

Colette and Saint-Tropez

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Introduction: Marseille to Saint-Tropez

Nicholas Hewitt opens his book *Wicked City: The Many Cultures of Marseille* imagining the experience of passengers arriving from Paris:

In 1939, the passengers on the eight o'clock train from Paris would have had their first glimpse of Marseille as they emerged from the Nerthe Tunnel north of L'Estaque at just after seven in the evening. After the eleven-hour journey from Paris, it would have seemed to many travellers that they had arrived in a country which was, to all intents and purposes, entirely foreign. Below them in the evening light was the magnificence of one of Europe's greatest ports, from which many of them were about to embark, and in the background, the hillside of Le Panier and the escarpment topped with the nineteenth-century basilica of Notre-Dame de la Garde (2019: 1).

Hewitt evokes the panorama of Marseille, of a similar spectacle to the Bay of Naples. The evening light bathes the scene in a glow, a warmth, that his words let be felt. As an opening to a book this is itself magnificent. It recalls for me my own first visit to Marseille, which was with Nick and other *French Cultural Studies* editors, for the journal's anniversary conference in 2013. Talking with Nick, on the Vieux Port, wandering in Le Panier, I was bewitched by his vision of the city's politics and commitments, especially in the period immediately following 1939, and his broader sense of the plenitude and drama of Marseille. I hope in some small way to pay tribute here to his work on the cultural imaginary of the South of France.

Leaving Marseille in this essay, though, I want to go east from Marseille St Charles towards the further side of the Riviera, a journey I've made on subsequent trips to the *Midi*. The train goes along the coastline with its otherworldly red *calanques*, the conch-like bay of Bandol, and the palms of Sanary-sur-Mer. From Toulon, the train runs inland, skirting *les Maures*, to Saint-Raphaël-Valescure. Once there you can take a ferry to Saint-Tropez, the town appearing like a mirage, an ancient settlement, when approached by sea. The American novelist Edith Wharton on a 1908 'motor-flight' through France, describes the coast route missed by train and boat passengers:

The stretch of coast from Toulon to Saint Tropez, so much less familiar to northern eyes than the more eastern portion of the Riviera, has a peculiar nobility, a Virgilian breadth of composition, in marked contrast to the red-rocked precipitous landscape beyond. Looking out on it from the pine-woods of Costebelle, above Hyères, one is beset by classic allusions, analogies of the golden age – so divinely does the green plain open to the sea (1995: 135).

My subject here is another novelist Colette, who bought a house outside Saint-Tropez in 1925. Her usual mode of travel from Paris was, like Wharton's, the motor car, but sometimes, like Hewitt's passengers, she reached the South by train. In a letter to Pierre Moreno, nephew and companion to her friend, actress Marguerite Moreno, on 28 June 1928, she writes: 'Je pars en chemin de fer avec chiennes, chats, fille, le samedi 7 juillet, pour St Tropez' (1959: 175).

I am interested here in moments and feelings from Colette's time in Saint-Tropez. This is to extend narratives of female sensual and cultural experience on the Riviera. I am inspired by Hewitt's approach, realised in the vivid snapshots in his work, to an 'imaginaire de Marseille' and by his reckoning with 'the unique hold exerted by Marseille on the nation's imagination' (2019: 6). I am interested further, through Colette, in tracing imaginative modes of inhabiting a space, seeing it as a psychic as much as material location, a repository for feelings. So frequently in Colette's work she invests a place with meaning through writing, so it becomes an imaginary space, intimate, sensory, and consciously feminine.

