The elegant velvet glove: A textual and visual reading of the gothicised female form in Lawrence Durrell's 'The Alexandria quartet'

Kreuiter, A.D.

Citation for published version (APA):

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Chapter 3: The Colonising Gaze

Introduction

Throughout the Quartet, the gaze, whether that of the narrator or focalisor, determines what is seen, how it is seen and how it is textually portrayed. The idea that the gaze is primarily male has been extensively expounded in feminist art and film theory. I am well aware that certain positions adopted by early feminist film theorists can be, and are, considered problematic, in particular theoretical ideas put forward by Mulvey on the notion of the gaze. The narrow view of the male gaze, bound up with voyeurism and fetishism, has been problematised by later feminist theorists such as Kaja Silverman (1988; 1996), Parveen Adams (1996), Naomi Schor (1985), Emily Apter (1991) and Elizabeth Grosz (1993). They have considered the possibility of female spectatorship and fetishism, the possibility of which Mulvey seemed to deny. While such possibility surely does exist, it is my contention that the theory of male voyeurism, fetishism, and the gaze still possesses validity as a critical tool, in particular when applied to Durrell’s narrative in the Quartet. I will demonstrate that Durrell’s male characters control the gaze without reciprocity within the story world (voyeurism) and, in so doing, establish sexual difference and the erotic fantasy of the female form (often leading to fetishism). This becomes obvious when reading the novels. However, my interest is not in this obvious fact, but in the literary strategies and complexities with which Durrell creates such a masculinised avatar.

In particular, in my consideration of these theoretical standpoints, I will raise questions concerning how focalisation within a narrative can lead to the enforcement of dominant ideologies. I suggest that merging certain aspects of feminist film theory with art theory offers a more comprehensive as well as more subtle approach to my examination of vision in Durrell’s novels. Feminist art theory, in particular, has exposed how the creative act is “naturalized as masculine through the circulation of woman as beautiful, mysterious, desired and loved image for the desiring masculine gaze” (Pollock 1988: 161). Woman, as image, is surveyed and controlled by the male gaze, whether as an object of desire or of fear, dislike, and even disgust. My assertion is that the objectifying gaze is a masculine form of control fundamental to the story world of all the novels in the Quartet. A positioned
gendered viewer, one that takes pleasure in looking, constructs the narrative world of the novels, just like the viewer who visually engages with art and film.

A central device in the narrative of all the novels in the *Quartet*, the focalising gaze constitutes the visual field in which all the characters are held. The operation of the gaze sets up the subject identity of the narrators and focalisors against the objectified images of the female characters. Psychoanalytical theorist Jacques Lacan (1977) argued that the gaze preceded language and established itself in a space exterior to the subject where it was first contained in the mother’s look and then in the mirror image. Looking in the mirror provides the child with pleasure and according to feminist cultural geographer Gillian Rose:

This recognition of self in images outside the self is narcissistic, and the tension between narcissism – identification with the image – and voyeurism – a distancing from the image – is central to the continuing dynamics of the gaze. (1993: 103)

However, this recognition of the self as unitary is a fantasy and the constant re-looking at the reflection reinforces the split between the gaze and the image. As these images are simultaneously inside and outside the self, a tension is set up between the narcissistic identification with the image and the voyeuristic distancing from the image. Film theorist Christian Metz, writing on the voyeuristic distancing of the gaze, indicates that:

If it is true of all desire that it depends on the infinite pursuit of its absent object, voyeuristic desire, along with certain forms of sadism, is the only desire whose principle of distance symbolically and spatially evokes this fundamental rent. (1975: 61)

The voyeuristic gaze requires a distance between itself and the desired object. This gaze establishes the bearer’s identity by means of the remove it offers between desire and the eroticised object.

Rose observes that “the seen image is central to feminist psychoanalytic theory: the gaze is theorized as being eroticized, so that the visual space [is] more than the domain of simple recognition” (1993: 103). This eroticised space becomes a fantasy construction: one reliant on perceived otherness. The detachment and exteriority of the gaze functions as a mastery and recuperation of the Lacanian *objet a*, or lost object. This loss drives the desire
to re-attain the missing part of the self, to fill the lack. Psychoanalytic theorist Bracha Ettinger infers that “In the scopic sphere of vision, the objet a is the gaze, lacking and split forever from the passion of the eye, and dwelling in the Other” (1997: 629). This passion of the eye is firmly founded in the concept of desire integral to what Lacan termed the ‘Other’.

Jacqueline Rose indicates that in Lacan’s concept of the Other perceptions of identity and the proper body (wholeness) are fantasies (1996: 55). The subject in symbolic discourse (language) needs to believe in a definitive truth or knowledge. Addressed to an Other outside of itself, the subject founds its need in this Other, which becomes the fantasy place of truth. This is the place of Lacan’s Other that seems to hold the truth of the subject and appears to be able to heal its loss (56). Woman is relegated to the place of the Other because she is the negative definition of man and, according to Rose, this definition was designated by Lacan as a fantasy. Rose suggests that as the negative of man, woman becomes the total object of fantasy and is elevated to the place of the Other and made to stand for its truth (1996: 74). The result is the mystification of Woman. Rose indicates that the objet a, which is the cause of desire and supports male fantasy, is transposed onto the image of Woman as Other. She goes on to indicate that the otherness of Woman serves to secure for man his own self-knowledge and truth (74). Therefore, it is through the agency of the gaze that the Other and sexual difference are installed. Rose notes that the scopic (gaze) drive’s relation with the object of desire, or Other, is not one of distance but of externalisation. In this situation, the observing subject can in turn become the object of the look and be elided as the subject of its own representation (196).

Jacqueline Rose’s position on the gaze can be contrasted with that of Mulvey’s consideration of the pleasure of spectatorship. Using the psychoanalytical theories of Freud and Lacan, Mulvey regards the voyeuristic gaze as inherently male. Rose, like Silverman, has made the point that the Lacanian concept of the gaze is not gendered because it comes from a state that pre-exists the Symbolic or the installation of patriarchy. Silverman, in her essay Masochism and Male subjectivity (1980) raised questions about Mulvey’s notion of the gaze being fundamental to visual pleasure. She argued that Mulvey did not engage with the question of masculine pleasure as reliant on mastery. For Mulvey, the drive to pleasure in looking at a person as an erotic object hinges on what she terms the “scopophilic instinct” – an action she regards as inherently male-centred, voyeuristic, controlling and distancing
Mulvey’s focus on the voyeurism, fetishism and pleasure associated with her conception of the gaze has been the subject of much critical discussion.25

The fact that scopic control of the image has generally been regarded as possessed by the male viewer has been questioned by, amongst others, theorists such as Silverman, Ettinger and Bal who have advanced an argument for a non-appropriating look. Similarly, Nash, in a consideration of the visual representation of landscape, whether bodily or geographical, has proposed that though visual representation can enforce gender, sexual, class and racial oppression, it should be acknowledged that there is no monolithic male gaze (1996: 152-153). She argues instead that “positions of identification, distance, voyeurism, narcissism or fetishism” are not static as looking provides movement between these spectator positions which is applicable to both male and female (158). For Nash, arguing for a male gaze or a female gaze becomes normative and she proposes that it would be better to argue for a “multiplicity of shifting viewing positions, gazes or ways of seeing” (159). Correspondingly, Bal, writing on the gaze, voyeurism and focalisation in a reading of the art of Rembrandt, points out that the gaze is a visual aspect of the creation of myth, adding that it “fixes the object and builds on the illusion that the object exists outside of time, space and the viewer’s body” (1991: 148). This seems to support Metz’s (1985) argument concerning the distance involved in the erotic voyeurism of the gaze.26

Though Bal’s reading is based on the interpretation of visual art and Metz’s relates to cinema, I contend that the viewing practice central to Durrell’s literary narrative undertakes a similar distanced and externalised fixing of the erotic female form as an object of illusion: the Other outside of the masculine viewer’s body. Whilst acknowledging the arguments advanced for a non-appropriating gaze or shifting viewing position that privileges neither male nor female, I would argue that within the story world of the Quartet the gaze is and remains ultimately male. In these novels the gaze and its relation to the pleasure in staring at the object of desire is one of control, so, for the purposes of my discussion of Durrell’s tetralogy, Mulvey’s work on voyeurism, the fetish and the eroticised gaze remains apposite.

Subject to this erotic gaze, the female forms become fantasy creations through which the male characters, particularly Darley, attempt to found their definitive truth and self-
knowledge. These women are never more than canvases, the Other negatively defined by patriarchal ideology and symbolic discourse; always objects and never subjects. Philosopher Slavoj Žižek has discussed the reciprocity of the gaze, stating that the object is “a stain preventing me from looking at the picture from a safe, ‘objective’ distance, from enframing it as something that is at my grasping view’s disposal” (1991: 125). This is very interesting in relation to Durrell’s narrative, where the picture of the female characters offered is never safe or objective, but always unreliable and stained by the gaze of memory. Grasping, fixing or framing these women is something that the vagaries of human memory can never adequately achieve.

However, Darley attempts to fix his memories of the women with whom he was involved through the employment of what Bal refers to as the “disembodied retinal gaze of linear perspective and the colonising mastery it affords” (2001: 62). Film theorist Mary Ann Doane alluding to this colonising mastery indicates that the pleasure of seeing is founded on what is prohibited in relation to the female body. Doane indicates that the desirable feminine image rouses “the gaze, a limit, and its pleasurable transgression” (1982: 76). Simultaneously, this gaze as objet a has another function particularly relevant to the image of the female body that Silverman has indicated relates to the objet a’s reliance on an internalised gaze (1989: 56). The subject consequently sees itself being seen even when there are no eyes on it and the gaze is transmuted into an internal surveillance mechanism (56). Art critic John Berger, in his discussion of the representation of the female body in art, adds support for Silverman’s argument when he comments on the effects of the internalisation of the gaze on the feminine psyche as follows: “the surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female” (1972: 41). Women therefore internalise the surveillance of the gaze and, in turn, reflect it. In so doing, they become the specular image of desire open to the mastery of the gaze, which in Durrell’s novels is based on what Gillian Rose terms a “specific masculine way of seeing” (Rose cited in Nash 1996: 155).

