# A CHRONOLOGY OF CONFLATED DISPERSION — Duras and Orwell

Subjectively edited by Haegue Yang, 2021

**Marguerite Duras (1914-1996) and George Orwell (1903-1950)**

1824 The First Anglo-Burmese War (March 5, 1824 – February 24, 1826) between the British and Burmese empires began primarily over the control of Northeastern India. The decisive British victory gave them total control of Assam, Manipur, Cachar and Jaintia as well as Arakan Province and Tenasserim.

This war was the longest and most expensive war in British Indian history. Fifteen thousand European and Indian soldiers died, together with an unknown number of Burmese military and civilian casualties.

1852 The Second Anglo-Burmese War was provoked by the British, who sought the teak forests in Lower Burma as well as a port between Calcutta and Singapore. The British occupied all of Lower Burma and as a result of their victory, obtained access to the teak, oil and rubies of their newly conquered territories.

1858 From 1858 to 1862, the French Empire and the Kingdom of Spain launched a series of military operations against the Nguyen dynasty of Dai Nam, present-day Vietnam. Saigon was captured on February 17, 1859. The war concluded with the 1862 Treaty of Saigon, which ceded the three Southern Vietnamese provinces of Bien Hoa, Gia Dinh and Dinh Tuong to France.

1884 The Sino-French War began in August.

1885 Though the Sino-French War ended in a military stalemate in April, France gained control of northern Vietnam.

The British initiated the Third Anglo-Burmese War, which lasted less than two weeks in November. Justifying their actions by claiming that the last independent king of Burma, Thibaw Min, was a tyrant conspiring to give France more influence in the country, British troops entered Mandalay on November 28.

1886 After gaining various parts of Burma from the three wars, the British occupied the entire country, making the territory a Province of British India on January 1.

1887 French Indochina became officially known as the Indochinese Union. It was a grouping of French colonial territories in Southeast Asia and at the time, comprised three Vietnamese regions—Tonkin in the north, Annam in the centre and Cochinchina in the south—and Cambodia.

1898 Guangzhouwan, a small enclave on the southern coast of China was ceded by Qing China to France and was administered as an outlier of the Indochinese Union.

1899 Laos was added to the Indochinese Union on April 19.

1903 George Orwell was born Eric Arthur Blair on June 25 in Motihari, Bengal, in the then British colony of India. His birthplace and ancestral house in Motihari, the headquarters of East Champaran district in the Indian state of Bihar, is now a historical monument.

His father, Richard Walmesley Blair (1857-1939), was a British colonial civil servant and worked for the Opium Department of the Indian Civil Service. His mother, Ida Mabel Blair (1875-1943), grew up in Moulmein, Burma.

1904 His mother relocated with Orwell and his older sister, Marjorie, to England and settled at Henley-on-Thames in Oxfordshire.

1908 Orwell's younger sister, Avril, was born.

1911 At the age of eight, Orwell obtained a scholarship, and his mother sent him to board at St Cyprian's School, in the seaside town of Eastbourne, Sussex. He boarded there for five years, returning home only for the school holidays. Although young Orwell knew nothing of the reduced fees, he soon became aware of his humble background.

1912 Orwell's father retired from the service and joined the family in England. Apart from a brief visit in mid-1907, Orwell hardly saw his father. Even after his father returned, they had a distant relationship. Orwell found his father, who was by then in his fifties, to be a grouchy and dull man.

1914 Marguerite Duras was born on April 4 as Marguerite Donnadieu in Gia-Dinh, near Saigon, Indochina (now South Vietnam). Her parents, Henri Donnadieu (1872-1921) and Marie Legrand (1877-1957), were French colonists. She had two elder brothers: Pierre (born 1910) and Paul (born 1912).

At the age of eleven, Orwell's poem *Awake! Young Men of England* appeared in the local newspaper Henley and South Oxfordshire Standard. It was his first work ever published.

1916 Orwell came second in the Harrow History Prize, and had another poem published in the Henley and South Oxfordshire Standard where his work was praised by the external examiner. He won a scholarship to Wellington College, a school with a military background appropriate for colonial service. Although he had won an Eton scholarship, this was subject to a place becoming available, and he decided to enrol in Wellington.

1917 After Orwell had been in Wellington for nine weeks, a place at Eton became available. He entered Eton as a King's Scholar. Aldous Huxley was Orwell's French teacher at Eton for a brief period.

1920 A student strike against the new University Act in Burma broke out, and 'National Schools' sprang up across the country in protest against the colonial education system. Further strikes and anti-tax protests occurred in the villages. Prominent among the political activists were Buddhist monks, such as U Ottama and U Seinda in the Arakan who led an armed rebellion against the British.

1921 Some sources state that Duras' father died on December 4, when she was seven. Marie Legrand, Duras' mother, attempted to diversify her income with the purchase of rice fields in current Cambodia, but the investment was tainted by corrupt French colonial bureaucracy. The area was often flooded with seawater, making it unsuitable for agriculture. The family's savings dwindled as she sank money into an ever-failing plan to construct sea walls to prevent flooding.

Orwell completed his studies at Eton, where he was involved in the production of at least three publications: *The Election Times*, *College Days* and *Bubble and Squeak*, and also participated in the *Eton Wall Game*. His academic performance reports suggest that he neglected his academic studies.