There are globally fewer museums, heritage spaces and author or artist houses commemorating women than men – *La Maison de Colette*, the museum in the house of Colette's childhood, in Saint-Sauveur-en-Puisaye, is a notable exception, as is the *Maison de George Sand* in Nohant, visited by Edith Wharton on her motor-flight – and I see efforts to redress this imbalance as critical. Imagine a museum for Agnès Varda, for example, or Marguerite Duras. Like Diana Fuss, in her groundbreaking *The Sense of an Interior*, I am deeply interested in the literal coordinates of 'houses that sheltered and shaped the imagination of writers' (2004). But I am interested as well in *virtual* feminist museums, to borrow Griselda Pollock's terms (2007). Pollock explains her concept: 'This is not a cybernetic museum on the internet, a feminist virtual museum. Yet it cannot be realised. Virtual is used here first as an ironic term. It signals a

museum that could never be actual. The dominant social and economic power relations that govern the museum make feminist analysis impossible' (2007: 9). Pollock envisages in place of the impossible real museum, 'a feminist space of encounter' (2007: 11). She continues: 'It is about argued responses, grounded speculations, exploratory relations, that tell us new things about femininity, modernity and representation' (2007: 11). Her words inspire me to think about a virtual author house as well, and, in Colette's case, to examine all that cannot be captured in a material place, a real museum, and to envisage feminist work, speculative and exploratory, to respond to, to give expression to, how her spaces were lived in and dreamed.

I explore here an imaginary museum for Colette in Saint-Tropez, a repository of feelings, drawing on evidence from a locale, from different locations, but also from layers of writing, which offer a sense of what was felt in a place, its intimacy, what it represented. In her topographical account of Colette, *Colette's France: Her Lives, Her Loves*, Jane Gilmour offers a glorious resource, going herself in the footsteps of Colette, visiting and photographing the locations of Colette's life and work, and offering a guide for the reader's own journey in search of the writer. After chapters on Saint-Sauveur-en-Puisaye, Paris, and Brittany, Gilmour comes to Provence, finding Colette in her prime. It is Gilmour's work on place which inspires me, and that I hope to extend here, but in imaginary terms.

I suggest that for Colette, Saint-Tropez, and the house she named herself, *La Treille muscate*, hold meanings, for feminist analysis, for thoughts about modernity, which circulate around the feminine and pleasure and which expand the cultural meanings of the Côte d'Azur and of Saint-Tropez itself as former fishing port turned Bardot heaven. In *La Naissance du jour*, started between Paris and Saint-Tropez in 1927, and published in 1928, Colette questions about *La Treille muscate*: 'Est-ce ma dernière maison? Je la mesure, je l'écoute, pendant que s'écoule la brève nuit intérieure qui succède immédiatement, ici, à l'heure de midi' (1991 III: 279). Where it was not the last place she lived, and her iconic flat in the Palais-Royal is the location of her later years, I argue that in *La Naissance du jour* imagined in Saint-Tropez, made possible in this space,

the house, lived in and described, holds some sense of a destination, finality, peace, an extremity in both her residential and emotive existence.

Part I *La Côte d'Azur*

In his volume on the myth of the Riviera, *Making Paradise*, Kenneth E. Silver writes: 'How seriously can one take art made in a place devoted to pleasure and to hedonistic pursuit?' (2001: 17). He goes on: 'Although the Riviera is among the most important centers for twentieth-century creative endeavour, its role in the real and imaginative lives of many of the century's most significant visual artists has long been ignored by critics and historians' (2001: 17). *Making Paradise* in the main explores the work of male artists. There is, though, discussion of architect and furniture designer Eileen Gray, in the context of a house she conceived with Jean Badovici, E.1027, built around 1926-1929 at Roquebrune-Cap Martin (2001: 71), where 'the Riviera sun was of paramount importance in [its] design' (2001:72). There is reference, too, to the women who accompanied Picasso to the Riviera, Olga Khokhlova, Dora Maar, and Françoise Gilot, to Lisette Model's photographs in Nice, and to the art of Sophie Täuber-Arp, Sonia Delaunay and Charlotte Salomon. Colette herself receives a brief mention for her representation in *La Naissance du jour* of an already overrun Saint-Tropez (2001: 119-120). Responding to Silver's characterisation of the Riviera as a space devoted to hedonistic pursuit, I suggest that his work initiates a new cultural reckoning with this area, which I want to develop in a more sustained exploration specifically of women's experiences and pleasures on the *Côte d'Azur*.

