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

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**Publication date**  
2014

[Link to publication](#)

#### **Citation for published version (APA):**

Kreuter, A. D. (2014). *The elegant velvet glove: A textual and visual reading of the gothicised female form in Lawrence Durrell's 'The Alexandria quartet'*.

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## Chapter 4: The Fetish

### Introduction

Fetishism is a subject that has been examined extensively by many theorists. In this section, I will limit my discussion to the Freudian concept of the fetish. I will indicate how I aim to employ this concept in a reading of the representation of the female characters in the novels of the *Quartet*. Further, I shall show how the gaze and the fetish are intricately associated aspects. I also aim to establish the relevance of these concepts to my consideration of the Gothic as a structuring device for the embodiment of the female characters. In her work, *The Acoustic Mirror* Silverman elucidates the Freudian theory of castration anxiety and the fetish. She indicates that in Freudian theory, the boy's initial sighting of his mother's genitals that lack a penis causes the crisis of castration anxiety. This crisis leads to an inability to accept the mother's lack, so re-evaluating the mother's physical image becomes an integral part in the establishment of male subjectivity (1988: 17). Silverman goes on to show how, based on the distancing nature of vision, a space it establishes between the known and unknown; a process of disavowal takes place. This process establishes the masculine subject and opens up the possibility for the installation of fetishism. The fetish is generally a fixation on an object close to the perceived castration of the female body. The fetish is either a piece of clothing or underwear, which acts as a substitute and disavowal of the perceived lack of the female anatomy. The fetish, installed over the place of the lack, re-establishes the image of woman as unthreatening, passive; an image that is controllable (1988: 17-22).

Therefore, the fetish is integral to vision and visualisation as Doane notes in relation to the formation of fetishism: "the male spectator is destined to be a fetishist, balancing knowledge and belief" (1982: 80). Doane, in her discussion of the female gaze says that woman has more difficulty with being a fetishist because of her over-identification with her own 'castrated' image. This over-identification results in the inability to allow for a visual distancing. In relation to this difficulty, I contend that the women in Durrell's novels are unable to use the agency of the look to speculate, represent or describe themselves. Instead, they become the object of the look, caught in paintings and photographs or

voyeuristic descriptive images. These fetishistic agencies enforce identification with an ideal held in memory's subjective perception. This subjective ideal is only conceptualised on masculine terms, as Doane has argued (1982: 87). The fetishisation of the female characters in Durrell's *Quartet*, I propose, takes on a number of attributes that metonymically stand in to counter the male characters' fear of the female lack. According to Silverman, the male subject uses the mechanism of the visual to convince himself that it is not he who is castrated but someone else - woman (1988: 17). Bal regards the visual projection that establishes sexual difference to be negative because it is founded on the primacy of the (absence of the) phallus (or symbolic) (2006: 277). The primacy of the phallus, or the institution of the Symbolic (law of the Father), is the central force, according to Kristeva's conceptualisation of the semiotic and Symbolic in her work *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1984), which drives the separation from the mother.<sup>29</sup>

Kristeva in her book *The Powers of Horror* further discusses the separation from the mother, but in relation to what she has termed abjection. The abject, Kristeva argues, is the reaction to the limits or boundaries the subject encounters during separation from the mother. This separation is a recoil and horror against the imposed limits but, simultaneously, an anguished desire for re-fusion with the now prohibited maternal realm. The abject is the confusion experienced between contact and separation, outside and inside, and everything related to the functions of the body. In the child's attempt at separation from the maternal body, the abject is installed during the process of the establishment of the subject and object relations (1982: 1-4). The separation from the maternal body results not only in the establishment of subject and object, but, as discussed by Silverman with regards to Freudian theory, also leads to the realisation of sexual difference and, for the male subject, the realisation of the mother's castration (1988: 17). The result is the gothically abject horror, fear and repulsion of the masculine castration anxiety, which can lead to disavowal and the visual projection of the fetish. According to Bal, visual projection results in a "gendered act of fictionalization" and an "act of interpretation" that constructs sexual difference or gender from an absence (2006: 277).

The fetishist's disavowal of the female lack establishes the question of sexual difference. This difference has been used, Silverman has argued, to underpin the system

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<sup>29</sup> With regards to fetishism, see Emily Apter and William Pietz (1993); Mieke Bal (2006); Mary Ann Doane (1982); Christian Metz (1985); Laura Mulvey (1996); Kaja Silverman (1988).

that structures woman as an image of anatomical lack thereby establishing her as Other - a dark continent (1988: 14). Castration becomes a device used to protect the male subject from a confrontation with the lack that would result in his acknowledgement of his own insufficiency. To acknowledge that his subjectivity is already founded on an absence is, according to Silverman, "to concede that he, like the female subject, has already been deprived of being and already been marked by the language and desires of the Other" (15). The male subject is afraid of becoming his sexual opposite of a re-fusion with the feminine and a concomitant loss of subjecthood. Instead, Silverman has suggested that he projects the notion of his own castration onto the female in a violent act of displacement. This act eroticises an object close to the female such as shoes, clothing, jewellery, etc (18).<sup>30</sup>

I would propose that in Durrell's novels the masculine fetishising of the female characters involves two acts of displacement: synecdoche and metonymy. Synecdoche represents a part that stands for the whole and, in my discussion of Durrell's novels; this relates to the voice, hands and blindness. Metonymy is a thing that stands adjacent to another in place, time and logic, and this will relate to the descriptions of clothing and jewellery. Investigating Durrell's female characters as constructed erotic spectacle, I will explore the manner in which certain parts of their anatomies are visualised in the manner of snapshots making the images over-determined and placing certain motifs on display. These motifs such as the veil, the shawl, the sequined dress, and the ring are all symbolic expressions of containment and surfaces which highlight external bodily appearance (Spooner 2004: 3). The fetish objects ascribed to the women characters in the novels, I will argue, fashion them as Gothic surfaces open to focalisation and inscription.

In her discussion of fetishisation, Bal has indicated that it remains firmly fixed in the mechanism of vision. It should be apparent, therefore, that my argument concerning the integral nature of vision in the establishment of the fetish has much in common with my previous chapter on the gaze. The disavowal at the heart of fetishism is a refusal visually to acknowledge anything that lacks pleasure, which aligns it with the gaze. The gaze according to Silverman is involved in the pleasure of desire and refuses to acknowledge anything that evokes "unpleasure" (1988: 16). I suggest that the gaze and fetishism are complementary visual strategies dependent on castration anxiety and abjection. Bal has pointed out that

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<sup>30</sup> For a further analysis of woman as the "dark continent" see Ranjana Khanna (2003)

vision is deceptive because it is no more reliable than perception through any of the other senses. In this regard, Bal suggests that the fetishist's violent displacement of lack onto the female form can be considered a cloak for visual deception (2006: 280). Although the visual act of fetishism and the gaze are related, I felt it necessary to discuss them in separate sections to highlight the inherent differences between these scopical strategies and how Durrell employs them in the *Quartet*.

Continuing the discussion on fetishism, Bal looks at the relationship between the Freudian fetish and Marx's idea of commodity fetishism. She quotes a very interesting statement from philosopher Slavoj Žižek concerning how objects believe in their place. This belief seems located within the ideological structures that exist in the social relationships between subjects and objects. Žižek suggests that it is no longer the subjects who believe in the relations, but the objects who continue to do the believing for the subjects (cited in Bal 2006: 280). Though this discussion concerns the notion of Marx's commodity fetishism, I would argue that it offers a way to read how vision in Durrell's novels negatively establishes a fictionalisation of gender and sexual difference by privileging the phallogocentric position. Reading Žižek's assertion, one could conclude that it is the object, in this case the female characters in the novels, which has come to believe in its position as lack. This belief in lack also references the idea propounded by Berger and Silverman of internalised female surveillance, which enforces an assumption of the role of object and spectacle. Interwoven into the excess and violence of fetishism, and the manner in which its ideologies and structures are maintained, reside the prevalent Gothic elements, which I suggest permeate Durrell's tetralogy. Objectified as fetish, Justine, Leila and Liza can be considered complicit in their own production as Other and embodied lack.

The three characters under discussion, Justine, Leila and Liza, I will suggest, become, at one time or another, represented as parts in the form of hands, voice, blindness and clothing with its associated decorative accompaniments: rings, brooches and earrings. Writing on Durrell's novels, Cecily Mackworth makes the comment that: "Mr. Durrell has a sharp eye for women's clothes, and dresses each of his heroines exactly as she would have dressed" (1964: 27). The idea of the author as Pygmalion, constructing his female characters like paper dolls and supplying them with the clothes in which they would have wanted to dress, is a rather interesting idea in relation to Durrell's tetralogy. The eye for women's

clothing with which Durrell is attributed seems to indicate a fixation and the dresses described as worn by his female characters could be regarded as metonymically moulding them as fetish. But, as noted, the fetishisation of clothing is also a prominent feature within Gothic fiction allowing for the articulation of the bodies of the female characters through certain thematic concerns such as imprisonment, spectacle, monstrosity and disguise (Spooner 2004: 4-5). Engaging with the concept of the fetish and its imbrication with the gaze and the Gothic allows me to reveal, in more detail, how the narrators and focalisers phallogcentrically construct the female characters as metaphorical gothicised representations within the *Quartet*.

### **Masquerade and Spectacle - Justine**

#### **Fur and Sequins**

In the novel *Justine*, the first snapshot memory image Darley presents concerns Justine. In this visualisation she appears as an erotically glamorous spectacle: “Dressed in a sheath of silver drops, holding her magnificent fur at her back as a peasant holds his coat – her long forefinger hooked through the tag” (J: 17). Darley focuses only on her clothing in an act that denies her anatomy. Initially, the sheath of silver drops glitteringly catches his eye. The word “sheath” indicates that the dress tightly fits her body making it desirable, an excess of sparkle and spectacle. Yet, Darley does not go on to describe the shape of her body, which remains an absence. The presence of the word “sheath”, with its denotation of a covering for a knife, explains this occlusion of the physical. This is an indirect reference to the threat of castration posed by Justine’s hidden body, which, unconsciously, Darley perceives to be a dangerously phallic object. Darley’s gaze quickly moves to take in the accessory so carelessly carried by Justine over her shoulder – her “magnificent fur”. This fur is not only an expensive fashionable commodity, but also a fetish acting as a symbolic substitute for her pubic hair (Freud 1977: 68). Fur represents the uncanny, Gothic doubling of the fetish and, even as it recalls the traumatic vision of castration, it conceals and takes its place, so that absence and presence function simultaneously. An outstanding example of fur as fetish, presented with irony, is Meret Oppenheim’s *Object (Breakfast in Fur)* from 1936.



