

Prismatic Intersectionalities: An Ecocritical Negotiation of Oppositional Utopias in *L'Amant*

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Abstract

In an exploration of the concept of utopia, different elements are evaluated to analyze this unique, though not necessarily identifiable, space. With this in mind, primary constructs found within utopias are hope and desire (Levitas 191). When considering the film *L'amant* (1992), both leads display characteristics of hope and desire, creating a utopia from the Bachelor's Room, which functions as an 'Otherly place'. However, the opposing identities of the Young Girl and the Chinese Man create conflicting utopias unique to their situational idealisms, battling one another within the same 'Other place' (192-193). At the same time, ecofeminism will be used to understand how the Young Girl and her Lover interact in their 'Otherly place'. According to Douglas Vakoch (2011), ecofeminism employs a worldview that respects organic processes, such as female sexuality, pleasure, orgasm, and agency. However, the field of ecofeminism also analyses the detrimental relationship formed between women and nature, especially concerning the narratives of conquering feminine land and ownership. With this in mind, an ecofeminist framework can be used to explain the imposition of patriarchal values onto the Young Girl, as well as the way she navigates the established 'Otherly space.'

Keywords

ecofeminism, prismaticology, female sexuality, social constructs, power, race

Résumé

Dans une exploration du concept d'utopie, différents éléments sont évalués pour analyser cet espace unique, mais pas nécessairement identifiable. Dans cet esprit, les constructions primaires trouvées dans les utopies sont l'espoir et le désir (Levitas 191). En considérant le film *L'amant* (1992), les deux protagonistes incarnent des caractéristiques d'espoir et de désir, créant une utopie à partir de la Salle célibataire, qui fonctionne comme un « autre lieu ». Cependant, les identités opposées de la Jeune fille et de l'Homme chinois créent des utopies conflictuelles propres à leurs idéalismes situationnels, se battant au sein du même « autre endroit » (192-193). En même temps, l'écoféminisme sera utilisé pour comprendre comment la Jeune fille et son Amant interagissent dans leur « autre lieu ». Selon Douglas Vakoch (2011), l'écoféminisme utilise une vision du monde qui respecte les processus organiques, comme la sexualité féminine, le plaisir, l'orgasme et l'autonomie. Cependant, le domaine de l'écoféminisme analyse également la relation préjudiciable formée entre les femmes et la nature, en particulier en ce qui concerne les récits ayant une conquête de la terre et la propriété féminines. Dans cette optique, un cadre écoféministe peut être utilisé pour expliquer l'imposition de valeurs patriarcales sur la Jeune fille, ainsi que la façon dont elle navigue l'« autre espace » établi.

Mots-clés

écoféminisme, prismaticologie, sexualité féminine, constructions sociales, pouvoir, race

A consequence of human sexuality is the enforcement of control, or perhaps more appropriately, the establishment of power. In this regard, we must understand desire and pleasure as capital, especially when considering the sexually exploitative narrative within the film *L'Amant* (1992). Present within Jean Jacques Annaud's film adaptation of Marguerite Duras' coming-of-age autobiographical *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* (1984) is a sexually determined arrangement that intersects opposing ideologies concerned with sex, race, and gender. Underlying these oppositional ideologies are elements of utopia, such as the hopes and desires of the main characters and their established 'Otherly place' within the Bachelor's Room. Moreover, the filmic reimagining of the story's Otherly place establishes a series of unique relationships between environment and colour, and importantly, between environment and women. As a result, the Otherly place functions both as a setting and as a character within the affair, reinforcing the intersecting ideologies within the film's narrative. Therefore, through a feminist analysis, the frameworks held by the main characters of *L'Amant* are exposed as conflicting utopias influenced by extrinsic constructs of power that have fundamentally shaped their identities, hosted by a shared Otherly place that will be characterized by ecocritical evaluations of colour.³¹

The course of this article will grant emphasis to a visual analysis of the film adaptation of *L'Amant*, visiting both renditions of Duras' novel, *L'Amant* (1984) and *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* (1991), when appropriate. This choice may have been made under the ecocritical conditions of prismaticology, which attach significant ideologies, beliefs, and fundamental constructs of earth's life and dormancy to the spectrum of colour. The interconnectivity of