The gaze directed at Durrell’s female characters is located within the haziness of the male characters’ memory. Here these figures are “lost in time”, marginal beings both uncannily absent and present. Memory is central to the agency of the gaze. However, the gaze is also accompanied by what can be called the look or the glance. According to visual theorist Norman Bryson, the glance is different from the gaze. Where the gaze implies a
disengaged, cold, omniscient aloofness, the glance is a “furtive or sideways look whose attention is always elsewhere” (1983: 94-95). My reading of Durrell’s work will employ the term gaze as a function of colonisation that constructs and shapes the female characters so that they become what Bal terms objects of male desire, perspective and ideology (1991: 143) within Durrell’s four novels. I will use the terms glance or look in instances where vision occurs between the female characters, which is a non-appropriative or colonising act, but a seemingly reciprocal interaction. This manner of seeing will also be considered when an attempt to deflect the gaze, indicating an unwillingness to be watched, seems to be present. Throughout the *Quartet*, the gaze of memory is the device brought to bear on the reconstruction of the past. The images of the desired forms are fixed in the visual field of remembrance. However, memory is fluid and non-linear causing an uncanny repetition of ideas, images and events to occur throughout the novels. Darley’s memories of Justine, Melissa and Clea act as my point of entry for an examination of the women’s visual embodiment as objects of desire.

**Usurping the Gaze - Justine**

The novel *Justine* opens with the narrator-focalisor Darley’s memories of Alexandria and the women with whom he was emotionally involved. Denying linearity, the gaze of memory telescopes time and space together in a visual act that Bal terms a “mastering, looking from above, dividing up and controlling [which] is an approach to space that ignores time as well as the density of space’s lived-in quality” (2001: 48). Memory is the structuring tool of the temporal-spatial-visual text of the narrative, where “space is focalized from within” (49). Within this intangible focalising space, the embodied female form is constructed as an object of desire. Darley obsessively projects his desire onto Justine, and it is her face alone that he longingly describes. Clea regards Justine as someone who “simply and magnificently is ... Like all amoral people she verges on the Goddess” (J: 68). There is both an envy of Justine’s magnificent disregard for rules and societal norms as well as overtones of disgust. Clea’s response to Justine’s amorality is tinged with personal animus and, because Justine only verges on the Goddess, Clea judges her and finds her lacking. This vision of Justine is one of appropriation containing an element of disdain. The word “magnificently” is suggestive of the sublime, and the use of this adverb traces Justine’s form with intimations
of the Gothic. Justine’s semi-Goddess-like traits further her sublimity. In the word, “amoral” resides all Justine’s transgressive power and charismatic allure for the male characters, in particular Darley.

Incarnating a fantasy woman, Darley most remembers Justine as a dark goddess with “sombre brow-dark gaze” (J: 15). This statement seems to offer Justine the possession of the gaze, further affirmed when Darley writes “she turned upon one elbow and lowering those magnificent troubled eyes to me she stared at me for a long moment” (J: 23). He goes on to describe many moments in which Justine is seen to gaze, as when “stopping me as we walked by the expedient of standing in front of me and catching hold of the lapels of my coat she gazed earnestly into my eyes” (J: 36) and

I lay with half-shut eyes while Justine (how clearly I see her!) was up on one elbow, shading her eyes with the palm of one hand and watching my face. Whenever I was talking she had the habit of gazing at my lips with a curious half-mocking, an almost impertinent intentness, as if she were waiting for me to mispronounce a word. (J: 41).

In all these descriptions, Justine is focalised in a pose of striking watchfulness and mocking distance. Her gaze appears to survey and objectify Darley. Durrell, it seems, is allowing Justine to annex the mastering gaze and thereby assume the subject position. Through this action she is seen to challenge male superiority and disrupt the stability of socially accepted sexual identity. Ostensibly seizing power she takes on the role of the villainess in a Gothic tale accentuated by her dark colouring and “impertinent” intensity. The use of the word “impertinent” indicates Darley regards Justine’s stare as lacking respect. It undermines his masculinity reflected in his tone of discomfort and vexation.

To counter Justine’s usurpation of the gaze, Durrell offers Darley a reciprocal scopic means of control through the space and vision of memory: “how clearly I see her!”. The use of the pronoun “I” immediately situates Darley back into the subject position. He reassumes the role of the seeing agent and in so doing can re-formulate the power relations between them. By this act of legerdemain, Darley regains dominance and denies Justine access to the gaze. Yet, it is the woman he is trying to revive through memory who stares back at him with a dark intentness that is disquieting because it is denied. Images of Justine constantly invade Darley’s present like alluring revenants that consume him word-by-word and
memory by memory. Darley slowly re-embodies Justine’s dark mystery in the space of his own fantasy of desire.

Trying to unravel the dark mystery of Justine’s image and force it to conform to his own needs, Darley seeks answers within the memoirs of another man: Jacob Arnauti. Arnauti is Justine’s ex-husband, who wrote a book, *Moeurs*, a memoir of his life with the lady he named Claudia. The title is a word play, meaning lifestyle or moral behaviour, but when attached to a woman it implies loose or amoral. This book belongs to the genre known as the psychological novel, a further play on the word *moeurs*. Through the gossip of others, Darley believes this book represents a depiction of Justine and he proceeds to absorb its mishmash of concerns and ideas like gospel. He barely takes into account the fictional nature or subjective views present in its narrative. Words upon words produce a palimpsest of Justine as a mocking mirage; a subjective textual doubling of images built up by Darley and Arnauti in their respective writings. Like Arnauti’s, Darley’s first encounter with Justine is her image in a mirror. This encounter occurs after Justine has attended a lecture Darley has given on Constantine Cavafy, the poet of the city of Alexandria, whose ghostly voice and presence haunts the novels.

Justine surprises Darley after the lecture when he is seated alone in a café, and he notes: “I looked up boorishly and saw her leaning down at me from the mirrors on three sides of the room, her dark thrilling face full of troubled, arrogant reserve” (J: 27). Her split reflection looks blindly down at him, and gazing at her face, he perceives it to be “thrilling”, “troubled” and “arrogant”. These adjectives are indicative of Darley’s projected fantasy of desire. The prismatic effect of the mirror on Justine’s image is an indication of the multiplicity of her persona and could allude to the idea of Freud’s three divisions of the psyche: ID, superego and ego. The words “thrilling and troubled” reveal the instinctual impact of the ID, where “arrogant reserve” represents the critical and organised functions of the superego and ego.

In the reflections of the mirrors, the images of Justine provide an illusory sign of depth. Nevertheless, what Darley sees remains a multiple representation of ghostly artifice. The fragmentation of Justine’s body in the mirror, and the many adjectives applied to these reflections, causes the reader to wonder what is ‘real’ and what is ‘false’ in this description. Is it merely a deceptive fabrication of Justine’s self, one that conceals her whilst it creates
his erotic fantasy of her? This would seem to be the case because the image of Justine presented will, on closer inspection, reveal itself to be a forgery constructed by Darley’s subjective focalisation. The fakery of truth, reality and identity caught in an empty multiplicity of reflections becomes visible in a later scene. Here, Darley voyeuristically watches Justine who, seated before a mirror, comments:

Look! five different pictures of the same subject. Now if I wrote I would try for a multi-dimensional effect in character, a sort of prism-sightedness. Why should not people show more than one profile at a time? (J: 23)

Feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray has argued that all dominant Western knowledge is phallocentric because meaning is structured around the possession or lack of the phallus. For Irigaray this means that phallocentrism can be seen to privilege men, where the phallocentric subject has what Gillian Rose has referred to as a specific space of self and knowledge (1995: 762). Rose has indicated that Irigaray considers the structuring of this self to be a mirroring, so the mirror acts as the central device in structuring this subject. According to Rose, Irigaray argues that the desire of the phallocentric subject for sameness elides any sexual difference. It is the flat mirror that Irigaray has regarded as instrumental in providing sameness because the mirror acts to reflect the self back to himself as the same (762). In this manner, Irigaray notes, “the male dominates the representational economy” (1985: 25). The reflections of Justine in the space of the mirror act in a similar manner to affirm and reaffirm the subjectivity of Darley because he is the one doing the looking. Justine remains a reflected representation of sameness and Darley’s gaze is the active and dominant force in this scene where Justine’s is nullified.

Though Darley tries to know her through his remembrance of these images, Justine remains unknowable because her reflections only affirm Darley’s own self-knowledge. The mirror thus represents a specific space-time geometry that allows for all space to be organised by the knowledge and logic of the masculine subject and as Irigaray notes, “If he arrived at the limits of known spatiality he would lose his favourite game, the game of mastering her” (1993: 42). Darley gazes at Justine who is staring at herself in the mirror, where she is both the object of the gaze and narcissistically absorbed in her own reflection. Aware of Darley’s gaze, watching him in the mirror, she seems to occupy the place of subject and he that of object. Simultaneously, from his subject position she is the object of
his gaze. The reflection establishes a distance between the object and the subject. This distance Rose argues constitutes dominant masculine subjectivity because it ensures only the selfsame distance and mastery (1995: 769). In Durrell’s representation, the gaze is multiple, reflecting both the desire of Darley and the desire and narcissism of Justine, in a complex interplay of fragmented, counterfeit images. However, because it is too close to the image, Justine’s gaze lacks the separating distance needed, so it remains immersed in itself and static.

