

Just Like Her
Tout comme elle

Louise Dupré
translated by Erin Moure

followed by a conversation with Brigitte Haentjens



Wolsak & Wynn

OVERTURE

Daughters.

Mothers.

Daughters who are mothers and mothers who are daughters.

Mothers who bear their daughters and daughters who bear their mothers.

Possibly the same women, from one act to another.

*Or different women, but who share the same heritage:
the infinite genealogy of daughters and mothers.*

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Tableau 1

There she is, sitting at the table by the window. She sips her tea, her gaze lost in the fading light; she takes another sip and refills the cup, and sips her tea until the teapot is as empty as an empty womb. She says nothing, asks for nothing, needs nothing. She dreams, her gaze lost in the dusk that slowly falls. Who knows where she goes in the convolutions of her mind, until nothing else exists, not the stained tablecloth, nor my father, seated across from her, quietly rolling his cigarettes, nor us, her daughters. In the evening, when dusk dims the sky outside the window, she is no longer ours.

Aes Two

Tableau 11

Me, forever separated from hatred, forever separated from her, my mother, forever separate. One day, I simply packed my bag and set off, leaving her with the daughter she cherished, her marvel, her white magic, her mirror. One day, the time comes to get up and go, without turning back. You walk; you walk until the body refuses another step, until that fatigue you confuse with forgetting. It's not so easy to get rid of a childhood. It shows up again, at the least jolt in the landscape, it slinks under the eyelids, it makes you tremble and you ask if there's not some way to set it right. You grip your mother's portrait in your hands and convince yourself she loved you. That's when it rises, the crazy temptation to go back.

Act THREE

Tableau 8

It's the only way to survive. Leave. Put creeks, rivers, estuaries and all the brine of the oceans between daughter and mother. I left. Far, too far away for any possible return. To where I could start to see my own daughter as a woman who someday would also want to leave. Because she'll leave me, my daughter will. I have this glint of knowledge my mother never had. She'll leave me, and I'll be as inconsolable as any mother. But maybe she won't have to put all the brine of the ocean between us. She'll come back to see me, sometimes, to ask me, *How's it going, Mom?* And I'll answer, *And you, dear daughter?* Then she'll leave again, until the next visit. She'll leave and I won't try to hold her back.

Louise Dupré and Brigitte Haentjens, August 2005

Louise Dupré: Our desire to talk reminds me of *Les parleuses*¹, where Marguerite Duras and Xavière Gauthier converse openly, “woman to woman,” about the process of creating art, life and themselves. I remember how much I liked that book.

Brigitte Haentjens: I reread it when I was preparing to stage *L'Éden-cinéma*.² And, even when I work on your text, Marguerite Duras is not far away. As one of the huge family of women writers – Violette Leduc, Annie Ernaux, Gabrielle Roy, Pierrette Fleutiaux – who've written on the subject, Duras centred a good part of her work on the relationship...

LD: ... with the mother.

BH: Yes. The mother is extremely present not only in her autobiographical works like *The Sea Wall* and *The Lover*, but also, even more so, in her masterpieces *The Ravishing of Lol Stein* and *The Vice-Consul*, where she gives us an idealized mother figure, a female character of cold and distant beauty who provokes totally lethal passions.

LD: That's so true. I just reread *The Lover* and the relationship with the mother is incredible, that love-hate seesaw is constantly present in the book.

¹ Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1974. Exists in English translation by Katharine A. Jensen as *Woman to Woman* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1987).

² A play created from text by Marguerite Duras and staged by Haentjens' company Sibyllines, in conjunction with the French theatre of the National Arts Centre in Ottawa and the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, in June 2003. It won the Ottawa Critics' Circle Prize for the 2002–2003 season, and three Quebec papers voted it among the ten best plays of the season.