³¹ As defined by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, ecocriticism, also known as ecopoetics, environmental literacy criticism, and green cultural studies, encompasses a study of the whole physical environment, composed of human and non-human and their relationship to one another. This is the study of the relationship between the physical environment and human cultures within literature. (xix)

prismaticity is constantly reiterated by Jeffery J. Cohen's in his book *Prismatic Ecology* (2013). Understandably, colour can be referenced in literature and bear significant impact upon the story, but colour written in the text is imaged within the reader's mind and therefore struggles to gain characterization discretely. A film, however, grants an unobtrusive yet startling power to setting and design through the compositional elements within mise-en-scène which, according to Cohen, "stresses that color is formative, the substrate as well as conveyor of an intricate world" (xvi). Further, the colours of interest, as found in the Bachelor's Room within *L'Amant*, being white, beige, green, and blue, intersect with compounds of utopia, with specific focus on modern feminist utopias and narrative. At the same time, the intertextual and oppositional utopias manifesting within the story's Bachelor's Room display constant negotiations of power. For instance, set in the late 1920s, *L'Amant* tells the true story of fifteen-year-old Duras and her sexual affair with an affluent Chinese man in Saigon, Vietnam. During this time, Saigon (presently Ho Cho Minh), was governed under French rule, introducing French settlers and class divides influenced by Whiteness.

Interacting with oppositions of power and socially constructed identities, the Young Girl uses her Whiteness and sexuality to sustain a financially beneficial relationship with the Chinese Man, temporarily relieving her family from poverty. This is accomplished through abusing Otherness, as witnessed with attempts by the Young Girl to belittle the Chinese Man due to race during dialogue and by ignoring him when they are in public together. At the same time, the Chinese Man attempts to break the Young Girl's confidence by using patriarchal constructs of power against her, such as virginity and premarital sex as deterrents from marriageability. This is evident during a dinner scene when the Young Girl emphasizes the intolerable sexual

relationship between her and a ‘Chinaman’ and her concern around unvirginal marriage, to which her Lover replies,

It’s no longer possible after... after that dishonor. For instance, if I wanted to marry you, I would not be allowed. We can’t tolerate the idea of that. I’m Chinese, I’m sorry. Now that you’ve done that with me, marriage between us would be impossible. (Annaud 50:25)

Slightly hurt by his response, the Young Girl defends herself by reiterating, “Well, it’s for the best then! Chinese – I don’t like the Chinese very much” (Annaud 51:43). Feasibly, these negotiations occur under the premise of female agency, as it intersects with other instances of power such as wealth and race. With this in mind, the film’s adaptation also makes nodes towards the intersection of sex work and female liberation, alternately paraphrasing the story to be a depiction of an attempted sexual utopia.

Modern negotiations of utopia have introduced, among many things, a hard-pressed removal of oppression upon female sexual agency. Perhaps, in understanding sex within a utopia, it should be taken into consideration that the first rendition of *Utopia* by Thomas More in 1516 left little to no variation for sex in favour of female pleasure (Sargent & Sargisson 301). Therefore, More’s *Utopia* and those that would follow for centuries contained heterosexual, patriarchal, and hierarchical sexual limitations. In most cases, women were objectified for their uterus’ capacity and sex in general was considered an indulgence unfit for a properly functioning society.

Since the concept of utopia was first proposed as a model for a prosperous society, it neglected pleasure and ensured the utmost attention to practicality. Anything that deviated the

focus of the manageable and well-kept society required enforced control. Lyman Sargent and Lucy Sargisson acknowledge this when they state,

The need to control is apparent in *Utopia*—More was well aware that sexual attraction was more powerful than the laws and institutions of even a good society and found it necessary even in the land of *Utopia* to include the severe punishments of slavery and death for sexual relations outside marriage. (301)

With this in mind, utopia can be understood as an equation, totalling hopes and needs to construct a biosocial place that satisfies desires and upholds order for functionality (Stockton 170). However, a universal utopia is seemingly impossible due to the conditions of positionality that reveal variances among the distresses of individual citizens. Since this is the case, a collection of utopias has been drafted to satisfy different facets of life, such as modern feminist and sexual utopias. According to Ruth Levitas, within the numerous utopias suggested exist conflicts that may directly oppress the concepts within opposing utopias, meaning that a utopia can simultaneously be a dystopia (192). This occurs when a utopia oppresses a certain individual or act, such as More's *Utopia* that assumes sex is only for reproduction and that women are only as useful as their uterus is capable, emphasizing the power complex of the utopia's narrator. Therefore, one citizen's utopia may be another's dystopia.