Justine’s gaze at herself in the mirror distorts spatial perspective to reveal a self that is shattered and mutable, a mask that veils a lack. She does not possess a unitary sense of being; rather her image consists of many reflections – a fake surface lacking in any real depth. Reproduced, these likenesses have ensured that Darley is able to constitute himself through the surface of Justine as Other. However, trying to confirm his own sense of identity against these flat mirror images allows Darley to contemplate, but never to really know either himself or Justine. When discussing the seeing of oneself seeing oneself and its suggestion of the possibility of full self-knowledge, Jacques Lacan noted “in this matter of the visible, everything is a trap” (1977: 93). Gillian Rose has observed that this seeing of self and Other remains forever an illusion (1995: 762). Darley’s play of memory and his gazing at reflections allows the Other to constantly flee, thereby setting up a conflict between, as Bal has suggested, the need to develop identity by encountering the Other and the inability to do this so that the resulting conflict defines the subject (1997b: 6).

On the basis of these particularities of the dynamic of focalisation, I suggest Darley structures his identity on the continual adjustment of the images presented in the reflections of memory. His attempts to arrange these to fix the otherness of Justine are a failure. This inability to hold her reflected embodiment in memory is because the images reflect only sameness back. Darley founds his subjectivity and self-image against a fantasy construction. In contrast, Justine’s mirroring exceeds the construction of her self-image, because, as discussed, she remains too close to her own image. Irigaray, writing on the nature of this proximity, argues that it represents “nearness so close that any identification of one or the other, and therefore any form of property, is impossible. Woman enjoys a closeness with the other that is so near she cannot possess it any more than she can possess herself” (1980: 104-105; emphasis in text).
I contend that Darley’s vision masters and controls the sexual otherness of Justine’s image and its reflection in what Doane considers “the very logic behind the structure of the gaze [that] demands a sexual division” (1982: 77). Justine is the spectacle to be looked at. As such she is a surface production that Durrell visually and textually articulates in a manner Rose has argued sets up a relation between phallocentric notions of depth and the (deceptive) surface of femininity as lack (1995: 769). Justine is constituted as Darley’s sexual Other and her gaze in the mirror is an empty look that makes her vulnerable to Darley’s objectifying focalisation. His need and longing for Justine evoke an image of her face as an electrifying reflection. As an object, Justine possesses neither subjecthood nor her own self-image. Instead, she remains a ghostly surface trace in the mirror of Darley’s creative imaginings held in the space of memory.

Clea’s description of Justine provides a further augmented objectification of Justine. In a letter to Darley, Clea describes Justine in a manner that reveals her own subjective bias. Her agenda is to shatter Darley’s obsessive veneration of Justine:

She has gone a good deal fatter in the face and has chopped off her hair carelessly at the back so that it sticks out in rat’s tails. [...] No trace remains of the old elegance or chic. Her features seem to have broadened, become more classically Jewish, lip and nose inclining more towards each other. [...] I noticed that those once finely-tended hands were calloused and rough. Watching her now and remembering the touching and tormenting person she had once been for us all I found it hard to comprehend the change into this tubby little peasant with the hard paws. (J: 211-212)

Here is an image of the woman Clea once termed a goddess now visualised as gone to seed. Justine is focalised in animalistic terms through the use of “rat’s tails” to describe her hair. Clea, who implies there is no longer any “chic” or “elegance” about Justine, bitingly destroys her glittering femme fatale image. Her desertion of her past and the landscape of Alexandria results in the dissipation of Justine’s allure. Her previous physical erotic attraction is tarnished; sunk into the commonplace. Therefore, the space of Alexandria is instrumental in creating the illusion of Justine’s powerful, charismatic charm. In her new surroundings, Clea pictures Justine as a peasant with a hooked nose and chin, hard paws, scruffy, dirty hair and the rounded girth of an old woman. In the ‘Once upon a time’ of the letter’s story, Justine is
transformed into the stereotypical crone or witch; the childhood nightmare figure from fairy
tales. Clea’s appropriation of Justine’s image replicates that of the masculine gaze in its
mastery, manipulation and objectivisation. Clea maps the space of Justine’s physical
landscape in words devoid of empathy that scathingly assess her as lacking. Mirroring the
traditional male response to a dowdy, undesirable woman, Clea, I submit, is an agent of
accepted opinions and social conventions. Her voyeuristic and objectifying look invasively
conforms to what Griselda Pollock considers the assuming of a masculine position that
enjoys the humiliation of women (1988: 122). Darley, like the reader, is a complicit voyeur in
this visualisation of Justine. This element of surveillance is, as Peggy Phelan postulates, an
assertion rather than a denial of masculine constructions of feminine identity through the
scopic system of power and knowledge (1993: 205).

The surveillance and scrutiny of Justine by a woman continues in Balthazar. Equally ill
disposed towards Justine, Leila Hosnani, mother of Nessim Hosnani, recognises that she and
Justine are mirror images. She unhesitatingly declares this to Balthazar at Justine and
Nessim’s wedding: “I was telling myself that she looked something like I did once and that
she is an adventuress” (B: 83). The convention of mirror doubling ensures these women
become perfect shadow reflections of one another. This closeness of the image negates the
possibility of any space or distance between the gaze and the object being present. This lack
of distance denies either of them entrance to self-definition. The stare Leila directs at
Justine is simultaneously desirous and antagonistic, a feminine identification that Doane
claims takes place because “the female spectator’s desire can be described only in terms of
a kind of narcissism-the female look demands a becoming” (1982: 78).

Leila is unable to achieve this becoming; not only because she remains a mere
reflection, but because she cannot assume a subject position. Her female look is only made
possible, as Irigaray has noted, through “identifying itself with the masculine, thus by losing
itself” (1977: 65). The distorted doubling of the mirror is the result of what Irigaray has
suggested is “a distance separating the object from the subject, the self from the scene, by
being a ‘non-place’” (1985: 205). The women remain caught in the in-between and liminal
space of the mirror, transformed into alienated others. Where the mirror in Foucault’s
heterotopia acts to force a definition of self in relation to the image, for Irigaray the mirror
functions solely to privilege the definition of the phallocentric subject’s sense of self
(Irigaray cited in Rose 1995: 762). In Durrell’s novels, the reflection and doubling of the surface of the female characters gives the impression of fashioning them as real/unreal bodies lacking selves. Caught in the uncanny heterotopic non-place of the reflection, their mirrored embodiments act as a Gothic counter-site.

Justine’s image remains an object of reflected lack that continues to be inaccessible to Darley. Wanting to possess the truth of her, and thereby himself, Darley indicates he needs to return to memories of the past and Justine’s “unfinished” portrait (B: 42). In its incomplete state, the painting harbours a mystery and is as open-ended and incomplete as the memories of Justine herself. The painting has caught Justine in a moment as if “an idea had just come into her mind, but had not yet reached her lips” (B: 42). She seems to come alive in the containing frame of the portrait, but the narrative-framing device of the painting, much like the framing device of the mirror, makes Justine a prisoner of Darley’s gaze. Nevertheless, the painting possesses an uncanny mystery, with words that Darley cannot invent, though he does speculate on what they could have been. These words can never be re-captured and Justine’s image and voice will remain forever frozen. In this silent suspension, she can be objectified and evaluated as a work of art. Repeatedly doubled, Justine is a figure focalised through the conventional motifs of the mirror and the painting. Captured in the stasis of her portrait, Justine is reminiscent of a Fayum mummy portrait. Justine’s dark Mediterranean beauty might bear a resemblance to a wealthy woman painted around 160-170 AD, considered by some to be the mathematician Hypatia.

![Figure 5 Fayum Mummy Portrait](image-url)
In this formal mummy portrait, the woman faces the viewer and gazes directly at them. Her head seems slightly angled and her pose is straight and regal. The background of the painting is a monochrome light cream colour, which feeds into the colour of the diaphanous cloak over her shoulder. Her clothing is dark blue with a gold clavus, a decorative line of the chiton, which copies in shape and movement the expensive gold necklace around her neck with its large gemstones, which look like emeralds and garnets. She wears small pendant earrings also of emerald and shining white stone. On her head is a fine gold diadem of laurel leaves in the inverted shape of the clavus and necklace and they seem to act as a rounded frame, like a cameo, to contain and make prominent her face. This face is a lovely oval shape with a Mediterranean skin. Her huge dark eyes, enhanced by her sombre eyebrows, stare solemnly out at the viewer. Arrayed in a simple central parting, her dark hair frames her forehead and waves down over her temples. Placed in the centre of the portrait, she is gravely beautiful and rather like an icon.

The images associated with Justine in the novels of the tetralogy seem to approximate those of this Fayum mummy portrait. Justine’s sombre-browed gaze and the proud stare she directs at Darley and Pursewarden are reminiscent of the woman in the portrait. Justine’s image is focalised in a manner that tends to present her frozen in the manner of a photograph or painting. Consequently, like the Fayum mummy portrait, Justine becomes an art object to be gazed upon. She is a specular surface with no more depth than the encaustic panel painting of the mummy’s face. Yet, the aliveness of the representations of these women seems to possess the potential to allow them to step out of the containing frame in an escape from the static death of the portrait. The vivid representation of both these women does indeed ensure that they continue to return from the past into the viewer and reader’s present.