Figure 11 Meret Oppenheim: *Object (Breakfast in Fur)*

The attraction and denial of Oppenheim's furred object (an obvious representation of the female sex in the form of an eroticised commodity), playfully, but blatantly, works as a commentary on the relation between the furry cup and saucer and woman as fetish and commodity. The fur covering of the cup lures the fascinated gaze, whilst eliciting a response of denial. This abject desire/repulsion adds an uncanny *frisson* of horror to this object. The cup from which we could normally drink becomes associated with oral and tactile sexual pleasure and the act of imbibing female desire. This fetishised image representing the concavity of lack is projected onto women. At the same time, the phallic spoon can be inserted into the cup. Nevertheless, it remains a part of the cup connected to it by its furry nature. The cup and spoon are joined together in a representation of female sexuality as both lack and phallic.

In a similar manner to Oppenheim's cup, but without humour or irony, the image of Justine's fur is a violent displacement of Darley's desire. The fur is hooked over Justine's long forefinger, which curls into the vaginal opening of the tag in a most phallic manner. This image of Justine has similar connotations to that of Oppenheim's cup and spoon. For Darley, and perhaps for some readers as well, Justine represents female sexuality as both lack and phallic. She assumes the position of phallic mother desired by Darley in the same instant he perceives and recoils from her lack. He acts to displace his desire onto what he can visually possess - the fur coat and the shimmering dress. The deception of vision lies at the heart of this fetishism. This vision constructs Justine as an illusion based on an absence. She is focalised as spectacle and Darley's description of her lived femininity disavows and reduces it to an excessive act of flaunting. In this manner, her clothing becomes the visible surface under which there is nothingness. Consequently, Darley constitutes Justine as an

artificial spectacle of ornamentation and he manipulates her image into one of excess and disguise. In his descriptions of Justine, Durrell uses colour, light, texture, accessories and reflection. There is a textual transformation between one kind of surface and another that adds depth and visual presence to the manner in which she is portrayed. This portrait of Justine is further inflected by the one that Darley offers of her during the carnival in Alexandria.

### **Blood and Phallicism**

During the carnival celebrations that occur in the novel *Balthazar*, Darley presents a vignette of Justine in her

dress (the colour of hare's blood) glowed among the ikons seeming to enjoy the semi-darkness of the candlelight – to feed upon it and give back the glitter of her barbaric jewellery. (B: 166)

Darley does not just describe the colour of the dress as red. Rather, he equates it with the colour of blood and indirectly with fur and a dead male animal. The blood-coloured dress, and its association with the fur of the hare, intimates the abject qualities of death and menstrual blood. These qualities evoke an atmosphere of incipient menace causing Darley's obvious feelings of fascination and subconscious repulsion. The scene is excessive and the initial concentration on the blood colour of the dress is transferred to the "barbaric" nature of the jewellery. Therefore, Justine's clothing and jewellery synecdochically and metonymically stencil abject motifs onto her surface. Presenting her as resembling Sekhmet, the Egyptian goddess of war and death, who is portrayed wearing a blood-coloured dress, the focalisation of Justine is saturated with a violent disavowal of castration and death.

The word "ikons" adds a further religious overtone to the depiction of Justine. In a more general semiotic sense, an icon is also a sign that links to another signifier through a similarity of appearance, thereby establishing a nexus with the metonymic aspects of fetishism. Justine is the icon of Woman and as such representative of the feminine as both dangerous and desirable. Images are different for every viewer, which means Darley sees Justine in a different manner to the image she might evoke for the reader. I suggest that in this description of Justine, Durrell establishes the subjective nature of Darley's visual

interpretations as well as those of the reader. This difference ensures that alternate images or signs are palimpsestically intertwined both inside and outside the frame of Durrell's description. Visually, Justine could be a figure from one of Michelangelo de Merisi da Caravaggio's paintings, in this instance *Judith Beheading Holofernes* (1598-99).

The description of Justine's dark red dress, enhanced by the warm glow of the candlelight, evokes the dramatic lighting and use of velvety, vermilion folds of fabric in Caravaggio's paintings.



Figure 12 Michelangelo de Merisi da Caravaggio: *Judith Beheading Holofernes*

Bal's challenging reading of Caravaggio's painting of Judith concentrates on the blood spurting from the neck of Holofernes and the red fabric dangling about him. She points out that blood is iconic because it relates the blood to the paint. The paint and blood are directly associated with Holofernes' body and symbolically link passion and violence (1994a: 11-12). In Justine's case, the blood iconically relates to her dress as fetish that is, in turn, synecdochically related to her body.

For Kristeva, the image of Judith is one of merciless castrating femininity – that of the all-powerful phallic mother (2010: 76). Judith's use of the sword, a phallic symbol par excellence, stolen from Holofernes, punishes him through the ultimate castration – a detaching of his head from his shoulders. The obvious target of visual fear present in this painting is the usurpation of phallic power by the woman, the male now being the object of lack through his beheading. Holofernes is an object and his decapitation is an act of violent vengeance. I hold that the cut on Holofernes's neck, with its strange flow of blood, can be related to the wound of the female genitals and menstrual blood. Seen in this manner,

Holofernes becomes the sexual other and the lack, associated with the female body, is transferred onto his male body. Woman, the symbol of castration and the fetish, has in startling fashion revealed to the male viewer what Silverman indicates he constantly disavows about himself: that he is subject to lack (1988: 15).

The image of Justine is less problematic than that of Judith because she is not seen violently and actively killing a man. Rather, in her blood-coloured dress, she merely acts as a metaphorical representative of the killing or castrating powers attributed to the conceptualisation of the phallic woman. Therefore, Darley's ambivalent vision of Justine is one of a spectacle of desirability and a dangerous threat. Both Caravaggio's painting and Durrell's textual image contain elements of the Gothic, whether the sensuous and excessive folds of the materials in Caravaggio's work, the blood red dress of Justine, the wonderful chiaroscuro lighting in both painting and text, or the overt violence of the painting and the potential violence in the text; in all this striking excess, the Gothic is palpably present. The most notable feature remains the theme of castration, which, in the text, Darley has attempted to disavow by initially displacing his fear onto Justine's dress. He then focuses on the piece of barbaric jewellery that adorns her one hand.

### **Barbaric Jewellery and Murder**

Justine's piece of jewellery, a ring, is symbolically associated with the ikons because both belong to the history of the Byzantine Empire. Elements of the ancient past become patently and tangibly extant in the present and this invasion adds darker, palimpsestuous drives of desire to the scene. The ring is the focus of this transgressive lust in its depiction of the ecstasy of Pan raping a goat. Repelling and attracting attention with its violence, the ring is evocative of animalistic sexual transgression, qualities it metonymically transfers onto the surface of Justine's body. In *Balthazar*, this ring will result in the violent murder of a minor character, the homosexual socialite Toto de Brunel.

During the carnival, Toto dons the ring at the request of Justine. His murder, brought about through a misconstrued erotic advance, is an inversion of the Biblical murder of Sisera by Jael found in the Biblical book of *Judges*. There are similarities between Judith beheading Holofernes and Jael's killing of Sisera. In both cases, the males are generals of armies that

threaten to destroy the women's people and homes. Both women slay the males whilst they are asleep and both women inflict death to the head of the man (the rational and Symbolic) with obvious phallic and castrating symbolism. In the story of Jael, Jael invites the opposing army captain Sisera into her tent, and once he is asleep, she rams a tent peg through his temple. Toto de Brunel is killed by having a hatpin rammed through his temple by Narouz, Nessim's brother. Narouz believes it is Justine, his sister-in-law, who is making sexual advances to him based on his seeing the ring. Durrell is cleverly alluding to the deceptive nature of vision and perception.

The ring as object stands out as a deceptive identifying feature and, in the process, becomes the metaphoric element of displaced violence. Symbolically the ring enacts the role of phallic destroyer, the metaphor for the sword and the tent peg. It does not decapitate the victim, but is the conduit for a death associated with the head. An object not only seen as representing perverse sexual eroticism, it masks the fear of eroticism and of castration. Perceived to be a horrific artefact, it is turned into a fetish and referred to as "Justine's unlucky ring" (B: 184) or, as she refers to it, "my dreadful ring" (182). Superstitious fear and horror, combined with an almost reverential note in the use of the word "dreadful", makes the ring an object in excess of its capacities as death bringer. The grotesque dreadfulness emphasises the ring's fetishistic attributes in its association with Justine's body.

For Darley, the ring becomes "the eburine ring of my lover which I could not see even now without a pang" (B: 185). The word eburine is an unusual one. In the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles*, the word is spelt "eburin" and it is indicated that this is a substance made of ivory or bone dust mixed with ox blood or albumen subjected to pressure (1980: 626). The symbolic relevance of this word becomes apparent when Darley sees Justine and Nessim dancing together, Justine's "shapely hand on his shoulder still wore the great ring taken from the tomb of a Byzantine youth" (B: 200). Bones, theft, blood and death are all part of the ring's history, qualities that are transferred to Justine in her role as powerful castratrix. Being contiguous to Justine's body, the ring focuses attention on her hand that, in turn, becomes the single, eroticised part that comes to stand in for the whole of her body. Justine's hands are equally significant to Clea who paints them, and this

painting establishes the dominant and obsessive image Darley presents of Justine's gloved hands.

### **The Fetish of the Black Glove**

Darley is fixated on Justine's black gloved hand. This visual obsession gives concrete shape to Bal's view that fetishism can be regarded as a visual experience with a strong eroticised attachment to a single object (2001: 277). In this instance, Darley's visual attachment to the black gloves ensures they become the metonymical element that stands in for Justine. This highlights the idea of a clothing accessory being a surface that opens up the body for inscription in discourse. The eroticised gloves become temporary fetishes that fragment the image of Justine's body; much in the manner of photographer Germaine Krull's work entitled *Nude Woman wearing Gloves* (1935).



*Figure 13 Germaine Krull: Nude Woman Wearing Gloves*

In this photograph, a nude woman wearing long, black leather gloves with an inlaid diamanté patterning has her left gloved arm wrapped across her upper torso. The middle finger of the gloved left hand, just above her exposed right breast, gently indents the skin just near her right armpit. The triangulation of the left arm fragments her body into two, as does the bottom frame of the photograph, which slices cross her slightly angled hips just above the pubis.

