children. On the level of revelation, we see references to the Mother of Sorrows through the tears on her face, as we have seen in her previous paintings. There are also references to Christ by the piercing nails and the white cloth that covers her lower body. As a theatricalized image of pain, the collective revelation and personal history merge, and her body is the site on which both are depicted. It is important to recognize that Kahlo is inscribing the personal and cultural histories on her body. At once, Kahlo shows the viewer a self-comparison to Christ and makes a reference to *la llorona*, the mother-murderess. Kahlo is showing her viewer that the image of her body, the female body, resists a single, static interpretation. The artist demonstrates that the image of a woman's body can be a site for a plurality of interpretations. Kahlo implies that various extremes of interpretations of the female body can co-exist.

4. Conclusion: A Comparison of the Languages of Pain in the Works of Marguerite Duras and Frida Kahlo

The question posed at the beginning of this study was can pain be situated in language? Elaine Scarry says that physical pain destroys our ability to speak and that we must depend on the coherent language of others, those who are not in pain, to speak for those who are. In Scarry's estimation, the expression of pain cannot manifest itself in discursive language because it is a phenomenon that lacks referential content external to s/he who suffers. Consequently, Scarry suggests that because of the difficulty of adequately objectifying our pain, it is resistant to language. However, Scarry provisionally claims that if one were to objectify pain, it manifests itself most clearly on the body. In this study, we have seen that literary and pictorial representations of the female body are the primary site on which both artists formulate their language of pain. The language of pain in Duras and Kahlo is one that is constructed by the subversion of traditional narrative and pictorial conventions. Both artists, in their respective media, subvert representations of the female subject as part of the language of pain.

In the first three texts, Duras subverts conventional narrative form to give her female protagonists a voice to express their pain. In the latter two novels, Duras shows us that the presence of the omniscient narrator serves to block the individual's ability to express her own pain. Kahlo uses wounded self-representation as the focal point of all the paintings studied here to express her painful experiences. The language of pain is not merely about establishing a set of discursive words that give coherence to the expression of pain. The

language of pain in both Duras and Kahlo is a performative act. Duras and Kahlo cultivate a relationship between narrator/self-image and reader/viewer. The female protagonists control their own pain. By making their works testimonies allows for the narrator/self-image to express her pain in a medium she has developed from a language that does not necessarily have to be communicated through discursive expression.

The idea that the female body and voice are the objects that the two artists use to objectify their language of pain has prompted an investigation of the social, cultural and personal circumstances that have influenced their respective works. As we have seen throughout this dissertation, Duras sets the female body in socially and politically adverse circumstances such as colonialism, poverty, gender inequities and war. Kahlo makes reference to socio-cultural histories such as failed motherhood, physical illness, sexuality, colonialism and religion through choice of images and the way she stages them in her paintings. The remaining task of this study is to examine the implications of testifying to personal and culturally collective pain on the female body.

In her essay, “Language and Body: Transactions in the Construction of Pain,” (1997)¹⁵⁵ Veena Das implicitly challenges Scarry’s claim that pain cannot be expressed because of its resistance to objectification.

The sentence ‘I am in pain’ becomes the conduit through which I may move out of an inexpressible privacy and suffocation of my pain...this is not an indicative statement, although it may have the formal appearance of one. It is the beginning of a language game. Pain...is not that inexpressible something that destroys communication or marks an exit from one’s existence in language. Instead, it makes a claim asking for acknowledgment, which may be given or denied. In either case, it is not a referential statement that is simply pointing to an inner object. (70)

¹⁵⁵ Veena Das, “Language and Body: Transactions in the Construction of Pain,” *Social Suffering*. eds. Arthur Kleinman, Veena Das, and Margaret Lock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997) 67-91.

The idea that revealing that one is in pain is part of a language game first suggests that pain exists in language, and second, that its expression, its objectification, involves the participation of others. Throughout this project, we have studied Duras' and Kahlo's languages of pain within the context of testimony. Testimony, as we have seen, is inherently performative. Let us recall that the act of testifying requires the witness to tell her story from her own point of view in the presence of a narrator/reader/viewer. The implication here is that the narrator/reader/viewer participates in the performance of testimony. Dori Laub, states that the role of the listener/reader/viewer is as significant as the witness' in the definition of a testimony.

