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Chapter 5: Gothic Fantasy of the Femme Fatale - Justine

Introduction

Fear of castration is central to the male response to Justine in the *Quartet*. In their eyes, she represents the *femme fatale* or monstrous-feminine. As *femme fatale*, Justine exemplifies evil, an evil that feminist theorist Michelle Montrelay has associated with the *femme fatale's* "playing out of her sex" in a flaunting of her sexuality that is considered by men to be scandalous (1978: 93). The defiance of the socially accepted role and rule of law is what makes the *femme fatale* dangerous. She is confined to her body as excess and deadliness. Doane has noted, however, that the *femme fatale* remains an ambivalent figure because she is both active and passive. Doane goes on to say that the over-representing of the *femme fatale's* body is due to the fact that she is attributed a body that is given a power over which she has no control; she has power but no agency (1991: 2). This power without agency leads to her representation as the embodiment of castration anxiety, the loss of identity and uncontrolled drives resulting in her being "situated as evil" for which she is "frequently punished or killed and her textual eradication involves a desperate reassertion of control on the part of the threatened male subject" (Doane 1991: 2). Not being the heroine but the symptom of male fears, the *femme fatale* is the monstrous-feminine Other (2).

Feminist film theorist Barbara Creed notes that the monstrous has been defined by its association with the abject in ancient religious systems where "sexual immorality and perversion; corporeal alteration, decay and death; human sacrifice; murder; the corpse; bodily wastes; the feminine body and incest" are considered abominations (1986: 46). Creed further indicates that the abject is deployed in patriarchal cultures to separate "the human from the non-human and the *fully* constituted subject from the *partially* formed subject" (1986: 45; emphasis in text). This binary opposition between human and non-human is what Hurley, in her study of the Gothic body, has termed the abhuman after the writer William Hope Hodgson. Hurley defines the abhuman subject as one that is "a not-quite-human subject, characterized by its morphic variability, continually in danger of becoming not-itself, becoming other" (1996: 3-4). Hurley acknowledges that the abhuman resembles the

ambivalent nature Kristeva assigns to abjection (1996: 4). Contending that the abject is a reaction to the limits and boundaries that are imposed by the Symbolic and the social and cultural limits it enforces; Kristeva regards the child's separation from the mother's body as giving rise to the abject (1982: 13-14). This separation, Kristeva argues, is an attempt to distinguish the subject from the object, but the abject is resident within the self and not outside it (13). The abject, therefore, is not a definable object and Kristeva indicates that it also does not fall within the "quest of desire" (1982: 1).

In Kristeva's detailing of the abject it becomes apparent that it acts as a barrier in opposition to the "I", but is not recognised as an object, rather it is regarded as a thing (1982: 1-2). This thing is perceived as loathsome and the "I" attempts to expel it from itself: "I expel *myself*, I spit *myself* out, I abject *myself* within the same motion through which "I" claim to establish *myself*" (3; emphasis in text). This ambivalence between the expulsion of self and the creation of self is central to abjection, where the subject attempts to maintain a defined identity, violently denying anything that threatens it. At the same time, Creed indicates that there is the need to succumb to the pleasure of non-differentiation and a return to the pleasure of oneness with the mother (1986: 50). The abject threatens and "disturbs identity, system, order, what does not respect borders, positions, rules" (Kristeva 1982: 4). The viscous fluids that leak from the body transgress the fragile division between the inside and outside of the body destroying its borders.

Grosz, in her examination of Kristeva's abject in relation to Mary Douglas's theory of dirt in her book *Purity and Danger* (1980), notes that the fear of fluids, with their refusal to adhere to boundaries thus challenging solid identity, has governed the representation of the image of the proper body (1994: 195). The female body and its sexuality have been produced by what Grosz terms an order, or the masculine hierarchy, as "marginal, disgusting and viscous" (195). The fluids associated with female sexuality are rejected by the male as abject. These fluids, such as menstrual blood, are excluded because they evoke the fear of a loss of self, and the return to a state of non-differentiation. Hurley has termed this entrapment in the fluid, sexualised female body "Thing-ness" (1996: 120). She regards this Thing-ness as being an aspect of the abhuman nature of femininity, deemed monstrous under patriarchal laws. Writing about the inside of the body, with its threat of the flow of unclean fluids, Kristeva indicates that the male horror of these fluids causes him to cross

“over the horrors of maternal bowels and, in an immersion that enables him to avoid coming face to face with an Other, spares himself the risk of castration” (1982: 53). Fear of the fluids of sexual difference, with their perceived threat of castration and promise of becoming like the Other, causes the phallogocentric ideology to represent the female body as monstrous.