Her right arm is bent at an angle and her right black-gloved hand has its fingers splayed across her throat. The top frame of the photograph slices her head off just above her upper

lip, which adds to the fragmentation of her body. Her thick, medium-length, wavy hair curls around her ear and its folds add a sensuous, natural texture to the image. This sensuous wavy line is picked up in the diamanté patterns in the gloves. The image is at once sexually provocative and violent with its overtones of sadism in the fetish of the gloves. The gloves act as a distancing device, one that focuses the viewer's gaze onto the body of the woman. However, the body in this photograph is not necessarily only for male visual pleasure. Krull undertook many lesbian photographic studies. There is an abject attraction and repulsion about the eroticism in this image, which possesses a certain Gothic atmosphere. The monochromatic nature of the image enhances this feeling of uncanniness. The ghost shadow of the glove over the woman's chest and her out of focus lower body disavows her lack and sex. The entirety of her fragmented body becomes sexualised as fetish through its metonymical relationship with the gloves. As Silverman has suggested, the strange otherness of Krull's nude might pose a direct threat to male subjectivity (1988: 18). In order to avoid its threat, a specular distance needs to be maintained from the image.

In Darley's case, he achieves this distance from Justine's body by fetishising her black gloves, whose agency is like those in the Krull photograph. Darley's specular desire adopts the gloves as a fetish image to act as a separating boundary and obviate his fear of loss thereby retaining the phallogocentric binary structure of sexual difference. Justine's identity comes to reside on the gothicised surface of her body and her perceived alignment of herself with the object of the ring and the surface spectacle of her clothing is indicative of her love for an object connected to a sense of self. This seems emphasised by her urgent demand to regain her ring after it becomes police evidence in the investigation of Toto de Brunel's death. If Justine's sense of self is located in the object of the ring, then the attributes of the ring constructs Justine's identity in a manner that seems to confirm Grosz's argument that a woman's investment in an object seems an effort to disavow her own castration (1995a: 149).

Justine's investment in an object as a means of disavowal is apparent in Darley's description of her relationship with the idol that hangs on the wall of her bedroom:

On the far wall there is an idol the eyes of which are lit from within by electricity, and it is to this graven mentor that Justine acts her private role. Imagine a torch thrust through the throat of a skeleton to light up the vault of

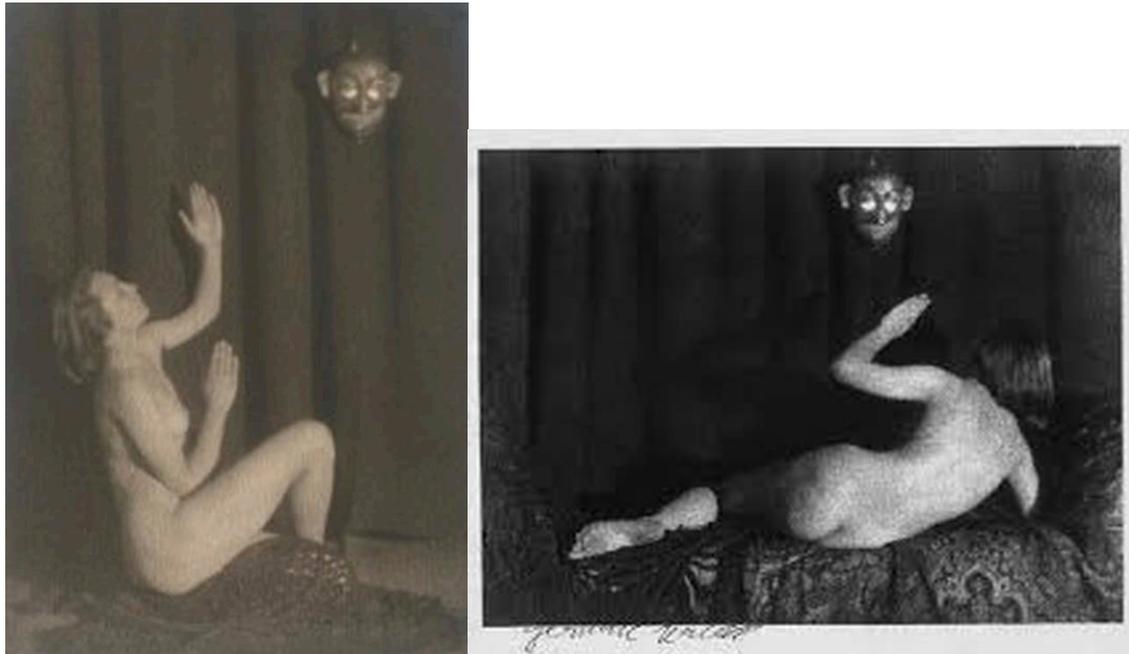
the skull from which the eyeless sockets ponder. Shadows thrown on the arch of the cranium flap there in imprisonment. When the electricity is out of order a stump of candle is soldered to the bracket: Justine then, standing naked on tip-toes to push a lighted match into the eyeball of the God. Immediately the furrows of the jaw spring into relief, the shaven frontal bone, the straight rod of the nose. She has never been tranquil unless this visitant from distant mythology is watching over her nightmares (J: 120)

This is an object that Justine appears to over-value, but which possesses little inherent worth in itself. It seems, in its otherness, to ground Justine's identity, functioning as a fetish. Mulvey, writing on the nature of the fetish, indicates:

Fetishism, broadly speaking, involves the attribution of self-sufficiency and autonomous powers to a manifestly "man" derived object. It is therefore dependent on the ability to disavow what is known and replace it with belief and the suspension of disbelief. (1993: 7)

The idol fetish is possibly Justine's manner of disavowing her lack. It acts as a substitute for what she perceives is missing and becomes an object of almost religious belief and worship. Justine's devotion to it suspends logical belief, instead taking on overtones of mystical primitivism.

Darley's act of envisioning the scene ensures concentration is devoted to the surface of the fetish creating a space that allows for what Mulvey has called a translation into an image (12). In an interesting series of photographs of Berthe Krull entitled *Aktmappe* (1923), Germaine Krull places Berthe before a very similar idol mask.



*Figure 14 Germaine Krull: Aktmappe*

The photographs range from the woman making an offering to the idol, kneeling before it in an ecstatic pose and, as seen in the images above, sitting or lying before it with her hands raised in a strange form of praise.

Like in the Krull photographs, the presence of the idol dominates the space of Justine's bedroom. In similar manner to the ring, it brings an eerie note to the space of the room. With its primitive face, it is reminiscent of ancient occult rituals. The shadows surrounding it seem to be emanating from its cranium like ghostly souls trying to escape the torment of the tomb and death. These shadows are the leftovers of Justine's nightmares, a part of the woman herself, projected onto the fetish who acts as her double. Justine prefers "the companionship of shadows which invaded life and filled it with a new resonance" (J: 64), an attraction to the supernatural with its promise of the return of the past. Uncanny spectral presences haunt the room, surrounding Justine and enveloping her corporeality. Immune to this sense of menace, Justine believes in the protective power of her idol and her ability to communicate with it.

Projecting onto the fetish what she terms her "Noble Self" (J: 120), the idol stands in for the idealised goodness and morals Justine would like to exhibit. Art theorist W.J.T. Mitchell, examining fetishism in Marx's theory of ideology and commodity, considers the fetish or idol: "an object of superstition, fantasy, and obsessive behavior" (1986: 162). Idolatry is the

result of a worshipper projecting their consciousness. Mitchell goes on to conclude that this form of fetish becomes a “specific form of a projection of masculinity, a projection which results in the symbolic castration or feminisation of the fetishist” (194). Based on Mitchell’s interpretation, I posit that Justine’s fetishising of the idol works in the reverse. An act of rebellion against her own castration, this fetishising of the idol becomes a complicit visual seduction that reifies Justine into conformity with masculine castration anxiety.

Justine’s need to validate her self-worth results in her phallicising her own body, which Grosz considers certain women do in order to believe that they are, or possess, the phallus (1995a: 150). Grosz discusses the plausibility of female fetishism and disavowal. In this discussion, Grosz outlines the Freudian object-choices related to female disavowal of castration: the ‘narcissistic’ type and the hysteric (1995a: 150). For my purposes, I shall specifically explore the narcissistic type and its relevance to the portrayal in Darley’s memories of the perceived identity of Justine. In recreating his memories, the representation of Justine’s narcissism will act to render her whole body an object of desire. A surface of spectacle, her behaviour becomes associated with what is termed female masquerade.

### **Masquerade, Mirrors and Transvestism**

The narcissistic woman makes herself the object of desire through the displacement of the phallus onto the entirety of her body. In order to retain her position as object of desire, she indulges in what Grosz has called artifice, appearance and dissimulation (1995a: 150). These are all tricks visibly indulged in by Justine who caters to the spectator, whether wearing her “sheath dress of silver drops”, or walking into Darley’s flat in

a white frock and shoes, and carrying a rolled towel under one arm with her handbag. The magnificence of her dark skin and hair glowed out of all this whiteness with an arresting quickness. (J: 74).

She is an over-determined representation of the female body as an object of visual desire. Her different costumes act as signs that mask her femininity and thus present the illusion of feminine appearance. Exploiting her femininity to seduce both her masculine and feminine lovers, Justine cannily camouflages her repressed masculinity under the guise of excessive

femininity. I propose Justine undertakes this masquerade to ensure she becomes the focal object of desire, thereby attempting to assume the phallus. Her representation becomes one of excess and absence that is tightly bound up with what Grosz has termed the fetishistic masquerade of femininity (1995a: 150).

This masquerade represented by her dress of silver drops, which is reminiscent of the surface of a mirror, parallels her constant narcissistic staring at her own reflection. Adopting the masquerade, I suggest, allows Justine to assume a certain mastery over her image, in a situation where she is the captive of Darley's focalisation. However, her masquerade extends to a form of what Doane refers to as transvestism. Doane discusses how female mastery over her image signals that her bisexuality has been achieved by adopting the pretence that she is Other (1991: 25). In donning costumes with masculine overtones, Justine visibly assumes the image of transvestism as a means to appear other and seize the power of the phallus. This transvestism allows Justine to create what theorist Miriam Hansen terms a "double distancing [of] the representation from its object" (1984: 108).