The listener has to be at the same time a witness to the witness... It is only in this way...that he can become the enabler of the testimony. (58)

Laub's observation suggests that the performance of testimony depends on both the witness and the enabler (in this study, it is the narrator/reader/viewer). It is important to distinguish between the role of the "enabler" of testimony and Scarry's notion of a *language of agency*. The *language of agency* is put into effect when the victim of pain is unable to speak and the agent uses his/her words to speak for s/he who is suffering. The narrator/reader/viewer is not necessarily the spokesperson for the victim of pain. The narrator/reader/viewer potentially provides a forum or context in which s/he situates the witness' testimony without necessarily functioning as the spokesperson. In the first of the three Duras' texts under study, *L'amant*, *La douleur* and *India Song*, the narrators are both witnesses to their own pain and the narrator who tells her own story. For example, in *L'amant* and *India Song*, there is no single, detached narrative voice who tells the female protagonists' stories of pain. In *L'amant*, it is the young girl and her older self who tell their

stories. In *India Song*, the chorus of narrative voices gives different perspectives on the women's lives and *la mendiante* screams her pain throughout the text. Because of the absence of an omniscient narrative voice to serve as an intermediary between the reader and the speaker, the reader becomes involved in the process of the protagonist's testimony of pain. In *La douleur*, the narrator tells her story in first-person within a disordered narrative structure. However, the narrator is clearly not omniscient, as she is unaware of the outcome. The reader is as ignorant as the narrator as to how the text will end. In all three texts, the reader is obliged to draw her own conclusions about the testimony of the female protagonist as there is no omniscient narrative voice guiding the reader through the story without a predetermined outcome. In this instance, the reader becomes involved in the uncertainty and anxiety of the social, political and personal oppression these female protagonists experience by the way in which the narrator structures the text. As a consequence, the female protagonists are vulnerable to the reader's subjective interpretations about the condition of their bodies and voices. The importance of the subjectivity of these texts is that the female protagonists express their pain, whether it is through their bodies or voices, or both, without the assistance of an omniscient narrator. We, the readers, and the narrators, are entering into what Veena Das calls "the language game." What these three texts share is that their language of pain is found in the dialogue between narrators and readers because of the subjective nature of their testimonies.

In contrast to the first three texts, in *Le barrage* and *Le rapt de Lol V. Stein*, the readers encounter omniscient narrators who operate within a conventional structure. In these two novels, Duras provides us with examples of what Scarry means by a *language of agency*. In each novel, the narrator speaks on behalf of the female protagonist,

undermining the testimonial quality of the texts. The narrator as interlocutor between the one who is in pain and the reader transforms the interactive, performative quality of a testimony in to a narrative that ultimately serves the agenda of its omniscient narrator. In both instances, the sufferers of pain, Suzanne and Lol, are not in possession of their own voices and movements; and they rely on the words and circumstances their narrators choose to give language to their pain. The reader, in these instances, like the female protagonists, is passively relying on the narrator to understand their pain. In these two novels, the narrators make commentary as opposed to creating a language of pain. The omniscient narrative voice eliminates the opportunity for dialogue between narrator and reader.

All of the female protagonists in this study are situated in oppressive situations. We will remember that an essential aspect of the performance of personal testimony is that it brings with it a commentary on the collective pain of an entire culture.

Through complex transactions between body and language, they [victims of the Partition] were able both *to voice* and *to show* the hurt done to them and also to provide witness to the harm done to the whole social fabric. (Das, *Violence*, 205-06) (Das' emphasis)

Das reminds us that the language of pain is not one that expressed simply by a language of agency, but that the ultimate burden of testimony rests upon the bodies and voices of its victims. Das also indicates that often the catalyst for bearing witness to personal pain is the result of social or political tension. Even if the witness is not directly affected by the event, Das suggests that the effects of these socio-political events manage to manifest themselves in the bodily and vocal testimonies of personal pain. We have seen that Duras stages the voices and bodies of her female protagonists as the sites on which she illustrates the pain of socio-political conflict. The pain caused by political or personal

oppression in these texts is an effect of the disruption and sometimes destruction of its victims' lives. In the first three texts, the fragmented narrator/witness relationship or the temporal disorder mirrors the effects of socio-political oppression. In each case, the witness/narrator is resisting, through her testimony, the devastation of political and personal oppression. The narrators, in her own way, is attempting to forge a unified or singular bodily or vocal presence in the midst of narrative and socio-political chaos.