1922 At the age of nineteen, Orwell joined the Indian Imperial Police in Burma, then still a province of British India. In October, he sailed to Burma via the Suez Canal and Ceylon. In November, he arrived in Rangoon and travelled to the police training school in Mandalay.

1924 Marie Legrand took a teaching position in Indochina. She and her children—Duras and her siblings—moved to Vinh Long, then to Sadec.

In early 1924, Orwell was posted to Myaungmya in the Irrawaddy Delta following a year-long training in Mandalay and Maymyo. He was posted to several different locations at the Imperial Force in Burma, including Twante, where he was a sub-divisional officer overseeing the security of about 200,000 people. When he was promoted to Assistant District Superintendent in Syriam, he took advantage of its proximity to Rangoon to visit bookshops and restaurants, breaking the monotony of his structured life.

1925 In September, Orwell went to Insein, which had the second largest prison in Burma renowned for its inhumane treatment of inmates and mental and physical torture. During his stay Orwell witnessed at least one execution, and it inspired his 1931 essay *A Hanging*. Some of the violence he saw also found its way into his 1934 novel *Burmese Days*.
Orwell acquired a reputation as an outsider who spent much of his time alone. He quickly learnt to speak Burmese fluently. He also made changes to his appearance in Burma that remained for the rest of his life. For example, he ported a moustache similar to other officers and acquired tattoos, a series of blue circles on the knuckles of his hands, following a Burmese tradition of bullet-deflecting talismanic tattooing.

1926 In April, Orwell moved to Moulmein, where his maternal grandmother lived. At the end of that year, he was assigned to a position in Katha in Upper Burma.

1927 In Katha, Orwell contracted dengue fever and was allowed to return to England in July to convalesce. While on leave in England, he decided not to return to Burma and to resign from the Indian Imperial Police to become a writer. Orwell undertook several explorations of London's East End to investigate the poorer parts of London over a period of five years, dressed like a tramp under the name P. S. Burton.

1928 Orwell's resignation from the Imperial Police took effect on January 1.

He moved to Paris, supported by his aunt Nellie Limouzin and her partner Eugène Adam, both writers, revolutionaries and radical Esperantists. They introduced Orwell to editors and writers, such as the French novelist Henri Barbusse (1872-1935). Barbusse, editor of the weekly international communist magazine Le Monde published Orwell's first article *La Censure en Angleterre* (*Censorship in England*), followed by several articles published in journals such as G. K.'s Weekly and Le Progrès civique. Orwell was obsessed with the subject of poverty.

1929 U Wisara, the first martyr of the independence movement in Burma, died after a protracted hunger strike in prison.

Duras, aged fifteen, met an older Chinese man who became

her lover. This encounter inspired her novel *The Lover* (1984); however, the main male character's identity remains obscure.

In March, Orwell collapsed from pneumonia and was taken to the Hôpital Cochin in Paris. His personal experience of human degradation in this public hospital was described in his essay *How the Poor Die* published in 1946. Shortly after being discharged from hospital, Orwell was deprived of all his money. Left penniless, he took up dishwashing jobs in restaurants, perhaps a way to also gather material for his writing.
In December, Orwell returned to England and was based in his parents' house at Southwold, Suffolk for five years. During these years, Orwell wrote reviews and was a private tutor. His life then was marked by dualities and contrasts. He led a respectable, outwardly eventless life, writing at his parents' house in Southwold. In contrast, he had another life in the East End, on the road, and in the hop fields of Kent.

1931 Duras entered a high school in Saigon. During this time, she became aware of her family's poverty, which surpassed most of her Asian schoolmates. She received her baccalauréat from the Lycée de Saigon. Her childhood in colonial Indochina provided her with source material for future writing. Her biographical facts often conflict due to her elusiveness when responding to questions about altering her own history to suit her needs.

Orwell regularly contributed essays—amongst others his articles *The Spike* and *A Hanging*—for the Adelphi, a magazine that had close connections to the ILP (Independent Labour Party). Through the Adelphi, Orwell met socialists such as the novelist Jack Common (1903-1968) who was known for his ironic and quirky writings that captured the daily realities of ordinary workers.

1932 At the age of seventeen, Duras moved to France. She entered the Sorbonne, intending to major in mathematics.

1933 Orwell's first full-length work, *Down and Out in Paris and London* was published (Victor Gollancz, London). This book offers an account of Orwell's experiences of poverty as he tried to build a career as a writer after quitting his job in the Imperial Police Force in Burma. He took the name George Orwell shortly before its publication.

1934 Orwell's first novel, *Burmese Days* (Harper & Brothers, US), was published.
In October, Orwell worked as a part-time assistant in Booklovers' Corner, a second-hand bookshop in Hampstead, London. His experiences provided background for the novel *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* (Victor Gollancz, London, 1936).

The Booklovers' Corner was run by Francis and Myfanwy Westrope, who were both members of the ILP and friends of Nellie Limouzin, Orwell's aunt. Journalist and historian Jon Kimche (1909-1994) who shared the job with Orwell at the Booklovers' Corner was also involved in the Party. Orwell's political mindset was shaped through the Westropes, their acquaintances, as well as the people he met in London.

1935 Duras acquired degrees in political science and law at the Sorbonne. She started to work as a secretary for a French government office representing Indochina.