The horror and fear of the abject and its relation to the abhuman, Thing-ness and the monstrous are closely associated with the Gothic. Hurley observes, “In its obsession with abominations, the Gothic may be said to manifest a certain gleefulness at the prospect of a world where no fixity remains, only an endless series of monstrous becomings” (1996: 28). Horror, disgust, monstrous abomination and decay are all aspects of abjection, and are all associated with the female body in its construction as a site of ambivalent danger. For the male characters in Durrell’s *Quartet*, it is the uncanny, terrifying and abject nature of the Other, which leads them to embody the female characters as monstrous forms. These women are textually portrayed as being sexually immoral, incestuous and hybridic creatures whose viscous nature intimates death and dissolution.

In the chapter that follows, Justine’s body will be shown to be a parchment on which the masculine text and its embedded gaze writes and overwrites its memories. This allows for the return of the past into the present with intimations of the future. The appearance of motifs such as mirrors, paintings, alter egos, vampires, mutilation, sexual transgression and dark secrets are indicative of objects and actions that Botting has indicated act to disturb “parts of human identity ... These devices increasingly destabilised the boundaries between psyche and reality” (1996: 12). I hold that Durrell plays with language because, as Botting in relation to the Gothic has indicated, language possesses an ambivalent, treacherous nature. This ambivalent duplicity allows Durrell to create verbal and visual images that destabilises the boundaries between reality, truth, perception and identity (1996: 14). This destabilisation can be carefully analysed through a close critical reading of words, expressions and visual-textual images in Durrell’s novels. Approaching the repressed ambivalence hidden in the narrative, I will expose how this discourse visualises Justine in many guises from abject, immoral and sexual monster; to freely moving flâneuse devoted to spectacle and masquerade; to automaton / womachine destroying all with which it comes into contact. Justine is the *femme fatale* as evil, monstrous-feminine and this representation

of her is complicated by overt misogyny. This misogyny, I argue, is aimed at retaining phallogocentric centrality and power by an eradication of the perceived threat of Justine who, bar for the city of Alexandria, is the most powerfully destructive and threatening feminine principle.

Dangerous Temptress

Justine is present in all the novels, but plays the main role in the novels *Justine* and *Balthazar*. In *Mountolive* and *Clea*, she is a peripheral, yet always dark, presence. How she is focalised by the male characters, I will argue, determines the manner in which her surface space is gothicised. Justine's embodiment partakes of the Gothic in a multiplicity of ways, from the portrayal of her as bestial monstrous woman to androgyne, *flâneuse*, courtesan and automaton. In what follows, I initially focus on Darley's perception of her in the novels *Justine* and *Balthazar*; thereafter I will examine her more marginal appearances in *Mountolive* and *Clea*.

In *Justine*, Darley recalls in memory his voyeuristic encounters with Justine before officially meeting her:

I catch an unexpected glimpse of her walking idly towards the town in her white sandals still, half asleep, Justine! ... I have had many such glimpses of Justine at different times, and of course I knew her well by sight long before we met ... I see her sitting along by the sea, reading a newspaper and eating an apple. (J: 17).

In this memory, a reconstruction of the past, there is a continuous sense of seeing in the deictic present tense, with constructs such as, "I catch an unexpected glimpse of her" and "I see her". Time is made elastic within the spatialisation of memory's visuality where certain details are brought into focus: the newspaper and the apple. The apple represents seduction, desire and the pain of the fall from grace and loss of oneness. It betokens the moment of the break from the Semiotic and the coming into being of the Symbolic law of the Father or the institution of language. Text and sin are held in this image where Justine is seen absorbing the Symbolic word of knowledge whilst eating the fruit of good and evil; her equation with the figure of Eve is subtly implied.