A female perspective on the Riviera was offered notably by filmmaker Agnès Varda in her 1958 film, *Du côté de la côte*, also pursued in her short book of 1961, *La Côte d'Azur*. Varda was working on her film on commission for the French Bureau de Tourisme. She was later offered a project which would cover the entirety of 'le littoral français'. She turned it down. She writes in her retrospective volume, *Varda par Agnès*, of the challenge even of *Du Côté de la côte*: 'Il me fallait vaincre [...] mon préjugé anti-Riviera puisqu'en descendant la Vallée du Rhône, j'avais l'habitude

d'aller à droit vers Sète [...] et non à gauche vers Saint-Raphaël' (1994: 76). In the film, askance, she critiques the hierarchies and barriers of the Riviera where private paradise gardens, looking over the sea, exclude passers-by. She looks instead for a paradise, a 'true' Eden, which she finds on the Île de Porquerolles, location also of beach scenes in Godard's *Pierrot le fou* (1965), where she films a couple naked in the sand.

In a chapter on the birth of glossy magazines, Nick Hewitt comments on the same summer when Varda was filming *Du Côté de la côte*: "Throughout the summer of 1958 *Paris-Match* ran an entire series of articles on the Côte d'Azur, especially Saint-Tropez [...]. With apparently unconscious irony, the magazine entitled one of its many articles on Brigitte Bardot on 26 July: "B.B.: the holidays of a hunted animal"' (1991: 124). Varda herself draws on imagery of Bardot, referencing her through an image of her initials cut into the flesh of a cactus plant. The film cuts to monochrome footage of Bardot in the streets of Saint-Tropez. As Ginette Vincendeau specifies, this footage shows 'Bardot à Saint-Tropez en compagnie de Sacha Distel, habillée en jeans et en T-shirt, les cheveux au vent' (2014). For Vincendeau the shots illustrate 'la singularité de B.B. en tant que star' (2014: 63). She speaks about Bardot's influence on 'ordinary' women, and, following Simone de Beauvoir's essay on Bardot for *Esquire*, of the modernity and youth of her image. Varda's book *La Côte d'Azur* replaces the footage from the streets of Saint-Tropez with a still of Bardot in a white swimsuit, her hair long, her toes reaching the sand with the waves behind her. She reproduces her image but teasingly dispels her myth, referring back to the cactus graffiti: 'Ecrire son nom. Ou celui d'une femme aimée dans l'espoir de la voir apparaître. Faute de voir Bardot, de lui parler, de la toucher, ils viennent boire à Saint-Tropez' (1961 unpaginated).

Varda also includes references to other women of the Riviera, Sophia Loren in Cannes, in her book alone Françoise Sagan, and in both book and film, the novelist Colette. It is indeed to the figure of Colette, that Varda, and current feminist explorers, can look beyond the icon and dream of Bardot for a different figure of female pleasure and art on the *Côte d'Azur*. Varda's naming of Colette comes with a glimpse of Matisse's line portrait of the novelist, and a photo of

the garden of *La Treille muscate*. Varda speaks in her voice-over of ‘Colette qui ressemblait à un chat de Saint-Tropez écrivant *La Naissance du jour*’. On the flyleaves of the accompanying book, *La Côte d’Azur*, Varda includes a quotation from *La Naissance du jour* together with a playful drawing of a cat, among other quotations. The words from Colette describe the cries of tomcats fighting on a July night outside *La Treille muscate*. In the passage as it continues, Colette captures the sensuality of the *Côte d’Azur*, the colours of the sky and the sea: ‘Oui, je sais qu’il est trois heures et que je vais me rendormir, et que je regretterai, à mon réveil, d’avoir gaspillé l’instant où le lait bleu commence à sourdre de la mer, gagne le ciel, s’y répand et s’arrête à une incision rouge au ras de l’horizon’ (1984-1991 III: 287). Varda herself captures such elemental moments from Colette’s writing in her own filming of *l’heure bleue*, of the sea, the horizon and an unreal red sun in *Du côté de la côte*. In an interview with Kelley Conway, published in English, where Varda speaks about a year she took off after her baccalauréat to spend reading, she notes that she consumed: ‘Everything by Colette, without a second thought, everything...’ (2015: 135).

