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Identity, Desire and Spectatorship: An Examination of
Germaine Dulac's *La Coquille et le Clergyman*

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
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University of South Florida

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**Identity, Desire and Spectatorship: An Examination of
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Jennifer A. Melko

ABSTRACT

Germaine Dulac's 1928 avant-garde film, *La Coquille et le Clergyman*, based on a script written by Antonin Artaud, presents the idea of the woman as an object of desire, subjected to the male gaze through the cinematic process. Not only is the lone female character the object of desire of her two male suitors on screen, but she also becomes the object of desire for the presumably male viewer of the film, who has become a silent character in the film. Rather than simply being the spectator, the viewer's own identity becomes entwined with that of the on screen characters.

While the idea of the woman as the object of desire subjected to the often male gaze in the cinema has been analyzed by many feminist film theorists, including Laura Mulvey, Kaja Silverman and Mary Ann Doane, the theories presented center on films directed either by male directors or female directors since the 1970's. Very little has been written about films directed by women in the 1920's, including *La Coquille et le Clergyman*. By examining *Coquille et le Clergyman*, I hope to fill in a gap in the discourse of the majority of feminist film theory.

This thesis will not only attempt to understand how Germaine Dulac, an early feminist film director, approaches the idea of the female body as an object of desire subjected to the male gaze differently than her male film director counterparts, but will

examine how the relationships between the female character and the two male characters differ from other male directed avant-garde films from the 1920's and how these relationships affect spectatorship. By examining *La Coquille et le Clergyman*, I hope to better understand how Dulac's cinematic interpretation of Artaud's script treats the idea of spectatorship, not only in 1928, but also today.

Introduction

During the 1920's in France, avant-garde cinema blossomed and many notable writers, including Charles Baudelaire, Robert Dresnos and Antonin Artaud, saw their works translated into the film medium. During this time, only a handful of female directors worked in the film industry—most notably, Alice Guy-Blanche, Lois Weber, Maya Deren, Marie Epstein and Germaine Dulac. Of these directors, Germaine Dulac is perhaps the most interesting, not only because of her success as a filmmaker, but also because of the controversy surrounding one of her films, *La Coquille et le Clergyman*. When looking at the works of Dulac, it is important to observe how she used the cinematic process to create a visually stimulating work of art and to examine whether or not her approaches to the cinema differ from those of her male counterparts. Through this examination, several questions arise. Does Dulac incorporate a feminine perspective in her films which creates a difference in how they are viewed? Would the viewer recognize Dulac's films as being "feminine" or "masculine"? Finally, in regards to *La Coquille et le Clergyman*, did Dulac break completely away from the aesthetic created by Antonin Artaud, the film's screenwriter?

Charlotte-Elisabeth-Germaine Saisset-Schneider was born in 1882 in Amiens, France. Her father, a career military officer, sent Germaine to live with her grandmother in Paris, where she was exposed to art, theater and music. Dulac's 1905 marriage to Louis Dulac, coupled with their bourgeois status, allowed Dulac the independence and

financial support to pursue her cinematic endeavors. Dulac's interest in the cinema came from her work as a drama critic for *La Française*, a feminist magazine, as well as a trip she took to Italy with friend and actress, Stacia de Napierkowska. After making a number of small films, Dulac released her first successful film, *La Souriante Mme Beudet* (*The Smiling Madame Beudet*) in 1923.

La Souriante Mme Beudet, adapted from an avant-garde play, depicts the fantasy life of a woman trapped in an unsatisfying marriage. In the film, Dulac deviates from the conventions of many of her male contemporaries. According to William Van Wert, *La Souriante Madame Beudet* "is one of the few experimental films of the decade in which women are not fragmented, shown as sexual freaks, stripped in close ups or through editing to reveal a bleeding mouth, bared breasts, or buttocks."¹ Films such as Man Ray's *L'Etoile de Mer*, where the female strips naked for the male character, and *Emak-Bakia*, where the shadows of a window blind fragment the woman's body, as well as Salvador Dali and Luis Buñuel's *Un Chien Andalou*, where the woman's eye is cut out, all present the female character as the object of desire which must be suppressed in some way. In contrast, Dulac presents Mme Beudet as the protagonist and focuses on the woman's inner desires through the "sustained exploration of (her) inner life (and her) subjective experience."² Through various fantasy sequences, Mme Beudet becomes the one who desires the sexual object, the male tennis player who represents some missing part of her relationship with her husband. She is never seen as the cause of anxiety, fear or disgust for the male subject. Instead, it is the male character, Mme Beudet's husband,

¹ William Van Wert "Germaine Dulac: First Feminist Filmmaker," *Women and the Cinema: A Critical Anthology*, Ed. Karyn Kay and Gerald Peary (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1977) 214.

² Richard Abel, *French Cinema: The First Wave 1915-1929* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984) 341.

who causes the fear and anxiety for both Mme Beudet and the film's viewer, due to Dulac's cinematic techniques.

According to Sandy Flitterman-Lewis, "Dulac's often anti-illusionist cinematic techniques were perfectly adapted to this inner portrayal of the inner life of a severely frustrated woman."³ Through point-of view shots from Mme Beudet's perspective, softly focused images and slow motion actions, Dulac draws the viewer into Mme Beudet's world. If Dulac created the film using traditional cinematic aesthetics—camera positions which create distance between the viewer and the on-screen characters, continuity editing and limited point of view shots—the viewer would be left with only an illusion of reality from an outsider's perspective. The viewer might understand Mme Beudet's unhappiness, based on facial expressions and her demeanor towards her husband, but he or she could only make assumptions about the extent of Mme Beudet's unhappiness. By moving away from the more traditional techniques, which merely present an illusion of a possible reality, Dulac constructs a more explicit reality in which the viewer becomes Mme Beudet. By cinematically illustrating "the character's perceptions and imaginings, the spectator is (not only) made to identify and empathize with a sensitive, remorseful woman"⁴ but is also allowed to explore and experience her psychological struggles and the loneliness and solitude of her fantasy world.

Dulac's *La Coquille et le Clergyman*, a film based on a script written by Antonin Artaud, presents the psychological struggles of the protagonist differently. According to William Van Wert, "the clear distinction between objective reality and subjective point-of-view shots that exists in (*La Souriante Mme Beudet*) no longer exists in (*La Coquille*

³Sandy Flitterman-Lewis qtd. in E. Ann Kaplan, *Women and Film: Both Sides of the Camera* (New York: Methuen, Inc, 1983) 88.

⁴ Abel 341.

et le Clergyman).”⁵ Instead of focusing on the inner struggles and fantasies of a female character, Dulac depicts the progressive insanity of the film’s primary character, the clergyman. While the viewer witnesses this progression, he or she never quite becomes aware of the clergyman’s inner-most thoughts. The viewer can only speculate on what the clergyman is thinking as he slowly loses his grip on reality. In *La Coquille et le Clergyman*, the clergyman pursues a beautiful woman and, at first glance, one might believe the woman is the force which drives the clergyman insane. However, upon further examination, one realizes Dulac’s portrayal of the woman takes her beyond being merely a sexual object. Like the male tennis player from *La Souriante Mme Beudet*, the woman in *La Coquille et le Clergyman* appears to be a representation of some missing part of the clergyman’s identity. By applying the psychoanalytic theories of Jacques Lacan and his idea of the “mirror stage,” it is likely that the woman, at least in a portion of the film, represents the part of the clergyman’s identity lost in his separation from the mother and his insanity is the result of his attempt to reconcile what is missing with his own identity. In addition to Lacanian psychoanalytic theories, Freud’s concept of the Oedipal complex also applies to the film. The three characters—the clergyman, the woman, and an officer/priest—set up an oedipal scenario, where the clergyman must kill the father figure (the officer/priest) in order to gain the affections of the motherly figure (the woman). Van Wert asserts that Dulac, in *La Coquille et le Clergyman*, “exploits the Freudian symbolism of her male colleagues. She makes a film in their style in order, at the end, to expose male fantasies.”⁶ While she interprets aspects of the script with a feminist viewpoint, illustrating male desires towards women, the idea of exploitation is

⁵ Van Wert 218.

⁶ Van Wert 218.

not as concrete as it might seem. Dulac did follow Artaud's script as much as possible; so much of the Freudian symbolism would inherently be present as Artaud's vision instead of Dulac's exploitation. In addition, defining Dulac's cinematic style in relation to her male colleagues becomes problematic.

Dulac's work tends to lean towards the more formalist aspects of the avant-garde. She creates films with a sense of visual harmony through the use of lighting, editing and other formal elements, while still portraying the inner struggles of the characters. However, since Dulac closely followed Artaud's script for *La Coquille et le Clergyman*, she is often considered one of the earliest surrealist filmmakers. According to Michael Gould, in his book *Surrealism and the Cinema*, "Surrealism concerns itself with a *desire* for the image or object (...). The surrealist feels he must become actively involved in the existences of these objects and seeks to form a whole with them. This search becomes so intense that he finds himself catering to a new hunger, and suffers from a want of fulfillment."⁷ This is certainly the case in *La Coquille et le Clergyman*, where the clergyman becomes absorbed with his object of desire, the beautiful woman. However, the assertion that Dulac was solely a surrealist filmmaker fails to take into account several issues; the most important being the fact that Dulac was a female filmmaker and writer who never closely associated with any of the members of the Surrealist group. Dulac's interpretation also moves the film away from the harsh juxtapositions, violent actions and fetishized portrayal of the woman often utilized by surrealist filmmakers, such as Man Ray, Salvador Dali and Luis Buñuel. Dulac's style, according to Sandy Flitterman-Lewis, belongs more to nineteenth century symbolism than twentieth century

⁷ Michael Gould, *Surrealism and the Cinema: (open-eyed screening)* (Cranbury: A. S. Barnes and Co., Inc., 1976) 21-2.

surrealism, due to its reliance on the “fluidity of images, a sort of expressive euphoria and a quasi-musical harmony.”⁸ Dulac felt strongly about creating an aesthetically pleasing, “artistic” film which could be followed to some degree by the audience. In this respect, she breaks away from the Surrealist filmmakers, who, like Artaud, used the cinema to “search for dissociation, fracture, (and) rupture, and (whose) violent discourse would proscribe all harmony.”⁹

Alan Williams notes that the film’s “reality in front of the camera, the material world of the fiction is never allowed to seem strange in and of itself: a sense of the surreal is imposed, not found.”¹⁰ Since Dulac did recreate Artaud’s script as accurately as possible, some aspects of *La Coquille et le Clergyman* could be interpreted as surrealistic, based on Artaud’s own surrealist ideological background—the concept of the woman as an object of desire, the mockery of the clergy, the primal urges of man. However, Dulac’s interpretation of *La Coquille et le Clergyman* does vary in some respects when compared to the script, especially in the parts of the script where Artaud’s description are vague. She tends to move away from the complete lack of narration, the harsh juxtapositions, shocking imagery and violence of the script in favor of a loosely based narrative without the violence or shocking imagery often used by her male counterparts. In fact, the most violent act in the film, the splitting of the officer/priest’s head is hardly violent at all. Instead of focusing on the violence of the scene, Dulac’s interest is in the visual rhythm created as the head splits with precise timing.