However, Darley denies Justine knowledge and rationality, retaining it as a domain belonging to men, as he says:

Whatever passed for thought in her was borrowed ... she had picked out what was significant in books not by reading them but by listening to the matchless discourses of Balthazar, Arnauti, Pursewarden upon them. She was a walking abstract of the writers and thinkers who she had loved or admired – but what clever woman is more. (J: 179)

Justine is regarded as a parrot repeating what she has heard – in other words, a mirror. She is, like all “clever women”, little more than an imitative reflection of the great male artists, intellectuals and conversationalists. For Durrell, the male creator remains the “real hero” (Pinchin 1981: 27). Throughout the *Quartet* Durrell’s male characters are shown believing their perspective is the only objective position. In so doing they attempt to order and control their world by means of words or Symbolic discourse. Their disquisitions are considered “matchless”, which elevates them to incomparable heights of attainment. They are the intellects, the adventurers, both physically and mentally, and they are the ones with power. Their gaze and imagination traverse the feminine landscape producing and constructing the image of the female characters. In this operation of male power, Justine is subjected to a sexualisation of her bodily surface. Foucault, in his study on the medical discourse surrounding sexuality, argues that:

The power which thus took charge of sexuality set about contacting bodies, caressing them with its eyes, intensifying areas, electrifying surfaces, dramatizing troubled moments. It trapped the sexual body in its embrace. (1978: 44)

The male gaze and sexual discourse have installed a powerful system that entraps Justine’s body. There is a permanent verbal inscription written over her skin by Darley whose visualisation presents Justine as a purely sexual body. Depicted as a passive and docile body trapped by her sexual difference; Justine is stereotypically fashioned to act as a stand-in for all clever women. For such a body, the mirror is the best metaphor and, in a mirror-like

illusion, Justine is counterfeiting the Symbolic thereby embodying herself as an artificial surface that lacks interiority.³⁶

Justine's identity is destabilised in her oscillation between the states of masculine and feminine. She assumes male attributes, Darley indicating she "talked like a man and I talked to her like a man" (J: 21). By contrast Darley adds "how pliantly feminine this most masculine and resourceful of women could be" (18). In Darley's memory, Justine becomes an ambivalent, bisexual figure where masculine and feminine attributes are joined, feminine pliability opposed to masculine resourcefulness. This fusing of traits is significant for Darley because he considers that he "knew her for a true child of Alexandria; which is neither Greek, Syrian, nor Egyptian, but a hybrid: a joint" (24). Justine and the city are merged together to form a single entity, one that destabilises both sexual identity and the identity of the self. The word "hybrid" alerts us to the manner in which Darley regards both the city and Justine. Not only are they seen as racial hybrids, they are also regarded as animal-human hybrids. Darley perceives Justine to be "of that race of terrific queens which left behind them the ammoniac smell of their incestuous loves ... The giant man-eating cats like Arsinoë were her true siblings" (18). The name Arsinoë belonged to three queens of Egypt and to Cleopatra's murdered half-sister. Queen Arsinoë the second was a strong woman who ruled Egypt, and she would, I posit, represent a man-eater because of her powerful personality and her "ammoniac" incestuous marriage.

The use of the word "ammoniac" is indicative of Darley's rather prudish reaction to Egyptian history, and his association of the sexual with something disgusting: in this case, the pungent smell of ammonia, a smell generally linked to urine. Figuratively relating Justine to Arsinoë and the attributes of a man-eating cat envisages her as part human-part animal, a dangerous hybrid. Egypt's ancient and darkly 'perverse' past becomes palimpsestically overwritten onto Justine. The powerful combination of sexualised feminine and masculine attributes Justine exhibits firmly establish her, in the eyes of the male characters, as threatening - a castrator. This predatory deadliness is etched in Darley's memory. He recalls Justine's laugh "shows magnificent white teeth", the teeth of a large man-eating cat, or a