For example, by problematizing the sexualized female body in *L'amant*, that is, making it the site of testimony, Duras reveals a layering of both personal and social histories. During the scene involving sex between the young girl and her lover, as we recall from an earlier chapter, the young girl is inspired to recall the sad relationship with her mother. The deeper social history that Duras reveals to us is that the source of the dysfunctional family relations was provoked by the dishonesty and greed of the French colonial government. The young girl's body provides the forum for physical evidence of personal and socio-political pain within the structural fragmentation of the novel. The sexualized body is the source of strength and unity in this testimony of pain. It is the only site that is not fragmented or weakened by poverty, and is strong enough to bear the burden of testimony.

The personal and social histories Duras reveals in "La douleur" are inextricably linked. The premise of the text, set in occupied Paris, is of the narrator waiting for news of her husband, whom the Nazis have arrested. The result of the narrator's language of pain in "La douleur" is one of exclusion and choice. The narrator excludes the voices of the Nazis throughout the text, but in order to make herself heard above their rhetoric, she chooses to minimize the presence of her own body. Only when the oppressors are gone does she re-situate her body back into the text. She is able to silence her oppressors through her role as a

non-omniscient narrator who is unaware of how her story will end, and consequently, the readers are as ignorant as she. This mutual ignorance compels her readers to participate in her anxiety. In essence, the readers are her captive audience, as she is the only voice we hear. Through her own chaotic discourse, the narrator is able to convey in a very personal manner the collective and destructive effects of the Nazi occupation to her readers.

The language of pain in *India Song* is one of irreconcilability. The reader/viewer encounters the disparity on thematic and structural levels. The economic and social disparities of the colonial government are represented on the body of the European woman and the voice on the unmediated subject. The relationship between the body and the voice foreshadows the inevitable failure of a colonial culture and the potential for a revolution on the part of the oppressed. Anne-Marie's languorous body is beautiful, but dying. *La mendiante's* screams, though difficult to bear, signal frustration and anger on the part of the colonized class. The testimony of the body and voice, representing the two cultures, under oppressive circumstances, will never be reconciled. There is comparable irreconcilability in the relationship between reader/viewer and witnesses. The structure of the text disorients the reader. We are assailed with the imagined dissonant sounds of screaming, multiple narrative voices and music. The structure of the written text itself is nearly impossible to follow in a discursive manner; the reader alternates between the precise stage directions, and the spoken lines of its narrators. The text is designed to create confusion and frustration on the part of the reader so that we may experience, if only slightly, the realities of those who are oppressed in a colonial culture.

In the latter two novels, *Le barrage* and *Le ravissement de Lol V. Stein*, there is a semblance of conformity to conventional novelistic structure that is not found in the first

three texts. The presence of the omniscient narrators establishes a boundary between the reader and she who is in pain. We do not experience the subjective relationship we have with the narrator/witness. In the two novels, the omniscient narrators function as commentators, as opposed to witnesses to a painful event. The narrators do not attempt to *enable* the testimonies of the painful life events of Suzanne and Lol, but rather serve as *agents* of discursive language. In order to situate pain in language, the narrator must symbolically dismember Suzanne's body in order to reveal the poverty of colonial oppression. In *Le barrage*, the omniscient narrator conforms to Scarry's idea that in order to express pain, one needs an agent, that is, someone who will speak for s/he who is in pain. As a result, she who is in pain, Suzanne, is not able to speak for herself. Suzanne's body becomes the site for the narrator to critique the colonial government, racial and gender inequities.

Jacques Hold suppresses Lol's voice and body in *Le ravisement of Lol V. Stein* so that he may assume the role of narrator. In the narrative, Hold creates a language of pain from writing scenes where he depicts himself as a voyeur, creating scenarios where he is dictating Lol's thoughts, words and movements. The language of pain is one of control. The reader is privy only to Hold's insidious rendering of Lol's character.