In Balthazar Justine is further visualised in a static pictorial vignette where the strange, intruding external palimpsestuous voice says:

> How beautiful her disaffected face looked – chloroformed by its own simplicity: she simply could not believe that someone might value her for herself – if she had a self. (B: 51)

Snidely choosing to comment on the nature of Justine’s identity, the focalisation of the palimpsestuous voice turns Justine’s face into an aesthetic and beautiful artefact. The
narrative becomes multi-voiced, as the external voice elides that of Balthazar, whilst Darley textually records both their voices as his own. Here the different narrators and focalisers seem to converge in an extremely strange and disconcerting manner. Durrell moves between narrators in the same backwards and forwards movement of memory’s time-space. This unnatural discourse introduces artificiality into the description of Justine that is visible in the censorious comments on her character or lack thereof. I propose that this palimpsestuous voice and its focalisation act to master and subordinate Justine not only through textual discourse, but through the representation of her as “disaffected”, filled with “simplicity” and “chloroformed”.

Simultaneously anaesthetised, uncomplicated and easy to understand, Justine is uncannily focalised as embalmed. Justine is like the victim of a killer who has paralysed the prey before killing it. Chloroform is toxic, and the image of Justine’s face becomes filled with ambiguous meaning. Either her face represents the toxic beauty of the femme fatale, or her chloroformed image represents a deathly stillness that fixes her in space and time, like her portrait. Where the portrait appears alive, in this scene Justine appears frozen; an ancient, deadly mummy. Metaphorically, Justine’s form assumes the characteristics of death and is gothicised. The image of Justine’s embalmed death-mask face will return in Darley’s final encounter with her in the novel Clea.

Scrutinised through the focalisation of Balthazar, the palimpsestuous voice and Darley, Justine is a trapped and visually constructed figure. These multiple views provide a kaleidoscopic layering effect where temporality and visual spatiality blend with the narrative voices. These voices function as framing devices that closely resemble those prevalent in Gothic tales, where the space between the writing “I” and the experiencing “I” provides the relativistic quality of the memories that form the narrative (Richardson 2006: 66-67). Justine is an object of the relativistic, perversely splintered, desire of the conflated subjectivities of these different voices. The effigy-like representation of her is revelatory of a jointly held and deep-seated misogynistic antagonism and attraction.

This antagonism and misogyny are very apparent in Darley’s final meeting with Justine, where he is shocked by her appearance and describes her face with a

... bright patch of rouge on each cheek-bone which showed up sharply against a dead white, overpowdered face. If she was beautiful still it was the passive
beauty of some Propertian mummy which had been clumsily painted to give the illusion of life, or a photograph carelessly colour-tinted (C: 42).

Justine’s face is seen to be immobile - a blank death mask. The use of the phrase “Propertian mummy” is striking in its oddity. The link between the poet Sixtus Propertius’s work and a mummy seems tenuous. Looked at more closely, Propertius’s involvement with a mistress with whom he was infatuated, but whose use of cosmetics he decried, seems to provide a possible link. The use of white-lead powder to whiten skin and hide imperfections through an enamelled or encaustic mask-like effect was common practice for Roman women during Propertius’s time. These women used rouge and many of the ancient writers, besides Propertius, commented satirically upon what they considered this vulgar and showy decoration. Face painting was indicative, in their eyes, of a certain moral degradation. The enamelled mask-like effect also recalls the encaustic process of Fayum mummy portraits. Created from wax mixed with layers of pigments such as lead-white, chalk, kaolin, red ochre and red lake these portraits were painted directly onto the linen wrappings that covered the head (Ramer 1979: 1). Darley makes the comment that the “touches of rouge gave her an enflamed look” (C: 43), so he, like the ancient Roman authors, is representing Justine’s use of cosmetics as indicative of a wanton vulgarity. Darley visualises her enamelled face as a modern mummy portrait. Simultaneously alive and dead, Darley represents Justine as an excessive and monstrous figure.

An object of Darley’s blatantly assessing and invasive gaze, he views Justine like an old, colour-tinted photograph that provides the mere illusion of life. The freezing of Justine’s face into the stillness of the photograph represents a desire to capture the past in the present. However, the photograph is always an artefact that, according to visual theorist Amelia Jones, reveals an image of what no longer exists; it remains a sign of mortality, of change and the steady movement towards death (2002: 954). Justine has become a spectre of Darley’s past and the mention of the photograph merely emphasises the death her image is undergoing. However, Justine’s visual appearance is not all that has altered. Her look has become a “half-drowsy stupefaction of glance” (C: 43). Almost blind, this glance is neither direct nor focused and no longer has the ability to objectify Darley as it previously seemed to do. A sign of refusal to be watched, Justine’s stuporous glance attempts to make her image unavailable to Darley by denying his invasive gaze.
The focalisation of Justine turns Darley, and the reader who is viewing her through Darley’s eyes, into a voyeur who employs what Bal refers to as a sadistic mode of looking (1991: 146). This form of looking conforms to Susan Wolstenholme’s contention that: “All Gothic fiction might be said to employ a kind of sado-masochism” (1993: 10). Wolstenholme’s claim, I propose, relates directly to the manner in which Darley’s gaze appropriates and manipulates the image of Justine. This act of focalisation, I suggest, simultaneously sees and hides secrets. Bal has suggested that the reader holds the position of an outsider who is looking in without being seen (1991: 150). The concealed and complicitous reader is fundamental to the sado-masochistic focalisation of Justine in Durrell’s narrative. Yet, Justine too remains hidden. Behind her make-up mask, Justine occupies the position of a gothically veiled surface. This veiling of her presence acts to entice the reader and Darley into a search for the secrets that its horrible grotesqueness might conceal. Throughout the description, Darley steers and remains responsible for the perspective provided. His voice and words fix Justine’s image as a repulsive object. This representation emanates from his subjective vision so that it remains a questionable construction.

A different version of Justine reappears in the letter that concludes the novel Clea. In this letter, Clea writes to Darley, who is once more on his Greek island, about a recent encounter she has had with Justine. Meeting Justine in an Alexandrian street, Clea describes her appearance as “radiant” (C: 245). The word radiant provides Justine with a vivid glow, a sense of vital life in direct opposition to Darley’s reappraisal of her. Now her drugged, dead, senseless glance has altered, and Clea notes Justine’s “eyes were sparkling with delight, a sort of impish mockery” (245). Justine displays a re-engagement with the act of looking, a glance secretive and filled with a devilish delight. The use of “sparkling” affirms this rekindled, hellish glance whilst “mockery” demonstrates Justine’s awareness of being a spectacle; one perpetrating an illusion and a false reality. Even her revived interest in her husband Nessim that Clea describes as “passionate ... as if oblivious to the rest of the world” (245) remains a fantasy. Justine has resumed her excessive role-playing in order to hide her lack of self.

The sparkling vitality, charisma and transgressive dark beauty of Justine are what originally held Darley in thrall. His obsession with her blinded him to the qualities of his
lover Melissa. The visual construction and representation of Melissa acts to establish a
direct contrast with Justine. This contrast highlights and foregrounds Darley’s obsessive and
vivid fantasy image of Justine, with Melissa remaining the diaphanous background image
which constitutes her as a shadowy doubling, a penumbra to Justine’s brightness. Whether
presented through the eyes of Darley, Balthazar or the external narrator in the novel
Mountolive, Melissa remains a weakly drawn non-entity. In the next section, I will examine
how the gaze denies Melissa an identity through its construction of her as a passive, spectral
creature, sketchily drawn with no real personality or tangible embodiment.

**Fragile Object - Melissa**

In the novel *Justine*, Melissa is Darley’s mistress. She works as a cabaret dancer, which is a
polite mask for being a prostitute. Darley’s memories of Melissa in this novel are of
something gentle, non-intrusive, and subservient. His distant indifference towards her as a
person is obvious when he recalls how he

> ... used to see her, I remember, pale, rather on the slender side, dressed in a
shabby sealskin coat ... Her blue-veined phthisic hands, etc. ... I saw her daily
for many months on end, but her sullen aniline beauty awoke no response in
me. (J: 15-16)

There is a sense of definitive closure in this memory of Melissa, of something that has
ended, that is of the past. The narrator uses the verbs “used to” and “saw”, an indication of
the aoristic tense that describes without involvement or engagement. In memory, like a
photograph, there is always a sense of death marked by the return of the past. This
description evokes Melissa in the form of a ghostly presence.

Film theorist Alan Cholodenko, in his essay on still photography, discusses the relation
of the photograph to the uncanny, the spectral and death (2005: 5). Cholodenko refers to
the metaphor of the crypt, terming it “the order of the uncanny, of the Cryptic Complex ...
the life of the photograph as... lifedeath” (5). He goes on to point out that the photograph in
its lifedeath both haunts and cryptically incorporates “the world and the subject –
photographer, viewer, analyst – in its lifedeath ... every analysis of it the ghost and crypt of
an analysis” (5). Melissa’s character in Durrell’s four novels is very much that of the spectral
inhabitant; a character caught in limbo. Her image, like a photograph, is spectral and uncanny. In Darley’s memories, she haunts the space of the text in which her life has been transcribed after her death. In Gothic style, Melissa has undergone live burial enclosed within the tomb of Darley’s memories.

Darley’s remembrance of Melissa’s hands as “blue-veined phthisic hands, etc.” is a voyeuristic focalisation of the surface of her feminine body that acts to reveal the interior as weak, corrupt and death-driven (consumption). Pollock suggests this form of representation is “determined by the ideological suture between female mortality from tuberculosis and femininity as an inferior, tainted body type” (1988: 145). What is likely to interest the reader is the use of the abbreviation “etc.” after the description. Darley seems unable to describe her in any detail, an indication of his refusal to engage with the implications of illness he displaces onto her hands. Melissa’s hands act in place of her absent body with its threat of decay and dissolution. Melissa’s illness exposes the spectral promise of death that haunts the narrative and she becomes the representative of the abject and monstrous. In her book Powers of Horror, Kristeva provides an outline of how aversion is inherent in subjectivity and marks culture through the transgression of the boundaries of the body (cited in Grosz 1994: 192). Melissa’s disease, with its convulsions and expelling of her inner self, makes her body monstrous in Darley’s eyes. The vomiting forth of blood from her mouth, typical of advanced tuberculosis, transgresses the limits of her body in a viscous, horrific flow. An expulsion that partakes of the Thing-ness Hurley has associated with the Gothic body.