⁸ Sandy-Flitterman-Lewis qtd. in Alain and Odette Virmaux, *Artaud/Dulac La Coquille et Le Clergyman: Essai D’Élucidation D’une Querelle Mythique*, trans. Tami Williams (Paris: Éditions Paris Expérimental, 1999) 111.

⁹ Flitterman-Lewis qtd in Virmaux 111.

¹⁰ Williams 148.

It is also important to examine how Dulac's cinematic techniques affect the spectatorship of the film. The interest in spectatorship is not a new one. Throughout history, works of art have engaged the participation of the viewer. Titian's *Venus of Urbino* and Ingres's *Grande Odalisque* all draw the viewer into the scene through the female subjects' exotic stares out of the picture frame. In the works of Titian and Ingres, the woman becomes the eroticized object of desire for the viewer and the representation of true beauty. In Titian's work, for instance, a woman lies seductively on a sofa as she stares intently out towards the viewer. Her engagement is with the viewer; her bared breasts and suggestive placement of her hand over her genital area objectifies her and attracts the attention and desires of the viewer. In Ingres' work, *Grande Odalisque*, the woman is not as displayed as Titian's *Venus*. Instead of having her femininity displayed for all to see, her back faces the viewer. She turns her head to look behind her, evoking a similar sense of desire in the viewer. In these paintings, it could be said that the male viewer desires the woman sexually, while the female viewer desires to be the woman, in order to be desired by the male. In comparison, Manet's *Olympia* differs from *Venus of Urbino* and *Grande Odalisque*. While to some male viewers, the woman in *Olympia* may represent some sexual desire, she appears to be more of a representation of what is not desirable. Geometric lines replace the soft curves of the woman's body. The harsh, blown out lighting of the woman's body against a darkened background becomes jarring. The awkwardness of the woman's body and her uninviting stare distances the viewer from her.

What makes the viewing of these paintings different from the viewing of a female character in a film? In the paintings, we see only one moment in time which the painter

represents for the viewer. We have little contextual information, other than the details of the painting, by which to make a judgment of the woman. The cinema, however, draws the viewer into the actions of the characters, often making the viewer a silent character. Through point-of-view shots, camera angles and other cinematic techniques, the viewer often takes on the perspective of the on-screen characters. Dulac's films, such as *La Souriante Mme Beudet* and *La Coquille et le Clergyman*, allow the viewer to experience the fantasies and insanity of the characters from their perspectives instead of distancing the viewer into the position of a silent observer.

Film theories from the 1970's through today have provided various perspectives by which the different types of spectatorship and issues of the gaze can be examined. In 1975, Laura Mulvey, in her article "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," incorporated Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytical theories to examine the male spectatorship of any given film. Mulvey's premise of the "woman as image, man as bearer of the look"¹¹ asserts that the predominantly male viewer looks upon the male characters in the film as a reflection of a "superior"¹² self. The female character is then reduced to being an object of desire, through "which man can live out his fantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer, not maker, of meaning."¹³ In her analysis, Mulvey considers the spectatorship of a film to be a form of scopophilia, where enjoyment comes from watching. Scopophilia, according to Mulvey, is divided into two forms. The first form makes the woman a fetishized object of male desire while the second form allows the viewer to identify with

¹¹ Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends*, 3rd ed., ed. David H. Richter (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2007) 1175.

¹² Mulvey 1175.

¹³ Mulvey 1173.

on screen characters. While Mulvey's theories provide an important basis for analyzing the portrayal of the woman in the cinema, they only present one aspect of the treatment of the female in the cinema and she only takes into consideration the perspective of the male viewer and the desires the male viewer has for the on-screen female character.

Subsequent theorists, including Mary Ann Doane, Teresa De Lauretis and Kaja Silverman, have re-examined the ideas of spectatorship to include the female viewer.

In the case of Germaine Dulac, several things become important when looking at various ideas of spectatorship. Prior to the creation of *La Coquille et le Clergyman*, Germaine Dulac had already instilled much of her feminine perspective in *La Souriante Mme Beudet*. Dulac's "experimentation with cinematic language and its constructions of the spectator, exploration of the structures of unconscious fantasy, and research into the possibilities for representing (female) desire"¹⁴ change how her films are viewed in comparison to the films created by her male counterparts. In *La Souriante Mme Beudet*, Dulac manipulates the relationship between the on-screen characters and the viewer through the depictions of Madame Beudet's fantasies, allowing for the both the female and male viewer to identify with the female character. Instead of making the woman the object of desire, Dulac creates a scenario where the male tennis player in Mme Beudet's fantasies becomes the sexualized object of desire. The viewer never identifies with the male character, Mme Beudet's husband. Instead the viewer identifies with Mme Beudet due to the numerous superimpositions and point of view shots from her perspective.

Dulac's approach to *La Coquille et le Clergyman* differs slightly from the that of *La Souriante Mme Beudet*. Her close adaptation of Artaud's script leaves more

¹⁴ Sandy Flitterman-Lewis, *To Desire Differently: Feminism and the French Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996) 35.

ambiguity in the examination of how the film is seen based on the spectator's gender. By remaining true to what Artaud envisioned, Dulac inherently incorporates the idea of the woman as an object of desire for the male character as well as the viewer. Yet Dulac's interpretation of the woman is mild compared to Artaud's, and she focuses on the clergyman's attempt at understanding his insanity instead of the woman's sexuality. Dulac's woman never flaunts her sexuality or provokes the clergyman by making innuendos towards him. Her mere presence drives him insane.

Whether her work embraces the more formalistic aspects of the avant-garde or takes on a more surrealist aesthetic, Germaine Dulac incorporates her own aesthetic sensibilities into each of her films. It is interesting to examine Dulac's films in a contemporary context, especially through the analysis of contemporary feminist film theorists, and observe how Dulac addresses her own feminist viewpoints in a male dominated industry. Her female characters are not simply objects of desire. They become individuals with whom the viewer can relate to and empathize with. Dulac's films allow the female viewer a sense of participation seldom seen in films created by her contemporaries. Throughout her career as a filmmaker, she embraced the cinematic process as a way to create a sense of visual harmony and proved that women could create thought provoking and aesthetically pleasing films.

Chapter One

The Varied Visions of Germaine Dulac and Antonin Artaud

On the evening of February 9, 1928, Germaine Dulac's film *La Coquille et le Clergyman*, based on a script originally written by Antonin Artaud, a noted Surrealist artist and author, premiered at the Ursulines. Dulac, during the premiere of the film, faced severe criticism from the members of the audience, many of whom belonged to the Surrealist movement. They accused Dulac of feminizing Artaud's script and nearly started a riot on the film's opening night. Over the last eighty years, the events of that night have been greatly debated. Early accounts claim Artaud instigated the attack with the assistance of his Surrealist friends. This is perhaps the most controversial assumption, given that Artaud, by many accounts, was not on the best terms with the Surrealist group. Other accounts claim Artaud was at the screening with his mother and sat quietly while other members of the audience yelled insults at Dulac. While Artaud disapproved of some of the decisions Dulac made and presumably thought he should have a greater role in the film's creation than he actually did, most accounts now agree he was not one of the vocal critics during opening night, although he probably secretly enjoyed the premiere's spectacle. In an interview conducted by Alain and Odette Virmaux, Artaud's friend and companion at the time, Alexandra Pecker describes Artaud as being "restless, garrulous, but quite cheerful"¹⁵ after the event.

¹⁵ Virmaux 94.

Regardless of Artaud's response at the premiere, it seems the Surrealists were merely interested in starting a scandal for the mere pleasure of creating public insult. If anyone other than a member of the group had directed *La Coquille et le Clergyman*, the events of the premiere might have occurred in a similar fashion, especially since anyone who did not appeal to the Surrealists left themselves open to severe criticism. Shortly after the *La Coquille et le Clergyman* incident, another film, Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí's *Un Chien Andalou*, nearly evoked a similar riot, simply because Buñuel and Dalí were relatively unknown at the time and their film would certainly "be a shameful usurpation."¹⁶ A private screening for André Breton of *Un Chien Andalou* saved the film from a fate similar to *La Coquille et le Clergyman*. After the viewing, Breton's excitement about the film eliminated any chance for controversy at its premiere. Since Dulac was never truly part of the Surrealist inner circle and did not have the endorsement from members of the group, her interpretation of the film provided the Surrealists an obvious excuse to cause controversy.

Despite the controversy surrounding the film, Dulac did attempt to follow Artaud's script and only deviated from it in order to "enable the explicit representation of often semi-abstract images."¹⁷ Many of the changes appear to be based solely on Dulac's interpretation of Artaud's script. For instance, the end of the opening scene is described as follows:

But then the officer is behind the back of the man dressed in black. He takes the oyster shell out of his hands. Plainly surprised, the man lets him. The officer circles the room several times with the shell, then all of a

¹⁶ Virmaux 92.