The testimonies reveal the hideousness of war and the de-humanizing effects of colonial occupation to the readers, through the subverted narrative structure and the relationship to the reader. What Duras demonstrates in the first three texts, *L'amant*, "La douleur," and *India Song*, is that discursive language is insufficient for the expression of pain. Duras must break with conventional narrative form in order to construct the language of pain. As the language of pain is performative, demanding interaction with an audience, as Das implies, the reader is permitted an intimate relationship with the text. The reader

understands the narrators' pain with somewhat more insight than in the latter texts because we are allowed to interpret their pain without the predetermined commentary of an omniscient narrator. In the latter two novels, *Le barrage* and *Le ravissement de Lol V. Stein*, the omniscient narrator holds its readers at distance and allows a limited perception of pain.

Frida Kahlo's pictorial testimonies primarily bear witness to the numerous personal tragedies she suffered throughout her brief life. In each of the five paintings studied, she manages to bear witness to the solitude and silence her pain has caused her. In order to contextualize the performance of testimony, we have looked to Artaud's theatrical language. *Mise-en-scène*, as we may recall, is as an artistic language that is designed to give material expression to emotions that are often inexpressible with words. As we have determined, pain is a phenomenon that when inflicted strips its victims of discursive speech. As a composition of theatrical elements, the images in Kahlo's paintings are transformed into an artistic language that conveys the artist's pain. As a part of the *mise-en-scène*, Artaud claims that each of the theatrical elements: costumes, objects, scenery, gestures and movement, all possess metaphysical qualities that reveal social, cultural and political histories that have been lost to Western culture.

Examining Kahlo's work through Artaud's lens, allows us to understand the composition of images in her paintings as a valid artistic language yet also as a permanent reminder of the verbal silence the artist's pain has caused her. Kahlo chooses dramatic images in her paintings because her pain has left her with few words with which to express herself. Kahlo negotiates the performance of the language of pain through the relationship between theatricalized elements (images other than the self) and her wounded self-image. In the paintings *Henry Ford Hospital*, *The Two Fridas*, *Tree of Hope*, *My Birth*, her self-image

and the theatricalized elements define each other as elements of pain. In contrast, in *The Broken Column*, the focus rests on the wounded self-image with virtually nothing to distract the viewer from the grotesqueness of the wounded body. In the final painting, the theatricalized elements are part of her body. The theatricalized elements define Kahlo's self-image as the unique site for testifying to her pain.

The common thread in all of the paintings is that the performance of the self-image inspires an examination of a plurality of personal and socio-cultural histories. It transforms Kahlo's language of pain from merely a personal chronicling of her suffering into revelations of social, political and cultural histories. Kahlo testifies to both the personal and collective histories of pain through various representations of cultural spheres because, as David Lomas reminds us, there is no specified artistic vocabulary for expressing pain. Kahlo must draw on knowledge of her own socio-cultural histories when choosing images to depict her language of pain. By examining the performance of these histories as an act of theater, the significance of her images transcends personal meaning and raises questions that potentially implicate greater socio-cultural issues.

In *Henry Ford Hospital*, the language of pain is one that expresses guilt. Her ailing, naked body as the focus of the painting transforms the surrounding depictions of everyday objects into part of a testimony of pain. For example, the institutional bed on which she lies, the distant U.S.-American skyline in the background and the dead fetus looming above her all convey the sense of guilt and loneliness she experienced after her miscarriage. The most illustrative example of Kahlo's guilt over her ambivalence towards motherhood is the theatrical gesture of the tear. The relationship between the body and the tear suggests a resemblance to the folkloric figure, *la llorona*, the evil mother who has killed her child. Let

us remember, too, that Artaud claims that the gesture is indicative of social unrest. If we examine the self-image as *la llorona* within the social context of Kahlo's lifetime, we can begin to understand the source of her guilt. The definitions of woman and mother seemed synonymous, but Kahlo's self-depiction as *la llorona* allows the viewer to understand the difficulty of defining oneself as a woman without being a mother.

