I explored how female desire is represented in the works of Marguerite Duras through the themes of female alcoholism as a substitution for a desire and a result of the stunning of emotion caused by a perpetually inveterate life: the ocean as a physical representation of female desire as cosmic and liberated; homosexuality as desire without object and the death of desire; and violence among heterosexual couples as necessary to merge with the Other. Desire, for Duras, is predicated on the unsurmountable sexual difference between people which can only overcome through violence, and ultimately, through violent murder.

**ALCOHOLISM**

I've always drunk with men. Alcohol is linked to the memory of sexual violence — it makes it glow, it's inseparable from it. But only in the mind. Alcohol is a substitute for pleasure thought it doesn't replace it. People obsessed with sex aren't usually alcoholics. Alcoholics, even those in the gutter, tend to be intellectuals. — *Practicalities* 16

**THE OCEAN**

> Born Marguerite Donnadieu, April 4, 1914 in French Indochina
> Died March 3, 1996 in France
> Her mother and father moved to Indochina where she worked as a schoolteacher and he worked as a professor of mathematics
> Her father died in 1948
> She had two brothers, Pierre and Paulo, and had an incestuous relationship with Paulo

> The ocean, or other bodies of water, figure prominently in how desire operates in *The Reversing of Loi Seita*, *Emily L.*, and *The Malady of Death.*

**HOMOSEXUALITY**

> Homosexuality is troubling to desire because he only thinks of desire as desire without object and the death of desire, she saw homosexuality as a form of death. As desire, she saw homosexuality as a substitution for a desire without an object. Although Duras fought vehemently for human rights, her understanding of homoemsexuality is troubling to a modern reader. Because of Duras’ understanding of the nature of desire, she saw homosexuality as a form of death. As desire, she saw homosexuality as a substitution for a desire without an object. But this view is not without motivation — Duras lived with Yann Andréa Steiner, a gay man, at the end of her life. He took care of her and worshipped her work, but frustrated her in his sexual escapades. Like so many of Duras’ affairs, she used writing as a way to deal with her own non-normative sexual relationships.

**VIOLENCE**

> For Duras, desire is necessarily predicated on sexual difference, on the impassable boundaries between people. Desire can only exist when the Other — another person — is totally separate from oneself. So, the ultimate satisfaction of desire, the death of desire, can only happen when the Other is no longer “other,” is no longer separate from oneself.

> But this merging, absorption, of selves does not happen in the act of sexual intercourse — it happens through Durasian violence, particularly through passionate murder.

> The unnamed woman of *The Man Sitting in the Corridor* reaches orgasm through violence. In *The English Mint*, Claire kills Marie-Thérèse to prove her love and devotion to Yann Andréa Steiner.

> Duras and her lover, Gérard Jarlot. The two had a violent relationship and ended it in heavy drinking. Alors Duras helped him into the Port Mâcon, the two broke up out of literary and sexual jealousies.

> She says: The wish to be about to kill a lover, to keep him for yourself, yourself alone, to take him, steal him in defiance of every law, every moral authority — you don't know what that is, you've never experienced it?

> You say: Never. — *The Malady of Death* 42

> “I wish to be about to kill a lover, to keep him for yourself, yourself alone, to take him, steal him in defiance of every law, every moral authority — you don't know what that is, you've never experienced it?”

> Duras and Yann Andréa Steiner, her homosexual partner. She dictated *The Malady of Death* to him and he figures as a central figure in *Emily L.*

**FEMALE DESIRE: ALCOHOLISM, THE OCEAN, HOMOSEXUALITY, AND VIOLENCE**

> I said it again — that I was going to write the story of the affair we’d had together, the one that was still there and taking forever to die. — *Emily L.* 12

> The ocean in French, is a feminine word. In *The Malady of Death,* the ocean is prominently in how desire operates in *The Reversing of Loi Seita*, *Emily L.*, and *The Malady of Death.*

> “You say: Never.”

> “You finish your sentence. For Duras, desire is necessarily predicated on sexual difference, on the impassable boundaries between people. Desire can only exist when the Other — another person — is totally separate from oneself. So, the ultimate satisfaction of desire, the death of desire, can only happen when the Other is no longer ‘other,’ is no longer separate from oneself.”

> But this merging, absorption, of selves does not happen in the act of sexual intercourse — it happens through Durasian violence, particularly through passionate murder.

> For example, in *Moderato Cantabile* and *10/30 on a Summer Night,* Duras’ female protagonists seek to parallel the lives of the murdered women.

> But in *The Malady of Death,* the same man satisfies his desire because he only thinks about violence.

> “A woman’s body, with its thousand and one thresholds of ardor — once, by smashing yokes and censors, she lets it articulate the profusion of meanings that run through it in every direction — will make the old single-grooved mother tongue reverberate with more than one language.” Helène Cixous, “The Laugh of the Medusa”