In a chapter, ‘Light and Clarity in the late work of Colette and Agnès Varda’, Diana Holmes also brings out connections between the two artists, drawing on their relation to beaches and seascapes, Saint-Tropez for Colette, Noirmoutier off the *Côte de Jade* for Varda. Holmes writes of Colette’s last texts: ‘Light suffuses these texts. Colette, writing beneath the soft light of the blue lantern, finds words to evoke the sunlit sea of Provence’ (2016: 178); and of Varda’s late film, her more personal take on *le littoral* of Belgium, and California, as well as France, *Les Plages d’Agnès* (2008): ‘Varda uses film to capture the play of sun on sea and human skin, celebrates the power of light transmitted through film to preserve transient time and create new realities’ (2016: 179). It is Colette’s transient time in Saint-Tropez that I move on to examine here. In Varda’s *La Côte d’Azur* two double-spread pages of paintings of *Le Port de Saint-Tropez*, by Paul Signac, Albert Marquet, Henri Matisse and others, bear the title ‘Le Musée mi-vrai mi-imaginaire’. It is this notion of a half real, half imaginary museum that I take forward in looking in more closely at Colette’s inhabiting of Saint-Tropez.

Part II *La Treille muscate*

In 2022 Antoine Compagnon published *Un Été avec Colette*, a written version of his series of radio broadcasts about Colette that were heard on France Inter through Summer 2021. In a brief chapter ‘De la Bretagne au Midi’ about the places where Colette lived, and which were part of her affective life, he follows the author to Saint-Tropez sketching her life there after 1925: ‘elle séjourne désormais en Provence durant les mois d’été, saison de loisir qui lui permet une écriture plus ample’ (2022: 166). He associates a development in her writing, its amplification, with this realm of pleasure and hedonism, the Riviera, and specifically Saint-Tropez where she would write the volume often considered now her masterpiece, *La Naissance du jour*.

Jane Gilmour also stops in Saint-Tropez in a long chapter ‘Provence – a new love’, her title ambiguous, referring at once to Colette’s new lover and future husband Maurice Goudekot, and to the Riviera which had not up to that point been part of Colette’s affective map. Gilmour like Compagnon associates pleasure with creativity in this period, writing of the years in Saint-Tropez as ‘a time of creative abundance and sensual pleasure for Colette’ (2013: 135). Goudekot opens his chapter on Colette’s life with him in the South, in his memoir *Près de Colette*: ‘Elle n’avait jamais été dans le Midi l’été’ (1956: 43). He notes too that *La Naissance du jour* is his favourite of the books of the novelist, whom he had read from his teenage years, before growing up to marry her: ‘De tous les livres de Colette, c’est celui que je préfère. J’y vois, au centre de son oeuvre, la fleur de sa pleine maturité’ (1956: 52).

Goudekot characterises Provence, for Colette, as a form of lost paradise. He writes: ‘La Provence épanouie sous le soleil, ses vives couleurs, ses parfums poivrés et jusqu’à la stridence de ses cigales, la conquiert dès l’abord comme un pays retrouvé’ (1956: 43). He reminds readers: ‘Il ne faut pas oublier que toute la famille de son père habitait Toulon, que lui-même y était né, dans le quartier du Mourillon’ (1956: 43). It was a spot, a lost homeland, to which Goudekot brought her literally. They met at the legendary resort of Cap-d’Ail, further along the coast, close

to Monaco and the Italian border. They travelled together in the South including Saint-Tropez, before moving there for their summers. As he writes: 'Colette fut séduite' (1956: 44).