The language of pain in *The Two Fridas* announces death. The use of costumes in this painting is essential to understanding the different kinds of death to which Kahlo refers. As an Artaudian theatrical gesture, the costume announces the death of the physical presence of the actor; it is a kind of memorial to his material existence. In *The Two Fridas*, the costumes, both the Tehuana and the Victorian, are sad reminders that the women who wear them are dying of a shared broken heart. As a theatrical gesture, the association of costumes and death uncovers another meaning. Period costumes also have the ability to reveal to their audience histories and traditions that have been lost or "dead" to Western civilization. In terms of *The Two Fridas*, we must examine the costume as it is staged on the self-image; this is when it reveals its deeper socio-cultural significance. Kahlo creates a culturally fused incarnation of the *Mater Dolorosa*. She stages her self-image as a Tehuana whose posture and size, in relation to the Victorian, resembles the Mother of Sorrows. Seated next to her is her dying counterpart, the Victorian, who is staged in a blood-stained, white gown. In this instance, the Victorian bears a resemblance to the role of Christ. Kahlo is using archetypal religious figures to express her pain, however, what is unique about this painting is that she subverts their conventional meanings. Kahlo merges Western and non-Western cultures and subverts the gender roles of a broken-hearted woman and Christ.

The relationship between the costumed and uncostumed self-images in *Tree of Hope* reveals the dark side of hope. The Tehuana Frida is constantly reminded that her physical weaknesses undermine the potential for good health. The uncostumed Frida shows the viewer that without the theatricalized dress, she is without a language and condemned to silence and hopelessness. The ability to possess a language that expresses pain in this painting is what gives the Tehuana Frida hope. Her dress and the objects she holds in her hands, the images that express her language of pain, are indicators of both the possibility and the tenuousness of her hope for recovery.

Kahlo's language of pain in *My Birth* reflects the conflation of identities of mother and child caused by grief in this painting. The inability of the viewer to clearly distinguish the identities of mother and child in this painting is Kahlo's language of pain. The artist demonstrates her language by the way she merges representations of Western and non-Western maternal figures. This painting, like *Henry Ford Hospital* is also modeled after a *retablo*. Kahlo transforms the conventional meaning of gratitude to one of grief by placing the consummate mournful mother, the *Mater Dolorosa*, in place of the savior-saint. The *Mater Dolorosa* presides over the death scene as a figure of comfort and grief. In honor of her mother's Spanish-indigenous heritage, Kahlo stages the dead woman, presumably Mathilda Kahlo, in such a way that her body resembles the sculpture of the Aztec goddess, *Tlazoteotl*. The dead child emerging from the mother's body reminds the viewer of Kahlo's recent miscarriage, but the artist depicts her own features on the dead baby's face. Perhaps she is wishing for her own death. The artist reveals to her viewer her overwhelming feelings of grief.

In *The Broken Column*, the body and theatricalized elements are fused into a single expression of pain. The performance of Kahlo's testimony and her collective, socio-cultural revelations are inextricable. The viewer associates the broken body with Kahlo's effects of her accident. However, we also view Kahlo's wounded self-image as the site on which the socio-cultural references that appear in the other paintings in this study converge. The tears on her face remind the viewer of *la llorona*. The corset that confines her body is set in opposition to the one she holds in a gesture of hope in *Tree of Hope*. The nails that pierce her body and the white cloth that covers her hips suggest a reference to Christ. Her ruptured pelvic region is an acknowledgment of her inability to bear children. The column that pierces her throat conveys to us the silencing effects of pain. The social implications of failed motherhood, religious representation and gender issues, and pain manifest themselves directly on her self-image. What distinguishes *The Broken Column* from the other paintings is that the objects define Kahlo's body as an image of pain.

We can draw inspiration from Artaud when we read Kahlo's paintings because the artist chooses dramatic images as part of the language of pain. We can draw further parallels to Artaud because Kahlo consistently theatricalizes the images by staging them as non-Western (the Tehuana and *Tlazoteotl*, *la llorona*) and subverted forms of Christian figures (Kahlo's self-image as a reference to Christ and the *retablo*). The implications the viewer imposes on the merging of Western and non-Western female figures to theatricalize her pain manifest themselves in multiple ways. We can situate Kahlo among feminists, as one of the first women artists of the 20th century who chose to challenge conventional religious and artistic forms by inscribing pain on their bodies, as Marie-Jo Bonnet has claimed. Kahlo's paintings inspire an examination of the gender inequities during her lifetime that force

women to define themselves as women by their reproductive capacity exclusively. We can also understand the merging of cultures as a way for Kahlo to bring to the surface radical political movements, like *Mexicanidad*, so that her viewers may understand the history of the struggle of the oppressed *mestizo* and indigenous populations in Mexico. The most significant implication that emerges from Kahlo's use of theatricality to express pain is that she is perpetually resisting the silence of pain. Kahlo appropriates motifs and images from cultures familiar to her so that she may give a language to her silence.