Contained within this leaking fluid is the immanence of death discernible in Darley’s description of Melissa’s fragile loveliness as being “a beauty which filled one with the terrible premonition that it had been born to be a target for the forces of destruction” (J: 177). Her outer surface’s beauty represents an envelope that gothically veils an inner corruption and disintegration; an idea common to religious literature and art. Melissa is a liminal body situated between life and death, a duality reminiscent of an anonymous engraving of the French School in 17th Century France. In this engraving, a young woman, with her body split in two, appears reflected in a mirror. This reflection shows one side of her as young and lovely whilst the other side is in the form of a skeleton.
The engraving displays the co-existence in one body of life and death. All living entities contain their death within themselves because the two states are inseparable. In line with patriarchal conventions, this engraving presents the homily that behind every woman’s beautiful façade the hag of death lies concealed. Represented as the gorgon, Woman is seen to bring madness, sickness and death into the world of men. Similarly, Melissa’s body blends life and death, a state that challenges boundaries in a semiotically disruptive manner. Superimposed onto her beautiful surface façade are the signs of her imminent death, which ensure that her visual and textual representation becomes abject.

Darley’s disinterest in Melissa is visible in his response to her surface appearance, as he says: “I saw her daily for many months on end, but her sullen aniline beauty awoke no response in me.” (J: 15-16). The phrase “awoke no response in me” indicates his lack of attraction and is an instinctive dismissal of her physicality. The words used to describe her, “pale, rather on the slender side, dressed in a shabby sealskin coat” and “sullen aniline beauty”, summon up an image of a faded almost ghostly presence (15-16). Her lack of colour along with her slender body makes her appear completely insubstantial. Darley attributes a certain beauty to her, which is strangely marred by the use of the adjective “sullen”. This word has a number of connotations mostly relating to mood: melancholy, silent, gloomy, serious, mournful, as well as “a dull colour” or “baleful or malignant” (Shorter Oxford English Dictionary 1980: 2184). There is an aura of haunted, despairing
spectrality surrounding Melissa. She appears to possess no material being, but is only a melancholy silhouette.

Melissa’s coat is not of fur but of sealskin, which lacks outer fur so that it resembles parchment - a surface that can be written upon. As a metonymic accessory, it represents Melissa whose surface Darley inscribes with dismissive adjectives that render her as an object lacking in value and erotic appeal. Yet, though he does not desire her, Darley becomes sexually involved with Melissa. The exculpatory reason he provides for this involvement is that Melissa overcame his shabby defences not by any of the qualities one might enumerate in a lover – charm, exceptional beauty, intelligence – no, but by the force of what I can only call her charity, in the Greek sense of the word. (J: 16).

By envisioning Melissa in this way, Durrell allows her to be the agent of penetration and not Darley. The use of the word “penetrated” implies Melissa is an active phallic principle, like a knife with its threat of possible emasculation or death. The narrator’s self-deprecatory acknowledgement of this penetration is revelatory of his apathetic sexual and emotional response to Melissa. Darley’s apparent modesty is merely a disguise that hides his condescending egoism and intellectual scorning of Melissa. Darley directs this hidden scorn at her because he does not consider her his equal, but merely a shabby woman who sells her body to the highest bidder. His callowness and patronising treatment of Melissa make Darley less than likeable and the reader has difficulty in empathising or identifying with him.

Durrell allows Darley to use the word charity, apparently a reference to its meaning in Greek. However, the Greek word is Agape, which represents a feeling of content or of holding someone in high regard. In the Shorter Oxford Dictionary, this word is defined as “brotherly love” (1993: 39). The word charity stems from the Latin word Caritas, used to translate Agape, particularly in the rendering of the Biblical New Testament. Caritas is Christian love for all other people, or charity. Darley’s misattribution of the word is an oddity, perhaps revealing his ignorance and lack of a Classical education. In a small measure, it punctures his pretentiousness. However, there could also be a biting comment on Melissa’s Greek heritage and her profession contained in the meaning of ‘love for all other people’. Caritas, or charity, is a self-sacrificing love and in Christian doctrine is necessary for salvation, with its links to the celebration of the Eucharist. Melissa is a vessel of self-sacrifice.
but one that represents an inversion of the eternal life associated with the Eucharist. Her blood holds merely the promise of non-existence. Melissa, and her total submissiveness in the face of Darley’s needs, has fuelled his ego into forming this liaison. When, due to illness, Melissa is sent away to a sanatorium, Darley’s disinterest in her is apparent when he admits, “Indeed, I did not think of her, having many other preoccupations at this time” (J: 51). This total lack of concern for Melissa seems premised on Darley’s feelings that she is just another tart, easily discarded and quickly forgotten.

Yet, Darley seems to purposely envisage her in a manner of a schoolgirl filled with desire-less innocence, in her “bright cotton frock and straw hat” with a “giggle” (113) and a “shy kiss” which Darley considers to be “amateurish as an early form of printing” (12). The phrase “an early form of printing” alerts the reader to the condescension of his response, which regards her as something naive, simple and primordial. The use of the word “amateurish” marks her, a prostitute, as unskilful and inept. This seems to be a projection of Darley’s own feelings of inadequacy. He is always quick to make snide and demeaning remarks about Melissa, because unconsciously he sees her as never anything more than a whore. Melissa remains an outline, held within the imagination of his memories; she is a pubescent form lacking all adult qualities of attraction and desire. In Darley’s memory, Melissa forms part of the golden light of the Sundays they shared. This evocation is almost paradisiacal, catching Melissa in a fantasy past where she is an innocent child “bright still with the colours that memory gives to those who enrich our lives by tears or laughter – unaware themselves that they have given us anything” (117). This visualisation of Melissa is reminiscent of a Claude Lorrain or an Antoine Watteau pastoral, filled with ambivalent warm light and an atmosphere of sorrow and happiness.27

The textual portrait of Melissa provided by Darley is one of a passive and harmless creature:

long bereft Greek face, with its sane pointed nose and candid eyes, the satiny skin that is given only to the thymus dominated, the mole upon the slender stalk of the neck.(J: 47)

27 Claude Lorrain (1600-1682) French painter of pastoral and other landscapes. Jean-Antoine Watteau (1684-1721) French painter of idyllic scenes that established the genre known as the fêtes galantes.
Though Melissa’s eyes are candid, this lack of malice is rather like a pool into which Darley narcissistically gazes to see his own reflection. Silverman has indicated that women, like men, are dependent on attaining identity by gazing at the masculine cultural Other. I would propose that Melissa never really looks or gazes at anyone, nor is she ever shown to objectify Darley or any of the other male characters with whom she is involved. Darley re-envisages her as guileless; an innocent primitive creature with malice-free eyes, but the description does not offer her the gaze or look. Instead, Melissa is circumscribed and contained in Darley’s memories where he moulds her to suit his own perceptions. He sees her satiny skin as “thymus dominated” and her neck as a “slender stalk” which evokes Melissa in a flower-like and infantilised manner. The boundaries between the vegetal and the human are transgressed, her body takes on aspects of what Kelly Hurley (1996) has termed the abhuman or the ‘Thing-ness’ of Gothic hybridity.

The pairing of the word “sane” with “pointed nose” is very unsettling. It personalises the nose and is a form of hypallage, which is a figure of speech, denoting an adjective transferred from the more appropriate to the less appropriate of two nouns (Baldick 2008: 160). In this instance, the adjective “sane” should qualify Melissa, not her nose. However, Durrell’s use of this word implies that Melissa’s nose is of reasonable proportions, yet “sane” normally refers to a person’s inner being not their physical attributes. A rather tragi-comic description of a nose, it adds little to the reader’s picture of Melissa’s appearance. In continuing his description of Melissa, Darley makes use of an even stranger expression when he visualises her as having a “long bereft Greek face”. The word bereft can mean sad or lonely, but also deprived or lacking. The image conjures up a face of incredible barrenness, one in which there is no truly defining feature, and recalls the ancient Greek theatre masks. The Greek word for these masks was prosopon meaning face and persona. These masks had exaggerated almost grotesque features and Darley’s description of Melissa’s face seems to meld her into a mask causing her to vanish. Veiled by this mask-like face with its overtones of nothingness and tragic mortality, Melissa’s physical features are subtly gothicised.

With her pallid, veiled identity, Melissa remains a ghostly presence. For Darley, she remains a “pale waif of the Alexandrian littoral” (B: 117). The littoral is a space between high and low tide where the abject ejected wastes from the sea collect. Humans possess a horror of the viscid, glutinous things found in the littoral. A waif of a liminal abject space, Melissa is
metaphorically associated with decay and waste matter. In the process her body is metonymically mapped as unclean, spectral, rejected, and abjectly abhuman. In her examination of the monster in the Gothic, theorist Judith Halberstam has considered the monster’s embodiment to be a representation of an uncanny, monstrous physical surface (1995: 7). Melissa’s surface is a visual text that, I maintain, constructs her to accord with the monstrous body discussed by Halberstam. I cannot agree with the writer Richard Aldington’s assessment of Durrell’s creation of Melissa as showing “tenderness for women and their undeserved sufferings” (1964: 7). There is no apparent tenderness towards women exhibited by Durrell’s male characters. In Melissa’s case, the selfish and indifferent cruelty displayed by Darley causes the reader to despise him. The trauma of losing Darley’s paltry affections to Justine translates into the abject collapse of Melissa’s body. With her death in the novel *Justine*, Melissa becomes the truly abject monster.