This distancing is nowhere more apparent than in the scenes in which Justine is represented as "mannish" in her "shark-skin costume" (J: 23), or in Darley's description of her wearing the "familiar velveteen costume – the coat with its deeply cut and slanted pockets and the soft velours hat pulled down over her brows – a schoolgirl's hat: leather jack-boots" (J: 184). A velveteen costume has overtones of the male dandy of the late nineteenth-century decadent movement. The leather jack-boots metonymically impart to her form attributes of the dominatrix, as well as an element of male, militaristic power associated with the Nazis and the coming war that haunts the *Quartet*. She combines this masculine clothing with the very feminine hat pulled down over her brows to hide her eyes. An impassive transvestite, Justine is unavailable while her body's surface is over-valued in a double distancing causing confusion between what feminist theorist Carol-Anne Tyler considers the "being" and the "having" of the phallus (2003: 52). Her transvestism and the flaunting of her transgressive femininity maintain her as the object of the erotic and disavowing gaze. The focalisation of this gaze ensures Justine remains the female-fetish-as-spectacle.

However, Justine's sense of identity remains questionable. Her continual looking at herself in the mirror studying her "own sorrowful, haunted face" (B: 212), indicates how

unstable her self-stylisation really is. Her reflected image is spectral, exposing a haunting absence of identity. In turn, her reflection turns her into surface with no depth. In conversation with her husband Nessim, who complains about the need to “keep on acting a part”, Justine’s reaction is strange: “ah, Nessim! Then I should not know who I was” (234). Justine’s reflection in the numerous mirrors into which she peers returns merely the image of a body worn “as a disguise”, an object feminist theorist Michèle Montrelay considers an excess whose surface is open to inscription (1978: 91; 93). The illusory disguise of the masquerade has resulted in Justine becoming what Doane has referred to as the “decorative layer which conceals a non-identity” (1991: 25), and theorist of the Gothic Jerrold Hogle has called Gothic fakery (2001). Contained inside this emptiness, Justine is a fragmented object of desire. She craves validation from the masculine viewer who, in return, violently projects his own fear of castration back onto her fetishised body. The displacement of her sexuality onto her body’s surface turns her into a spectacle and her effort visually to seduce through masquerade fails to allow her to possess the phallus. Male scopie desire is not denied or deflected but, rather, the masquerade becomes, as Jacqueline Rose has pointed out, “the very definition of femininity precisely because it is constructed with reference to a male sign” (1986: 67). Justine’s need to be the object of male focalisation ensures she falls into the trap of conforming to the very definition of femininity she is trying to subvert. She remains a gendered construct of masculine discourse and point of view.

However, Justine is not alone in being visualised in the position of lack, fetish and spectacle within the masculine discourse and point of view of the tetralogy. In the next section, I plan to examine how the character David Mountolive, as male focaliser in the novel *Mountolive*, represents the character Leila Hosnani as spectacle and fetish. Unlike Darley’s direct representation of Justine, Mountolive’s memories of Leila are distanced through the voice of an external narrator. This distancing technique acts to annul her bodily presence. Her liquid voice and the Gothic veil she assumes are fetish substitutes that conceal the castrating and castrated mother. Leila’s assumption of the mysterious black veil, and its associations with death, becomes the metonymic surface under which her monstrous body is concealed. The voice and the veil, I will demonstrate, reveal and conceal in a visual act of surface and desire that establish Leila as fetishised object.

## Voice and Veil - Leila

### Hands, Voice and Oriental Other

Leila Hosnani is the mother of the male characters Nessim and Narouz and she becomes the lover of David Mountolive, future ambassador to Egypt, the main character of the eponymously entitled novel *Mountolive*. He stays with the Hosnanis as a junior diplomat to further his knowledge of Egypt and improve his Arabic. On first meeting with Leila, Mountolive “hardly looked at her” and yet he still sees that she is wearing “white jodhpurs and a yellow shirt with a scarf. Smooth, small hands were white and ringless” (M: 25). This is rather a detailed description for someone who has “hardly looked”. In focusing on Leila’s clothing and hands, Mountolive deprives her of any interiority in order to disavow his desire. Her clothing and her hands become focal points in the distancing space that exists between Mountolive as subject and Leila as object. As Charles Levin writes on the nature of the fetish:

the interesting thing about a fetish ... is that it is never clear ... whether it is really an object or whether it is part of the self. A fetish ... can be thought of as existing in a free space between the subject and the object (1984: 42).

Mountolive’s framing of the clothing and hands as separate objects of focalisation overdetermines their value as signs and displaces any meaning synecdochically onto the body of Leila. But her clothing and hands are not the objects that really hold Mountolive fascinated; rather it is “the thrilling voice alone that set up odd little vibrations in his heart which he registered but did not wish to study” (M: 25). Mountolive displaces his desire onto Leila’s voice in the use of the adjective “thrilling”, the phrase “little vibrations” and “registered but did not wish to study”. The voice plays in the free space between the subject and the object and so, by placing a sexual overvaluation on the voice, Mountolive appears to deviate from normal sexual desire. Leila’s voice will act throughout as a substitute for her embodied form. This voice will appear within the text of the many letters she sends to him once Mountolive leaves Egypt. For the time that he remains with the Hosnanis on their estate, Leila’s voice is what Mountolive associates with her physical presence.

First heard by the reader and Mountolive as an ethereal voice which “comes laughingly across the variable airs of the lake”, the sound enchants like the call of a siren (M: 17). Kristeva considers laughter to be a powerful force: “one of the numerous pips contained in the symbolic apple’ ... because it designates an irruption of the drives against symbolic prohibition” (1984: 222). Leila’s laughing voice transgresses the control of the Symbolic law of language (Law of the Father) and, defying these laws, fragments masculine discourse through its dangerous closeness to the feminine body. An escape and an act of excess it flouts focalisation and becomes what philosophical theorists Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari have called a destruction of “guilt, law, castration” (1983: 311). If it destroys castration, Leila’s laughter, with its semiotic nature, represents what film theorist Barbara Creed terms the phallic mother (1986: 63). In her role as phallic mother, Leila, like Justine, attempts to deny her castration. However, Leila, in the same manner Justine will, has complied with an arranged marriage described as “a merger between two great companies” (M: 23). She is a commodity and made to conform to phallogentric societal rules. Denied subjectivity, Leila continues to be an object; only her laughter allows her to resist masculine subjugation. Mountolive’s fixation on Leila’s voice lets him disavow his desire and castration anxiety by substituting her voice as fetish, thereby controlling her image.<sup>31</sup>

Silverman indicates that castration is a divide that separates the speaking subject from the subject it speaks about, and that this is most pronounced at the site of the voice, which is the instrument of the cry and the word (1988: 86). Silverman further argues that it is the mother’s all encompassing voice that heals all lacks, or is rejected as abject and a threat to the phallic function of the Symbolic. This rejection promises discursive mastery (86). Mountolive is irrationally attracted to Leila’s voice, the voice he associates with the mother and healing. Leila herself regards Mountolive as her “only man-child” emphasising the almost incestuous mother-child relationship that exists between them (M: 25). By fetishising Leila’s voice, Mountolive is trying to fuse with a mother figure, heal his own disavowed lack, as well as reject her voice as abject thereby establishing his Symbolic mastery.

The perception of Leila’s “cool honeyed voice” or “deep sweet contralto” organises the world around Mountolive and introduces him to Egypt and its language (M: 21). Like a

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<sup>31</sup> See Hélène Cixous’s work *The Laugh of the Medusa* (1976) where she writes, “There’s no room for her if she’s not a he. If she’s a her- she, it’s in order to smash everything, to shatter the framework of institutions, to blow up the law, to break up the “truth” with laughter” (1976: 888). This shattering the law, or the symbolic of language, is also prevalent in the work of Julia Kristeva, particularly her books *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1984) and *Desire in Language* (1980).

mother, Leila provides Mountolive with entrance to the Symbolic, only to be rejected and constructed as the feminine Other. According to literary theorist Edward Said, Western male identity was defined against the Oriental because the East was a “contrasting image, idea, personality, experience” (1979: 1-2). The perceived difference was instrumental in European culture and literary tradition’s envisioning of the other as abject and alien. Gary Kelly writing on the alien nature of Orientalism and its establishment as other, has indicated that this figuration has acted as a powerful element in the masculine portrayal of sexual and social power, and has associations with Gothicism (1989: 3). The external narrator and Mountolive exhibit these same responses to Egypt and Leila conflating them as representations of Oriental otherness within the story world. Indicative of the hegemonic power the Western male imposed on figures of irrational and dangerous femininity, the representation of Leila partakes of this othering.

Consequently, Leila is focalised as “beautiful enigma” possessing “perfect simplicity of spirit”; an “extravagant nature” and one dependent on “compromise” (M: 23). Leila is portrayed as possessing these lesser Oriental qualities of beauty in the description of her as an enigma, simple, extravagant and pliable. In Western masculine terms, these attributes equate to a dishonourable untrustworthiness. The above-mentioned characteristics, I propose, fulfil the role of what has been termed the Oriental Gothic. This mode is visibly present in the narrative of *Mountolive*. This fantasy creation of the East fetishistically denies the threatening nature of its perceived otherness and has led to what Joseph Boone, discussing Edward Said’s work on Orientalism, considers the consistent feminisation of the East, leading to it being deemed open to sexual conquest and penetration (2001: 47). Leila’s surface, like that of the Egyptian landscape, is metonymically overlaid with Oriental themes and is both fetishised and gothicised in a process of othering.<sup>32</sup>

### **Hybridic Dark Continent**

Portrayed through both external and internal focalisation Leila becomes the stereotypical, enigmatic Eastern woman, the Freudian “dark continent”. An imaginative geography, upon which both Mountolive and the external narrator overlay a fantasy spatial mapping, Leila,

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<sup>32</sup> For another approach to the other of colonial discourse and how this other is fetishised see Homi Bhabha (1994: 66-84).

like the Egyptian landscape, is visualised as a primeval object. Mountolive essentialises Leila through his ideas of national, sexual, racial and gender identity fostered by his Occidental masculine perceptions. The mapping of Leila's body represents a phallogentric strategy of domination and control. Mountolive and the external narrator are active visual agents that show every appearance of being voyeuristic, sadistic and fetishistic. They remain in control of the way in which the story world is presented. Consequently, their representation of Leila conveniently fashions her as the passive, masochistic, narcissistic feminine object associated with spectacle and masquerade.<sup>33</sup>

Leila and the landscape are figured, in accordance with Gillian Rose's suggestion, as unknown objects of male desire and fear where the representation of Woman and nature is a suspension of the fear of lack whilst voyeurism with its implied distance supports the masculine founding of subjectivity (cited in Nash 1996: 155). Artfully constructed, Leila provides the foil against which Mountolive defines his Western masculine identity. But her beauty and sexuality induce in Mountolive an uncanny, passive stillness, which is combined with a feeling of icy coldness: "still as a needle, speechless, thoughtless, taking that strangely youthful body in his arms almost without desire or regrets; his eyes closed then like a man standing under an icy waterfall" (M: 20). Leila holds him in thrall, paralyses him. As a result, Mountolive's behaviour in her presence exhibits every indication of frigid horror. Described as being "almost without desire" and experiencing a cold liquid fear, Mountolive's ambivalence indicates his unconscious fear of an incestuous return to the fetishised pre-Symbolic mother, who is both castrated and castrating. His passive stillness and lack of rational thought show him caught in the enchantment and horror of what he considers the monstrous feminine otherness of Leila's Oriental body. Instead, Mountolive closes his eyes in a 'see no evil' manner in order to disavow the threat of Leila's uncanny lack. Instead, this monstrous lack is synecdochically deflected onto her "strangely youthful body".