¹⁷ Stephen Barber, *Artaud: The Screaming Body* (Creation Books, 1999) 12.

sudden draws his sword from its scabbard and smashes the shell a gigantic blow. The whole room trembles.¹⁸

While the actions are presented almost as they are described in the script, minor differences change the interpretation. When the officer removes the shell from the clergyman, the clergyman cringes in fear, rather than surprise, as he leans away from the officer. As the officer circles the room, Dulac includes several jump cuts to the clergyman's face, which retains its fearful expression. Throughout the film, this expression of fear, not surprise, is seen on the clergyman's face whenever he sees the officer. Another deviation of the script appears after the officer smashes the shell. Artaud's script calls for an immediate cut to the clergyman crawling on the streets, while Dulac's interpretation has the clergyman sinking to all fours in the room and crawling after the officer. This creates a narrative structure often used by Dulac to offset the harshness Artaud had envisioned. For Dulac, the ability to keep the viewer engaged by creating a sense of visual harmony was just as important as the formal elements and techniques used in a film. By extending Artaud's script and creating a loose narrative where the officer bullies the clergyman into giving up his shell and the clergyman must, at least in his own fantasy world, exact some sort of revenge on the man, Dulac is able to draw the viewer in rather than alienate him or her.

Dulac's feminist viewpoints also come through when comparing the film with the original script. In the ballroom scene, Artaud's screenplay describes the following:

Couples enter, some mysteriously on tip-toe, others extremely busy. The chandeliers follow the movements of the couples. All the women are

¹⁸ Antonin Artaud, Victor Corti, Simone Sanzenbach, "Scenarios and Arguments," *The Tulane Drama Review*, 11.1 (Autumn 1966): 174. *JSTOR*. University of South Florida, Tampa Lib. 07 July 2008 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1125280>>

wearing short dresses, short hair, flaunt their legs and stick out their busts.¹⁹

In Dulac's interpretation, the focus is hardly on the women at all. Instead of fragmenting the women by focusing on the length of their dresses, their hairstyles, their legs or their busts, Dulac simply shows a scene with couples dancing. The dresses of the women in the film are only modestly short, falling at the mid-calf, and the dress length is only seen in the shots where the camera is placed near the floor to show the legs of the dancers. The women are never seen "flaunting" their legs. Instead, Dulac's shows the legs of both the women and the men dancing to give a visual image of the music's rhythm. None of the women "stick out their busts." As a compromise, Dulac depicts one couple where a man's head is bowed down as he stares at his partner's breasts. Instead of just making the woman the object of desire, Dulac makes a commentary about the male single-minded focus on the sexuality of women.

In a later scene, the clergyman is seen on a boat where the officer, from earlier in the film, is chained to the deck. According to Artaud's script,

The clergyman is now in a ship's cabin. He gets out of his bunk, steps out on deck. The officer is there, weighed down with chains. Then the clergyman seems to retire within himself and pray, but when he raises his head, level with his eyes are two mouths which merge, disclosing a woman beside the officer who wasn't there a moment ago. The woman's body is suspended horizontally in the air.²⁰

¹⁹ Artaud 176.

²⁰ Artaud 177.

By calling for the woman to be “suspended horizontally,” Artaud makes the woman into a passive, sexual object. However, Dulac removes the woman from her place as an object and her interpretation has the woman actively leaning over the side of the boat to kiss the officer/priest. In this more romanticized version, the woman controls of the situation, not the clergyman.

Artaud was understandably attached to his screenplay and had, at one time, envisioned himself as the film’s director. In her interview with the Virmauxs, Pecker states, “Germaine Dulac was a woman with some talent. She proved this in other films. But she was not the director who was suited to adapting an Artaud script for the screen. No one other than himself could have done it.”²¹ Artaud placed his own interpretations about obsession, desire and gender into the script and seems to have had his own views as to how these concepts, which often emerge from his attempt to understand his own identity, are presented to the audience. As Naomi Greene argues in her article “Artaud and Film: A Reconsideration,” “(Artaud) writes to capture the self, to give form to what is deepest and most inchoate in him.”²² Many critics of the film have argued that the volatile character of the clergyman is a representation of Artaud himself. In fact, Artaud was initially cast to play the role of the clergyman, but circumstances prevented him from doing so.

Some of the controversy about the film stems from the assertion that Dulac deliberately chose another actor, Alex Allin, to play the clergyman. However, at the time when production of the film was to begin, Artaud was already working on another film, Carl Dreyer’s *La Passion de Jeanne d’Arc*. While the actual facts are not clear, it is

²¹ Virmaux93.

²² Naomi Greene, “Artaud and Film: A Reconsideration,” *Cinema Journal* 23.4 (1984) 28-40.

generally believed that Artaud was unable to receive adequate time off from Dreyer's film, and Dulac, who was probably aware of Artaud's attachment to his script and his aggressive personality, was not willing to adapt the shooting schedule to accommodate his schedule. Many of Dulac's critics, and even Artaud himself, believed Dulac set the shooting schedule to exclude Artaud from the production. Alain and Odette Virmaux suggest that "he must have, at that point, seen the situation as persecution, and convinced himself the Dulac deliberately delayed the beginning of shooting for a few days."²³ Despite this, Artaud never outwardly expressed his objections, especially to Dulac. The Virmauxs further suggest that "it is more likely that Dulac would have wanted to remain in charge of the production and not have to depend on the chance circumstances of another shooting."²⁴ While he realized he was not going to play the clergyman, "there is room to believe that he hoped, on the other hand, to be able to follow the production fairly closely, not of course as Dulac's assistant [...] but as a sort of technical advisor."²⁵ Dulac "agreed to direct Artaud's screenplay (and) was prepared to shoot it as faithfully as possible and to take into account his suggestions before the shooting (but) she did not want him present during the shooting at all, not as spectator, and especially not as advisor. She intended to remain absolutely in charge of the set."²⁶ "In fact, Dulac only met with him once, just before the shooting, on July 13th 1927 immediately after which, the same evening, Artaud wrote a very long letter, the longest of the lot, accompanied with a sketch"²⁷ of the black and white tile floor, which Dulac includes in the film.

²³ Virmaux 102.

²⁴ Virmaux 100.

²⁵ Virmaux 101.

²⁶ Virmaux 101.

²⁷ Virmaux 99.

So how did the controversy over the film begin? The first major conflict arose from Dulac's original title of the film, "...dream by Antonin Artaud, directed by Germaine Dulac."²⁸ Artaud objected to the use of the word "dream" in the title. According to him, "*(La Coquille et le Clergyman's)* screenplay is not the reproduction of a dream and it should not be considered as such. I will not try to explain its incoherence by the easy way out of the dream."²⁹ Although Dulac removed the word from the title, the stigma from its use remained and led to accusations that Dulac had "given a strictly dream-like interpretation of the screenplay"³⁰ and had "neutralized (the film's images) by treating them as being simply the representation of a dream."³¹ Artaud never wanted *La Coquille et le Clergyman* to be seen as a dream itself, but instead wanted to represent the dream process by seeing "how far a scenario could identify with the mechanics of the dream 'without being a dream itself'. For Artaud, the dream could never be a narrative which could be easily followed by a spectator because "a dream always collapsed into violence and fragmentation"³² and the process of the dream often creates harsh juxtapositions of images. According to Stephen Barber, Artaud's primary objection with Dulac's interpretation is how "the film had sutured together the raw and disjunctive images of his scenario, so that the film flowed easily for the spectator, despite the illogicality of its narrative."³³ Instead of creating a narrative for the viewer to easily understand, as Dulac did, Artaud wanted to take the viewer through the process of a dream. He most likely saw the cinema as the perfect means to visually express this

²⁸ Virmaux 103.

²⁹ Virmaux 104.

³⁰ Virmaux 103-4.

³¹ Barber 12.

³² Barber 14.

³³ Barber 12.

process, since it allowed for the interpretation of “the surrealist principles of displacement and dissociative juxtaposition.”³⁴

Based on these observations, it becomes easy to see how Artaud might have objected to Dulac’s interpretation. Dulac’s emphasis on lighting, slow-motion shots, and the use of numerous dissolves, rather than a harsh juxtaposition of images proposed by Artaud, creates a loose narrative. “For Dulac, whose Symbolist antecedents led her to regard the cinematic image as the site of a fusion, the film was conceived as a condensation of associations whose gradual accretion of meaning allowed the story to proceed, image by image, in a chain of metaphors.”³⁵ Each scene is tied together by some element to create continuity. When the clergyman’s shell is taken away from him by the officer, he crawls along the ground until he sees the beautiful woman with the officer. The viewer then makes the connection that the clergyman is following the man. The woman becomes the replacement for the shell. The clergyman rips the woman’s shell shaped bra off, then is seen holding it in the next scene. What becomes interesting to note is the criticism that Dulac followed Artaud’s script almost exactly. If this is the case, then one might be able to make the assertion that Artaud’s screenplay did indeed have a loose narrative and never had the dissociative juxtaposition he wanted. If Artaud had directed his own film, would the film have the same loose narrative as Dulac’s interpretation?

The use of the word “dream” was not the only conflict between Artaud and Dulac. According to the Virmauxs, “Another more serious grievance was formulated by Artaud and his friends: Dulac distorted the screenplay because she understood absolutely

³⁴ Sandy Flitterman-Lewis, “The Image and the Spark: Dulac and Artaud Reviewed,” *Dada and Surrealist Film*, Rudolf E. Kuenzli, Ed. (New York: Willis Locker and Owens, 1987) 110-1.

³⁵ Flitterman-Lewis, “Image” 111.

nothing.”³⁶ This issue arose from a misunderstanding of the script. According to Artaud’s script,

But as he grasps the skirts of his cassock to draw them around his thighs,
these skirt-tails seem to stretch out, forming an endless road into night.