Intertextual and oppositional utopias exist within *L'Amant* as well. First, the text is creating an inconsequential desire economy within the Young Girl's utopian consciousness, where her sexuality becomes capital in her advantage. To the Young Girl, her ability to receive sexual pleasure and companionship, without the conflicting impositions of dominating ideologies, establishes her equation of desire and hope. Having said that, the Bachelor's Room functions as her Otherly place where such desires and hopes are satisfied. This Otherly place can

also be understood as a pleasure-place, “the realm of art, where the logic of reason and the logic of desire meet and mould world and form into endlessly changeable narratives of possibility” (Wagner-Lawlor 60). It is within this place that the imagined can exist, though it transpires once it exits the established place. In this way, the pleasure-place or Otherly place is a definition of no-place, at the mercy of fiction and otherwise unable to assimilate within the society from which it is removed. Since this is the case, “This ‘no-place’ of fiction and fantasy is the most necessary and sought-after real estate on the map, a utopian space where what is possible can be staged again and again” (60).

However, the Young Girl’s utopia is dependent on the exploitation of her Chinese Lover, as representative of the Western world’s advances throughout the Orient, according to Jonathan Culler (168). Consequently, in turn, the Chinese Man has created an oppositional utopia that assumes power and dominance over his partner. Zoë Brigley Thompson underlines that within the Chinese Man’s utopia are instances of aggressive dominance, establishment of financial dependency, and symbolic raping of the concept of Whiteness (3). Reasonably, the Chinese Man wants to dismantle his internalized racism complex by destroying the power complexes available to the Young Girl, such as virginity and Whiteness, while controlling her access to his wealth (4). While his utopia oppresses the Young Girl, it likely liberates his own constraints. At the same time, however, it is evident that the Chinese Man wants to be loved by the Young Girl without the negations of society constantly deterring their romance, such as religion, race, class, and age. Perhaps the Chinese Man’s utopia benefits from authority over women. This includes sexual monetization as a method of control, and being the idealized patriarchal presence. Feasibly, this patriarchal power is similar to the power of Whiteness from which the Young Girl benefits.

It was not until the emergence of feminist utopian discourse, or in some debates, the rise of pleasure economies that relieved, to an extent, the patriarchal and religiously influenced bounds within utopian discourse, including the patriarchal governance of sex (Sargent & Sargisson 301). Sargent and Sargisson outline the evolving discourse concerned with sexual utopia, suggesting that when

Looked at historically, the treatment of sexual relations in utopia has changed very dramatically, from an aspect of a hierarchical, patriarchal society in which sexual relations reproduced the power structure (in dystopias, they still do) to a gender-equal assertion of the right to act freely that challenged (and still challenges) the power structure. Also, within free and equal sexual relations, anything goes that all participants freely choose, although it is generally agreed that such relationships should be caring. Such changes would constitute a sexual revolution, but revolutions, both sexual and nonsexual, have a tendency to end up benefiting only some people. (316)

Sargent and Sargisson are therefore drawing attention to the ways that even in a utopia, a primary benefactor subjugates an oppressed receiver. With this in mind, due to the negotiations of place and body in sexual utopias, or utopias in general, female bodies and land are intertwined, making them organically bound to the devices of patriarchal discourse (Mies et al. 14). A primary example of patriarchal control over the female body, mentioned in regard to *L'Amant* previously, is the conception of virginity, which is a direct consequence of the hymen. Jaques Derrida described the hymen as a “protective screen, the jewel box of virginity, the vaginal partition, the fine, invisible veil which stands *between* the inside and the outside of a woman, and consequently between desire and fulfillment” (qtd. in McAlister 45, original

emphasis). However, his rendition of the female body upholds the symbolic detriment of female virginity while also objectifying and rewarding her identity of *not* doing (45).