The language of pain in this study is about resisting its silence through a subversion of narrative and artistic conventions that do not necessarily support the expression of suffering. Pain, in modern culture, is a phenomenon that not only is understood to presumably resist language, but its expression must conform to a set of codified behaviors. In her book *The History of Pain* (1995)¹⁵⁶, Roselyne Rey observes that the language of pain is dependent on cultural norms.

Pain involves a codified form of social behaviour which sets the parameters of allowable overt manifestations and regulates the expression of such innermost personal experiences. (4)

Both Duras and Kahlo resist pain's silence by challenging the codified behavior that Western culture imposes on the expression of pain. Chantal Thomas, an 18th century scholar, implies in her book, *Souffrir* (2004)¹⁵⁷ that suffering, which is the expression of pain, is not a socially acceptable reaction in modern Western culture. In the past, Thomas tells us, suffering was seen as a kind of inspirational example of Christian faith.

Le principal motif d'être sur terre, le seul mode sur lequel accomplir sa destinée, des expressions telles que "ici-bas" ou "vallée de larmes" pour

¹⁵⁶ Roselyne Rey, *The History of Pain* trans. Louise Elliot Wallace, J.A. Cadden, and S.W. Cadden (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995).

¹⁵⁷ Chantal Thomas, *Souffrir* (Paris: Manuels Payot, 2004).

désigner le monde étaient l'évidence. « Ici-bas » avait un sens. Il impliquait un « là-haut » synonyme de félicité – un Ciel qui se gagnait en proportion des peines subies, des larmes versées, des offrandes de douleurs déposées sur l'autel du Seigneur. (9)

In modern culture, the religious ecstasy of earthly suffering for a greater reward in the afterlife has transformed into a taboo subject that must be hidden, rendered invisible.

« Souffrir est mal vu. À force d'être *mal vu*, souffrir...est devenu autant que possible *invisible*. » (9, 12) (Thomas' emphasis) Thomas implies that in modern culture, the expression of pain is marginalized. We can draw a parallel between Thomas' notion of the marginalization of those in pain and Scarry's theory of pain and silence. Let us remember that s/he who suffers from pain, according to Scarry, has been relegated to the margins of society because they no longer are able to express themselves in a discursive manner. They must turn to the language prescribed by a hegemonic culture in order to express their suffering. The intentions of Duras' and Kahlo's languages of pain are to express and to make visible that which has been deemed inexpressible and invisible.

Duras and Kahlo have re-drawn the boundaries that restrict the language of pain. The artists have transformed the expression of pain from one that privileges a unique reliance on discursive communication within prescribed experiences to a cross-cultural approach that reveals socio-cultural issues that have limited the notions of feminine subjectivity. Trinh T. Minh-ha, explains in her essay, "Not You/Like You: Postcolonial Women and the Interlocking Questions of Identity and Difference" (1997)¹⁵⁸ how a hegemonic culture attempts to create a homogenous sense of identity among its subjects. Minh-ha suggests that a departure in either character or ideology from what the dominant culture has deemed

¹⁵⁸ Trinh T. Minh-ha, "Not You/Like You: Postcolonial Women and the Interlocking Questions of Identity and Difference," *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation, and Postcolonial Perspectives* eds. Anne McClintock, Aamir Mufti, and Ella Shohat (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997) 415-419.

acceptable often results in being considered the “other” or that which is different. In Minh-ha’s estimation, those who display socio-cultural differences in a hegemonic culture are frequently marginalized.