Orwell's *A Clergyman's Daughter* was published (Victor Gollancz, London). It narrates episodes in the life of Dorothy Hare, the daughter of a widowed clergyman. Following a bout of amnesia, she sinks into poverty, lives on the streets, is detained in a police cell and finds employment as a teacher. These struggles echo episodes in Orwell's own life. The book is considered Orwell's most formally experimental novel and was influenced by the Irish novelist James Joyce (1882-1941). Dissatisfied with the work and considering it as simply an exercise, Orwell prevented it from being reprinted during his lifetime.

1936 The Spanish Civil War against the Republican government started on July 17 following decades of polarisation and discontentment. The Republicans consisted of urban and agricultural workers as well as the educated middle class. The rebel forces, known as the Nationalists were mainly Roman Catholics, key military personnel, and landowners who were supported by Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. Concerned about the rise of fascism, the Soviet Union sent equipment and aid to the Republicans, which also received the support of communists, socialists, and anarchists within Spain. 30-40,000 volunteers, including left-wing intelligentsia from Europe, joined the International Brigades that fought for the Republicans.

In January, Orwell finished *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* (Victor Gollancz, London). The novel concerns the struggle of an advertising executive to go beyond materialism, giving up his career to become a poet and descend into poverty. In the same month, Orwell was commissioned to write a book about the conditions of the working class that faced poverty and unemployment in industrial northern England. An editor of the Adelphi, Richard Rees (1900-1970), provided contacts for his trip to Wigan, enabling him to experience a range of housing and social conditions. These were captured in the book *The Road to Wigan Pier* (Victor Gollancz, London) published in 1937. Rees was involved in the Spanish Civil War and drove ambulances in Catalonia.
Orwell married Eileen O'Shaughnessy on June 9 at St Mary's Church in Hertfordshire. O'Shaughnessy was studying for a Master's degree in Psychology at University College London when she met Orwell. After their marriage, she withdrew from her studies and supported Orwell by typing his manuscripts, often in

the dark as their paraffin lamp was used by Orwell for his writing.
In July, Orwell attended an ILP summer school. In August, he gave a lecture at the Adelphi summer school, known for being an independent socialist university of sorts.
Orwell's essay *Shooting an Elephant* was first published in the literary magazine New Writing. The narrator in the essay is a police officer in Burma who is alerted to the death of a man killed by an elephant. At the scene, he is urged by the crowd to shoot the elephant. Though reluctant to, he does so to save himself from humiliation. The essay is regarded as a metaphor for imperialism and how the imperialists ultimately lose part of their own humanity. The sentiments of the police officer who began to grasp the "futility of the white man's dominion in the East" while holding a rifle near the elephant suggests that Orwell recognised his own involvement in advancing imperialism.
In late December, Orwell travelled to Barcelona, intending to fight for the Republicans against Franco's Nationalists in Spain. He originally planned to join the International Brigade, which had the participation of the majority of Englishmen. However, having been given a letter of introduction by the ILP, he felt obligated to visit their representative, John McNair. The ILP was supporting the POUM (Workers' Party of Marxist Unification), and Orwell eventually volunteered to join the POUM. He was impressed by the egalitarian atmosphere he encountered in Barcelona and naively thought that all political groups shared the goal of fighting fascism.
O'Shaughnessy later joined her husband in Spain and volunteered in the office of McNair.

1937 On April 1, Burma became a separately administered colony of Britain. Ba Maw, the first Prime Minister and Premier of Burma was a strong proponent of Burmese self-governance. The British separated Burma Province from British India in 1937 and granted the colony a new constitution calling for a fully elected assembly, with many powers given to the Burmese. But this proved to be a divisive issue as some Burmese felt that this was a ploy to exclude them from any further Indian reforms.

Duras became an employee of the Ministry of Colonies (Ministère des Colonies).

Orwell served on the Aragon Front. With the help of Georges Kopp, commander of the POUM section that Orwell joined, O'Shaughnessy visited him and brought him tea, chocolate and cigars. O'Shaughnessy was having a relationship with Kopp at that time. Orwell and O'Shaughnessy apparently had a rather open marriage, with Orwell himself having had several affairs.
On May 20, Orwell received a bullet wound by a sniper in his throat as he was moving through the trenches. As a result of the injury, Orwell lost his voice for weeks and was hampered by it for life. On June 16, the anti-Stalinist far-left POUM, was declared an illegal organisation. Like many other POUM members, Kopp was arrested. Orwell and O'Shaughnessy visited him in jail and some time later managed to escape from Spain after being almost arrested as 'Trotskyites'.
Orwell's investigations about unemployment and the conditions in northern England resulted in the publication of *The Road to Wigan Pier* (Victor Gollancz, London). The book also makes reference to his guilt at having been involved in the brutality of imperialism:
*For five years I had been part of an oppressive system, and it had left me with a bad conscience. Innumerable remembered faces—faces of prisoners in the dock, of men waiting in the condemned cells, of subordinates I had bullied and aged peasants I had snubbed, of servants and coolies I had hit with my fist in moments of rage (nearly everyone does these things in the East, at any rate occasionally:*
*Orientals can be very provoking)—haunted me intolerably. I was conscious of an immense weight of guilt that I had got to expiate.*

1938 Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia* was published (Secker and Warburg, London), containing the account of his experiences and observations during the Spanish Civil War. He describes the tedium of life during the first few months at the Aragon front and his gradual realisation of the inadequacies of the militia, which consisted of inexperienced recruits. The book also details the factions among the leftwing parties and the purge of the POUM by the communists. Orwell expresses his disillusionment with the anti-fascist coalition and sees the Spanish Civil War as a game for political parties to gain power, instead of a fight for democracy.
Though he had been involved in the ILP's activities for several years, Orwell joined it only at this point, laying out his reasons in the essay *Why I Join the I.L.P* published by *New Leader*.
For years, Orwell had periods of sickness. He was officially diagnosed with tuberculosis and spent several months at the Preston Hall Sanatorium.