Among the many power negotiations in the film *L'Amant* is the reiteration of worth as attached to virginal value within the Young Girl. The two most prominent reinforcements of virginity occur when the Chinese Man assures the Young Girl that sex before marriage makes a woman unmarriageable, even to the most undesirable of men. He assures her that she would never find someone who wants to love a 'deflowered' woman, especially one whose virginity was taken by a Chinese man. The next most important enforcement of virginity is when the Young Girl's eldest brother expresses his disgust in his younger sister's 'whore' behaviour, physically assaulting her and reducing her worth to symbolic nothingness. Tenably, the concept of virginity, as a consequence of the hymen, is a constant and unnecessary consistency upheld within the patriarchy. Nonetheless, as Jodi McAlister notes, it is completely idiosyncratic considering some women do not possess hymens at all (46). Moreover, the problematic debate around the conditions of the hymen are not particularly relevant to whether or not it exists, but more so an attempt for the men dictating its purpose to impose their own significance into the constructs of womanhood.

Similar impositions exist when evaluating the relationship between men and nature in the fields of ecocriticism. The anthropogenic positionality of patriarchy has determined land to be a conquerable resource, made to satisfy the wants of mankind. Where the flag is punctured into land to signify ownership and entitlement, it is the same place that the phallus' self-imposed importance punctures the hymen. Since this is the case, the narration of the female body on screen or within literature must possess, to some degree, the influence of a female narrator who is inherently less concerned with conquering, and more concerned with unobjectified and non-

fatalistic narratives of herself. However, the inclusion of female agency within the production of *L'Amant* becomes complicated when considering the intrusion of the male gaze and the expulsion of the text's original author from the set.

While originally part of the advisory council for the film adaptation of *L'Amant*, a quarrel between director Jean Jacques Annaud and author Marguerite Duras led to her indefinite removal from the film set. This expulsion prompted a re-writing, or better yet, a regenerated instalment of her initial novel *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord*, in which she tells her story how she wants it to be narrated. It has been recorded that Duras detested Annaud's adaptation of *L'Amant* (Ince 114). Imaginably, the cause of this distaste was the result of Duras' entanglement with a deep toned, controllable Chinese lover, as shown on screen. Her rewriting attributes a newfound attention to the

elements in the physical appearance of the lover: a less marked contrast in skin colour between the two lovers reduces the racial difference between them and contributes to a lessening of the supremacy of female subject over feminized male object found in *L'amant*. It also corroborates the undoing of the lover's exoticization as an object of desire. (Ince 120)

Regardless of the rewrite, which was successful in its own regard, just as her first novel, the intersecting tensions of race, power, and sex are focal points within the story. Therefore, mastering what Kate Ince describes as "Said-inspired 'orientalist' narration" to which she notes that both texts, as well as the film, contain "... (1) the eroticization of the exotic, (2) the feminization of the Other, and (3) the representation of the Orient as an ontological essence" (121). Arguably, the conditions of the Other under the dictation of Whiteness introduce an

intersection into prismaticity, which explains the ecocritical significance of colour as it pertains to everything in existence.

White ecology possesses a unique elasticity within the realm of ecocriticism due to the fact that it extends to both the narration of Western, Christian, and White metaphysics, and towards the encompassing spectrum of all ecologies (Herzogenrath 1). The latter is the mimesis of the colour white, whose properties include the excretion of every colour within the spectrum. With this in mind, the colour white represents a complex space that moves intersectional thoughts through it, though they refract at their own pace without the intervention of the colour white, which instead acts like a tunnel or transit station for other ecologies (2). Understanding the colour white in this way leads to the criticism that Whiteness, as the consequence of colonial domination, is also a station of sorts that moves goods, cultures, and traditions from their points of origin and into discontextualized markets. Additionally, white is achromatic, meaning that it does not have a hue. With this in mind, Whiteness represents the determining structure within racial power, but is considered by Neil Altman to be an unracialized body (60). Therefore, when understanding Whiteness, it shall be shaped into a prismatic lens that traffics Otherness and its qualities.

Take, for example, the narration of *L'Amant*, which tells the story through the lens of a White French woman who is aware of the power dichotomies between herself and her Chinese lover, and between them and their Vietnamese environment. Noticeably, when the Young Girl ignores the Chinese Man's initial introduction, until he assures her of the potential power she holds when he says, "... it's so surprising, a young White girl on a Native bus... and you're pretty, you could do anything you like" (Annaud 16:00). Not to mention, the affordances of Whiteness are frequented within the film both through the voice-over narration of the film, and

through the film's dialogue, enforcing the visceral condition of Whiteness. Elemently, as states Bernd Herzogenrath, within the realm of Whiteness are direct routes between religious power, patriarchal enforcement of values, governance over body and state, as well as Western metaphysical inclinations (1).