³⁶ Murat Aydemir provides a very interesting discussion of male bonding in *Dracula* in his chapter "Blood Brothers" (2011: 161-183) where Jacques Derrida's concept of fraternity and Edward Said's arguments concerning filiation and affiliation are contrasted in an examination of the nature of masculine bonding, desire, race and class linked to the exchange of blood. In Durrell, this male exchange is that resident in artistic creation denied to Justine, and in a large measure to Clea. In Durrell's story world creation remains an all-male preserve and something that is wrested from the feminine principle wherever possible in the novels.

vampire (17). Visually compared to animals throughout the narrative of the first novel, Justine is bestialised and denigrated, consigned to the state of an abhuman being. She is portrayed gazing around like “a half-trained panther” (26), spitting olive pips into her gloved hand “like a cat” (28), as an “eagle”; as being a “marvellous creature caught in the Pleistocene stage of her development” (65); offering blows “like that of a leopard’s paw” (75), and seemingly “free as a bat to flit around about the town at night” (37).

The focalisation of Justine in all these metaphoric images contains a sense of the ancient essentialism of Woman as inherently linked with nature. The leopard in medieval symbolism represented lust and sin. The image of the bat feeds into the idea of Justine as a vampire. The description of her as being in “the Pleistocene stage of her development” equates her with the primitiveness of *Homo erectus* or *Homo neanderthalensis* and their apparently limited language and ratiocination capacities. Darley’s memories visually and textually colonise Justine’s body, mapping its surface with a gothicised mixture of the monstrous-feminine and the abhuman animal-primitive. Writing on the horror of Gothic bodies, Halberstam indicates that bodies are gothicised by making “monstrosity an essential component of race, a class or a gender or some hybrid of all of these” (1995: 105). Justine is indicted a monstrous other, not only through the representation of her gender, which seemingly combines male and female characteristics with those of female and animal, but due to her race and class.³⁷

Forming a part of the multi-cultural mixture of Alexandria and its historical past, Justine, an originally poor Alexandrian Jewess, is regarded by Darley to be a foreign Oriental other. He is captivated and repulsed by her otherness. In his abject fear, he transforms her into a terrifying, phallic castratrix, whose sexuality threatens to swallow his identity. Misogyny and repulsion permeate the visual textual description Darley offers the reader. The nature of memory lets him exert power over Justine’s image, which he objectifies and controls. His gaze and text establish his hegemonic position as stable and defined (Hoffmann-Curtius 2008: 170). In order to retain this position, Darley attempts to unravel the perceived mystery of Justine in an effort to force her image to conform to his own needs and ideas.

³⁷ Scientists have recently pointed out that both *Homo erectus* and *Homo neanderthalensis* had fairly developed language skills with a concomitant ability of ratiocination.

The Flâneuse

The answer to Justine's mystery seems to reside in the spectacle of her excessive femininity which can, as Doane notes, be "aligned with the *femme fatale*" and "necessarily regarded by men as evil incarnate" (1991: 26). Justine's outrageous behaviour is perceived to blend both passive and active traits. In turn, this leads to her being considered unstable and threatening in her attempt to subvert the power of the male look and discourse. Justine's semiotic resistance to the ideal of docility is seen, not only in her violent expression of emotion, but also her aggressive freedom of movement through the city: "after all, she seemed free as a bat to flit about the town at night, and never did I hear her called upon to give an account of her movements" (J: 37). This positions Justine as that most unusual of beings: a *flâneuse* (lady stroller).

In Western culture, a *flâneuse* represents such a rare identity for women that it is hardly mentioned. Critic Janice Mouton discussing the *flâneuse* points out, "Aimless strolling, 'street walking' per se, still conjures up connotations of prostitution, although it fits the definition of *flânerie* precisely". The male *flâneur* was the nineteenth-century stroller whose apparent disinterest cloaked the fact that his gaze saw and reviewed everything and everyone he passed. Yet, the notion of the *flâneuse* remains questionable even now (Mouton 2001: 8). A stroll (*flânerie*) is conducted on foot through the city streets; done alone it has no objective other than to look and experience the surrounding images. Justine as *flâneuse*, it is implied, possesses the power of the look, a preserve of men, but her freedom of movement also assumes connotations of prostitution.