Hegemony works at leveling out differences and at standardizing contexts and expectations in the smallest details of our daily lives. Uncovering this leveling of differences is, therefore, resisting that very notion of difference that is defined in the master’s terms. (416)

In Minh-ha’s essay on the subjectivity of women, the scholar suggests in order to re-think the role of women in a hegemony, she must expose socio-cultural differences that the prevailing culture has worked to conceal. The idea of resistance, as Minh-ha articulates it, is particularly important to this study because both artists resist cultural norms that dictate what is, and more importantly, what is not usually promoted by the dominant culture. Both Duras and Kahlo demonstrate to their readers and viewers that feminine identity is neither homogenous nor static. The artists reveal through their languages of pain the plurality of feminine identity within both Western and non-Western cultures. For example, in both *The Two Fridas* and *My Birth* Kahlo transforms conventional representations of the *Mater Dolorosa* in to Aztec incarnations of maternal comfort and spirituality. In this instance, Kahlo challenges racial and social prejudices that exist within a conservative, Catholic culture. *Henry Ford Hospital* challenges her viewers to re-think conventions that have forced women to define themselves in terms of their ability and desire to bear children. In *The Broken Column*, *My Birth*, and *The Two Fridas*, Kahlo elevates herself to the role of Christ in order to express her pain. The implications of this is that she is creating a new path for women to view themselves as the ultimate martyr, a role that has been exclusive to male representation.

The notion of challenging the conventions of female subjectivity manifests itself in Duras' texts as the focal point and source of strength. In *L'amant*, "La douleur," *India Song* and *Le barrage*, each of the female protagonists is set within adverse circumstances. They must function within the bounds of a colonial culture or with wartime occupation. The restrictive, painful settings of each of these texts force the author to find alternative ways to express pain. For example, in *India Song*, *la mendiante* is a non-white subject of a colonial empire and is invisible to those who inhabit the country. Duras underscores her inarticulate cries throughout the text, situating it against a European, white setting. *La mendiante's* voice is put in painful opposition to the opulence of European wealth. The reader/viewer is obligated to take notice of she who has been silenced by political oppression. The emerging voice of the politically oppressed recurs in "La douleur." Mme.L's voice is the singular expression of pain during a time of political upheaval. In both *L'amant* and *Le barrage* the female body is the focus of the narrators' testimonies. The body in both texts testifies to the injustices of the colonial government in Indochina. *Le ravisement de Lol V. Stein* reminds the viewer of the repression and domination of a hegemonic culture. Lol is invisible and silent in order to serve the narrator's story.

Duras and Kahlo have inspired their readers and viewers to re-think prescribed ideas about women in art, literature and socio-cultural circumstances. By examining the artists' works as sophisticated expressions of pain, readers and viewers can understand that Duras and Kahlo have begun to redefine notions of feminine identity within Western and non-Western contexts.