This deflection results in Mountolive visualising Leila as "obedient and pliant, loyal as a finely-bred animal" (M: 23), a "gallant creature" (47), possessing "equivocal dark eyes" (27), and having a tongue like an "Egyptian cat" (28). Overwriting her with these traits Mountolive objectifies Leila's outer form, reifying it to conform to the abject Gothic body, rather in the manner of René Magritte's painting entitled *Discovery/La Découverte* (1928):

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<sup>33</sup> See Ranjana Khanna on the Freudian concept of the 'dark continent' (2003).



Figure 15 Rene Magritte: *Discovery (la Découverte)*

In this painting, Magritte fuses a female body with wood. The stripes of the wood grain might resemble tiger stripes that snake up the figure's right side from belly to collarbone, then down from her shoulder. Her right hand, like a striped cat's paw, leads into the large upward lines centred around the rosette shape on her right flank and buttock. Stripes creep up her inner left thigh and down the inner side of her left arm. The right half of her face is crosshatched where the left side is lit up, which creates a mask-like effect. Her torso reclines sensually backwards against the rectilinear dark background, thereby inviting the objectifying voyeuristic gaze.

The curves of her human form and their metamorphosis into the inanimate/animate establish a fantastical hybridity. An uncanny mystery and ambiguity is contained in this female figure, which hovers between body and thing, self and other, an admixed creature (Artschwager 1991: 10). The title of the painting stresses the transformation of this female form, predicting its change into something entirely inanimate - a wooden doll. Philosopher Theodor Adorno, in his *Looking back on Surrealism*, indicates that the paintings of the Surrealists were object-fetishes on which the libido was fixated (1977: 223). In his study of the image of women in the work of the Surrealists, Robert Belton considers woman not to be an autonomous being in the works of this art movement. Rather, he has argued that Woman is a linguistic construct, a passive entity that acts as the vehicle for the conception of the fetish. Belton has further argued that Woman's representation is that of a reified symbol which substitutes for intended meaning, in this instance castration anxiety (1995: xxxiv).

I contend that Durrell depicts Leila in a fashion similar to the woman in Magritte's painting. Focalised as a hybrid creature, she is gothically embodied to be part-animal part-women and therefore a lesser and abject being. In many ways, Leila conforms to the Surrealist depiction of the female as fetish. She has no autonomy in Durrell's textual construction of her. She remains passive and a symbol for the installation of the fetish as a disavowal of Mountolive's castration anxiety. The animalistic attributes assigned to her by Mountolive turn her into a non-human hybrid figure similar to that depicted by Magritte. She, too, is the enigma, the uncanny body that resides in the liminal and abject space between thing and other. Durrell does not allow Mountolive, or the external narrator, to accredit her with any form of self. Thus, Leila is forced to remain entrapped in her abhuman physicality.

The sound of Leila's sonorous voice continues to enthrall Mountolive, but Silverman, discussing the female voice, has indicated that it is always discursively impotent and, ultimately, silent (1988: 94). According to Mulvey, the silencing of woman happens because she is "tied to her place as bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning" (2006a: 343). The authority for the meaning in Durrell's novel, *I hold*, resides in the focalisation of Mountolive constructed by means of the external narrative voice. Together they turn Leila into a passive textual concept, a silent voice possessing no words. Yet, Leila's voice will hauntingly follow Mountolive when he leaves Egypt. Emptied out into the spaces between the words in her letters, Durrell effectively silences her physicality.

### **Letters and Romantic Punishments**

Though mention is made of an extensive exchange of letters, few details are provided in the story world's narrative. Leila seems to fade, to become disembodied, disempowered, caught between the leaves of Symbolic discourse that acts to silence her. Language disavows her motherly role, and her position as an object of visual pleasure. This takes away any agency she might have exhibited in the discourse of the novel. Leila's letters are imputed by the narrator to want to "possess" Mountolive, with their "hungry", "ardent" (M: 51) style containing a "touch of the vampire" (54). The words "hungry" and "ardent" are curious when used in connection with written discourse. They are active words denoting human emotional drives that semiotically irrupt through the limits of the rationality and logic of the

Symbolic. These words emphasise Leila's delineation by the narrator as a vampire with their connotations of consumption. This mosaic of voracious and dangerous attributes fashions Leila into a body that holds the promise of castration and death. Visualised as a vampire, doubling Justine's similar depiction, Leila becomes a monstrosity. This monstrosity is visible across the surface of her body when she is subject to what the external narrator terms a "romantic punishment" (57). This punishment takes the form of "confluent smallpox" (58), which is hardly a romantic affliction, but, as in Pierre Choderlos de Laclos' 1782 novel *Les liaisons dangereuses*, one sent to punish a female character for expressing her feminine sexuality and excessive desire.

The sanctimonious manner in which the external narrative voice condemns Leila is because of her perceived narcissism, and the illness is gleefully termed "the cruellest remedy for human vanity" (58). This sentence is almost Shakespearean in tone and it references the theme of vanity so common in Renaissance art, where women were depicted looking at themselves in a mirror. Linked to the *vanitas* theme is the concept that beauty is ephemeral and ends in decay and death. This physical ephemerality and destructive decay fills the vivid description of the metamorphosing of "what remained of her once celebrated beauty" (58). There is a definitive gloating nastiness in both the tone of the voice and its invasive focalisation. I propose that Durrell's narrative representation betrays an ingrained sadistic misogyny, which acts to disembody Leila, whilst moralistically implying she deserves the cruelty of this punishment. In effect, Leila's disfigurement becomes fetishised because it denies her desirability and in the process her body. After this horrible transformation, she describes the terrain of her face filled with "pot-holes and landslides – like a familiar landscape blown up" (58). Her bodily surface has become part of a damaged and disfigured landscape. The words "blown up" could represent a photographic image, or a terrain blown apart by war. In fact, a photographic image of the landscape associated with the First World War is elicited with the violent destruction and cratering of the physical terrain viewed from the air. Magnifying the image of her face leads to it becoming visually distorted and grainy. Trying to enter into her reflection in the mirror, Leila's surveillance of its surface denies her any interior identity or depth; she remains a pitted and scarred surface irrecoverably disfigured and grotesque - "a hag" (58).

## Gothic Veils and Monstrousness

No longer beautiful, Leila hides behind the “black veils such as poor people wear”, believing “the veils will free” her (M: 58-59). Buried alive under the surface of the fabric covering her disfigured corporeality, Leila secrets the deformation of her physical being behind the Gothic veil that becomes, what Catherine Spooner, in her work on gothicised bodies, has called, “the bearer of mystery (and of terror); what lies behind it is (literally) immaterial” (2004: 6). Leila has literally disappeared and become the threat of the nothingness that hides beneath the surface of the veil or shroud. Confronted with an image that negates her identity in the narrative, Leila internalises what John Berger has described as the condemnatory and normative judgement of the implicit male gaze (1972: 40). She castrates herself by hiding the surface of her body from this implied gaze and allows the veil to metonymically occupy the place of the fetish and mysteriously mask the site of her monstrousness.

The illness also alters her voice, so Leila resorts to textually expressing her thoughts in the semiotically transgressive voice of rhyme through which she bitterly parodies her assumption of the veil in lines adapted from the poet Andrew Marvell’s *To His Coy Mistress*,

The veil’s a fine and private place:  
But none, I think, do there embrace.

The lines emphasise the loss of sexual desire associated with the taking of the veil and the implied assumption of the life of a nun. The hints of death from Marvell’s poem remain, but Leila’s grave has become that of the veil. The tomb of the veil, like that of dead lovers, ends sexual desire. This parody shows the veil to be a protective device screening Leila’s still living, but monstrous body from the eroticised desire of the gaze. Doane has indicated that the screening nature of the veil raises the question of what can and cannot be seen (1991: 46). In Leila’s case, the veil’s major function seems to be to conceal the secret of her disintegrated beauty and bodily decay. Hidden in this encompassing black veil, Leila becomes an indiscernible figure, who would need to be uncovered to be discovered. The agonising nature of this snippet of poetry in relation to Leila’s engaging veil with its metonymic relationship to the body and death evokes the image of *Veiled Lady (Purity)* (1717-1725) by Antonio Corradini.



*Figure 16 Antonio Corradini: Veiled Lady (Purity)*

The face of Corradini's woman is veiled in gossamer thin folds of sculpted marble, whose transparency, though diaphanous, still makes the veil appear stifling and torturous. The marmoreal nature of the marble hints at death and petrification. The face of the figure is semi-visible, a presence that is a non-presence; an object that is there but hidden. This woman, who personifies purity, is mysterious. Kristeva, writing about this sculpture, suggests, "the mystery resides in the emergence and extinction of representation" (2000: 90). Kristeva, like feminist and queer theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, indicates that the concealment of the body attracts the gaze and incites desire. Acting as an additional surface layer, the veil eliminates an interior depth and reduces everything to a surface, which is both absent and accessible which, according to Doane, represents the embodiment of pure form (1991: 56).