The vampiric overtones of her figuration as a flitting bat feed into the idea of strolling. Botting has indicated in his article "Hypocrite Vampire..." that these creatures are flâneurs that use the maze of the city as a labyrinth of edible goods because of their driving need to consume (2007: 20; 24). Associated with these dead/undead creatures, Justine emulates their need to roam the streets at night searching and lusting with the desire to consume. Justine's movement through the city merges her body with the contours of the cityscape. Moreover, in so doing, Justine becomes the representative of the living qualities of Durrell's Alexandria. These living qualities, according to geographer David Harvey, textually render the city decipherable for the reader (2003: 55). A bodily extrusion of this ancient place, part of its earth and its archaic malevolence, Justine observes: "We are not strong or evil enough

to exercise choice. All this is part of an experiment arranged by something else, the city perhaps, or another part of ourselves. How do I know?" (J: 23). This compelling evocation of the city is what Harvey calls magical and mysterious, with the powers to transform and intervene in the lives around it (2003: 53). The city's malicious destructiveness towards her inhabitants is playfully overlaid onto Justine's own image. However, even though Justine tries to show that all the characters lack any will of their own, she does this in order to deflect responsibility for her actions, denying her status as an avatar, a child of the city. All the sinister desires and evil of this place form a part of Justine's living form.

Justine's *flânerie*, through the darkened city, acts to conflate the stroller with the streetwalker and streetwalking. This is inevitable when viewed through masculine preconceptions regarding woman. Hence, the lasting image of Justine is ambivalent, freely moving in the space of the city, a hybrid creature simultaneously androgynous and excessively feminine - a vampiric *femme fatale*. This masquerade allows her to use her sex whilst setting up a distance between desire and herself. Using her body for gain, she is thought to be a sexually rapacious monster because, though the male characters enjoy these carnal attentions, they judge her a whore. Darley notes:

Clea once said of her (and her judgements were seldom if ever charitable):
'The true whore is man's real darling – like Justine; she alone has the capacity to wound men. But of course our friend is only a shallow twentieth-century reproduction of the great hetairae of the past, the type to which she belongs without knowing it, Lais, Charis and the rest. ... Justine's role has been taken from her and on her shoulders society has placed the burden of guilt ... It is a pity. For she is truly Alexandrian'. (J: 67-68)

That this condemnation is placed into the mouth of Clea, an apparent friend of Justine's, is fascinating. Also interesting, is how Darley parenthesizes a comment highlighting that Clea's comments are "seldom if ever charitable". I suggest that this is indicative of Clea's conforming to masculine hegemonic ideology. It also reveals a negation, and perhaps jealousy, of Justine's allure. Clea frames her response to Justine within the discourse of the masculine narration. By implying Justine is a whore, Clea can go on to associate her with the "great" hetairae of the past before backhandedly denigrating her as a mere "shallow reproduction".

The use of the word “reproduction” evacuates all meaning from Justine’s embodiment and visualises her as something ersatz, a surface lacking in value or depth. A spectral simulacrum of previous historical courtesans, Justine is linked to two predecessors. From the examples cited, the name Charis stands out. Charis was not a courtesan but the goddess of beauty, grace and kindness and she was one of the Graces or *Charites*. Clea’s ambivalent metaphorical association of Justine with Lais and Charis transfers both the *femme fatale* qualities of the very expensive, beautiful courtesan Lais and the good qualities of the goddess onto her.

Clea, “never charitable”, condemns her own sex, siding with the social ideology of required behaviour. Adopting this position, Clea placates the male characters by appearing to be on their side. As early as 1972, John Berger, in his book *Ways of Seeing*, pointed out it is ‘woman’ who polices herself. He suggested woman contains both a surveyor and a surveyed within herself that form separate aspects of her identity. He further argued that for a woman “how she appears to others, and ultimately how she appears to men, is of crucial importance ... how a woman appears to a man can determine how she will be treated” (1972: 40). Clea’s strictures on Justine conform to this surveillance, a woman policing another woman in accordance with patriarchal hegemony and tutelage.