Interestingly, the conditions of Whiteness are directly challenged by an opaque or slightly darker version of the colour white, as found in its close neighbour beige. As Will Stockton introduces it, "Beige is the average color. If all the light in the universe, from all its known galaxy systems, were mixed together, what results would look like a latte" (170). Commonly known, however, is the result of converging galactic matter being a catastrophic explosion, sending out debris from former systems of the universe. Since this is the case, Stockton has decided to plague beige with the responsibilities of "apocalyptic eruptions, encounters, and condensations by focusing on the creation of products coded as waste; it studies the end of the world - but also, more hopefully, the creation of new worlds ..." (170).

Within these new beige worlds are shades of softer, opaque versions of other colours like red and purple, resulting in shades of pink and lavender. With this in mind, beige's ability to create new worlds and realities extends the colour into debates around sexuality, which is a natural phenomenon in the world, constantly reworked and exposed in different ways. Stockton borrows words from the ecocritics Cationa Mortimer-Sandilands and Bruce Erickson, who associate beige with sexual politics as it converges with biosocial constitutions within the natural world. Essentially, as explained further by Stockton, "sexual relations organize and influence both the material world of nature and our perceptions, experiences, and constructions of the world" (171). Therefore, beige is anthropogenic, arranging the universe around the consequences and practises of human sexuality. Consider briefly that the Young Girl's dress in the film is

beige, while the Chinese Man's suit is white. Consequently, the Young Girl exhibits fidelity towards pleasure and obsession, wanting to be lusted after with world-centring intensity. Presumably, this need for sexual attention could also be the result of her deteriorating family structure, her lack of love in other areas of her life, and her youthful angst. However, such grievances are better categorized by the colour blue (Joy 213-226). Regardless, she also displays accounts of female and sexual agency, determining the grounds of her sexual arrangement and enjoying it.

The Chinese Man, on the other hand, wears white to imply associations with the affordances usually reserved for Whiteness, such as his wealth, etiquette, and patriarchal power. Within his false aura of Whiteness, as the condition of Whiteness is a false one regardless of who wears it, is a grey line between sexual favourability and the impeding exoticization of his Otherness. This Otherness is examined within the controlled, built environment of the Bachelor's Room, which lacks shades of white or beige beyond the materials of the Young Girl, her Lover, and their sheets.

Importantly, within beige is the creation of environments animated by sexuality, such as the Bachelor's Room in *L'Amant*. The Bachelor's Room functions as a type of fantasy space, or Otherly place, characterized by the abject sexual practises that occur within its confines. Relating directly to sexual utopias, this room is not necessarily considered a "good sexual place," as in a utopia characterized by sexual liberation or quality, but more appropriately, '*the* sexual place,' as though it is simply a room in the utopian city that forgives the abject for being (Stockton 171). Outside this room, the abject remains.

The sexual place temporarily renegotiates limiting social constructs, to which Stockton notes that this place "... tropes sexual desires for partners across barriers of class and race

especially, facilitating an imaginative project of social remodelling in which these barriers are lowered and transgressed, though not necessarily dismantled entirely” (174). Withal, since beige is a colour representing the convergence of everything left over or wasted, it is also inclusive of societies abjections, such as sex work or other taboo relationships (171). In *L'Amant*, the affair that occurs between the Chinese Man and the Young Girl take on different abject forms, such as paedophilia (as it is recognized today in the Western world), interracial sex, and sex work.

Sex work is blatantly noted in the novel and more subtly within the film, which is instead trying to emphasize the Young Girl's circumstance as a love story, rather than a sexual arrangement. In either case, perhaps inspiring or influencing the Young Girl and her close boarding school friend Helene Lagonelle, is Alice, a dormitory supervisor at the boarding school who works within the sex industry as a companion to non-White men (116). On top of that, it is within the all-girls boarding school that the Young Girl voices her desires for sexual liberation. Following this reveal, there are a series of events in the novel and the film that emphasize the financial arrangement between the Chinese Man and the Young Girl, including the payment of her brothers' return to France (Duras 147; Ince 117). Prominently, the novel displays the feminine voice as a powerful force in generating income within a patriarchal society, monetizing the sexual objectification of her own body. The normalization of female sexual objectification is a historical circumstance of anti-feminist rhetoric which has infected Western founding thought in most cases. Arguably, Duras' novel presents a dissonant focus on sex work as taboo, and instead shifts the understanding of the sex industry to be more in tune with female agency.