The clergyman and woman run desperately into night.³⁷

Due to a typographical error, Dulac filmed the scene where the skirt tails only turn into a “huge nightshirt.” Instead of running down a path with the woman, the clergyman simply runs off holding the long tails of the shirt. In addition, Artaud’s script at this point reads as though the clergyman and woman run off into the night together. Dulac’s interpretation has a chase scene ensue where various, alternating point-of-view shots provide the viewer with the perspective of the woman, as she looks back at the pursuing clergyman, as well as the perspective of the clergyman as he tries desperately to catch up with the woman.

Perhaps the biggest issue between Artaud and Dulac deals with the ownership and intellectual copyrights of the filmmaker and the screen writer. *La Coquille et le Clergyman*, and later Brecht and Pabst’s lawsuit over Brecht’s *The Threepenny Opera*,³⁸

³⁶ Virmaux 104.

³⁷ Artaud 176-7.

³⁸ According to Richard Fawkes, “Brecht and Weill were paid a lump sum and put on retainers to rework the script and music. Brecht began working on a screenplay with Caspar Neher and, without telling anyone, not even Weill, radically altered the framework and plot of the stage show. When Nero Films found out, they were horrified. They had paid for a hit opera and that was what they wanted to see on the screen. Both he and Weill had it written into their contracts that they would have the last word on all matters concerning words and music, and he was determined to exercise that right. He refused to do any more work and when the producers opted to go ahead without him, decided to sue. Brecht lost, the court deeming that by refusing to work on the script any further, he had broken his contract. He was ordered to pay costs, but the production company, not wanting any more aggravation, agreed to waive the payment provided that he agreed to stay away from the film. They also paid him an additional fee “(*Opera on Film* (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd., 2000) 76). Similarly to Dulac’s interpretation of Artaud’s script, “Pabst’s film of *The Threepenny Opera* sticks closely to Brecht’s revised screenplay, but although a left-of-centre liberal, he softened much of the original social criticism by concentrating upon the relationships between the principal characters” (76). It is also interesting to note that Artaud ironically “had a small role

raised the question as to whom a film belongs. In *La Coquille et le Clergyman*'s contract, both Dulac and Artaud were given equal rights to the film, a stipulation which "would be detrimental (since) each of them strove to turn the situation to his or her advantage."³⁹ The Virmauxs suggest that Artaud's "objective, and that of Yvonne Allendy,⁴⁰ was constantly to impose the idea that the *Seashell* was first of all 'an Artaud film.'"⁴¹ By doing this, Artaud would have edged Dulac out of the way in order to take complete credit for the film. Several documents also suggest Artaud was not as unhappy with the film as he led people to believe. The Virmauxs note that "the boxes of invitations for the evening of February 9th, 1928 were marked 'Antonin Artaud's *The Seashell and the Clergyman*' (and not: 'screenplay by...'). If Artaud had had the feeling of being so betrayed by the production, would he have so openly assumed the authorship of the film"⁴²? They also note that a pamphlet, 'Opinion of the press on the film *The Seashell and the Clergyman*,'⁴³ which marginalized Dulac's role in the creation of the film, was found. Based on these documents, the Virmauxs believe "(Artaud's and the Allendy's) plan was to handle (Dulac) carefully, to reduce her role to simple technical assistance, speak of her as little as possible, and, thus discretely push her out of the way. According to this plan, the film would have been seen as the work of Artaud alone, all the rest being no more than technical matters of little importance."⁴⁴ This is quite possible given

in G.W. Pabst's film of Bertolt Brecht's *The Threepenny Opera*, a film which Artaud despised for what he called its 'vulgarity and its complete *disorientation*' (Barber 23).

³⁹ Virmaux 111.

⁴⁰ *La Coquille et le Clergyman* is said to have been based on the dreams of Yvonne Allendy, which she had written down.

⁴¹ Virmaux 108.

⁴² Virmaux 108.

⁴³ According to the Virmauxs, Artaud's name "is mentioned (in the pamphlet) a good fifteen times, while Dulac's is mentioned only five times. She is never attacked, but the entire pamphlet tends to substantiate the idea that Artaud is the veritable author of the film." (108)

⁴⁴ Virmaux 108.

Artaud's personality and his lack of funding to direct the film himself. It is not out of the question that Artaud would have used the Surrealist group's volatile nature to create a controversy surrounding Dulac's interpretation. However, Artaud underestimated Dulac.

The Virmauxs believe that Dulac was well aware of Artaud's motives. This would explain why she kept to a tight production schedule and why kept Artaud away from the production aspects of the film, including the film's pre-screenings. In fact, Dulac only met with Artaud once before production began. While she did incorporate suggestions made by Artaud into the film, she excluded him from all aspects of the shooting and editing processes. "An almost inevitable repercussion of this was that Artaud, irritated for having seen himself 'sidelined' for so long, decided to react, and show proof of his own rights with respect to the work."⁴⁵ Artaud published his screenplay in the *N. R. F.* before the film's premiere without giving Dulac any credit for her interpretation of the screenplay. The way presentation of the article created the illusion that Artaud himself directed the film. Dulac, upset about not being given her due credit protested to the journal, bringing light to the issue of directorial credits. "For quite a while, the writers had difficulty understanding that the directors of the films, also, spoke in the first person. A screenplay—even signed by a big name—is inevitably asked to disappear behind the universe and the style particular to the filmmaker."⁴⁶ Artaud's position as the author of the work certainly must have made it difficult for him to give up creative control.

After *La Coquille et le Clergyman*, Dulac created only a handful of films and newsreels. Some people believe she retired from making films because of the controversy of the film. This may be part of the reason, but it is difficult to believe that

⁴⁵ Virmaux 109.

⁴⁶ Virmaux 110.

she would have caved to the pressures because of what happened. It is more likely that the advent of sound technology in film and Dulac's protest against its extreme commercialization, especially with the incorporation of the voice, caused her to focus on writing about the cinema. After the controversy settled, Artaud's adamant position against the film's interpretation softened and he ironically wrote in 1932, "This type of film belonged, even and above all when composed during a waking state, to the dark and secret logic of the dream."⁴⁷ It is unclear what caused him to become more accepting of the film. Perhaps it was the inherent change in film aesthetics, or even his separation from the Surrealists. However, the controversy surrounding *La Coquille et le Clergyman* was probably more of a benefit to both Dulac and Artaud, due to the publicity it received. Even today, both Artaud and Dulac are given credit for *La Coquille et le Clergyman*, each in his or her own way.

⁴⁷ Virmaux 104.

Chapter Two

Interpretation of a Dream: Germaine Dulac and the Avant-Garde

When we think of what constitutes the avant-garde, we often think about something new and cutting edge, something which serves as an oppositional force to the current discourse. To understand avant-garde film, we need to examine the structure of classic cinema. Classic cinema often involves a narrative structure which drives the story forward while serving as “a means of organizing the recipient’s experience.”⁴⁸ The organization of the classic film often presents a false sense of reality which “prevails upon the reader or spectator to conform to its power structure and to enjoy vicariously the sense of coherence, omniscience, and mastery it engenders.”⁴⁹ The reality seen on the screen is carefully constructed by the filmmaker, providing the viewer a one-sided look at only the elements, characters, and events which the filmmaker carefully selects as being important. The avant-garde film tears apart this structure and in turn the “illusionary authority”⁵⁰ created within it. Instead of a carefully structured narrative, as typically seen in classic cinema, the avant-garde film uses “a mode of constructing reality in which the dominant discourses of time, space and causality, identity and difference are fundamentally destabilized.”⁵¹ This destabilization creates juxtapositions, awkward transitions and a jarring effect for the viewer. Classic cinema’s mere depiction of a

⁴⁸ Richard Murphy, *Theorizing the Avant-Garde: Modernism, Expressionism and the Problem of Postmodernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 202.

⁴⁹ Murphy 202.

⁵⁰ Murphy 203.

⁵¹ Murphy 203.

reality (the narrative structure) creates an outside perspective, as though the viewer were looking through a window at the on-screen action, whereas the avant-garde film creates an inside world of experience based on the perspectives of the characters. As we all know from our own lives, events never unfold in the same narrative manner as seen in the classic cinematic form. Our daily structure often changes as the unexpected enters into our routines. Often our inner thoughts and emotions run through our minds simultaneously with our actions. Think about how often we engage into a conversation with someone, while thinking about something completely different. It is the reality of experience which the avant-garde looks to capture. In Dulac's films, we become Madame Beudet or the clergyman and through the characters, we live their lives, even if is for a brief span of time.

Since its inception, the cinema, both classic and avant-garde, has been created with certain traditions and conventions stemming from the male perspective. The avant-garde provided women filmmakers more of a means of self expression, whereas the classic cinema often excluded women from its ranks. The avant-garde's focus on recreating experiences, rather than simply depicting a "classic" narrative, allowed women to focus on form and style as they "(re-thought) conventions for themselves, shaping them so as to make them serve their particular projects."⁵² Instead of having to conform to the patriarchal structure of the male dominated classic cinema, the avant-garde cinema provided female filmmakers "an outlet for their inner experiences, sensations, feelings,

⁵² E. Ann Kaplan, *Women and Film: Both Sides of the Camera* (New York: Methuen, Inc, 1983) 87.

(and) thoughts.”⁵³ Germaine Dulac, one of France’s most influential female filmmakers, turned to the avant-garde because of this.

Dulac’s works often fall into a category called the “First Avant-Garde,” also known as the “Impressionist” cinema. The Impressionist filmmakers were often interested in creating “alterations not only between actions in different spaces or periods of time, between reality and either memory or fantasy, but also between multiple image chains.”⁵⁴ These image chains link scenes which would not otherwise correlate together using reoccurring elements or symbolism. Filmmakers from this movement, including Dulac, considered the Impressionist film “the ‘psychological film,’ which places a ‘character in a particular situation...in order to penetrate into the secret domain of his inner life.’”⁵⁵ Just as the Impressionist painters—Monet, Degas, Renoir—sought to capture psychological perceptions and emotions through the use of color and brushstrokes, the Impressionist filmmakers used a more formalistic approach to their films as they attempted to capture the same perceptions and emotions through their cinematic techniques, especially the use of soft focus shots and a reliance on lighting. As Dulac writes,

Impressionism made us see nature and its objects as elements concurrent with the action. A shadow, a light, a flower had, above all, a meaning, as the reflection of a mental state or an emotional situation, then, little by little, became a necessary complement, having an intrinsic value of its own. We experimented with making

⁵³ Kaplan 88-9.