Leila's veil produces her as a gothicised surface that is both mysteriously absent and present. The physical, tangible nature of her body disappears and allows her to be visualised only through the reflecting surfaces of the mirror and the page. Like the claustrophobic but translucent folds of the sculpture's veil, Leila is similarly suffocated and contained by her veil. Both veils simultaneously allow and deny vision, which evokes the contradictory desires of fascination and uncanny repulsion. The title of the sculpture "Purity" perfectly embodies the parody of the poem's lines as it denies sexual desire, but still contains an enigmatic, erotic secret held within its folds. Doane has indicated that fetishism relies on the gaze being "consistently displaced in relation to the horror of absence, this gaze also aligns or misaligns itself with the body of a woman" (1991: 57). By assuming the veil to hide her

disfigurement, Leila ensures that the focalising gaze within the narrative is displaced onto the veil as fetish. This displacement means that the horror of what might lurk underneath is disavowed. Metonymically and synecdochically, the veil acts as the visual replacement of her body.

Pursewarden, on meeting this veiled presence, writes to Mountolive that Leila is “an odd imperious bundle of a woman in black, heavily veiled ... a parched voice ... of a desert father or desert sister” (M: 118). These audio-visual observations closely match Mountolive’s own thoughts of Leila, “draped in black like a nun” (146). I would argue, in line with Doane, that Leila’s veil creates an uncertainty of sexuality because it calls into question the nature of vision with regards to the visible form (1991: 46). Hidden by the veil, Leila seems to transcend any notion of gender identity, but, according to Kosofsky Sedgwick’s interpretation of the veil’s qualities, it “very often hides nothing, or death, or, in particular, some cheat that means absence and substitution” (1986: 257-258). Donning the veil allows Leila to hide her double wound and to mask what Robert Kiely terms “the reversal of the medieval tale of the ‘loathly lady’” (1972: 112). This establishes what Laura Mulvey terms the “enchantress/hag” dichotomy (1991: 147), whereby Leila’s form, instead of transforming into an enchantingly beautiful object when the veil is lifted, remains the physically repulsive hag.

This “imperious bundle” in black is the focalised object of Balthazar, the external narrator, Mountolive, Pursewarden and inevitably also the reader. I have examined how the male characters visualise, interpret and provide the perceptions from which Leila is uncovered and then concealed. She is a representation of the slanted meanings and perceptions assigned to her, where her voice is controlled whilst her letters oblige her to act in a manner that Silverman has indicated is to “speak a particular psychic ‘reality’ on command” (1988: 63). On Mountolive’s return to Egypt, he undertakes a final meeting with Leila during which he rejects her. This rejection is based on a combination of horror at her appearance as well as a need to discard a past he feels is empty of meaning. He has found someone else to assume the role of visual fetish object - Liza Pursewarden, the sister of Mountolive’s colleague and friend Pursewarden. Pursewarden is an intimate of all the main characters in the *Quartet* and is always referred to by his surname, a very English affectation. On a visit to London Mountolive has a meeting with Pursewarden, who brings

his sister along with him. In the final section of this chapter, I examine the manner in which the character-focalisers Mountolive and Pursewarden, through their separate focalising gazes, mould Liza as a specular construct onto which they project their fear of castration and lack, thereby establishing her image as fetish. This focalisation, I will argue, metonymically maps Liza's feminine form with Gothic motifs. These range from the clothing she wears, to the dark blackness of her hair; from her voice to how her blindness is textually and visually used to construct her as monstrous other.

### **Blind Medusa - Liza Pursewarden**

#### **Snow, Shawls and Strange Beauty**

Against the backdrop of a snowy London landscape, Mountolive encounters Liza's stark beauty for the first time. In a description supplied by the external narrator, the reader is told how Liza's "brilliant tartan shawl with a great white brooch" arrests Mountolive's gaze (M: 61). This vibrant piece of clothing, which the reader might imagine as Stuart red tartan, seems a prominent visual patch of colour in the landscape. Mountolive and Liza's brother, Pursewarden, both focus upon this bright patch. As an alternate focaliser in *Mountolive*, Pursewarden will later remember her "dressed in her old tartan shawl" (162). The continual return to the shawl provides access into the manner in which Liza is focalised. A surface detail, the shawl assumes an importance that imparts Liza's figure with certain characteristics. Mountolive's vision of her seems to fix her into a painting of bygone times when the tartan was symbolic of the Jacobite rebellion, and a ghostly historical past infiltrates the scene. The brooch, whose white colour and size attract attention, enhances the striking textured patch of the shawl.

The visualisation of the brooch and the piece of clothing are detailed aspects that, in her consideration of fetishism, Bal has argued act to substitute for the penis and become valued for their contiguity with the body (1994a: 22). Liza's brooch and shawl are metonymically fetishes, and act to disavow her otherness and lack. The shawl, much like Leila's veil, hides Liza's body and makes it an absence, thereby making her adequate to masculine erotic needs and fantasies. Mountolive and Pursewarden's focalisation on the shawl and the brooch allow these surface objects to detract and annul Liza's physical body.

Instead, the wholeness of her body is fragmented through its definition by the red patch of her shawl and the large, white brooch. Spooner, in her book on how the Gothic body is fashioned, indicates that clothing acts as a “fetishized boundary to the body that ultimately forestalls its penetration from the outside” (2004: 42). This device defers insight into how the surface of the body is perceived, because it functions to screen the body from the focalising gaze. The desire of the observer causes certain fragmented parts of Liza’s body to be over-determined, thus her face, hair, hands, voice and blindness become fetishised and eroticised visual synecdoches.

In Mountolive’s initial sighting of Liza, she is encircled and illuminated with “the warm lamplight splashed upon her broad pale face with its helmet of dark curling hair” (M: 61). The light provides a golden tone highlighting Liza’s face, rather like the tenebristic light in the George de la Tour painting *Magdalen with the smoking Flame* (c. 1640).



*Figure 17 George de la Tour: Magdalen with the smoking Flame*

In this painting, the light emanates from a single candle. The tenebristic nature of the painting establishes a mystery and an ambiguity to a scene of extreme simplicity. The figure sits gazing into the solitary flame of the candle. She appears to be musing or contemplating something to which the viewer will never have access. The single point of light reduces the painting to a surface that appears flattened. Moreover, the figure is entirely static. However, this stillness does not prohibit the viewer from paying attention to certain details picked out by the light. The left side of the painting is immersed in darkness that acts as a contouring device, which ensures that the figure and the candle become the focal points of the painting.

The dark hair of the woman is seamlessly blended with the black shadow that envelops her. However, a single strand of hair snakes down over her collar bone and then over her shoulder outlining the patch of darkness nestled in her slightly turned neck. Her left hand resting under her chin, and her face turned from the viewer obscures her features in a self-effacing gesture that excludes the viewer from her thoughts. The light dramatically highlights the pale flesh of her shoulders, chest and arms, a sensuality heightened by the contrast between the different textures of skin and clothing. The folds of the flimsy white chemise are a patch of direct brightness that concentrate attention on the hint of the breasts beneath, turning the viewer into a perversely, erotic voyeur. The white is sharply broken by the small red ribbon of the figure's skirt, which in turn is broken by the texture of the cord of rope around her waist. Beneath the rope, the rusty-red patch over the swell of her belly draws the viewer's eyes and brings the sudden realisation she could be pregnant. Yet, just below the swell of the belly, placed in her lap, is a skull. The forehead of the skull is lit and above the left eye cavity rests a very prominent circular patch of light reflected from the candle, drawing the viewer's eye. The right hand of the woman rests gently on the skull's cranium representing a comment on the *vanitas* motif.

The position of the skull adds a mood of pathos and the uncanny to the figure's solitary musing. The circular patch of light on the skull recalls the shine on the nose in Freud's discussion of castration anxiety and the fetish. The dramatic chiaroscuro and the play of light on the different textured surfaces combined with the static position of the figure provide the painting with an abstract quality held in the glow of the candle light. The patches of colour of the blouse and the skirt along with the skull can, I suggest, be regarded as fetish objects, as there are according to critic Margareta de Grazia: "no subjects in seventeenth-century *vanitas* still-lives. Only objects ... Only the memory of one remains – the *memento mori* or skull, now an object among objects" (1996: 1). An object among objects is a wonderful description of the nature of the fetish.

The light from the lamp, like the candle, illuminates the paleness of Liza's face and provides a similar play of light to that irradiating the Magdalen. Liza's face is a pale blank and expressionless object that acts to exclude the viewer. The reader wonders if she has or is allowed any thoughts at all. Like the Magdalen, Liza's dark hair acts as a contouring device for her face around which it curls. The description of the scene holds the image of Liza in a

similar moment of simplistic stasis and her sleek-dark cap of hair, her red shawl and white brooch make her a still-life object invested with an uncanny life: a living fetish. Durrell's use of the phrase "full second" (M: 61), which occurs twice within the space of five lines, acts like a film frame or shutter click of a camera lens. This framing captures the image of Liza by arresting a moment in time and space. Art theorist Craig Owens discusses the idea of a proto-photographic moment in which the split second allows the vision to bend back on itself and in so doing produce its own imprint (1994: 196). This proto-photographic moment is caught in the imprinting of Liza's image in Mountolive's memory, only to be bent back into the textual representation of this image. Liza is visually inserted into what Owen has called a "closed system, a relation of identity between seer and seen" (1994: 196). In this closed system, Mountolive, along with the reader, retains the position of seer and the position of the subject whilst Liza becomes the object that founds this identity. The "warm lamplight" spotlighting Liza makes her appear like a figure from a sacred work of art. However, the imagery and attributes associated with her description are not in any manner Christian, but pagan.

### **Medusa, Serpents and Terror**

In her article, "*That 'one book there, a Plutarch'*", Durrell scholar Carol Peirce suggests the description of Liza links her to the Goddess Isis and Athena. She sees Liza's pallor as a reference to Isis the moon goddess and her helmet of black hair to Athena (1990: 85). I suggest that Liza resembles a combination of Athena, with her "helmet", "broad pale face", that is "strikingly beautiful" (M: 61), and Aphrodite, her face filled with a "shocking placidity" (61). Pursewarden envisions her possessing "the marble whiteness of the sea-goddess's face" (162). This striking beauty, with its detachment, establishes her resemblance to the "austere mindless primeval face of Aphrodite" (206), an expression that has previously occurred when female characters are described in the novels *Justine* (97) and *Balthazar* (141). The repetition and return of this phrase evokes a sense of haunting, a spectral reference to both the mythological past and the characters' present. The movement backwards and forwards where the past seeps into the present and the future enforces the palimpsestuous nature of Durrell's narrative.