The film, however, portrays the Young Girl to be her own victim, as though her sexually liberated choices and manipulation of patriarchy are inevitably intended to return heartbreak and disappointment, as the colour blue would also suggest (Joy 213-226). Briefly, blue, beyond a

deep, melancholic sadness, arguably has a distinct connection to weather. With that in mind, weather is inherently linked to water, which is a force that can be destructive in presence, such as during a typhoon, or in absence, such as drought. Debatably, water is within the realm of womanhood, as a healing property and source of life, just as the womb (218-222). *L'Amant* places the Young Girl into situations with blue, such as the Bachelor's Room which has blue walls, and also stages her in scenes with water. The blue walls of the bedroom hear the Young Girl voice her depression, inherited from her mother, while also hosting a pair of broken hearts when the affair ends. That said, the Young Girl's interactions with water occur when she arrives by boat, during her meet cute with her Lover, and also her focus on watering the wilting plants within the Bachelor's Room. Interestingly, the watering of the plants is mimicked in the bathing scene following the first sexual encounter between the Chinese Man and the Young Girl in the Bachelor's Room. In this instance, blue and green collide. For example, instead of the Young Girl watering the plants, the Chinese Man 'waters' her while she stands in a shallow basin, similar to the shallow pots that hold the plants. In her pose, her arms and legs form a stand similar to that of the small planted trees to which she tends. In this case, the Young Girl is directly compared to nature, greening her feminization and showing that she has been planted or will grow as a consequence of her sexual collision with a man. With this analysis, it may be inferred that the Young Girl takes accountability for herself as time moves forward, eventually bathing herself, even in the presence of her Lover, just as she takes accountability for the plants, watering them under her own accord. Arguably, taking care of herself is a more sustainable practise than relying on her Lover, therefore representing a dominating concept within the colour green.

Green has come to represent a collection of things, also positing itself as an intersectional colour. For instance, the colour green works to demonstrate sustainability and, in some regards, development (Nardizzi 148). This rendering is the consequence of green studies as it relates to the health of ecosystems as influenced by political representation, marketing, and public policy or advocacy. When applying sustainability to *L'Amant*, we see greenery in the tropical landscape of Vietnam, but not often in association with the Young Girl and the Chinese Man, with the exception of the two plants in the bedroom, which are only cared for by the Young Girl. The lack of green around the couple is arguably representative of the unsustainable affair. The disregard for green may also suggest that the arrangement lacks naturalness or natural harmonization, unable to grow or blossom under the predetermined conditions of society that warrants their relationship impossible. Finally, there is an intellectual and emotional development of the Young Girl, as narrated when her character says,

Very early in my life it was too late ... I grew old at eighteen. I don't know if it's the same for everyone, I've never asked. But I believe I've heard of the way time can suddenly accelerate on people when they're going through even the most youthful and highly esteemed stages of life. (Duras 1)

Interestingly, the Young Girl seems to mature rapidly in both the novel and the film. This may be due to the length and depth of the works, the novel being composed of fewer than 150 pages and the film containing limited settings, both progressing with drastic emotional changes. Peculiarly, it is as though time both stands still and accelerates during the film, and this progress is measured by how the Young Girl styles her hair privately, then publicly, as well as how she walks. For instance, the Young Girl first appears on screen wearing her hair in two youthful French braids, which are eventually unravelled after her sexual interactions with her Lover. At first, her

unbraided hair was only present in the company of her Lover in the Bachelor's Room and then when they would go out for dinner together. In time, her free flowing, yet messy, hair and confident stride would be present around her family, which led them to the realization that she was now sexually active.