⁵⁴ Abel 293.

⁵⁵ Abel 280.

things move through the science of optics, tried to transform figures according to the logic of a state of mind.⁵⁶

It is through these techniques that Dulac captures the inner-most fantasies of Mme Beudet or the increasing insanity of the clergyman. She embraces the idea of the art film and the idea of “pure cinema,” where movement, form, and light all create a rhythmic balance and visual harmony. For Dulac, the cinema evokes impressions and emotions through its techniques. The viewer of the true film, the visual film, with its combination of harmonies, agreements of shadow, of light, of rhythm, of movement, and facial expressions, should not be able to just relate to the film, but also be drawn into the experience of the film.⁵⁷ As a way to understand her cinematic approach, Dulac uses the example of a train track, where the tracks are simply multiplied lines of steel. As the wheels move over the tracks, a rhythm is created where the “mechanical movement follows the rhythm of a heartbeat.”⁵⁸ It is this rhythm, formed by the visual elements of the film, which creates the sense of experience in Dulac’s films. According to Sandy Flitterman-Lewis, Dulac’s films often separated “the diegetic content of the films (their narrative meanings) from their formal structures (the way those meanings are organized).”⁵⁹ In doing so, Dulac creates a perception of reality that perhaps becomes more “real” than a traditional narrative.

As an early feminist, the cinema provided Dulac a means of “cinematic expression through the manipulation of formal elements, in order to provide an

⁵⁶ Germaine Dulac qtd. in Abel 280.

⁵⁷ This is summarized from my translation of Dulac’s article *Visual and Anti-Visual Films* from her book *Écrits Sur le Cinéma* (Paris: Éditions Paris Expérimental, 1994).

⁵⁸ Flitterman-Lewis, *Desire* 94.

⁵⁹ Flitterman-Lewis, *Desire* 47.

alternative to the dominant film practice, to speak in another voice.”⁶⁰ In *La Souriante Mme Beudet*, Dulac gives Mme Beudet a voice, which would be otherwise silenced in classic cinema, by exposing her inner-most thoughts and fantasies to the viewer. It is not just Mme. Beudet’s voice which is exposed, but also the voice of every other woman who faces the same situation as Mme. Beudet. In comparison to *La Souriante Mme Beudet*, *La Coquille et le Clergyman* does not focus on the inner struggles of the female character, but instead focuses on the increasing insanity of the primary male character, the clergyman. While the focus is not on the female character, Dulac’s techniques still take the viewer through the process of insanity, rather than simply depicting a structured narrative where the clergyman goes insane and the viewer witnesses each small event which adds to the insanity. Dulac’s use of repetitious elements, especially the image of the clergyman in different scenarios, illustrates his “double-nature or ‘decenteredness.’”⁶¹ Throughout the film, the clergyman is unable to take on the role of a character that sequentially moves through a daily routine, as you might see in a classic cinema narration. His existence is made up of an ‘infinite series of confusing alternatives,’⁶² which will eventually lead to what Richard Murphy calls a “crisis of perception.”⁶³ As the clergyman moves from scene to scene, he is never able to “distinguish clear and fixed identities and events.”⁶⁴ One moment he happily fills his vials, while in the next moment, he is reduced to crawling on the ground. After he gleefully swings the woman’s bra in the air, it falls to the floor, busting into flames and sending the clergyman into a state of introverted despair. He locks the woman’s image away, only to turn a corner and find her

⁶⁰ Flitterman-Lewis, *Desire* 48.

⁶¹ Murphy 206.

⁶² Murphy 206.

⁶³ Murphy 206.

⁶⁴ Murphy 206.

with the fearsome officer. He kills the officer, but the officer returns. Dulac's use of these various scenarios sets up a dreamlike state from which the clergyman is unable to emerge. Once he conquers or reconciles part of his life, something else enters into the scenario in opposition. Instead of following classic cinema's "distinctions between 'inside' and 'outside,' 'reality' and 'hallucination,' 'consciousness' and 'dream',"⁶⁵ Dulac merges these distinctions into the clergyman's inner struggles.

It is easy to see how Dulac's films fit into the idea of the avant-garde, given her own views toward the cinema. According to Dulac, "It seemed frivolous to place a character in a given situation without penetrating the secret domain of his [or her] interior life, of visualized feelings."⁶⁶ In the case of *Madame Beudet*, the viewer is drawn into the inner struggle of her loneliness and isolation, as well as her fantasy world through Dulac's cinematic techniques which "render(s) female subjectivity filmically through the metaphoric figuration of her character's fantasies."⁶⁷ Instead of creating a structured narrative about Madame Beudet and her life, Dulac takes the viewer into Madame Beudet's inner mind through soft focus and close up shots, distortions, manipulations and various camera angles. According to Jessica Benjamin, "An important component of women's fantasy life centers around the wish for a holding other whose presence does not violate one's space, but permits the experience of one's own desire, who recognizes it when it emerges of itself."⁶⁸ The image of the male tennis player is a perfect example of Benjamin's argument. Mme Beudet's fantasies turn to the image of the tennis player in

⁶⁵ Murphy 207.

⁶⁶ Flitterman-Lewis, *Desire* 89.

⁶⁷ Flitterman-Lewis, *Desire* 100.

⁶⁸ Jessica Benjamin, "A Desire of One's Own: Psychoanalytic Feminism and Intersubjective Space," *The Feminist Philosophy Reader*, ed. Alison Bailey and Chris Cuomo (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2008 188-204) 200.

the photograph. He becomes real, emerging from the photograph, only in her fantasy world when she wants him to be real. Unlike her husband, who is all too real, the tennis player can never violate her reality, since she can stop fantasizing about him and he will return to the flatness of the photograph. Each of Madame Beudet's fantasies "are anchored in the particulars of the (female) character (Dulac) creates, a frustrated, imprisoned housewife who longs for some sort of romantic evasion."⁶⁹

In the case of the clergyman, his inner struggles are presented through his interactions with the other characters in each of the sequences. In one scene he cowers at the presence of an officer/priest. In another, we see him strangling the officer/priest, and in yet another scene, we see the clergyman throwing his rival off a cliff. The clergyman's interactions with the female character further add to his fantasy world. He rips the woman's bodice off in one scene and frantically chases her in another. He moves from one scene to another, but none of the scenes are ever truly resolved. Dulac plays with oppositions in the film, as well. We see an intermixing of the outside world, the world where the clergyman is reduced to crawling after the woman and where he frantically chases her down a path, and the inside world, the world where the clergyman hears the woman's confession or where he wanders through a maze of hallways. At times, we never really know where the scenes are taking place. Dulac moves from one environment to another, yet each scene takes on a new and different context. We never know what is real and what is imagined in the clergyman's mind. Despite this shift, Dulac's editing does create a narrative flow which can be followed by the viewer.

⁶⁹ Flitterman-Lewis, *Desire* 102.

Dulac's approach to cinema "concentrate(s) on the rhythmic play of light, movement and form over the content based conventions of narrative causality and visual continuity of the traditional commercial cinema."⁷⁰ It is through these techniques that Dulac is able to take the cinema beyond a structured narrative with patriarchal conventions. She takes the film viewer into the inner realm of the human psyche. She creates a place where the female voice can be heard and understood rather than simply glanced over. As an avant-garde artist, she is able to "(reject) referentiality (...) in favor of the more cinematically 'pure' properties of light, rhythm and movement"⁷¹ and present a form of cinema based on human experience. According to Dulac, "The avant-garde has provided the abstract research and manifestations of pure thought and technique later applied to more clearly human films."⁷² The experience of reality Dulac creates in her films through her cinematic techniques, especially the reality from a feminine perspective, distinguishes her from her male counterparts and establishes her as a model for future avant-garde filmmakers. "Germaine Dulac also worked both sides of the fantasy genre. Two of her films (*La Folie des vaillants* and *L'invitation au voyage*) were produced independently and were consciously organized as visual ballets or music compositions."⁷³

In addition to being considered an impressionistic filmmaker, Dulac is often considered one of France's influential Surrealist filmmakers, a categorization which is deeply flawed, yet quite understandable, especially when examining *La Coquille et le Clergyman*. The surrealist filmmakers were interested in capturing emotions, inner

⁷⁰ Flitterman-Lewis, *Desire* 47.

⁷¹ Flitterman-Lewis, *Desire* 90.

⁷² Flitterman-Lewis, *Desire* 90.

⁷³ Abel 150.

fantasies and the unconscious mind through the cinematic process. Both the impressionists and the surrealists used the formal aspects of the cinema in a non-narrative, juxtaposed way. However, the surrealists were not interested in creating visual harmony and they attempted to “play with illusion and displays of primal or infantile emotions.”⁷⁴ As mentioned in the introduction, the surrealist filmmakers focused more on harsh juxtapositions, violent actions and the fetishized portrayal of the woman. While the Impressionist filmmakers created aesthetically pleasing images of a fantasy life, the surrealists portrayed the volatile and animalistic urges locked deep within the human psyche. To the Surrealist filmmaker, “the presence of the image (representing an idea) is more influential on our awareness than the shot itself.”⁷⁵

Dulac’s style in *La Coquille et le Clergyman* becomes difficult to analyze, mainly due to its screenplay having been written by Artaud, who incorporated his own surrealist ideologies into the work, as well as the fact that she filmed the script as close to Artaud’s ideas as possible. While she does inherently use Artaud’s ideologies, she softens or even eliminates many of the truly surrealist aspects of the script, thereby moving her away from the surrealist filmmaking style. Dulac eliminates the emphasis on violence, lessens the woman’s role as the cause of fear, anxiety and desire in the male characters, and turns the volatile and violent clergyman of Artaud’s script into a cowardly character who can never take control of his own life until the very end of the film. In some respects, she could even be considered as a filmmaker who bridges the gap between the avant-garde. Her focus on the viewer’s ability to understand a film, coupled with the emphasis on the

⁷⁴ Elza Adamowicz, “Bodies Cut and Dissolved: Dada and Surrealist Film”, *Gender and French Cinema* (Oxford: Berg, 2001) 21.