1939 The Spanish Civil War ended.

The Second World War began.

Duras married Robert Antelme. Their apartment on 5 rue Saint-Benoît in Saint-Germain-des-Prés became a gathering place for authors and intellectuals including Jean Genet, Georges Bataille, Henri Michaux, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Edgar Morin.

Orwell's father died.
Orwell's satire, *Coming Up for Air* was published (Victor Gollancz, London). The novel focuses on the radical changes experienced in England and the tension between nostalgia and progress.
The ILP had been opposed to the war against Hitler, considering it as a war between two forms of capitalism. Though Orwell had kept to its position, he eventually decided to support the war and left the Party.

1940 Duras published *L'Empire français* (Gallimard, Paris), a collection of nationalistic and propagandistic statements, co-written with Philippe Roques. It is the only book published under her birth name, Donnadieu. Decades later, Duras continued to deny the existence of this book, which justifies French imperialism in Asia.
Duras quit her job at the Ministry of Colonies.

1941 In December, Aung San, a political activist and anti-imperialist, announced the formation of the BIA (Burma Independence Army) in anticipation of the Japanese invasion of Burma in 1942.

Orwell began work for the BBC Eastern Service, mostly working on programmes to gain Indian and East Asian support for Britain's war efforts. He was well aware that he was shaping propaganda.

1942 The Empire of Japan invaded Burma, disrupting British rule of Burma during their occupation till 1945. The Japanese had assisted in the formation of the Burma Independence Army and trained the Thirty Comrades, who were the founders of the modern Armed Forces (*Tatmadaw*). However Japan never succeeded in conquering the entire colony.

From 1942 to 1944, Duras worked for the Vichy government's Paper Allocation Agency. Facing a shortage of resources during the war, this agency functioned as an unofficial station for censorship and determined whether a book would be allocated paper for publication.

1943 In July, the Fascist government fell and Mussolini was arrested.

On August 1, Japan nominally declared the British colony of Burma independent as the State of Burma, a puppet government led by Ba Maw in Rangoon.

Duras, her husband Robert Antelme, and critic and political philosopher Dionys Mascolo joined the Mouvement national des prisonniers de guerre et déportés (MNPGD), a French resistance group against Nazi invasion. As part of the resistance, they became acquainted with future French president François Mitterrand, who also hid himself at their home at 5 rue Saint-Benoît. Duras also met French intellectual and author Maurice Blanchot through the publishing house Gallimard and Mascolo.

Orwell's mother died.
Despite the good pay, Orwell resigned from BBC Eastern Service in 1943 and became literary editor of the *Tribune*, a weekly left-wing magazine. By now he was a prolific journalist, writing articles, reviews and books.

1944 On August 25, the French capital of Paris was liberated from the Germans.

In the same month, Aung San and other nationalist leaders formed the Anti-Fascist Organisation, which asked Britain to form a coalition with the other Allies against the Japanese.

Duras, then struggling as a writer, published her first novel *Les Impudents* under the surname of Duras, as the story takes place in Duras, the birthplace of her late father. During that same year, her child was stillborn. She began a romantic liaison with Mascolo. Duras joined the PCF, Parti communiste français (French Communist Party) with Antelme and Mascolo. In June, Antelme, her sister-in-law Marie-Louise, and two other members of MNPGD were arrested at Marie-Louise's apartment in rue Dupin, while Mitterrand barely escaped. All four were sent to a concentration camp.
By September, Duras commenced publication of Libres, a newspaper that communicated the whereabouts of war prisoners to their family and friends. When Antelme was sent to camps in Buchenwald, Gandersheim and then Dachau, Duras stopped writing until 1950. She remained an active member of MNPGD. While awaiting her husband's return from the concentration camp, she began a tumultuous relationship with Pierre Rabier, whose real name was Charles Delval and who was part of the Gestapo. During this time, she kept diary-like notes, which formed the basis for a 'memoir' published in 1985.

In June, Orwell and his wife Eileen adopted a son, Richard Horatio Blair (born in May 1944) .

1945 The Russians reached Berlin shortly before the US forces in April. Italian partisans captured Mussolini and executed him on April 28. On April 30, the German leader Adolf Hitler committed suicide in his bombproof shelter together with his mistress Eva Braun, who he had, at the last minute, made his wife.

Russia declared war on Japan and invaded Japanese-ruled Manchuria on August 8. The US dropped an atomic bomb on the island of Nagasaki on August 9, as the Japanese had not surrendered following Hiroshima on August 6.

The Japanese unconditionally surrendered to the allies, ending the Second World War on August 14, and the Imperial Japanese rule over Korea ended on August 15. Anxious that the Peninsula would be entirely under the influence of Soviet forces, two young American officers hastily decided on the 38th parallel to split the Peninsula into two zones on August 10. Soviet forces occupied the North and the US Forces, the South to disarm the Peninsula.

By April, the Allies had driven the Japanese out of Burma. Subsequently, negotiations began between the Burmese Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League and the British government for inde-

pendence. During the Japanese occupation, 170,000 to 250,000 civilians died in Burma.