In speaking about 'un pays retrouvé', Goudekot perhaps echoes Proust. Elsewhere in *Près de Colette* he writes about Colette's passion for the novelist, which dated from her reading of the first lines of *Du Côté de chez Swann* and continued after the death of Proust. Goudekot writes: 'J'ai, par hasard, été présent chaque fois qu'elle a reçu des Proust inédits, puisque *Albertine disparue* et *Le Temps retrouvé* ont paru après 1925. Elle quittait ce qu'elle faisait, et sans perdre un instant, se mettait à lire, sombrement' (1956: 145). Compagnon, Proust specialist, notes meanwhile in *Un Été avec Colette*: 'Colette avait inventé la mémoire involontaire avant Proust, dans l'odeur du bouquet de violettes que le père de Claudine apporte à sa fille dans *Claudine à Paris* alors qu'elle est malade. Ce bouquet lui donne la nostalgie de sa campagne, qui ressuscite en entier' (2022: 106-7). He continues: 'L'odorat, le toucher, le goût, et bien sûr le regard, pas d'écrivain plus sensuel que Colette' (2022: 107).

Colette alludes to Proust directly in her novella *La Lune de pluie*. Her protagonist enters an apartment in Paris and realises belatedly from the sensory triggers of a window handle that it is one where she has lived before, the realisation bringing with it a pleasurable sensation of vertigo: 'je ressentis le léger vertige, plutôt agréable, qui accompagne les rêves de chute et de vol...' (1984-1991 IV: 63). She avows her susceptibility to the past and imagines Proust himself pursuing 'un temps révolu' (1984-1991 IV: 66) in the blue interior of his apartment. In the languor of this late story, its Proustian *séisme* in the self, Colette shows her fascination with the past re-found through the senses in an architectural space. The apartment in the novella offers a space for imagining possible lives not lived, paths not taken, as Colette's protagonist wonders about the self she might have been. These feelings are related to those I want to collect up in thinking about Colette's Saint-Tropez, where domestic architecture, a house, a garden, a coastal location, offer access to heightened psychic, nostalgic and sensory exploration.

Colette's family left the house in Saint-Sauveur-en-Puisaye, now her memorial museum, in 1891 (1984-1991 I: cxxix). She did not return until autumn 1921, when she went in the company of an adolescent lover, her stepson Bertrand de Jouvenel. Dominique Bona writes: 'À l'automne 1921, Bertrand, auquel Colette a raconté son enfance, l'entraîne dans une escapade amoureuse en Puisaye. Elle s'était toujours refusé à revoir Saint-Sauveur, les deux jardins, l'église, l'école, mais avec sa main dans la main de Bertrand, elle peut se réconcilier avec le passé' (2018: 340-1). Bona continues: 'Un sentiment inhabituel de paix et de douceur s'installe' (2018: 341). She explains that it is Bertrand who asks her to write *La Maison de Claudine* 'où elle invente le personnage de Sido et donne une légende à sa propre mère' (2018: 341). Evidence for this comes from Bertrand de Jouvenel's 'La Vérité sur "Chéri"', a short text published in the second volume of the Pléiade edition of Colette's complete works in 1986, one year before de Jouvenel's death. He writes that after his second summer in Rozven, Colette's house in Brittany where the family would gather in the summer, she and he became attached. This was in 1921. In his words: 'Colette me parlait de son enfance, et je lui demandai pourquoi elle ne me faisait pas connaître ce qu'elle avait aimé. Et à l'automne, nous allâmes ensemble à Saint-Sauveur-en-Puisaye, le pays de son enfance. Je crois que j'ai dû, par mon insistance, à ce qu'elle écrivît son livre: *La Maison de Claudine*, en 1922' (1984-1991: lvii).

Compagnon writing two decades later says of 'l'amour de Bertrand de Jouvenel': 'Comment en parler aujourd'hui?' (2022: 159). Leaving the detail of the relation aside, what concerns me here is the access this love affair seems to have given to memories of Colette's childhood, of her mother, to the writing out of those memories in *La Maison de Claudine* and most importantly in *La Naissance du jour* a book written in *La Treille muscate* and memorialising her past as well as her present in Saint-Tropez and her own pleasure there.