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(fig. 1) *Anguish*



(fig. 2) *The Daughters of Lot*



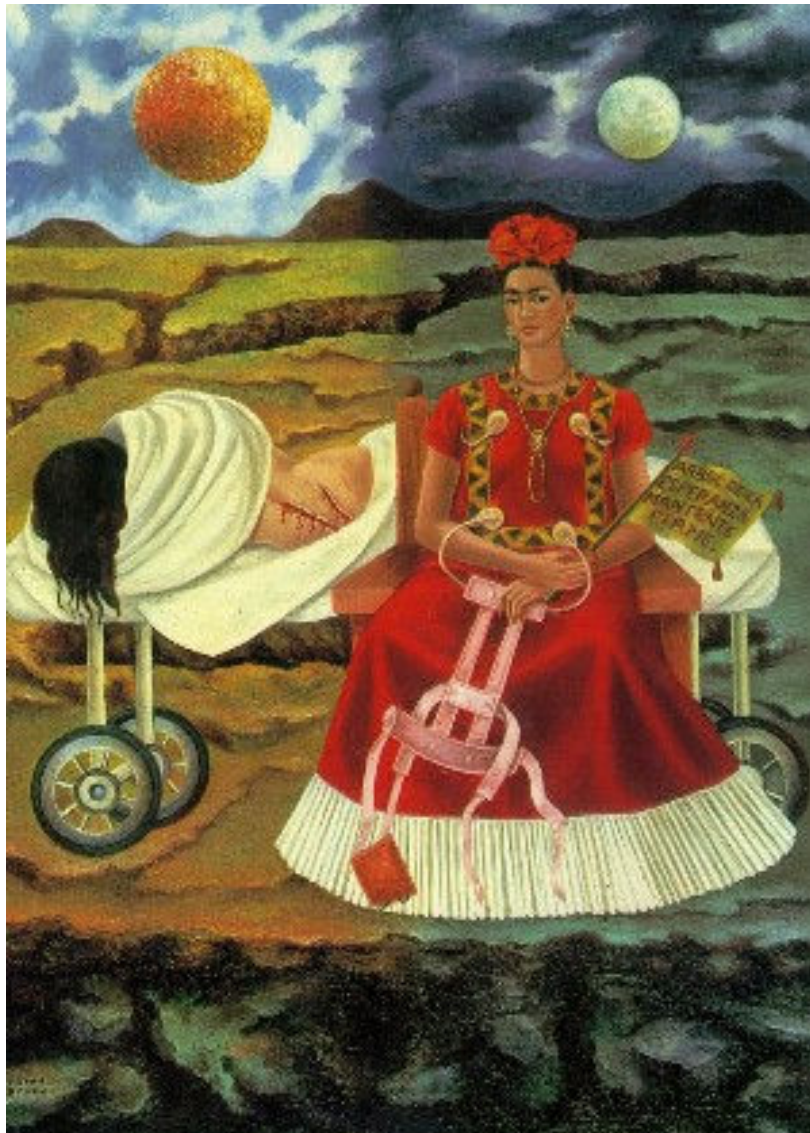
(fig.3) *Henry Ford Hospital*



(fig. 4) *The Two Fridas*



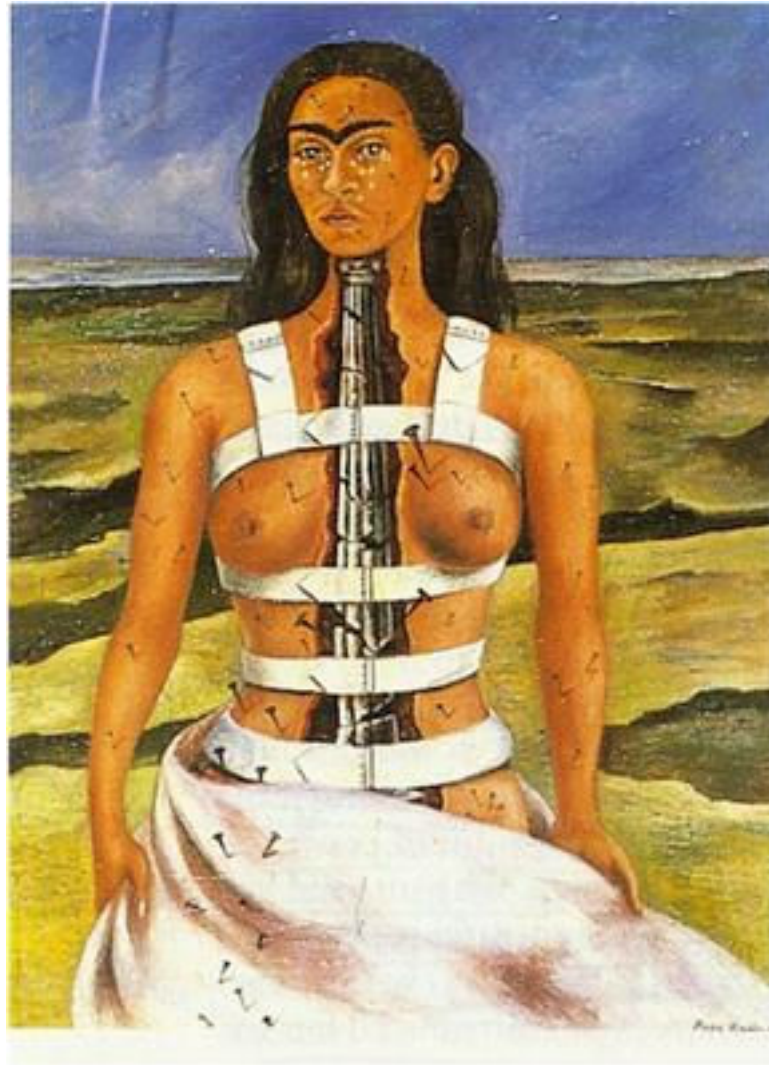
(fig. 5) *La Pietà*



(fig. 6) *Tree of Hope*



(fig. 7) *My Birth*



(fig. 8) *The Broken Column*

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