Mountolive sees Liza's countenance in a comparable manner to Pursewarden as resembling a Greek statue in its marble-like pallor and stillness. Adding to this impression is that, like a statue, her eyes are "spectacularly missing" (M: 61). Liza's blindness leads Mountolive to describe her as possessing "the head of a Medusa" (61) and Pursewarden remembers her as a "Medusa amongst the snow" (162). Freud considered blindness to be related to the fear of castration and the sighting of the female genitals. He linked castration anxiety and the fear of blindness to the mythological figure of Medusa when, in 1922, he wrote: "Medusa's head takes the place of a representation of the female genitals" (1964: 273-274). In making this symbolic connection between Medusa and the female genitals, Freud emphasised the phallogocentric ideology of what Creed has called the monstrous-feminine that is imbricated with sexual difference (1986: 44). Therefore, the mythological figure of Medusa becomes a symbol for both the castrator and castrated.

In Greek mythology, Medusa was turned into a monster with serpents for hair and a gaze that petrified (castrated) anyone who looked at her. The hero Perseus, aided by the mirroring qualities of the goddess Athena's shield, decapitated Medusa and in so doing castrated her gaze. Even when killed, Medusa remained a force with which to be reckoned. Her sightless eyes were still deadly, and so was her blood. Medusa's head was given to Athena who placed it upon her shield transforming it into an apotropaic symbol averting evil. The transformation of Medusa's head and gaze onto the mirror of the shield captures her image in its reflection where she becomes petrified - a castrated force. Art theorist Hal Foster has suggested that Perseus's slaying of the demon is portrayed as a rite of passage establishing his heroic identity and masculine power (2003: 181). Medusa's head becomes a fetish that the hero has disavowed through the phallogocentric ideological power of the sword that stands as the representative of the Symbolic law of the Father.

Kristeva, writing on the representation of the severed head in art and literature, writes, "Medusa's gaze kills, but it is the reflection - the figure of splitting in two of representation - that finally kills Medusa" (2012: 30). Her decapitated head still has the power to arrest the vision of the viewer through the intermediary of the image threatening castration, but Foster notes this reflected glory has killed her power to gaze, to be an active female principle (2003: 182). As a horrific image Medusa can threaten, but is unable to act. However, for Freud, the snake locks on Medusa's head were representative of the penis

associated with the phallic mother, and Medusa as a woman, Freud felt, aroused the uncanny terror of castration through her monstrous image. In view of this interpretation of Medusa, it is striking that in the novel *Clea*, Darley questions whether Liza has not “coiled herself, like a small hateful snake, at the centre of his [Mountolive’s] peaceful life” (M: 145).

The association between Liza and Medusa is accentuated by the phrase “small hateful snake” with its phallic connotations and deadliness. Perceived as “coiled at the centre” of Mountolive’s life, Liza possesses connotations of horrific abhuman qualities and the castrating, menacing and evil aspect of Medusa. Darley’s use of the word “hateful” is indicative of the masculine fear and terror of being swallowed or losing the penis. Foster writes that Freud, in his article *Medusa’s Head* (1922), twins Medusa with Athena so that Medusa becomes the representative of both terror and consolation, which ensures she becomes the “original fetish, both a ‘memorial’ to castration and a ‘protection’ against it” (2003: 185). At the centre of this mythopoetic representation in Durrell’s narrative resides the uncanny fear and horror of the feminine. Liza, associated with Athena and Medusa, becomes, like these mythological goddesses, horrifying with the violent promise of castration and death. This mythological irruption into Durrell’s narrative represents a return into the novel’s present of the ancient past with the result that the darker qualities associated with these myths are metonymically overlaid onto the figure of Liza.

Foster argues that Medusa was “depicted as both young and old, beautiful and ugly ... she appears both bestial and human as well” (2003: 182). For the Romantic poets, Medusa was the epitome of beauty, but a beauty of inherent ambivalence. Foster mentions that the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley declared that in order for beauty to be compelling it had to reveal “the tempestuous loveliness of terror” (2003: 184). In the eyes of Mountolive and Pursewarden, the beauty of Liza is one filled with the loveliness of terror, of beauty and monstrousness. Their doubled description establishes Liza as a Medusa with “spectacularly missing” eyes and marble-like pallor and stillness. This masculine gaze creates the image of Liza, and then textually offers it for the delectation of the reader. Liza’s monstrous, troubling, and in a manner horrifying, beauty holds a resemblance to the statue by the sculptor Auguste Rodin entitled *The Tempest* (c. 1886)

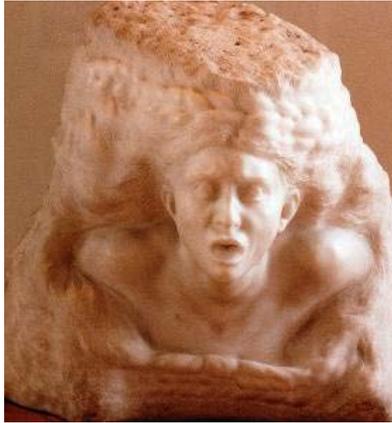


Figure 18 Auguste Rodin: *The Tempest*

Frenzied and expressive, the head of the figure of the woman blends into the abstract nature of the relief, which emphasises the movement and force of the wind that blows around her. When first exhibited the sculpture was christened *Hurle de Terreur* (Howl of Terror), an appellation that is visibly expressed through the strained torso and the thrust forward face.

The statue's mouth is open as if letting lose a great shriek of anger, fear or pain. In *Clea*, Darley sees Liza in much the same manner: "She stood before me with her face thrown upwards, forwards – with an air of spectral bravery – as if presenting her lovely neck to an invisible executioner" (C: 144). Darley has further seen her arguing with Pursewarden where "She had an expression of grief and pain on her face" (99). The face of Rodin's statue, pale, translucent silver, presents the same spectral aspect. Her head thrown upwards and forwards tense and frozen is an exhibition of grief, pain or anger - a Medusa before her invisible executioner lets fall his sword. The statue's hair is wild and billows backwards, then wraps around forwards over her body. Though she is not a classic depiction of the Medusa with writhing snakes for hair, still this windswept mass seems to writhe and knot itself in a sinuous, snaky movement.

Leaning forward, her blind bullet eyes seem to glare in an effort to petrify the viewer. The sculpture is both erotically beautiful and terrifying in its raging passion. This blind head is a classic fetish object, her open mouth suggesting the threat of castration. Her luxuriant swirling tresses seem to offer the visualisation of the presence of the penis and its absence in an ambivalence that turns the head into an object of disavowal. Liza's frozen, marble-like whiteness could easily be envisioned as the double of the Rodin sculpture. This relation to

Rodin's statue is emphasised by the manner in which, during the novel *Clea*, Darley describes a sighting of Liza: "The wind was blowing her dark hair back in a shock from her temples, and with her sightless eyes she looked like some strange Greek statue come to life" (C: 100). However, like the statue, Liza only appears to intimate the threat of castration; both images are blind. Yet, they remain objects of the gaze with their erotic and horrifying allure that repulses and fascinates. Like Medusa, they are objects of terror and beauty frozen into fetishes.

I maintain that Durrell, by metonymically associating Medusa with his portrait of Liza, has castrated Liza's power to freeze men. The disfiguration of her blindness, I suggest, removes the masculine characters' terror of castration, and a return to a state where difference no longer exists. Durrell has negated any threat Liza might have posed by allowing Mountolive and Pursewarden violently to disavow her through their focalisation on parts of her body, which they proceed to fetishise. In his article *The Medusa Effect*, Owens writes about the dismantling of the body as a locus of action. He discusses how this dismantling is an act of stereotyping in which submission and subservience are imposed in a manner that represents a "form of symbolic violence exercised on the body to assign it a place ... it promotes passivity, receptivity, inactivity – docile bodies" (1994: 194). Durrell's narrative does in fact enforce a symbolic, misogynistic violence against Liza in its continual portrayal of her as assuming a passive position. She is constructed much like the female torsos in Surrealist art, to be an inactive and totally docile body. Her stillness is uncanny and there is eroticism in the comparison of her image with that of a perfect marble goddess.

### **Statues and Incest**

A metaphorical poem by Pursewarden more violently and unpleasantly images Liza as a disturbing Greek statue. This *ekphrastic* depiction of his sister metonymically relates her to Greek statues and is a verbalisation of his gaze. Mountolive reads the poem noting its aspects of coarse marble, grittiness, violence and arrogant narcissism. Apparently, a love poem to Liza, the enjambment of the first line delays the transgressive nature of what the poet is expressing:

Greek statues with their bullet holes for eyes

Blinded as Eros by surprise,  
The secrets of the foundling heart disguise,  
Lover and loved.... (M: 67)

Mountolive experiences an icy discomfort because the poem seems to have “impinged upon his memory”, an indication that there is a forcible jarring into some form of recollection or knowledge (67). A sense of the uncanny, of something dangerous that is insidiously encroaching, fills him with “a sudden chill of misgiving” (67). An unmistakable thrill of a dark and perverse secret adds to his anxiety, tingeing it with fear. It is Liza’s “white serene face” that Mountolive sees rising like a ghost from the poem” (67). The serenity of this face is contradicted by the violence of the words “bullet holes” that jangle a discordant, disquieting and destructive note. Simultaneously, the origin of the word bullet is that of a small ball or bubble, which relates to the blank, rounded curvature of the sightless eyes of statues. The passive, cold and static form of the statues with their empty, blinded eyes ensures they are unable to return any form of gaze. They possess no subjectivity, but remain merely objects for an observer. Liza is summoned up as a similarly frozen, passive, perhaps damaged, object. Her sightlessness makes her subjectivity equally questionable because, unable to behold any object, she has nothing against which to found a conception of self. She, like the statues, remains the visual object of the gaze in the poem, as well as that of Mountolive and the hidden reader, who focus upon her form with perfect freedom.

The images evoked in Pursewarden’s poem lead Mountolive to regard the poetic text as “savage” (M: 67). Mountolive’s analysis of the poem is astute observing, as he does, its brutality, but he is slower to acknowledge the underlying amoral content. He only haltingly envisages the theme of sibling incest, yet the perverse content both attracts and reviles him. The words of Pursewarden’s poem sculpt Liza into a marble artefact of darkness, of hidden monstrosity, and her surface is transformed into a gothicised textual fetish. Her ‘difference’ or lack has been petrified in the process; referred back to and signified by a traumatic past event: Medusa’s decapitated head with its castrating gaze turned into a fetish object. In her work on fetishism and curiosity, Mulvey states, “the fetish is a metaphor for the displacement of meaning behind representation in history, but fetishisms are also integral to the very process of the displacement of meaning behind representation” (1996: xvi). I propose that Durrell has made Medusa the metonymic stand-in for the representation

of Liza's corporeality. These two interwoven mutilated bodies are the uncanny reflection of the fears of Durrell's male characters. In order to subvert this terror, Durrell allows them to disembody Liza through their gaze, which fragments her into a face whilst absenting her body beneath an "old tartan shawl" (M: 162).