Antelme returned to France, thanks to a dramatic rescue effort by Mascolo and Georges Beauchamp, initiated by Mitterrand. Duras devoted herself to successfully nursing the severely weakened Antelme to recovery. Duras and Antelme founded the publishing house La Cité Universelle. The couple lived together with Mascolo until the end of the war.

Orwell's *Animal Farm* was published (Secker and Warburg, London), a political fable set in a farmyard but based on Stalin's betrayal of the Russian Revolution. The novella made Orwell's name and ensured he was financially comfortable for the first time in his life.
Orwell became the Observer's war correspondent and later contributed regularly to the Manchester Evening News.

1946 Duras and Antelme divorced after he recovered from typhus.

Orwell's essay *Why I Write* was published in the summer edition of the literary magazine *Gangrel*. In the essay, he traces his writing journey and highlights the importance of the Spanish Civil War in influencing the political inclination of his works. He identified sheer egotism, aesthetic enthusiasm, historical impulse and political purpose as four motives that every writer possesses, to varying degrees, for writing.
Orwell's first wife, Eileen O'Shaughnessy, died of cardiac failure during a hysterectomy.

1947 The Indochinese Union became officially known as the Indochinese Federation.

The Indian Independence Act of the Parliament of the United Kingdom partitioned British India into the two new independent dominions of India and Pakistan.

Duras' only son, Jean Mascolo, fathered by Dionys Mascolo, was born. Antelme published *The Human Race* (La Cité Universelle, Paris), narrating his experience in Buchenwald.

1948 On January 4, Burma achieved independence from British rule and became an independent republic, under the terms of the Burma Independence Act 1947.

1949 The People's Republic of China was established.

Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was published (Secker & Warburg, London). Set in an imaginary totalitarian future, the book's title and many phrases—such as "Big Brother is watching you", "newspeak" and "doublethink"—entered popular use. The term "Orwellian", which refers to an attitude or policy of severe control by manipulation and surveillance is said by the New York Times to be the "most widely used adjective derived from the name of a modern writer".
The Burmese translation of *Animal Farm* was published (Burmese Translation Society, Rangoon).
Orwell married Sonia Brownell in autumn.

1950 The Communist Party labeled Duras a revisionist, and she resigned, together with Antelme and Mascolo. In a later interview, however, Duras stated that she had always been a communist. Around 1950, Duras established her reputation as a professional writer. That year, she published an autobiographical novel, *The Sea Wall* (Gallimard, Paris), which was adapted for film twice. The narrative investigates a mother's failed attempt to build a wall to prevent seawater from flooding her farmland. In quick succession, she published *The Sailor from Gibraltar* (Gallimard, Paris, 1952), *The Little Horses of Tarquinia* (Gallimard, Paris, 1953), *Whole Days in the Trees* (Gallimard, Paris, 1954) and *The Square* (Gallimard, Paris, 1955).

On January 21, Orwell died at the age of forty-six from tuberculosis, which he had probably contracted during the period described in *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933).

1950-1953 The Korean War between North Korea and South Korea began on June 25, 1950.

1952 Two years after Orwell's death, Partisan Review published a long autobiographical essay, *Such, Such Were the Joys*, in which Orwell describes his experiences between the ages of eight and thirteen, in the years before and during World War I (September 1911-December 1916), while a pupil at St Cyprian's in Sussex. The essay—presumably drafted in 1939-40, revised in 1944-46 and completed only in May or June 1948—offers various reflections on the contradictions of the Edwardian middle and upper class world-view, on the psychology of children and on the experience of oppression and class conflict. The veracity of the stories it contains about life at St. Cyprian's has been challenged by a number of commenters, including Orwell's contemporaries at the school and biographers, but its powerful writing and haunting observations have made it one of Orwell's most commonly anthologised essays.

1953 The Cuban Revolution, an armed revolt by Fidel Castro's revolutionary 26th of July Movement and its allies against the authoritarian government of Cuban President Fulgencio Batista, began in July.

1954-1962 The Algerian War of Independence was fought between France and the Algerian National Liberation Front, leading to Algeria's independence from France.

1956 Duras' *The Square* was staged at Studio des Champs-Elysées, co-directed by Claude Martin.

1957

Duras and Mascolo separated.
From 1957 to 1958, Duras contributed to France-Observateur, a left-wing magazine. Her concerns were mostly about the hidden world of groups or individuals, which she linked with political issues by narrating the texture of everyday individual experiences.

1958 Duras received high praise for *The Square*, which she followed with the novel *Moderato Cantabile* (Les Éditions de Minuit, Paris). From this period, the ideas of sexual desire, love, death and memory appeared, becoming major themes in her later works.

1959 The 26th of July Movement overthrew the Fulgencio Batista dictatorship in Cuba.

On September 13, the Soviet Union's Luna 2 mission became the first human-made object to reach the surface of the Moon.

Filmmaker Alain Resnais asked Duras to write the screenplay for *Hiroshima Mon Amour*. The film received a lot of attention and led Duras to focus on writing for screen. Duras was later nominated for an Academy Award for Best Original Screenplay.