In this case, *L'Amant* is demonstrating the process of aging, while more precisely, the process of coming-of-age, thus leading into another staple of ecofeminism: the respect of natural/organic processes. For example, the Young Girl's sexual discovery reveals the organic luxury of orgasm. At the same time, the film's staging and cinematography show the natural movements of intercourse and the development of the Young Girl's body is exposed. Ergo, the relationship between sex, maturity, and time are presented in a poetic manner as Duras narrates the film's events.

All things considered, this is likely due to the fact that the novel is a powerful remembering written by a woman about herself, therein emphasizing female agency. While the adaptation by Annaud is inherently tainted by the male gaze and the ignorant confining limitations of patriarchy, the Young Girl's nude body is still a focal point, even under the influence of her own agency. According to Karen Hollinger, known to literature as feminist critique is the evaluation of patriarchal manipulation of viewership in literature and film, which is necessary when accounting for films such as *L'Amant* (7). Within this critique is Laura Mulvey's concept of the male gaze, which is the "totalizing conception of the workings of the Hollywood system as dominated by male structures of seeing" which navigates *L'Amant's* cinematographic focus on the underage, nude body of the Young Girl (11). Her constant exposure leaves the "female image, as well as the female spectator, in a position of silence, masochism, and complete absorption within male fantasy" (11). That being so, feminist critique

demands that female desire and fantasy, as determined by women, be present on screen and within literature.

Feminist critique also concerns feminist utopias and narrative strategies. For example, Jennifer A. Wagner-Lawlor suggests that romantic narrative strategies predominantly contain utopian conclusions, resulting in the idealized “happily every after” followed by a content imaged life within “the pleasurable illusion of stasis” (1). However, when renegotiated under the supervision of feminist speculation, the generic romantic narrative is either challenged and expunged, or indulged and amplified, leading to the discussion around what qualities are carried over into a feminist utopia as constructed within feminist narrative.

Consider *L'Amant*, which is not a utopian narrative per se, but instead a feminist narrative that carries brief instances of utopia and far more attempts towards feminist sexual utopia. Since *L'Amant* is an autobiographical work, the hopes and desires present are determined by the dystopian or unfavourable circumstances of reality through a collection of remembered events. Then, in being just that, a remembering, it is at the mercy of utopian consciousness, which disturbs authenticity with the temptation of reimagining things better than they are (Wagner-Lawlor 2). In the case of *L'Amant*, Duras is rewriting the circumstances of an affair with a wealthy, older Chinese man that she had in her youth as French girl living in Vietnam. According to Katherine Nelson and Robyn Fivush, in the case of autobiographical memory, Duras is linking “self-impinging emotions, goals, and personal meanings ... characteristics of autobiographical memories” (487). Since this is the case, Duras may have been shaping her memories into the more bearable version of the real events. With this in mind, her autobiographic memory may be understood as a type of declarative memory, in which she is choosing to inform herself and her readers that her story occurred as documented in her novel.

Certainly, this must be true in some form, considering the re-remembered version of events within the rewrite, *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* (1991), which creates a story that is attuned to the vision Duras has for herself, rather than the one depicted by Annaud. Viably, this demonstrates an intrusion of utopian consciousness which grants the ability to rewrite memory.

Arguably, utopian consciousness is present within all renditions of *L'Amant*, taking form within the film as the Bachelor's Room. Functioning as an Otherly place, or pleasure-place, the blue walls and beige sheets represent a deep, melancholic sadness and sexual ambiguity. Pointing towards the conditions of ecology, the use of prismaticity has allowed characterization of the mise-en-scène within the Bachelor's Room using colours to understand the different ideologies and positionalities intersecting the affair between the Young Girl and her Chinese Lover in *L'Amant*. Moreover, within this room are colliding ideologies and enforcement of power, such as classism and racism. Interestingly, this intersection is mediated via the capital exchange of sex and desire. For this reason, the conditions of this relationship have been analyzed with multiple feminist frameworks, such as feminist critique as it applies to film, and ecofeminism. All things considered, the relationship between colour, as it pertains to setting and race, intersect constantly within the Bachelor's Room. As a result, the Young Girl and her Lover represent different ideologies, which can arguably be understood as self-informed, conflicting utopias that rely on the oppression of the Other. Since this is the case, the affair in *L'Amant* is exposing extrinsic constructs of power that cannot be deferred in the identity forming of the Young Girl and the Chinese Man, even within utopian consciousness.

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