### **Nectar and Honey**

A further source of the fetish attributed to Liza remains as intangible and hidden as her body. Transient as memory, it impinges on the text to become an evanescent signifier of presence. The semiotic sound of Liza's voice, like that of Leila's, captivates Mountolive. He responds to this voice in a manner similar to what feminist theorist Peggy Phelan called perilously near to a fetishising of the female voice (1988: 118). Liza, in much the same manner as Leila, is described by Mountolive as having a "clear and melodious voice – a voice which might have given such overtone to the words: Honey and nectar", and it enthrals him (M: 62). However, Silverman reminds us that the sound of the female voice "establishes her as occupying a position of mother, siren innocent, etc." (1984: 134). Liza is Leila's double in her ambivalent role of the Siren mother. Fixating on her voice, Mountolive imputes to Liza the tone of a siren or the traits of one of the goddesses on Mount Olympia, her voice partaking of "Honey and nectar", the main ingredients of the godly drink ambrosia. The voices of Liza and Leila seem to merge with one another in a musical palimpsest. Isolating Liza's voice and describing it in these terms turns it into what the Slovene philosopher and cultural theorist Mladen Dolar, in his study on the nature of the voice, has termed "an object of aesthetic pleasure, object of veneration and worship" (2006: 4). The voice becomes an object, a presence. Not only a sounding instrument, it is one associated with meaning and the symbolic. The use of the words "melodious" and "overtone" associate Liza's voice with music. Kristeva regards music as transgressive, a semiotic drive that challenges the Symbolic order of language and text. Liza's musical voice allows it to sound and convey what cannot be expressed in words, making it threatening in its seductiveness.

In Dolar's exploration of the metaphysical voice, he makes the point that "the voice beyond sense is self evidently equated with femininity, whereas the text, the instance of signification, is in this simple paradigmatic opposition on the side of masculinity" (2006: 43). The aestheticisation of Liza's voice and its metonymical association with music ensures that

her voice remains absent and is turned into a fetish object. Inserted into the discourse of the narrative, Liza's voice threatens symbolic castration inducing Mountolive to, as critic Salomé Voegelin writes: "invite the fetish to replace the loss of understanding of the object" (2010: 104). The voice as object semiotically exceeds signification; both Silverman and Dolar have concluded that the masculine voice is associated with the text and signification, whilst the feminine voice remains beyond sense contained in the pre-verbal of the semiotic. The female body thus becomes a double lack not only anatomically but textually deprived of access to discourse. Liza's voice pours forth in a sensual but empty play without meaning. The actualisation of this seductive lack of sense is equated with femininity, for, as Silverman notes: "to embody a voice is to feminize it" (1988: 50). The rational voices of Mountolive and Pursewarden, the voices of signification, swiftly silence and fetishise Liza's voice. Their male discourse immediately occupies the position of the speaking subject, relegating Liza's voice to the realm of the pre-verbal semiotic.

Mountolive indicates that Liza plays no role in the conversation but remains in "eloquent silence" (M: 64). This phrase is oxymoronic because silence, no matter how nuanced, does not speak as implied in the use of the word "eloquent". Instead, her purportedly "eloquent" silence expresses itself as a negative contrast to the male discourse that surrounds her. Denied existence as a subject, her body remains an absence and her silence represents a stasis. Silence is an unquantifiable thing, as it remains a non-verbal, non-temporal space. This space is disavowed by Mountolive because it is beyond understanding. He installs the fetish of the voice to remove the threat Liza's silence poses. Attributes of her voice are synecdochically written over her surface in order for Mountolive to be able to perceive her as a non-threatening, malleable Other. In *Clea*, the emptiness and incorporeality of Liza's voice is an aspect commented upon by Darley:

So it was that her voice, when first is floated over the office telephone came as an unexpected intrusion – a surprise in a world where surprises were few and not unwelcome. A curiously disembodied voice ... (C: 144)

He finds the voice an "intrusion", a sound that discomforts him in its spectrality as it comes "floating" across the ether like that of a ghost. Simultaneously, it arouses his curiosity being a "surprise" and not "unwelcome". The sentence is contradictory and the ambivalence Darley experiences is apparent. Her voice is an object contained in a void, flowing as it does

from the fissure of the telephone. This disembodied sound remains unattached to the slit from which it originates. The image of the telephone is sexualised and the distance it allows acts to alleviate Darley's fear. As an inanimate fetish object, it assumes to own a sexuality that is disembodied.

There is nothing to protect Darley from the uncanny engulfing nature of the voice, because it exists without a body. On visiting Liza, he is further discomforted by her: "small cold voice, pronouncing the words incisively as if to make her meaning plain" (C: 147). Curt, cut-off phrases that lack warmth and seem in their way non-human, automated in their incisiveness, the tone lacks verbalisation and the voice is deemed small and insignificant. Darley's experience of Liza's voice resembles Mountolive's own first experience when she pronounces on her brother in his absence. Mountolive hears the words she speaks about Pursewarden with admiration: "His one job is to learn how to submit to despair" (M: 64). The sentence seems aphoristic and pretentious, making the reader suspicious of whose words are flowing out of Liza's mouth. She seems to be a puppet repeating an aphorism learnt from Pursewarden. What she says thereafter, small repetitive snippets, rather like an automaton, appears to emulate the uncanny repetition of phrases uttered by the doll Olympia in *Der Sandmann* (1816), a story by the German writer E.T.A. Hoffmann.

The representation of Liza as a doll or puppet is enhanced during the scene Mountolive witnesses, in which Pursewarden and Liza waltz in the snow around the empty space of Trafalgar Square. An uncannily elegant spectacle, almost like a scene inside a snow globe, the two people move in the emptiness of space "in perfect measure gradually increasing in speed ... On they went and on, magnificently in accord" (M: 66). This parallels the dance between the automaton Olympia and the young student Nathaniel in E.T.A. Hoffmann's tale. Olympia dances with perfect, rhythmical measure, however in the composer Jacques Offenbach's version of this tale, the dance with Olympia goes ever faster and faster and on and on until Olympia spins out of the room. In Mountolive's description time seems to stand still while what bothers the reader is the emptiness of the London landscape described. The image of this empty space with two figures dancing renders the familiar alien and uncanny. The space of the city seems asleep in its snowy blanket and Pursewarden and Liza are the centre point of this picture gazed upon by the voyeuristic Mountolive, and the hidden external narrator and reader.

The city is frozen in suspended animation caught between the two living bodies and the historical dead; one of these high on his phallic column silently towers above them. Durrell, I argue, presents the space of London in a disturbing and uncanny manner. Along with the falling snow and the darkness of night, this city space is filled with a menacing atmosphere of icy, almost Victorian or Dickensian, unease. According to Robert Mighall, London's vocabulary has always harboured the grim, dark, haunting, cold veils of misty fog. He considers these elements bring to the landscape the essential 'obscurity' lying at the heart of Gothic terror (2007: 56). The snow, silence and space of the London landscape in which Pursewarden and, in particular, Liza are foregrounded is revelatory of the nightmarish, sinister and dangerous nature of urban horror (56). The snow and the empty, silent landscape mirror the fetishistic portrayal of Liza's figure. She becomes an exemplar of the cityscape she inhabits, an embodiment of its uncanny Gothic nature.

## **Conclusion**

The vocabulary of the Gothic and how it constructs the embodiment of Justine and Clea will form the subject of the next two chapters. In the previous chapters, I have discussed the narrator and focalisor, the gaze, and the fetish in relation to the manner in which certain female characters are constructed in the *Quartet*. My argument thus far has aimed to reveal the discernible and overlapping qualities I consider exist between the gaze and the fetish. The imbrication of fetish and gaze with the Gothic is of paramount importance to the narrative figuration of women as objectivised other. Durrell's female characters are textual forms, written into being by the male narrators and focalisors. Representations of the Symbolic, they do not partake of its signification but remain silent objects. In the two chapters that follow, I aim to examine how the close interrelationship between the narrator, the gaze and the fetish intersects with the Gothic and the abject monstrous-feminine.

Motifs such as silence (in this instance the lack of a female voice), the labyrinth; imprisonment; the double; automatism (especially the idea of the doll); the *femme fatale*; monstrosity, hybridity; spectrality and madness are, I have argued and will continue to argue, used to fashion Durrell's women as gothicised objects (Spooner 2004: 4). The notion of the uncanny and the Gothic are such imbricated terms that for my purposes they will be considered as sharing the same thematic concerns. For this reason, and based on the work

of numerous theorists of the Gothic, I plan to employ the term gothicisation to denote the visual superimposition of uncanny features onto the surface of the female body. The layering effect of these features, I will show, acts to metaphorically embody and establish the personalities of the characters Justine and Clea in the narrative. The use of the term feature will be used interchangeably with the terms elements or motifs. I will argue that gothicisation encompasses the creeping horror and sense of fear associated with the liminal and the in-between nature of the female body as object. The inherent transgression and threat of dissolution of boundaries between the self and other that resides at the heart of gothicisation, I contend, intimately relates it with the Kristevan abject.<sup>34</sup>

I aim to deploy Kristeva's theory of abjection and Creed's theory of the monstrous-feminine along with the concept of gothicisation to position my reading of the representation of the characters Justine and Clea as entities that are both beautiful and monstrous. Their visualisation is founded on sexual difference and the desire and fear it inspires. The fear and desire aroused by sexual difference and its resultant gender stereotyping will, I argue, result in representations of the bodies of these female characters being fragmented into either part animal-part human hybrids, or 'womachines', which are part-human part-machine/automaton. These aspects have been briefly touched upon in the previous chapters, but I aim to develop them more fully in the discussion of Justine and Clea that follows. The fashioning of these women into hybrids forces the monstrous and the beautiful to co-mingle in an abject manner that is transgressive and partakes of the nature of gothicisation.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> See Becker (1999); Botting (1996); Halberstam (1995); Hurley (1996); Punter (2001); Sedgwick (1986) and Spooner (2007, 2006, 2004).

<sup>35</sup> The term 'womachine' stems from Fred Botting's chapter "The Flight of the Heroine" in his book *Gothic Romanced: Consumption, Gender and Technology in Contemporary Fictions* (2008: 161).