⁷⁵ Gould 23.

technical aspects of the film, appears to combine both traditional and avant-garde aesthetics (both impressionistic and surrealist) to create her own style of filmmaking.

Chapter Three

Objects, Symbolism and Metaphor in *La Coquille et le Clergyman*

Of all the instances of symbolism in *La Coquille et le Clergyman*, the woman is the most important representation. She is the one who brings the clergyman off his knees. She is his salvation and his object of desire but she will never be his. She is the one who is different from him, the Other, and her presence represents the missing and irreconcilable part of the clergyman's identity. While the film depicts the increasing insanity of the clergyman, the representation of the woman allows the viewer to understand the clergyman's insanity from all angles.

The clergyman first sees the beautiful woman after a confrontation with an officer who berates the clergyman. The officer takes away the large shell, from which the clergyman fills the glass beakers, and slices the shell with a sword in a motion resembling castration. The clergyman, once content with simply filling the beakers, is reduced to cowering from the officer and crawling on the streets of the city after him. When the clergyman sees the officer in a carriage with the beautiful woman, the clergyman associates the woman with the shell taken away from him. The clergyman rises from the ground and his restless pursuit begins. The mere sight of the woman gives life to the clergyman, not only bringing him off his knees, but also driving him to the brink of insanity. The woman becomes the representation of desire; a "concrete, visual

manifestation of unconscious force.”⁷⁶ In Dulac’s interpretation, this desire does not appear to be sexual. The woman becomes a substitute for both the shell and the liquid in the beakers, thereby becoming a threat to the clergyman by representing a missing part of him. Throughout the film, the clergyman relentlessly pursues the woman and will let nothing else stand in his way. This pursuit is not for sexual gratification, at least in Dulac’s interpretation. Instead, “the woman is continually presented *as* representation.”⁷⁷ When the clergyman first sees her, she is not a sexual object, but an embodiment of his subconscious self and, according to Lacan’s concept of the mirror stage, she represents the lost identity of the mother, which the clergyman constantly tries to reconcile. The clergyman’s endless pursuit represents this attempt at reconciliation. In order to begin the process of reconciling his lost identity, the clergyman must eliminate the authoritative male figure, the officer, in order to obtain the woman. When the clergyman faces the officer, he becomes much more violent and obsessive, causing the “inner conflictual tension which leads to the awakening of his (the clergyman’s) desire for the object (the woman) of the other’s (the officer’s) desire.”⁷⁸ Each strategy devised by the clergyman to eliminate the officer becomes more and more violent. These violent tendencies only cease when he obtains the woman. Once the clergyman finally captures the woman’s image and places it into a glass vase, the idea of the mirror stage no longer applies. The missing part of his identity, the woman, has been captured, implying a successful completion of the self. Lacan would regard this completion as impossible.

Lacan’s idea of the mirror stage only applies during the clergyman’s pursuit.

According to Lacan, the reconciliation with the missing identity can never truly be

⁷⁶ Flitterman-Lewis, *Desire* 120.

⁷⁷ Flitterman-Lewis, *Desire* 121.

⁷⁸ Lacan 114.

complete. Once separated, the identity associated with the mother is no longer real and simply becomes a representation of an identity which the child constantly searches for. Once the clergyman captures the woman's essence, the process of reconciliation begins, but is not truly complete until the clergyman drops the vase holding the woman's image. The woman's image first turns into the clergyman's own image, then becomes the dark liquid from the introductory scenes of the film. When the clergyman drinks this liquid, he finally completes his journey; fully reconciling his identity.

It is difficult to ignore Dulac's treatment of the woman throughout *La Coquille et le Clergyman*. Feminist writer, Simone de Beauvoir sees the woman in a patriarchal system as "the privileged Other, through whom the subject fulfills himself: one of the measures of man, his counterbalance, his salvation, his adventure, his happiness."⁷⁹ Throughout the film, the woman of *La Coquille et le Clergyman* does maintain many qualities of the patriarchal society which doom her into Otherness, including her place as the object of desire, her passivity and her femininity. Dulac's subtle interpretations change how this Otherness is viewed. Unlike the masochistic behavior exhibited by the man in Man Ray's *L'Étoile de Mer*, who "adopts the attitude of a respectful bourgeois and starts to talk with the (woman) in a business like way"⁸⁰ when he stands to leave after she undresses for him, the game seems endless for the clergyman. Since the woman never returns the clergyman's affections, he resorts to random acts of violence towards her. After the clergyman rips off the woman's bodice, revealing her bare breasts, he waves the carapace shaped bra around in victory much like a madman. In fact, when the clergyman sees the woman again in the next scene, he reverts to his insane pursuit of her.

⁷⁹ Simone de Beauvoir, "Myths of Women in Five Authors," *The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends*, 3rd ed, Ed. David H. Richter (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2007) 676.

⁸⁰ Žižek 1184.

Dulac's woman fails to truly fulfill the clergyman. Despite his constant pursuit, he never finds salvation or happiness through her. In fact, he only finds balance when he releases the glass vase in which he had captured her essence.

The clergyman, in his pursuit, is quite selfish, never taking into consideration the woman's opinion of him. "This original condition is called 'primary narcissism,' for one cannot respond to anyone else if one does not realize that there is anything more to the universe than one's own feelings and needs. One is self absorbed-concerned only with oneself-by default."⁸¹ Not only does the clergyman fail to consider the woman's feelings, he also must destroy everything that comes between him and his object of his desire, especially the officer. The officer becomes the father figure for the clergyman—a constant authoritative figure. The clergyman's fearful reaction to the man in the beginning and the constant attempts to destroy him to obtain the woman all suggest the concept of the Oedipus complex, where the clergyman "fears that his father will castrate him if he persists in wooing his mother,"⁸² in this case, the female figure. "The Oedipus complex is all about narcissistic wounds, and, as in the myth of Narcissus, sight plays a prominent part."⁸³ The clergyman, by either the nature of his career as a clergyman or some lack which he tries to eliminate, sees himself as having the absence and the authoritative figure as having the presence. After the officer takes the shell away from the clergyman, the clergyman sees the officer with the beautiful woman. In a process Žižek calls "sublimation," where "an object, part of everyday reality finds itself at the

⁸¹ Diana Tiejens Meyers, *Gender in the Mirror: Cultural Imagery & Woman's Agency* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) 116.

⁸² Meyers 116.

⁸³ Meyers 116.

place of the impossible thing,”⁸⁴ the woman then becomes the substitute for the shell. Having seen the officer strike the shell with a sword in a motion representing castration, the clergyman associates his sublimated object, the woman, with castration. The idea of the oedipal complex is especially relevant in the brief scene where the clergyman witnesses the woman lean over the side of the boat to kiss the officer. His passivity quickly turns to rage as he lunges at the officer.

In her analysis of Man Ray’s *L’Étoile de Mer*, Inez Hedges examines the symbolism of the sea and many of her observations certainly apply to *La Coquille et le Clergyman*. According to Hedges, “the theme of the voyage into the unknown becomes a focus and metaphor for the experience of love; the voyage becomes associated with the mystic quest.”⁸⁵ In *La Coquille et le Clergyman*, the clergyman’s quest is not for love, but rather, for self awareness. Just as in *L’Étoile de Mer*, where “the ‘mer’ of the title is the dangerous sea on which the alchemist sets out, searching for the unification of elements, represented as male and female (and) the starfish is the androgynous symbol that lies at the end of that search, enclosed in glass, the alchemist’s vessel,”⁸⁶ the sea in one brief segment of *La Coquille et le Clergyman* represents the clergyman’s attempt at unifying what had been taken from him with his identity. The woman in *La Coquille et le Clergyman* can be compared to the starfish in *L’Étoile de Mer*. The clergyman must enclose her in the glass vase in order to end his quest. While “the woman (in *L’Étoile de Mer*) becomes the path to the starfish,”⁸⁷ the woman in *La Coquille et le Clergyman* will never end the clergyman’s quest. As the clergyman realizes, capturing the woman’s

⁸⁴ Žižek 1186.

⁸⁵ Hedges 101.

⁸⁶ Hedges 101.

⁸⁷ According to Hedges, the starfish represents “the symbol of the man’s Surrealist quest; thus at the end of the film he can accept her loss...because he has found the ‘étoile’” (Hedges 105).

essence is impossible and he must break the woman free from the vase in order to reach the end.

When we see the clergyman at the beginning, filling the glass beakers with the liquid, it is quite unclear what he is doing. It is only at the end that we realize that the liquid is actually the essence of the clergyman. According to Luce Irigaray,

the “subject” (the clergyman) will be multiple, plural, sometimes deformed, but it will still postulate itself as the cause of all the mirages that can be enumerated endlessly and therefore put back together again as one. A fantastic, phantasmatic fragmentation. A destruct(tura)tion in which the “subject” is shattered, scuttled, while still claiming surreptitiously that he is the reason for it all.⁸⁸

Each time the clergyman fills and then breaks a beaker, a new, exact replica of the previous beaker appears. “The subject plays at multiplying himself, even deforming himself, in this process.”⁸⁹ The liquid in the beakers represents part of the clergyman, his identity which he must separate into glass beakers and then methodically and mechanically destroy. Yet he seems quite content with breaking the glass until the shell and the liquid in the shell are removed from him.