1960 Named for its number of signatories and published in 1960, the 'Manifesto of the 121' included Duras, Antelme, Jean-Paul Sartre, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Henri Lefebvre and Alain Resnais. These 121 intellectuals refused to participate in the war against the Algerians, whom they felt were oppressed by the French.
Duras' *Moderato Cantabile* was adapted for film by director Peter Brook and starred Jeanne Moreau and Jean-Paul Belmondo. Moreau's character leads a boring life as the wife of a big steel manufacturer. Her life changes when she witnesses the murder of a woman by her lover. Her fascination with this violent love affair sparks a morbid relationship with a man played by Belmondo.
Duras began to exhibit signs of alcoholism, yet by the 1960s had published eight novels.

1961 U Thant, the Union of Burma's Permanent Representative to the United Nations and former secretary to the Prime Minister, was elected Secretary-General of the United Nations, a position he held for ten years.

1962 Following a coup d'état, Burma became a military dictatorship under the Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP). On July 7, the government broke up demonstrations at Rangoon University, killing fifteen students.

1964 Duras collaborated with Gérard Jarlot for the screenplay of the telefilm *Sans merveille*. She published *The Ravishing of Lol Stein* (Gallimard, Paris).

1965 Duras staged *Whole Days in the Trees*. She published *The Rivers and the Forests*, *The Square*, *La Musica* (Gallimard, Paris) and *The Vice-Consul* (Gallimard, Paris).

1968 On March 17, about 10,000 people demonstrated against the Vietnam War in London, beginning with a huge rally at Trafalgar Square and ending with clashes outside the United States Embassy in Grosvenor Square. Over 200 demonstrators were arrested and 86 people were injured.

Beginning in May, a period of civil unrest, which became known as *May 68* occurred throughout France and lasted some seven weeks. Punctuated by demonstrations, strikes and the occupation of universities and factories, the unrest brought the economy of France to a halt. The protests spurred movements worldwide, with songs, imaginative graffiti, posters and slogans.

In early May, during the student occupation protests, Duras signed a petition published in Le Monde supporting the students. On May 20, the Students-Writers Action Committee was created; Duras, Antelme, Mascolo and Blanchot joined. It is thought that one of the most famous slogans from this period—Sous les pavés, la plage (Under the paving stones, the beach)—was coined by Duras.

1969 The US' Apollo 11 was the first manned mission to land on the Moon on July 20.

From June to July, following the dissolution of the Students-Writers Action Committee, Lettres nouvelles published five anonymous texts under the heading *A Year Later, the Students-Writers Action Committee*. Duras and Blanchot each authored one text while Mascolo contributed three.

Duras' feature-length film *Destroy, She Said* premiered. It was adapted from her novel of the same title. The student movement and strikes of May 1968 nurtured the films.

1970 The 1970s was a period of filmmaking for Duras. She shot many of these films in Neauphle-le-Château, where she lived alone.
Duras published *Abahn Sabana David* (Gallimard, Paris) dedicated to Antelme and Blanchot. Here, she described Jews as the most progressive revolutionaries, not submissive to any state power but pursuing exile, anonymity and failure. Similar perspectives towards the Jewish diaspora are also present in her film *Jaune le soleil* (1971).

1971 From 1971 to 1973, Duras wrote screenplays and directed *Nathalie Granger, Woman of the Ganges*, and *Jaune le soleil*. Jeanne Moreau and Gérard Depardieu—in his first film role—acted in *Nathalie Granger*. Both actors developed a strong friendship with Duras. Duras once stated that *Nathalie Granger* is about a house and the violence of a child; she discovered that the previous owner of the home was illiterate, a fact that she found terrifying. Duras also noted that people tend to return home to commit suicide, a situation which resonates with the notion of home as a charged place in this film. Scholar Emma Wilson translated one of her notes, "In a house, horror of the family is also inscribed, the need for retreat, a whole set of suicidal feelings".

1972 President Richard Nixon spent eight days in China in February, during which he met Chairman Mao Zedong and signed the Shanghai Communiqué with Premier Zhou Enlai.

1973 The 1973 oil crisis began when members of the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries proclaimed an oil embargo.

Duras published *India Song* (Gallimard, Paris).

1974 In May, strikes were held in Rangoon and other parts of Burma amid corruption, inflation and food shortages. The Burmese military violently suppressed large anti-government protests at the funeral of U Thant. As a close advisor to U Nu, a former Prime Minister who was overthrown in the 1962 coup d'état, U Thant was perceived to be a symbol of opposition and was denied a state funeral.

1975 The Vietnam War, which started on November 1, 1955, came to an end with the fall of Saigon on April 30.

Duras directed the film version of *India Song*. Delphine Seyrig—a tall and frail actress—played the mysterious central female figure, Anne-Marie Stretter, the promiscuous wife of the French Vice-Consul of India in the 1930s. Seyrig was known to be a militant feminist; she signed *Le Manifeste des 343* (a declaration of having had an abortion) along with Duras, Moreau and Simone de Beauvoir. Duras wrote an article for Vogue on Seyrig, who also appeared in her films *La Musica* (1966) and *Baxter, Vera Baxter* (1977). Although *India Song*—with themes of decadence, passion, and loss—is supposed to be set in India, it was entirely shot in a Boulogne mansion (le Palais Rothschild). Duras chose not to familiarise herself with Calcutta, which she had visited in her teens, just as she never traveled to Hiroshima for her screenplay for *Hiroshima Mon Amour*. Another notable aspect of this film is its non-synchronic approach, which Duras once expressed as 'le film des voix,' whereby no actor in *India Song* speaks. Voices only come from 'outside' and do not accompany the actors' performances, while the piano waltz composed by Carlos d'Alessio repeats throughout.