As Silverman has noted about the voice in cinema, Clea’s voice is spoken for her, as though she is reading a male prepared script (1984: 135). Going on to say of Justine that her “role has been taken from her and on her shoulders society has placed the burden of guilt”, Clea transforms Justine into a societal scapegoat. Bearing all the feminine guilt for exhibiting sexual desire in a subversion of accepted norms, Justine is painted as a spectacle. By saying, “she is truly Alexandrian”, Clea directly couples Justine and Alexandria, which is an indication of how Justine belongs to this city as its child and allegory, and thus partakes of its ancient history and superstitious beliefs. In the novel *Mountolive*, the spectacle of Justine is relocated from the city streets into the privacy of her bedroom where her masquerade assumes a different guise.

Bedroom Body

In *Mountolive*, the external narrative voice describes Justine's bedroom in which an atmosphere of sensuality with hints of the occult is apparent:

The bedroom for example with its bronze phosphorous light, the pastels burning in the green Tibetan urn diffusing a smell of roses to the whole room. By the bed the rich poignant scent of her powder hanging heavy in the bed curtains. A dressing-table with its stoppered creams and salves. Over the bed the Universe of Ptolemy! (J: 119)

The mention of Ptolemy is a complex allusion. At first glance, it seems to refer to the astronomer Ptolemy, who resided in Egypt. However, the surname Ptolemy belongs to the family who ruled Egypt of whom Cleopatra, the last pharaoh of Egypt, was a descendent. Durrell scholar Carol Peirce, commenting on Durrell's appropriation of the Cleopatra legend, has suggested there is a marked relationship between Cleopatra and the portrayal of Justine (1984: 174). Durrell once said in an interview that he thought, "Cleopatra was probably something like her" (Durrell cited in Peirce 1984: 174).

The description of Justine's bedroom leads the reader to recall the lines from Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*:

The barge she sat in, like a burnish'd throne,
Burn'd on the water; the poop was beaten gold,
Purple the sails, and so perfumed, that
The winds were love-sick with them
(Act 2 sc 2: 199-202)

Much like the "burnish'd" and "beaten gold" in the Shakespearean passage, the image of Justine's room shows it filled with a warm oblique light, a "bronze phosphorous". However, being bronze, it is of slightly less value than gold, which seems to imply Justine is merely an imitation of the queen. The burnishing light against the green of the Tibetan urn creates a bright play of mottled luminescence in a chiaroscuro, which illuminates through the flickering contrasts evoked in the reader's imagination. Interweaving light and shadow along with scent offers movement and texture to the written image. The heavy smell of powder and incense form part of the excessive richness of the bed drapings, thus adding to the

exotic nature and romanticism of the scene depicted. In this it mirrors, though without the royal colour, the splendour of the “Purple sails, and so perfumed” of Cleopatra’s barge.

The stoppered creams and salves add a further luxuriance as well as an element of the occult to the visualisation of the bedroom. Then the strange image of the Universe hangs over all of this with its suggestions of supernatural magic from the ancient past of Alexandria. The heavy richness of texture, scent and history, along with the play of shadow and light, evoke a rather stifling atmosphere impregnated with sensuality and sexual promise. The image of the bedroom seems a part of Justine, where the elements of light and shadow, exotic richness, magic, sensuality and excess are traced over her body in a figuration of the Orientalist Gothic. In this room, Justine is a seductress promising pleasure and something ancient, mysterious, dark, filled with arcane secrets. Here she is seen “Afloat upon the dark damascened bed-spread her feet and hands crossed ... in the silence of a room ... under a Tibetan mask with lighted eyeballs” (M: 232). The damascened bedspread is excessive in its ornate, intaglioed designs. Her feminine form is envisioned floating and blending into this embellished background, which acts to transpose gothicised motifs over her skin.

In this position, the voyeuristic male gaze perceives her feminine form to be a silent, sculpted corpse that returns no look. Picturing Justine in this pose is reminiscent of a painting entitled *Le Trajet* (c. 1900) by the artist Romaine Brooks.