Throughout the film, the clergyman’s actions are very methodical and repetitious. “Session after session, in a procedure that is also regulated by visual-rememorative-laws, he repeats the same gesture reestablishing the bar, the barred.”⁹⁰ He continuously tries to reestablish his identity through his actions. Not only does he break the beakers, one after another, at the beginning of the film, but he also partakes in other repetitious actions: his

⁸⁸ Irigaray 135.

⁸⁹ Irigaray 136.

⁹⁰ Irigaray 138.

constant chase of the woman, his pacing through hallways once he captures the woman's image, even the allusion to a tennis match. Throughout all these actions, the clergyman never appears content, as though he must continue these actions in order to reconcile his identity.

As the film continues, the viewer sees the clergyman in a room with a vase. He beckons to something invisible, captures it and places it into the jar. The viewer is given a brief glimpse of the woman's face superimposed over the jar and realizes the clergyman has finally captured the woman's essence in the glass vase. For the clergyman, this confinement of the woman does not lead to a true resolution. The next few scenes show the clergyman walking through a series of endless hallways as he locks and unlocks doors. "Everywhere he runs into the walls of his palace of mirrors, the floor of which is in any case beginning to crack and break up."⁹¹ As he walks through the hallways, it seems as though the clergyman is deep in self reflective thought. The hallways become the visual interpretation of the clergyman's inner struggles. Each time he turns a corner, he runs into a door which he must unlock, which "serves, of course, to distract him again from his specular imprisonment and becomes a diversion from the depths of his madness, pretext for an increase in attentiveness, vigilance, mastery."⁹² These hallways turn into a windowless maze, through which, the clergyman must find his way out of. Similar to Louis Aragon's description of the passageways in the *Passage de l'Opéra*, the hallways through which the clergyman paces become a "privileged zone of fantasy and desire."⁹³

⁹¹ Irigaray 137.

⁹² Irigaray 137.

⁹³ According to Joanna Malt, Louis Aragon's 1926 *Le Paysan de Paris* is "the archetypical surrealist text" in which "Aragon pursues a detailed and methodical inventory of every business, character, and physical feature of the condemned *Passage de l'Opéra*, sometimes interrupting his account with

He is seemingly at the apex of peace, since his “fantasy and (object of) desire,” the woman, is locked up where she can no longer torture him. For Aragon “the passageway, and what lies beyond the passageway make up two different worlds, “the internal and external realities.”⁹⁴ While he is in the hallways, the clergyman is locked into his “inner” fantasy where the woman is locked away. The reality of the woman actually not being captured represents the “external” reality, which the clergyman attempts to block out of his mind. The clergyman himself is very similar to Aragon, who “describes his own actions as predatory, and sees himself caught up in a chain in which he finds his prey and is prey to someone else.”⁹⁵ At this point, the clergyman should be satisfied since he finally captured the woman, yet something appears to still be missing from his life. When he turns the corner and runs into the woman with the officer, the clergyman realizes the woman still eludes him and the pursuit resumes. However, as the clergyman later realizes, the woman is not the cause of his anxiety.

Throughout *La Coquille et le Clergyman*, Dulac’s use of symbolism changes how the woman is seen, especially when compared to Artaud’s original script. Despite her Otherness from the clergyman, Dulac uses her, as well as various objects, to further illustrate the clergyman’s increasing insanity. Aside from her portrayal of the woman, the Dulac’s visual interpretations of the shell, the sea, the glass vase and the hallways add depth to characters and actions which might only be seen as one-dimensional.

fantastical episodes, imaginary dialogues, and nonsensical poem” (Johanna Malt, *Obscure Objects of Desire: Surrealism, Fetishism, and Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) 42-3.)

⁹⁴ Malt 44.

⁹⁵ Malt 45.

Chapter Four

Spectatorship and the Gaze in *La Coquille et le Clergyman*

In 1949, Simone de Beauvoir's book, *The Second Sex*, introduced the idea "that gender is a matter of culture, acquired through social conditioning, rather than being 'natural' or innate."⁹⁶ In Western civilization, all of the cultural practices⁹⁷ are based in the patriarchal views and "laws" of society and these views "are the vehicles for myths, created by men and constructed from their viewpoint."⁹⁸ Certainly the film industry, from its beginnings through today, has created films from a masculine perspective. If we examine the roles, positions and treatment of the female characters in the majority of films, we would notice the woman is either extremely passive, subjecting herself to the desires of the male character, or, if she is given a sense of power, she submits in some way to the male character at the end of the film. More importantly, the way in which filmmakers depict these women affects how the spectator views a film. Laura Mulvey's 1975 article, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," sparked a new interest in the idea of spectatorship in films, especially how the female character is viewed. In the article, Mulvey makes the assertion that the woman is "displayed for the gaze and enjoyment of men, the active controllers of the look."⁹⁹ By using Freud's idea of scopophilia, the

⁹⁶ Shohini Chaudhuri, *Feminist Film Theorists: Laura Mulvey, Kaja Silverman, Teresa De Laurentis, Barbara Creed* (London: Routledge, 2006) 16.

⁹⁷ According to Chaudhuri, these practices come from "religion, traditions, language, tales, songs, and movies"

⁹⁸ Chaudhuri 16.

⁹⁹ Mulvey 1177.

pleasure found in looking, Mulvey examines how the nature of the cinema allows the female on screen representation to become either the fetishized object of the gaze or the object which the viewer identifies with. Mulvey's theories are one sided, focusing on the male viewer, not the female viewer. Since Mulvey's article came out, the works of subsequent theorists, including Kaja Silverman, Mary Ann Doane, Teresa de Lauretis and others, have examined how the cinema affects female spectatorship as well.

Contemporary film criticism has makes us more aware of the role gender plays. We can now look back at early films such as *La Coquille et le Clergyman* and *L'Étoile de Mer* and further analyze how each director approaches the ideas of gender, desire and spectatorship. In Mulvey's analysis, the female character in the film provides the means by which the "man can live out his fantasies and obsessions" simply by observing the actions of the female on screen.¹⁰⁰ The on-screen character of the clergyman in *La Coquille et le Clergyman* thereby provides an outlet for the male viewer to live out his fantasies without actually acting. While Mulvey's theories apply to the male viewer and became the catalyst for subsequent feminist writings about female representation in film, the focus remains on the desires of the male spectator, and her theories fail to present a larger picture of how the female form is ultimately treated in regards to the female spectator.

As Kaja Silverman points out, the viewer in Mulvey's theories "occupies a specifically masculine position (where) this viewer, whether in fact a man or a woman, identifies with the look of the male protagonist."¹⁰¹ For Silverman, the distance between the film's characters and the spectator mimics the separation created between the mother

¹⁰⁰ Mulvey 1173.

¹⁰¹ Kaja Silverman, "Lost Objects and Mistaken Subjects," *Feminist Film Theory: A Reader*, ed. Sue Thornham (New York: New York University Press, 1999) 102.

and the infant in Lacan's mirror stage. As Silverman points out, "it is this irrecoverability of the object to subject, this irreducible distance separating representation from the real, that cinema has often seemed destined to overcome."¹⁰² This takes the idea of the mirror stage beyond the confines of the relationships between the on-screen characters. Through the viewing of the film, the spectator begins to sense a missing part of his or her identity. The female representation becomes the lost part of the viewer's identity. This more gender neutral approach allows more room for interpretation of the female viewer's relationship with the female character on screen, from a feminine point of view, rather than the masculine point of view asserted by Mulvey.

Mary Ann Doane takes this further stating, "while the male is locked into sexual identity, the female can at least pretend she is the other."¹⁰³ Instead of forming a sexualized desire of the female character, the male viewer recognizes her more as the identity he once lost after the separation from his mother. Doane points out that the ideas of spectatorship mentioned by Mulvey defines spectatorship in terms of "either voyeurism or fetishism, as precisely a pleasure in seeing what is prohibited in relation to the female body."¹⁰⁴ The act of the clergyman stripping the woman of her shell-bra thereby reinforces the idea of the woman as a sexualized object. Dulac's use of close up shots, soft focus and various perspectives further reinforces the woman's place as an object of desire. "The image orchestrates a gaze, a limit and its pleasurable transgression. The woman's beauty, her very desirability, becomes a function of certain practices of

¹⁰² Silverman 99.

¹⁰³ Mary Ann Doane, "Film and the Masquerade," *Feminist Film Theory: A Reader*, ed. Sue Thornham (New York: New York University Press, 1999) 138.

¹⁰⁴ Doane 132.

imaging—framing, lighting, camera movement, angle.”¹⁰⁵ However, it is the use of cinematic techniques which changes the spectatorship of a film. By using the close up and point-of-view shots from the woman’s perspective, Dulac allows the female spectator to identify with the woman on screen. Doane argues that “Given the closeness of this relationship, the spectator’s desire can be described only in terms of a kind of narcissism—the female look demands a becoming.”¹⁰⁶ The female viewer looks upon the female character to see a reflection of her own self and in this reflection; she recognizes some aspect of herself which is missing.

Teresa de Lauretis takes Doane’s theories a step further. De Lauretis divides spectatorship into “two sets of identifications.”¹⁰⁷ The first set is the separation of “the masculine, active identification with the gaze [the looks of the camera and of the male characters from] the passive, feminine identity with the image”¹⁰⁸ as seen in Mulvey’s argument. The second identification “allows the female spectator to occupy both active and passive positions of desire at once—she is doubly desiring spectator whose desire is simultaneously ‘desire for the other, and desire to be desired by the other.’”¹⁰⁹ Not only is the woman of *La Coquille et le Clergyman* an object of desire for the clergyman, but her presence makes the clergyman almost want to become her in his search for his identity.

¹⁰⁵ Doane 132.

¹⁰⁶ Doane, “Film” 135.

¹⁰⁷ De Lauretis qtd Chaudhuri 72.

¹⁰⁸ De Lauretis qtd Chaudhuri 72.

¹⁰⁹ De Lauretis qtd Chaudhuri 72.