1976 On the centenary of the birth of Burmese poet, writer and nationalist leader Thakin Kodaw Hmaing (1876–1964), more than 100 students were arrested for their attempts to peacefully commemorate the event.

Duras adapted *Whole Days in the Trees* and *Son nom de Venise dans Calcutta désert* for film. In the latter, the plot returns to *India Song*, where the narrative is constructed completely through voice-over and is entirely free of actors, while the camera wanders in the abandoned mansion where *India Song* was shot. *Son nom de Venise dans Calcutta désert* is an extreme 'double' of *India Song*, a cinema of text, destroying the cinema of actors.

1977 Duras wrote and directed *The Truck*. The eighty-minute-long film comprises mainly Gérard Depardieu and Duras reading the script together for, as she put it, 'what would have been a film.' The narrative unfolds in the living room of her house in Neauphle-le-Château. Duras published *Les Lieux de Marguerite Duras* (Les Éditions de Minuit, Paris) in collaboration with Michelle Porte.

1978 Operation Dragon King was a military operation conducted against the Rohingya Muslims, an ethnic minority living in northern Arakan, Burma who have been persecuted by the government. Officially, the operation was intended to register citizens and expel what was deemed as foreigners prior to a national census. On February 6, civilians were rounded up and over three months, an estimated 250,000 fled to Bangladesh. The Rohingya refugees reported cases of intimation, rape and murder by immigration officials and military personnel.

1979 US President Jimmy Carter granted China full diplomatic recognition, acknowledging mainland China's One China principle and severing diplomatic relations with Taiwan.

1980 Duras suffered from severe alcoholism. Nonetheless, she had a prolific year, publishing *The Man Sitting in the Corridor* (Les Éditions de Minuit, Paris), *L'Été 80* (Les Éditions de Minuit, Paris) and *Green Eyes* (Cahiers du cinéma, Paris). Duras once confessed that she wrote many of her works under the influence of alcohol.
Duras met Yann Andréa, a philosophy student and an ardent fan of hers. Yann Andréa became her secretary, actor and companion until her death, notwithstanding their differences in age and sexual orientation. Years later, Duras wrote about their relationship in *Yann Andréa Steiner* (P.O.L., Paris).

*George Orwell: A Life* by British political theorist and democratic socialist Professor Sir Bernard Crick (1929-2008) was published (Secker and Warburg, London). Although Orwell's will had indicated that a biography of him should not be written, and Sonia, his widow, had attempted to rebuff several requests by writers, she eventually commissioned Crick to produce this scholarly biography. Sonia came into conflict with Crick due to his questioning of the accuracy of several of Orwell's writings and tried to prevent the publication of the book.

1981 Duras wrote and directed *Agatha et les lectures illimitées* starring Bulle Ogier and Yann Andréa. *L'Homme atlantique* was produced, from the remaining material of *Agatha et les lectures illimitées*; only Andréa is featured and Duras provided the voice-over, while the screen stays predominantly black.

1982 Duras wrote *Savannah Bay* (Les Éditions de Minuit, Paris). She was hospitalised for alcohol addiction, receiving treatment at the American Hospital of Paris. Duras' writing from this period addresses isolation and self-destruction in relation to the impossibility of love. *The Malady of Death* (Les Éditions de Minuit, Paris) was published. The tale, narrated in the second person, features a contract between 'you' (vous) and 'her' (elle), and depicts nights in which the wish of 'you' to learn how to love is unrealised, while 'she' diagnoses 'you' with a 'malady'. Duras included directions on stage and film adaptations, yet never directed a version herself. Leslie Hill writes in *Marguerite Duras: Apocalyptic Desires* (1993): "The relationship between text and theatre in *The Malady of Death* provides an implicit gloss on the question of the relation between the sexes in Duras. The encounter between them, whether sexual or textual, is arguably always already a missed encounter; the only mode of relationship that Duras' text allows one to envisage is in fact a non-relationship".

1983 In a critical response to *The Inoperative Community* (published in 1983 as an article, and later as a book in 1986; Christian Bourgois, Paris) by French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy, Maurice Blanchot wrote the essay *The Unavowable Community* (Éditions de Minuit, Paris) that references *The Malady of Death*. Kuisma Korhonen writes: "Duras' narrative not only served for Blanchot as an example of the intimate-passionate order between two subjects in the text, but also appeared as an allegory for a textual encounter in general, as if literary communities, just as communities of lovers, belonged ultimately to those asocial and unworked communities that are always on the brink of collapse".

1984 At the age of seventy, Duras published *The Lover* (Les Éditions de Minuit, Paris). It sold two million copies and earned her the Prix Goncourt. The novel conflates fiction and memoir. Written during her alcoholic rehabilitation, it deals with her childhood, her relationship with her mother and the older lover from her youth. This blurring of boundaries between fact and fiction has been termed 'the French new autobiography', a style apparent by the melding of conventions of the autobiographical genre such as specific biographical references with the writer as both narrator and character, together with a disinterest in maintaining consistency in biographical facts.