In Bertrand de Jouvenel's telling, her relationship with him took Colette back to her childhood, where they literally travelled together to Saint-Sauveur-en-Puisaye. That she would speak about her childhood in her summer love affair with him, that they would visit her former

village the following autumn, speaks of an imaginary world sustaining their desire. De Jouvenel offers no reflection on why he wanted to draw out narratives of Colette's childhood, though he shows pride in the writing that ensued. Perhaps this narrative of his role as muse is of his own fashioning – the story does not appear in any account written by Colette herself. But the timing of the affair, the visit, and her writing and subsequent publication of *La Maison de Claudine* in 1922 are unquestioned by commentators. This love – de Jouvenel writes 'Colette entreprit mon éducation sentimentale' (1984-1991 II: LVII) – is at the threshold of her fuller writing about her own childhood, and her organisation of her past in *La Maison de Claudine*, and then of her past and present in *La Naissance du jour* in the interior, the rooms, and the different gardens of two houses, her birthplace and the house she bought in Saint-Tropez.

Colette's move to Saint-Tropez postdates her affair with de Jouvenel. She is accompanied now by Goudekot and his tender role in her discovery of *La Côte d'Azur* is clear in his writing and hers. But most of all *La Treille muscate*, at least as she imagines and presents it in *La Naissance du jour*, is the house of her own imagining, her sensuality, her serenity, where the house of her childhood is no longer disowned, unvisited, but is instead recalled, yet also displaced by a new paradise on earth, a place of pleasure and hedonism she creates for herself, in limestone and in words. It is a place of her past and her present, and a place of a sensory beauty that seems outside time.

La Naissance du jour opens with what is presented as a letter from Sido, the author's mother. She writes to her daughter's husband, Henri de Jouvenel, father of Bertrand, that she is grateful for the invitation to visit her beloved daughter – 'vous savez combien je la vois rarement, combien sa présence m'enchante' (1984-1991: 277) – but that she will desist. She explains:

Voici pourquoi: mon cactus rose va probablement fleurir. C'est une plante très rare, que l'on m'a donnée, et qui, m'a-t-on dit, ne fleure sous nos climats que tous les quatre ans. Or, je suis déjà une très vieille femme, et, si je m'absentais pendant que mon cactus rose va fleurir, je suis certaine de ne pas le voir refleurir une fois... (1984-1991: 277)

As Gérard Bonal, editor of an edition of Sido's letters to Colette which appeared in 2012, points out, 'la fameuse lettre dite "du cactus rose", qui ouvre *La Naissance du jour*, est un faux' (Sido, 2012: 10). The real letter on which Colette's fictionalisation is based dates from 10 November 1911. Sido here accepts the husband's invitation to visit her daughter: 'Votre invitation si gracieusement faite me décide à l'accepter pour bien des raisons, parmi ces raisons il en est une à laquelle je ne résiste jamais: voir le cher visage de ma fille, entendre sa voix' (2012: 466). Where Colette, rewriting, seems to change the sentiment, she can be seen to reflect a caveat included already in the original letter. Sido, in the real letter, says she will only stay briefly because her plants, 'un sédum qui est près de fleurir et qui est magnifique; un gloxinia dont le calice largement ouvert me laisse à loisir surveiller la fécondation' (2012: 466), will suffer in her absence. Colette transforms the pink sedum, this fleshy-leaved succulent, and the erotic image of the wide-open calyx of the gloxinia, into the single *cactus rose*, a pink-flowering cactus whose exoticism, flesh and colour seem at home on the *Côte d'Azur*. While Sido in her real letter readily agrees to visit, Bonal explains in a footnote: 'Bientôt très souffrante, Sido ne pourra pas se rendre à l'invitation de Jouvenel' (2012: 466). This sad turn of events is nicely occluded in *La Naissance du jour* where Colette presents her mother declining to come, choosing to see her cactus flower, rather than being forever prevented.