What makes *La Coquille et le Clergyman* an interesting example to examine in the context of the various theories about spectatorship and the gaze is the feminine perspective Dulac instills into the film, despite the masculinity of its screenwriter, Antonin Artaud. When the clergyman first observes the female character, he becomes obsessed with her despite the fact that she is seemingly involved with another man. As the clergyman watches her, his desire becomes so great, he must act upon these desires. Not only is the female character looked upon by her on-screen male counterparts, the clergyman and his nemesis, the woman's on-screen lover, but she also becomes an object to the implied male viewer, an effect heightened by Dulac's unique use of camera angles, point of view shots and various other cinematic techniques. In comparison to the techniques used in traditional cinematic productions, where "the position of the spectators in the cinema is blatantly one of repression of their exhibitionism and projection of the repressed desire onto the performer,"¹¹⁰ Dulac's techniques give the viewer the feeling of being part of the on-screen action, taking on the role of a silent character throughout the film. The beginning of the film opens with a hand held shot as the camera/spectator moves through a passageway and through the door. The spectator then takes the position of standing directly behind the clergyman. At this point, the spectator is merely a silent observer. As the film progresses, Dulac incorporates several point-of-view shots which change the position of the spectator. Through the use of shot, reverse shot editing, we see the clergyman and what the clergyman sees. We see the clergyman crawling through the streets. As he stops suddenly, we see the beautiful woman from the clergyman's perspective. The spectator moves from being a silent observer of the clergyman to being

¹¹⁰ Mulvey 1174.

the clergyman himself. In the pursuit scene through the park, Dulac uses point of view shots from the perspective of both the clergyman and the woman to change whom the viewer identifies with. One shot shows the viewpoint of the clergyman, with the distant image of woman running away from him. These point of view shots from the clergyman's perspective conform to the idea that the male character, and thus the male viewer, must capture the woman either to reconcile some missing part of his identity or to eliminate his obsessive desire of the woman. The female viewer feels empathy with the woman, silently urging her to run faster to escape the grasp of the clergyman. Dulac then cuts to the perspective of the woman, who is looking back and her pursuer, the clergyman running towards her/the viewer. Dulac's point-of-view shots from the woman's perspective create empathy with her from both the male and female viewer's perspective. Instead of identifying with the clergyman and his attempt at reconciling his lost identity, empathy is created with the female character and the viewer feels that he or she is the one pursued. Through the use of these various perspectives, especially the use of the woman's point-of-view shots, the viewer relates to all the characters, regardless of gender.

Compared with *La Coquille et le Clergyman*, where the viewer develops a more intimate relationship with the characters through point-of view shots and various camera angles, films such as Man Ray's *L'Étoile de Mer* create a sense of separation between the characters and the viewers. "It is precisely this opposition between proximity and distance, control of the image and its loss, which locates the possibilities of spectatorship within the problematic of sexual difference."¹¹¹ In *L'Étoile de Mer*, the first sense of

¹¹¹ Doane 132.

intimacy coincides with the first view of the female form, when the camera shows a full, unfocused and quite distorted shot of a man and a woman walking towards the camera, allowing the viewer to distinguish only the shapes of the two people. Man Ray's use of distortion not only obscures the actions in the scene, but further heightens the sense that the film's viewer, presumably male, is becoming a voyeur for his own pleasure. This plays into Mulvey's concept of "the determining male gaze project(ing) its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly."¹¹² The male character in the film gives a silent permission to the viewer by watching the female's sexualized actions. This makes it acceptable to look at the female and consider her as a sexualized object, since she falls into a "traditional exhibitionist role (where) women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact."¹¹³ Whereas Dulac's cinematic techniques allow the viewer to reconcile a lost identity, the glass used by Man Ray to create the sense of separation further removes the viewer from ever reconciling any lost identity which might have occurred after the separation from the mother. The viewer of *L'Étoile de Mer*'s highly sexualized images of the woman and the nonchalant attitude of the male character tends to develop a connection with the sexual desires of the male characters. In contrast, the viewer of *La Coquille et le Clergyman* develops a sense of empathy with the female character since he or she becomes a witness to the male character's obsessive behavior towards the woman.

As opposed to Dulac's clergyman, who obsessively acts on his desires, the man in *L'Étoile de Mer* sits on the bed and voyeuristically watches the woman undress rapidly, only to turn away as the woman lies on the bed in a pose reminiscent of Giorgione's

¹¹² Mulvey 1175.

¹¹³ Mulvey 1175.

Sleeping Venus or Titian's *Venus of Urbino*. The man looks at her and turns away once more, almost in disgust, although it is a bit difficult to tell his emotions through the distorted image. The facial expressions of the male character in *L'Étoile de Mer* are not crucial, as they are in *La Coquille et le Clergyman*, where the crazed, emotional expressions of the clergyman add to the sense of empathy created between the viewer and the female character.

In the scene from *L'Étoile de Mer*, the male subject is a voyeur, watching the object of the gaze as she bares all for his pleasure. Yet her nude form all but repulses him. Once he has made his observations of her body, his pleasure of looking at her diminishes, and he departs without fulfillment of any sexual urges that he might have experienced. The erotic nature of the act of a striptease causes a reaction in the male character where the “[w]oman is desexualized at the very moment when she is stripped naked.”¹¹⁴ It is through this statement that one begins to understand how the gaze sustains a fantasy. The woman is the object of desire as long as the seductive play remains. Once that ends, then the woman ceases to be the object and the desire wanes. The male spectator loses interest, thus becoming indifferent to the woman once pursued as the object of desire, as seen with the male character in *L'Étoile de Mer*. Dulac approaches the idea of the woman as an object of desire differently. In *La Coquille et le Clergyman*, the act of the striptease is not voluntary, as the clergyman is the one ripping the bodice off the woman, not the woman herself, and once the woman is stripped naked, the clergyman's desires only increase. Why does Dulac differ from the male perspective presented by Man Ray? Is she using her experiences as a woman to illustrate reality? Is

¹¹⁴ Roland Barthes, “Striptease,” *The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends*, 3rd ed., ed. David H. Richter (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2007) 869.

she presenting a criticism of the viewpoint seen in *L'Étoile de Mer*, where the woman, once stripped naked, “connotes something that the look continually circles around but disavows: her lack of a penis, implying a threat of castration and hence displeasure”¹¹⁵?

The experience of viewing these films, to the voyeur, is not to completely satisfy any animalistic urges, but to simply observe the object of desire. If he acts on his urges or if the woman surpasses the rate of his fictional desire, the object will cease to be the object of desire. It seems that Dulac’s approach is to create a male character incapable of self-control. The female representation remains the object of the gaze, thus becoming the object of desire, whether it is a sexual desire which can never be fulfilled or the desire to reconcile the missing portion of the subconscious identity. As the male characters in both films attempt to satisfy their desires, the viewer develops a relationship with the female that has become the object of desire.

¹¹⁵ Mulvey 1177.

Conclusion

After the release of *La Coquille et le Clergyman*, Dulac directed several other films, such as *La Princesse Mondane*, her last commercial film. As sound films became popular, the avant-garde aesthetic, at least as Dulac envisioned it, began to fade.

According to Sandy Flitterman-Lewis, Dulac “felt that the exciting potentials of the sound film could not be fully explored so long as the emphasis remained on the verbal text and sound remained simply a means to accrue greater realism to the image.”¹¹⁶ She turned to writing about the cinema, founding “a subsidiary group of Gaumont to produce a ‘magazine of filmed news events’,”¹¹⁷ as well as teaching film courses. The majority of Dulac’s films deal with the inner struggles of the main characters; Madame Beudet’s struggle to find her own identity through her fantasy world and the clergyman’s struggle to reclaim a missing part of his identity. She also places part of her feminine aesthetic into her films, moving them, as seen in the dance scene in *La Coquille et le Clergyman*, away from masculine portrayals of women. Throughout her filmmaking career, she exemplified the avant-garde style through her emphasis on visual harmony. Dulac died in 1942, leaving a legacy of avant-garde filmmaking which influenced many subsequent directors.

As a filmmaker who embraced the “impressionistic” aesthetics of the avant-garde, Dulac is able to take the viewer on a journey into the inner psyche of her characters.

¹¹⁶ Flitterman-Lewis, *Desire* 70.

¹¹⁷ Flitterman-Lewis, *Desire* 71.

Instead of simply watching a narrative unfold on a screen, the viewer of Dulac's films "experiences" the film through the perspectives of the characters. From her depiction of Mme Beudet's fantasy life and a reversed idea of the object of desire, where the man becomes the object of desire as opposed to the woman, to her visual interpretation of the clergyman's increasing insanity, Dulac illustrates the abstract struggles her characters face within their own subconscious minds. Through her cinematic techniques—point-of-view shots from each character's perspective, slow-motion action, attention to lighting, and the use of superimpositions—Dulac creates a visual harmony in her films, while still creating a narrative structure which her viewer can follow. The viewer of Dulac's films is no longer an outsider. Instead, the viewer is allowed to *experience* the film from the characters' perspectives.

Looking at Dulac's films through the examination of the contemporary film theories of Mulvey, Silverman, Doane and de Lauretis, it is interesting to see how both the male and female spectators relate differently to the characters. While the female characters serve as an object of sexual desire for the male viewer, they also appeal to the female viewer as well. While the female viewer can take on the "masculine" position while watching the film, she can also identify with Dulac's characters. She places both the character and the viewer into "a particular situation...in order to penetrate into the secret domain of his inner life'."¹¹⁸ Despite the controversy surrounding *La Coquille et le Clergyman* and her close adaptation of Artaud's script, Dulac makes the film her own through subtle changes in the interpretation of the script by instilling a sense of femininity into the film without destroying the script's masculine undertones or turning it

¹¹⁸ Abel 280.

into a strictly feminist interpretation. Dulac keeps the woman as an object of desire, but never demoralizes her or makes her into a sexual “toy” for male pleasure. The focus remains on the clergyman’s attempt at understanding his insanity and the woman merely provides another perspective to gauge his insanity by. It is perhaps her ability to depict all aspects of human existence that makes her one of the most influential female film directors in cinematic history.

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