1985 Duras published *The War: A Memoir* (P.O.L, Paris), a haunting portrait of her time in Paris during the German occupation and the first few months of liberation. The book depicts the intense period whilst waiting for her husband, and the process of nursing him back to health after he returned from a concentration camp. It also features her strange liaison with a French Gestapo agent, Monsieur X, called Pierre Rabier, who was also attracted to Duras. The meetings between Duras and Rabier grew into an intense play of power and dependency. She was in need of information from him about her husband, while he of her companionship—though he had the authority to arrest her. Later, when the defeat of the Nazis became evident, Duras had the option to testify against him, yet she remained ambivalent. Another remarkable aspect of this memoir lies in the substantial changes in style and tone made to her original notes. Though many of Duras' peers regarded this rewritten version of *The War: A Memoir* as a shameful distortion of the truth, it was also acknowledged that historical accuracy was never Duras' primary goal. In the search for understanding and closure from a tragic event in these two versions, notions of truth and history might divert but also coincide in emotional authenticity.

1986 In November, Duras explained in an article titled *La Pute de la côte normande*, (published in Libération) why *The Malady of Death* could only be read onstage. Duras published *The Slut of the Normandy Coast* (Les Éditions de Minuit, Paris) and *Blue Eyes, Black Hair* (Les Éditions de Minuit, Paris), a novel dedicated to Yann Andréa. The latter features an incomplete love triangle between a heterosexual woman and a homosexual man.

1987 The economic growth experienced in Burma in the 1980s soon led to an economic crisis due to falling commodity prices and rising debt. In September, U Ne Win, Burma's de facto ruler cancelled certain currency notes due to superstition, allowing only forty-five and ninety kyat notes that could be divided by nine, his lucky number. His decree followed a series of attempts at demonetisation, wiping out people's savings in the process.

1988 The 8888 Uprising on August 8 was a coordinated demonstration led by students, a culmination of nationwide protests, marches and civil unrest in Burma that began in late 1987. Demonstrators in larger numbers demanded multi-party democracy, leading to Ne Win's resignation on July 23. On August 26, Aung San Suu Kyi, the daughter of Aung San, addressed half a million people at Shwedagon Pagoda and became a symbol for the struggle in Burma, particularly in the West. Aung San Suu Kyi urged the crowd not to turn on the army but to find peace through non-violent means. However, by the end of the year, there were 10,000 estimated deaths.

In a coma for five months, Duras was diagnosed as incurable, yet regained consciousness. She continued to write, focusing on her life and her impending death.

1989 A commission set up by the military regime of Burma made the decision to change the English name of the country to 'Myanmar'. The use of 'Burma' and 'Myanmar' by other countries and the media remains mixed. Several countries including the US refer to the country as 'Burma', in part to question the right of the regime to change the country's name.

In the spring of 1989, thousands of students held demonstrations in Beijing's Tiananmen Square, demanding democratic reforms and an end to corruption. On June 3, the government sent in military troops to clear the square, leaving hundreds of protesters dead.

1990 When the military junta arranged an election, Aung San Suu Kyi's party, the National League for Democracy, won 81% of the seats in the government (392 out of 492). However, the military junta refused to recognise the results and continued to rule the country as the State Law and Order Restoration Council. Aung San Suu Kyi was also placed under house arrest.

Duras' ex-husband, Antelme, died.

1991 Aung San Suu Kyi won the Nobel Peace Prize.

Jean-Jacques Annaud directed a film version of *The Lover*. Duras did not like the adaptation. She published *The North China Lover* (Gallimard, Paris) as a counterpoint.

1992 Duras published *Yann Andréa Steiner* (P.O.L, Paris), which describes the beginning of her relationship with her companion Yann Andréa.

1993 Duras published *Writing* (Gallimard, Paris), which discussed her writing methods and her desire to write.

Crick, the writer of Orwell's first biography (*George Orwell: A Life*, 1980), founded the Orwell Prize. Four prizes for political writing, political fiction, journalism, and "Exposing Britain's Social Evils" are awarded for writing and reporting that meets Orwell's ambition to "make political writing into an art".

1995 Duras published her final book *No More* (P.O.L, Paris). The last entry of the book was written on August 1, 1995:

*It's done, I think. My life is over.*
*I am nothing now.*
*I have become absolutely frightful.*
*I no longer hold together.*
*Come quick.*
*I have no mouth left, no face.*

1996 On March 3, Duras died aged eighty-one in her apartment in Paris. She was buried in the Montparnasse Cemetery.

2012 On 16 June, two decades after being awarded the peace prize, Aung San Suu Kyi gave her Nobel acceptance speech at Oslo's City Hall.

The Burmese translation of Orwell's *Burmese Days* was published (Law Ka Thit Sarpay, Yangon). The translator Maung Myint Kywe won the National Literature Award for Translation.

2014 The Youth Orwell Prize was launched to support and inspire a new generation of politically engaged young writers.

2015 Aung San Suu Kyi led the National League for Democracy (NLD) to victory in Myanmar's first openly contested election in 25 years.

2016 Aung San Suu Kyi was appointed as the newly created role of State Counsellor of Myanmar. In the same year, a crackdown by Myanmar military forcing over a million Rohingya to flee to neighbouring countries led to an ethnic cleansing. Aung San Suu Kyi drew international criticism because of her silence over the genocide of the Rohingya people in Rakhine State and her refusal to acknowledge that Myanmar's military has committed massacres.

2021 On February 1, Myanmar's military detained Aung San Suu Kyi in a coup d'état in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to nationwide protests and a mass civil disobedience movement, which was violently struck down.