Melissa’s approaching death is presciently visualised in an image of her provided by Darley. Called to a party where someone is ill, Darley finds Melissa and rescues her. On entering the party Darley sees her and calls her face “a cave” that is caught in a “permanently engraver shriek” (J: 49). He goes further saying she looked like she was wearing “a catastrophic Greek comic mask” (49). Melissa’s face seems to have assumed the look associated with the face found in Edvard Munch’s painting *The Scream of Nature* (1893).

![Figure 7 Edvard Munch: The Scream of Nature](image)

Melissa’s “engraved shriek”, I submit, seems to bear the same fear and horror of the creature in Munch’s work: a fear of falling into madness with its obliteration of personality
or of a painful death. The painting is a representation of an image of a human being stripped of a soul, pushed as far as is bearable, a mask or skull screaming silently with a wide-open mouth. The painting roils, and its organic undulations of unnaturally coloured fiery sky contrast with the blue of the water that flows beneath the red horizontal lines of the jetty. The angled lines of the jetty are like the base of a triangle from the broad space where the central screaming figure stands, narrowing towards the two dark and elongated figures on the left of the painting. The lines draw the gaze of the viewer into the depths of the painting and the approaching dark figures add a sense of dread. This horror further emanates from the violence of the swirling movement of the paint whose waviness takes on the attributes of sound waves. Nature and the screaming figure meld together in a powerfully impassioned expression of fear and mad terror. Melissa is a cipher, an absence with a silent shriek. Her cave-like face recalls a death’s head in similar manner to the skull-like face in The Scream. In this manner the monstrous, the abject and the Gothic invade the painting and the literary world of Durrell’s novels, surrounding Melissa’s corporeality with the fear and horror associated with death.

Towards the end of the novel Justine, Darley again encounters the horror of death when he visits Melissa’s corpse in the hospital. He is confronted with a death mask, which was once Melissa’s face, and is entirely unlike any of her other faces:

Then I lit a cigarette and sat down beside her on a chair to make a long study of her face, comparing it to all the other faces of Melissa which thronged my memory and had established their identity there. She bore no resemblance to any of them – and yet she set them off, concluded them. This white little face was the last term of a series. Beyond this point there was a locked door. (J: 208)

Melissa has overstepped the boundary represented by death, and has slipped away from the control of Darley to where he can no longer fashion her as Other. Memory no longer has a referent against which to found the textualisation and focalisation of his perceptions.

Facing this dead body, Darley experiences the fear of abjection and its dissolution of the self into non-identity and nothingness, forcing him into the realisation of his own mortality. For Kristeva the corpse is the most basic form of pollution and waste and the ultimate expression of abjection. She indicates that:
If dung signifies the other side of the border, the place where I am not and which permits me to be, the corpse, the most sickening of wastes, is a border that has encroached upon everything. It is no longer I who expel. ‘I’ is expelled. (1982: 4)

A body without a soul, Melissa’s ‘I’ has been expelled and she has come to occupy the place of the abject, which is, according to Kristeva: “where meaning collapses” (1982: 2). Facing this place where the ‘I’ is not, Darley in fear pushes it away from his living subjectivity. Darley feels repulsion for the “terrible marble repose of the will which one reads on the faces of the dead” (J: 208). Even in death, Darley has set up an Other, because he sees the corpse as representative of a “terrible will” acting in opposition to his own living will. For him, this will represents, not only the uncanny power of the dead over the living, but of death as the ultimate devouring feminine principle, which results in non-differentiation. Threatened by both aspects, Darley propels this ‘will’ away from his body and deposits it onto Melissa’s corpse. Darley ejects the abject onto the other side of an imaginary border thereby separating it from his own sense of subjectivity. I argue that this projection of the abject onto Melissa’s body allows Darley to reinforce the surface gothicisation of her image through a denial of his own mortality.

Melissa’s cadaver has penetrated the borders of Darley’s body image, so he beats a hasty retreat saying: “The dead do not care. It is the living who might be spared if we could quarry the message which lies buried in the heart of all human experience” (J: 209). In his egoism and fear, he fends off her death playing the distancing and intellectually rational game of centuries, what if we could control death through knowing about it from the dead, and then the living (such as myself) might gain the answers to eternal life, and not have to face dissolution and mortality. As in life so in death Darley spares little thought and minimal emotion on the whore, he pretends to love and to have loved in the recollection of his memories. Darley’s memories of Melissa, and his subsequent textual embodiment of her, ensure she becomes entirely his own factitious fabrication. Melissa has ceased to possess any autonomy. She has become merely a play of palimpsestic signifiers inscribed over the embodied space of her ghost (Alexandre-Garner 1985: 36). Melissa’s ghost blurs the boundaries between life and death, in what Derrida terms “the border between the present, the actual or present reality of the present, and everything that can be opposed to it:
absence non-presence, non-effectivity, inactuality, virtuality” (1994: 39). On the border between life and death and the fragile law of the Symbolic, Melissa seems to be a presence craving restitution. Entrapped in this liminal place, she haunts Darley’s recollections of Alexandria.

Melissa’s reappearance in the novel *Mountolive* represents a return to a time before her death. In this novel, Pursewarden, in a letter to David Mountolive discussing Colonial policy in Egypt, makes mention of Darley. Commenting on Darley’s involvement with Justine, Pursewarden mentions that he finds this relationship a little strange because Darley is also involved with a “rather nice little cabaret dancer called Melissa” (M: 112). Curious about Justine’s need to deceive Melissa, Pursewarden makes no mention of his own involvement with Justine. Pursewarden regards Melissa as a pallid rival to Justine for Darley’s affections, but in order to satisfy his curiosity he sets out to seduce her. Returning together to Pursewarden’s hotel, their attempt to have sex is unsuccessful, so Melissa reads his palm in which she sees “death very close. You will hear about it in a matter of hours” (M: 174). Suddenly, Melissa mutates into the monstrous-feminine, the ravenous archaic mother, attempting to pull Pursewarden into the oblivion of death as, “She closed her eyes and spread her repellent arms out before her like a sleep walker” (174). Pursewarden sees her as possessing repellent arms in an abject visualisation that, linked to the idea of her as a sleepwalker, evokes something mechanical, which moves without thought. With her “repellent arms out before her” the amusingly Gothic image of a murderous mummy, who seems to sleep walk with arms before it, springs to mind. Melissa’s prediction of a death acts as a harbinger of the one she unwittingly precipitates.

The ‘petite mort’ of sex anticipates the horror to follow. After the act, curled in the water of a warm bath, Melissa is seen as “one of those marvellous Japanese paper-flowers which open in water”. An inanimate object made alive by the water, the narrative voice likens her to a flower, and she metamorphoses into a hybrid creature part human and part vegetal. As Melissa re-animates, she deals the deathblow. Expressing only contempt for the Hosnalis, Pursewarden sees her emerge from the “clouds of steam like an angel emerging from heaven in some seventeenth century engraving” (M: 178). This image metamorphoses Melissa into more than merely an angel, as her appearance seems to reference the iconology of the avenging angel. However, there is something unusual about the reference
to the dating of the engraving. The more famous engravings of avenging angels come from the sixteenth century. Albrecht Dürer’s work comes to mind, and although many seventeenth-century paintings containing angels exist, there are fewer engravings and even fewer depictions of avenging angels. Dürer’s *The Four Avenging Angels of the Euphrates from the Apocalypse* (1496-1498 published 1511) is a woodcut. The scene depicted is from the Biblical book of *Revelations* in which angel soldiers descend from heaven to wreak havoc on earth. They have come to kill one third of humanity no matter their status, so they hew peasant, king and pope without discrimination. This is a ferocious vengeance and the angels appear grotesquely frightening like Greek furies rather than angelic hosts. The look on the faces of the angels reveals their nature; they are implacable instruments of destruction driven to murder.

![Figure 8 Albrecht Dürer: The Four Avenging Angels of the Euphrates from the Apocalypse](image)

The woodcut is powerfully dramatic, filled with wild movement, lion-headed monsters, vengeful unholy angels and the death and destruction of war. This is the apocalypse with its irrational perceptions that, critic Marina Warner suggests reveals “the demented and skewed relationships between all the narrative elements – the duration, the characters, the impact of the violence” (2005: 14). The frenzied nature of the woodcut, with its excessively monstrous and violent aspects, disturbs and fills the viewer with fear. An uncanny bubbling to the woodcut’s surface of the iconology of the Gothic mode occurs. I argue that Durrell’s providing a dating for the image, described as reminiscent of an engraving, overlays
Melissa’s surface and actions, firmly placing them within a past tradition that has erupted into the present. The fact that the Gothic literary tradition has its roots in the seventeenth century seems to be serendipitous to the focalisation of this scene with its aura of demented vengeance.

Melissa’s own appearance is as demented and frenzied as the angels in Dürer’s woodcut, her anger and need to avenge herself on Justine and the Hosnani family drive her to exact retribution. Yet, an angel, even an avenging one, is sexless and the bearer of the commands and Word of God - the Logos. Figuratively merging Melissa’s embodiment with that of an angel, Durrell allows Pursewarden to negate her femininity by collapsing the sign and referent. In an examination of Irigaray’s paper Belief Itself, critic Amy Hollywood writes that Irigaray suggests the transparent and disembodied, sexless angel opens the possibility for communication between two bodies in a face-to-face encounter (1998: 242). At the same instant, the patriarchal perception of the angel brings with it a powerful terror with its “sacrifice of the mother on which this inscription of male subjectivity ... depends” (242). This inscription of male subjectivity onto the form of the angel, I would argue, also has roots in the late nineteenth century’s mystique of the ‘angel in the house’ in which the female body was idealised and its sexuality contained, controlled and disavowed. Woman became merely a projection of male perception and belief. Durrell has transformed Melissa’s body into a sexless body which remains reliant on a masculine morphology based on an ideology, Hollywood has indicated, that believes an angel works on behalf of a male God and for the male subject (1998: 242). Melissa is metaphorically embodied into a terrifying form that is sexually absent whilst physically present.