From a further letter from Sido in the collected edition, dated 30 December 1911, we learn that Colette sent her mother a memoir article on her childhood. Sido writes to her daughter: 'Il m'a beaucoup plu. Je vois, chère, que la vieille maison et son jardin te hantent. Cela me plaît et aussi m'attriste' (2012: 479). She moves on to a reverie about Colette as a child: 'Je vois toujours ta gracieuse petite forme s'y promener, rêvant à mille choses' (2012: 479). She continues: 'Je te vois, quand je t'évoque dans ce temps-là, plus souvent dans une toilette bleu pâle qui te faisait si jolie et qui ravissait Mme P. Bert quand nous nous promenions ensemble. Que tout ça est loin. Oui, tu étais mon soleil d'or' (2012: 479). The love felt by Sido and the

poignant beauty of the child in the distant past are still vivid. Most affecting of all perhaps is the imperfect tense, ‘Oui, tu *étais* mon soleil d’or’ (my emphasis).

In *La Naissance du jour*, seventeen years on, and in *La Treille muscate*, another house, Colette in turn encounters an azure, spectral image of Sido. She questions, referring to the well in the garden of *La Treille muscate*, which can still be glimpsed from the road: ‘A la margelle du puits un fantôme maternel, en robe de satinette bleue démodé, emplit-il les arrosoirs?’ (1984-1991 III: 280). Colette is not merely refinding her childhood in *La Treille muscate*, I think, or making herself at home in a regressive space, but finding a place where her pleasure and her memories of childhood can co-exist, a place where she can entertain the phantom image of her loving mother. *La Naissance du jour* is not the book of her mother’s house, as *La Maison de Claudine* is translated in English, but of her own house, *La Treille muscate*, a house of memories that is also a house of pleasure outside time in this new location.

Detailing the ripened fruit and vegetables in her garden – ‘tomates, piments’ (1984-1991 III: 279) – Colette recalls her loving descriptions of the *potager* in *La Maison de Claudine*, but here, differently, there are ripe melons, phlox, dahlias, new mandarin trees. She acknowledges in her writing her recall of the past and her new sense of nostalgia, of return, in her middle years:

Tout est ressemblant aux premières années de ma vie, et je reconnais peu à peu, au retrécissement du domaine rural, aux chats, à la chienne vieillie, à l’émerveillement, à une sérénité dont je sens de loin le souffle – miséricordieuse humidité, promesse de pluie réparatrice suspendue sur ma vie encore orageuse –, je reconnais le chemin du retour (1984-1991 III: 280).

Like Goudekot she mentions that she is close to the territory of her father and grandparents. But she also observes: ‘D’autres pays m’ont bercée, c’est vrai, – certains d’une main dure. Une femme se réclame d’autant de pays natals qu’elle a eu d’amours heureux’ (1984-1991 III: 282). If she thinks of her childhood home, Colette also makes of each of her love affairs a homeland, creating an image of cradling that is both nurturing and erotic. She continues as well, in words that speak to the title of the book, *La Naissance du jour*: ‘Elle [une femme] naît aussi sous chaque ciel où elle guérit la douleur d’aimer’ (1984-1991 III: 282).

The azur sky of the coast, break of day in the *Midi*, allow a rebirth, a flourishing, an *éclosion*, recalling the imagined flowering of Sido's *cactus rose*. This is a space beyond childhood, of pleasure beyond unhappy love. Colette's writing gains a suppleness, as remarked by Compagnon and Goudekot, and also a modernism, as she paints in bands of colour. She images the dawn: 'Demain, je surprendrai l'aube rouge sur les tamaris mouillées de rosée saline [...] Le chemin de côte qui remonte de la nuit, de la brume et de la mer' (1984-1991 III: 279). The vision looks forward to Varda's filmic image of the sun red over the sea. Colette returns to describe the sea and its changing affect through the hours, describing 'la mer plate, dense, dure, d'un bleu rigide qui s'attendrira vers la chute du jour' (1984-1991 III: 279). The text is a series of variations in rose and blue: the pink of the cactus flower, of the limestone walls in Saint-Tropez, of *La Treille muscate*, the *rose* heard also in 'rosée saline', *saline* itself indexing the *Route des Salins*, and the *Salins* beach Colette's house overlooked; and the blue of 'ce rivage bleu de sel' (1984-1991 III: 282), *sel* recalling *saline*, echoing the more banal *bleu de ciel*, but also precisely conjuring in its image of blue Persian salt the blue-white, crystalline, granular colours and textures of the coastline. The rub of the walls, the sand, the foam of the sea, are all felt in the texture of her prose, that is also at other moments tender, its images ethereal. Colette traces the move of the light from rose to blue, from outside to interior: 'Tantôt l'aile de lumière est rose sur le mur de chaux rose, et tantôt bleue sur le tapis bleu de cotonnade chleuh' (1984-1991 III: 282). The repeated sounds let her pleasure and her savouring of the place in words be felt. A letter to Marguerite Moreno of 22 July 1928 shows Colette pursuing this imagery, and the move from night into day, now with the rose of dawn on the sea, and her pleasure expressed:

On se couche sur la terrasse, surtout ma fille que le lever du jour n'éveille pas. Moi, il m'éveille, et je regagne ma chambre pour ne pas céder à l'envie de sortir. Tout est bien beau! Avant-hier avant sept heures, comme nous rôdions près de la mer et que je montrais à la petite les tamaris couverts du givre salin que leur apporte la rosée, nous sommes entrées dans la mer plate et rose, Colette [her daughter] en pyjama, moi en chemise de nuit, ce bain frais et tranquille nous a donné tant de plaisir qu'on recommencera (1959: 178).

La Naissance du jour represents a homecoming and dawning of Colette's writing. The repose of the house, its simplicity, its roughly beautiful setting and its sensorium, its colours and textures, make their way into her writing. If the Riviera is a region that has been only reluctantly recognised as cradle of modernist art because its association is pleasure, hedonism, Colette brings pleasure and modernity together allowing the coast's sensory grandeur to sensitise her writing, to let her extend beyond herself and renew her art. Her house at once recalls her childhood paradise, latterly revisited with an adolescent lover, and exists as a sensory haven, an imagined *pays natal*, where Colette in love silently recovers.

Through *La Naissance du jour*, through her presence on this coast, Colette comes to enchant this area and to haunt its memory. She offers a Saint-Tropez in the feminine, where through pleasure and sensory experience she conjures the past, and lives and heals. These are some of the meanings, feelings, that may be held in this virtual feminist museum. This allows a reimagining of the location, of a Riviera in the feminine. Colette's creative and affective life I've revived here for feminist ends, lauding her sense of pleasure, her sensuality, her literary flourishing, her making peace with the past in an almost hallucinatory living in and outside time. Colette creates moments of being and imagining, some feminine paradise, 'mi-vrai, mi-imaginaire', in a flawed world.

Conclusion

In his chapter, 'Writing, memory, and history', that I invited for the *Cambridge History of French Literature* (2011), Nick Hewitt writes:

The process of memory involves complex patterns of writing, both fictional and non-fictional, and often written in the form of memoirs. These are typically written during the periods in question, purporting to be eyewitness accounts, or as soon after the period as possible, but if they survive their immediate transient purpose through re-publishing, they take on an afterlife all of their own which can form part of the collective memory of those who took no part in the events whatsoever (662-3).

La Treille muscate, a former home of Colette, is a material house that still exists, and can be glimpsed from a coast road on the outskirts of Saint-Tropez. In her narration of her life there in her experimental memoir text, *La Naissance du jour*, Colette makes real, confirms, its place, and the place of the Saint-Tropez she lived in and loved, in our collective memory, in the cultural history of this Riviera location, as Varda already anticipates. In reading this text, and laying next to it extracts from her correspondence, and accounts of her life by her loved ones, and by later critics and scholars, I have hoped to hold in this essay something more of the aura and imaginary of Colette's Saint-Tropez and to look forward to its further feminist afterlife. Colette's feminism I see residing most surely in her pursuit of pleasure. This place can be a house of feelings, about love, about present pleasures shaded by past experience, a space accessed through the senses. The lushness, the pink light, the salt shoreline of Saint-Tropez yield access to expression of her childhood, her present moments of being, her amorous life, her blue melancholy, her full sense of herself as an artist. Her house in this location, real and imagined, I see as a space of speculation and exploratory relations, in which to think too about the lived and dreamed realities of other female lives.

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