The sound of Melissa’s voice now instils a terror because it seems non-human with its “brassy fishwife” (M: 179) sound like the sound of the trumpet associated with the avenging angels. The sexless voice of an angel was known to possess an inhuman quality, a voice, Felicia Miller Frank has suggested is dedicated to sacrifice and death (1995: 98). Melissa’s inhumanly harsh and loud voice seems to meld with that of the angel as she trumpets about how her dead ex-lover smuggled “arms into the Middle East, into Palestine, for Nessim Hosnani” (M: 178). Her metaphorical sword resides in these words and the information and insight they offer to the hearer. The shock and horror of the meaning of what is said bursts forth on Pursewarden. In his horror, Pursewarden retreats from Melissa whom he regards.
as an abjectly monstrous and repellent creature, one that symbolises the final act of castration – death.

Melissa’s unwitting exposure of Nessim and Justine’s conspiracy has allowed her to exact vengeance on her rival for Darley’s affection. Yet, she also figuratively kills Pursewarden by destroying his illusions and his friendship with Nessim Hosnani. Pursewarden’s suicide brings to a close not only the moral and ethical dilemmas associated with Melissa’s information, but the complicated and incestuous love relationship with his sister Liza. This death ends his protection of Nessim against the British Secret Service. The Hosnani’s gunrunning scheme, with its aim to overturn British policy, is thwarted and Nessim and Justine are placed under house arrest. Melissa’s information seems to tie the threads of the thriller plot of Mountolive together, as well as the many other questions raised in the novels Justine and Balthazar. Unaware of her role in the exposure of this dark plot, Melissa dies in the narrative of Justine before the results of her night with Pursewarden come into effect. In Mountolive, she represents a revenant returned to haunt the narrative with its strange space-time that represents a permanent incursion of the past into the present. She is a spectral presence who is the apparent key to the unravelling of the plot of the Quartet. Her ghostly presence will briefly return again in Clea, when Darley returns to Alexandria from his seclusion on the Greek island.

On his return, Darley takes up residence in the flat he previously inhabited when living in the city. Inside the flat old memories rise of the time Darley spent with Melissa. Her disappearance is nowhere more apparent than when Darley whispers “her name softly. With surprise and chagrin I discovered that she had utterly vanished” (C: 35). Jogged by “a street-photograph”, one that is “very faded”, Darley recalls Melissa (C: 35). The photograph is a ghost of a moment caught in time. Held in the immobile flatness of the medium, Melissa is merely a faded ‘street walker’, one who has become part of the fuzzy half-rememberings of the past. Darley’s shocked realisation is that there is an absence to the ghost of these memories because it is:

impossible to restore this vanished afternoon to mind! I gazed carefully at the circumstantial detail of the picture like someone bent upon restoring an irremediably faded fresco. (C: 35)
The double use of “restore” and “restoring” indicates the effort Darley needs to make to recall his memories of Melissa and this past moment in time. Darley’s gaze is fixated on the “circumstantial detail” as though this will offer landmarks to refresh his memory, rather than the figure of Melissa. Melissa’s existence takes on the nature of a fresco, one that has peeled, lost its colour and for which there is no cure, no means of resurrection. A fresco is painted onto wet or dry plaster, an inverse mirror of the manner in which a death mask is done. Similarly, this death-like stillness and rigidity reside in the motionless distance of the photograph. Unable to capture Melissa, the photograph places her beyond Darley’s grasp. Melissa has become a spectre in the death of the photograph as well as Darley’s memories of the lost time of the past.

Of the female characters Darley attempts to represent, Melissa is the least physically present; the least rounded and alive. She remains faceless and entirely without identity or personality. There is no novel with her name, she is and remains a liminal figure never portrayed in a painting or shown looking in a mirror. Instead, she is the figurative representative of hybridity, abjection, illness, decay and death. I regard this visual figuration of Melissa as a means for Durrell to permit his male characters to escape from an acknowledgement of their misogynistic fear and horror of sexual otherness. Textually recorded memories of Melissa become a means to expiate Darley’s own guilt and sexual fears. His re-creation of his relationship with her is an exculpation of his pitiable treatment of her. His mea culpa remains unsatisfactory and false to the end. At the close of the novel cycle, Melissa has gone and memories of her etiolated form and character, visually and textually denied throughout, have finally dematerialised. In opposition to this fading of Melissa, Clea’s visualisation becomes steadily more important until she becomes the main object of focus in the eponymously entitled novel, Clea. Focalised by the male characters, Clea is embodied and visualised as an object of aesthetic delight, desire and beauty. An idealised construct, Clea is a fantasy Woman evoked by memory. In my next section, I shall explore how the gaze constitutes Clea in a visualisation of the stereotypical beautiful, golden and innocent heroine.
Golden Perfection - Clea

First encountered by the reader in the novel Justine, Darley introduces Clea as an artist and the friend of Melissa, Justine, Nessim, Pursewarden and Balthazar. The very first visual evocation of Clea is a detailed description that reveals her as an ideal, objectified figure who possesses a golden radiance:

Everything about her person is honey-gold and warm in tone; the fair, crisply trimmed hair which she wears rather long at the back, knotting it simply at the downy nape of her neck. This focuses the candid face of a minor muse with its smiling grey-green eyes (J: 113-114)

The warm golden light associated with Clea acts as a contrast to Darley’s focalisation of Justine, the thrilling and dark mistress, and Melissa, the shadowy, bereft waif. Clea’s honey-blond aureole of hair and innocent open face resemble a holy portrait or that of a heroine in a romance novel. Like a lily of light, Clea is a visual representation of both purity and a stasis waiting for an alteration in state. Her luminescent grey-green eyes mirror the colours of the sea, with a limpid clarity similar to the depiction of the eyes of the goddess Flora in Sandro Botticelli’s painting entitled the Primavera (c. 1482).

![Figure 9 Sandro Botticelli: Primavera - Face of Flora](image)

In this painting, Flora’s direct gaze is inscrutable, yet gently knowing and her smile is enigmatic; features Darley indicates that Clea shares. Like Flora, Clea is a child of nature and an apparently harmless delight for men, being their dream of innocent perfection.
The tawny youthfulness of Clea is indicative of the season of spring, and is an image of unattainable purity and beauty. The novelist Pursewarden, gazing at Clea’s body, makes a direct connection between her and the work of Botticelli when he notes “her marvellous hair swinging about her like a blonde Botticelli” (C: 131). Visually attributed with aspects of both Botticelli’s *Birth of Venus* (1486) and the goddesses of the *Primavera*, Clea’s blonde hair is a symbol of her connection with the goddess Venus and the astrological figure of Virgo. Their golden hair and body are, according to critic Marina Warner in her work *From the Beast to the Blonde*, sources of goodness and purity (1994: 374-376).

![Figure 10 Sandro Botticelli: The Primavera](image)

Golden blondeness and purity are attributes shared by all the female figures in Botticelli’s *Primavera*. These women glow, making them desirable objects of delight. Notable in the painting is the flower theme, where flowers spew from the mouth of the nymph Chloris who is associated with spring. Chloris is on the far right of the painting in the arms of the wind god Zephyrus, who kidnapped and raped her. He later married her and she metamorphosed into the goddess of spring - Flora. This connection is in the placement of Chloris’s hands, which are almost touching Flora’s dress. The flowers from Chloris’s mouth seem to have spilled over onto the fabric of Flora’s dress, which they now bountifully cover.

Clea’s tawny beauty is similarly associated with spring and with flowers, when Darley voyeuristically watching her sees her “naked and slender as an Easter Lily” (C: 90). The attributes of purity and innocence are unmistakeable, because the lily is a symbol of all virgin goddesses as well as the goddess of fertility. Darley further envisions Clea as “poured, while still warm, into the body of a young grace: that is to say, into a body born without
instincts or desires” (J: 114). In the Primavera, the three graces stand to Flora’s right, below the outstretched hand of the figure of Venus, whose handmaidens they are. Hands entwined, they dance, but their faces remain remote and unemotional. They, like Venus, possess an exquisite lightness, grace and beauty, and art historian Paul Barolisky suggests the figures seem tinged with tones of wistful sadness in their separateness from Flora (2000: 33). The bodies of the graces are draped in diaphanous material that reveals more than it conceals. This ensures their physical charms become the focus of the desiring gaze of the viewer. With her body of a grace, Clea is equally available to the voyeuristic and eroticising gaze of, not only Darley and Pursewarden, but also the reader.

Yet, both Darley and Pursewarden are quick to deny her physicality by ascribing to her only a pure and striking beauty. Pursewarden indicates, “she would have been worth taking the trouble over had she not been so beautiful” (C: 131), which indicates a fear of such overwhelming beauty. These men deflect their fear through their presentation of Clea as almost untouchable in her physical perfection and asexuality. She is the Grace of chastity and their gaze evokes the imaginative fantasy of the perfect, sculpted form. In naming his character Clea, Durrell has obscurely referenced the priestess Clea, an oracle at Delphi and friend of the ancient Greek writer Plutarch. The attributes of Clea the apparently real-life priestess seem to be metonymically associated with the character Clea.

A paragon, Clea appears to remain outside desire avoiding its dark drives, so she remains inside what the critic Rebecca Stott terms “the frontier protecting the symbolic order from chaos” (1992: 38). A male fantasy of the heroine, Clea is the unattainable, passive, gentle, virgin mother figure that is protective and non-threatening, thus fulfilling their needs. Yet, the gaze’s focalisation of her stems from an erotic yearning that voyeuristically surveys the surface of her body constructing it as an object of carnal desire. This voyeurism is considered by Bal to be tantamount to touching, where the look arouses desire even if this desire is suppressed (1991: 150). This touching, through the desire of the eyes, represents a violation and possession of Clea that is rarely acknowledged and nearly always denied. The conflicting nature of denied desire is obvious in Darley’s attempt to make Clea containable within the imaginative confines of his memories. He produces her as a mystery, as something he needs to decipher in order to master. By mastering her mystery, any threat she offers to the borders of his identity will disappear. Accordingly, Darley refers
to her as “the gentle loveable, unknowable Clea” (J: 113), an unfathomable entity in her
golden Botticellian beauty with her aura of sweet grace. Darley constructs her as a
stereotypical fantasy conception of Woman: the passive, golden haired heroine of a Gothic
romance.

The metaphorical relation between Clea and the Gothic heroine continues after Darley
returns to Alexandria. This return marks a renewal of his interaction with Clea, and a new
visual embodiment of her. He sees her “more beautiful than I could remember her to have
been, slimmer, and with a subtle range of new gestures and expressions suggesting a new
and troubling maturity” (C: 67). Rendering Clea anew, Darley provides himself with a
different subjective perspective of her to retain in memory. Her body is once more the
object of his comments when he notes its slighter shape and altered movements. The
realisation that she has aged, that her innocence has given way to a maturity, troubles him
because he wishes to retain the idealised image of her innocence and purity. He fears her
assumption of knowledge with the concomitant possibility of her assumption of the subject
position. This becomes very apparent when he says, “So stern those splendid eyes had
become” (C: 205), emulating Pursewarden’s comment that Clea’s “brilliant glance exposed
everything and forced me to take shelter from her” (C: 131). The use of “stern” provides her
with attributes of unrelenting severity and authority, and the blinding adjectives, “splendid”
and “brilliant”, offer an intent and piercing quality to her eyes. These eyes seem to
challenge these male characters in an assessing and intimidating manner.

In their statements, Pursewarden and Darley reveal their fear of becoming objects with
the concomitant loss of identity, control and power. Silverman, writing on the two-way
workings of vision, points out that “our look can never function as the gaze for ourselves, it
can have that function for others, even at the moment that we assume the status of object
for them” (1988: 77). This reciprocal relationship is obvious: Darley and Pursewarden are
gazing at Clea as an object who is looking at them in return. The male characters construct
this interpretation of Clea’s look and its impact on them. Thus, indirectly, through their
description, they remain the controlling subject. The use of the word “glance” is, as I
previously argued, based on Bryson’s interpretation of the glance, where this act of looking
can be considered furtive; a flickering movement that hurriedly hides itself, so as not to be
seen indulging in the forbidden act of seeing from the position of the subject (1983: 94-95).
Clea’s “brilliant glance”, I would argue, is not the distanced, controlling gaze, generally associated with the masculine way of seeing. Instead, it represents a swift movement that quickly hides itself, concealing any interior thoughts. Her glance becomes the object of the distancing phallocentric gaze. This gaze annuls her glance through the power of its visual textual appropriation of her image.

Clea’s look is clearly important, not only because it is the main means of sensory perception for an artist, but, more importantly, because it threatens the male characters with whom she interacts. Voyeuristically, Darley watches her “gazing at a coffee cup with a wry reflective air of amusement, her hands supporting her chin” (C: 67). There is gentleness in this amused gaze because it remains totally non-appropriative. Tempered by dreaminess, Clea’s gaze is aimed at an object that arouses no desire because it is inanimate and utilitarian. Caught in this act of pensive contemplation, Clea is rather like Rodin’s statue of The Thinker (1902), an abstracted and non-threatening figure. This gentle stare is in direct opposition to Darley’s description of her sitting “silently before a painting gazing at it with an inattentive malevolent fury” (206). Her gaze is no longer bright or focused. Her previous golden, lily-like light is gothically tainted by the use of the adjective “malevolent” appended to the noun “fury”. Darley envisions her in the form of an avenging deity. However, her silence, and the use of the word “inattentiveness”, makes her fury passive, self-contained, blind and distanced. Darley’s focalisation entraps her gaze and her physical form, allowing him to project darker and more violent motifs onto her surface. For all her perceived threat, Clea lacks presence and her ability to inflict any harm is negated through the effacement of her gaze.

Clea’s vision is entirely negated in the final scene in which Darley encounters her. She is in a hospital bed, the same one in which Melissa died. Clea has turned her head away from Darley and the reader, and her eyes are “open, gazing at the wall with the dazed look which suggested morphia and fatigue combined” (C: 222). Vision is now firmly with Darley whose gaze constructs the manner in which Clea is perceived. Her vision is glazed and befuddled and she no longer possesses the bright look that so intimidated Darley and Pursewarden. Facing the wall, uncomprehendingly staring at an object that cannot gaze back, she seems unwilling to be watched or appropriated. She refuses to look at Darley and becomes unavailable and outside his power and control. Withdrawn and indifferent, she pushes
Darley aside and has “closed her eyes and was fading softly into sleep ... There was the faintest trace of a smile at the corners of her mouth” (223). Her vision is extinguished by sleep, the close companion to death. Metaphoric intimations of death are prominent, and Clea’s state of the dead/undead resonates with elements of the Gothic. Visually stencilled with these elements, Clea’s body, in similar manner to the other female characters, becomes a gothicised spatial surface. However, she has slipped away from Darley’s fantasy projection of desire and her smile, like that of the Mona Lisa, enigmatically hints at the freedom from trials and tribulations experienced by the heroine at the end of a romantic tale.

Conclusion

Throughout the preceding sections, I have argued that the gaze of visual textuality present in the Quartet allows the narrators and focalisors to control and construct what the reader sees. The object brought into focus is the female body, the vision of which vacillates between erotic desire and the fear and rejection of the unknown feminine Other. In considering the depiction of female embodiment, I have discussed the main characters Justine, Melissa and Clea who are caught in the multi-voiced male narrative and focalisation of the novels. This focalisation and perception could be considered representative of what Elizabeth Grosz regards as a masculine effort aimed at making Woman “containable within his imagination (reduced to his size), but also produces her as a mystery for him to master and decipher within safe or unthreatening borders” (1994: 191).

The surface form of the female characters acts as a parchment or landscape that the male characters, such as Darley, attempt to decipher, annotate and contain. The space and surface of this corporeality is subjected to the superimposition of the text, or Logos, with its structuring motifs. The representation of the female characters in the narrative appears to conform to what Pollock suggests is the manner in which women have always been represented in phallocentric discourse: “derelict, exiled in the symbolic order that does not signify us except as a sign of its own, phallocentric meaning” (1996: 9). In the Quartet, this inscription of the symbolic order is achieved through the gaze, the effect of which is the institution of the hierarchical binaries that establish Woman as the sexually different Other. I contend that the visual mapping of the exteriors of Durrell’s female characters is an
aggressive attempt to obtain what Bal has suggested is a position of mastery and exclusion (Bal 1991: 143). Throughout this chapter, my aim has been to demonstrate how the desiring and voyeuristic gaze of the narrators, focalisers and readers constitutes the visual representation of the female characters.

I have discussed how the gaze is occasionally countered by the glance or look of a female character. In Justine’s case, her gaze is dominant, almost masculine, in its appropriation of Darley. However, the textual re-creation of events, caught in the transcribing of his memories, allows Darley to deflect and deny Justine the subject position and the gaze. In so doing, he asserts control over the events in his text and over Justine. Memory is one of the prominent agencies of the voyeuristic gaze, where the male narrator becomes the subject, and the female character is visualised as the fantasy object of desire. This objectification is possible through the gap established by the space of memory between the object of contemplation and the subject of that contemplation. Darley’s memories resemble a film or photograph, forms of visualisation that represent what Doane has termed the dominant system. This system matches “male subjectivity with the agency of the look” (1982: 77). By means of this act of vision, readers are forced into a position of complicity with a certain viewpoint. They become hidden outsiders who oversee the events, and are compelled to adopt the masculine focalising position implicit within the novels. Durrell ensures that the active, creative participants in the novels remain the male characters, particularly the artist or writer. These ‘creative’ male characters actively conflate the female characters with the notion of Woman. In the narrative, the women are forced to assume the role of primitive, enigmatic, sexual bodies visually gothicised, whether as dark mistress, inconsequential tart, or innocent heroine. I contend that this results in the establishment, throughout Durrell’s novels, of an essentialist binarism that privileges the masculine.28

In the next chapter, I will employ the theoretical concept of the fetish to explore the manner in which sexual desire is installed on the surface of the female characters in the guise of Gothic motifs. The particular fetishes I will explore are the voice, hands, jewellery and clothing. I will assess how these fetishes are associated with the visualisation of Justine,

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28 Essentialism is the belief that there is an all-encompassing female essence that defines woman as other and as lack. This sets up binaries that always ensure that Woman is confined to the inferior aspect of the binary, thus active/passive; culture/nature; virgin/whore, etc. See theorists such as Nina Auerbach (1982); Teresa de Lauretis (1990); Diana Fuss (1989); Sarah Kofman (1980); Toril Moi (1999); and Efrat Tseelon (1995).
Leila and Liza Pursewarden, sister of Pursewarden, as objects of erotic desire and masculine fear. I plan to access and explore the fetishism in Durrell’s novels through the theoretical work of Doane, Silverman and Bal. I will also reference Kristeva’s position on castration and indicate how this is an aspect of abjection. The abject, as indicated, will be one of the central theoretical underpinnings of my engagement with the Gothic that I assert acts as a primary thematic and structural feature in the *Quartet*. 