Figure 19 Romaine Brooks: *Le Trajet*

This painting of the dancer Ida Rubinstein references Hans Holbein’s painting *The Body of the Dead Christ in the Tomb* (1520-1522).



Figure 20 Hans Holbein: The Body of the Dead Christ in the Tomb

The position and pose of the two figures with their skeletal thinness is almost identical. The positions of the visible hands is markedly similar, but where Christ's middle finger juts out and is extended at an angle, the female hand is in a light fist with the middle and fourth finger only slightly raised. Similarly, the hair of both figures is spread out behind them. The female body lacks the wound in Christ's side, her wound being concealed within the joining of her thighs. Where Christ's sex is carefully shielded by the white cloth, the female body is entirely nude and her raised left hip, turned towards the viewer, ensures that her sex is the blatant focal point of the painting.

Unlike the glassy-eyed, open-mouthed face of Christ that is visibly dead and agonised, the woman's face remains abstracted and tranquil. The viewer of Brooks's painting remains unsure whether the woman is a corpse or merely in a deep sleep. Anatomically stripped, her transcendent body seems to float on a white-winged object resembling a catafalque or a white pall, similar to that found beneath Christ's body. The woman's alabaster body, on the white of the cloth beneath her, is only broken by her black hair, which, rather like art nouveau tendrils, trails off the top of the structure on which she lies and blends with the darker background on the painting's left-hand side. The corpse-like female body exhibits a piquant sexual eroticism that is lacking in the rigid body of the Christ.

The otherness of female identity, with its blending of life and death, recalls Kristeva's discussion of the abject's associations with the cadaver as "the other side of the border, the place where I am not and which permits me to be, the corpse, the most sickening of wastes" (1982: 3). The life-death representation in the painting veils the body, so whilst physically available to the gaze, its interior identity continues to remain hidden. The use of the muted colour palette, combined with the sharp, almost geometric yet curvilinear outline, enhances the ethereal silence of the paintings atmosphere (Elliot and Wallace 1992: 15). This is

markedly different to the very realistic and present body of Holbein's body of Christ. This representation of the unnameable nature of death relates to a void or lack considered to reside at the centre of language. In the space of this void, the unutterable or unnameable comes into being and can only be termed 'The Thing'. According to Gary Farnell, this Thing is located both inside and outside of language and inside and outside of the self (2010: 8). This space, and its unnameable nature, resides not only within the Symbolic and Semiotic, but also in abjection. Farnell goes on to indicate that the notion of The Thing is pertinent to the Gothic's presentation of space and subjectivity and is of particular relevance to the threat to subjectivity within interior spaces (2010: 8).

In these paintings, and in the quoted passage from Durrell's narrative, the bodies imaged are situated in a containing space. Christ is placed in a claustrophobic architectural space where the walls of the tomb are his closed-in coffin (Kristeva 1989: 110). In Brooks's painting, the figure is framed by oppressive darkness as she lies on her white palled slab. The space in which she lies feels less claustrophobic and restricted than that of Christ, but both figures are in isolated aloneness. The palette of both paintings lends itself to the sombreness of the unnameable nature of death, in the monochrome of the Brooks painting as well as in the greys, greens and browns of Holbein's. The description of Justine in Durrell's narrative: "Afloat upon the dark damascened bed-spread her feet and hands crossed ... in the silence of a room" places her in much the same floating position as Brooks' female figure and the darkness of the architectural space of the room places Justine in an equally enclosing space (M: 232). This enclosed loneliness is added to by her pose, which resembles that of a funerary sculpture on a tomb, and the solitude of her figure is caught in the use of the word "silence". As Gary Farnell has noted, this sort of representation of the space of the body, with a closed-off subjectivity and interior space are familiar traits from numerous Gothic fictions (2010: 8).

These paintings and the narrative are attempting to represent the non-representable, the unnameable terror of death. Philosopher Slavoj Žižek has indicated that this unnameable and unsymbolisable Thing is always expressed in the world of cultural objects where it becomes a presence in absence (Žižek cited in Farnell 2010: 9). Holbein, Brooks and Durrell seem to be presenting to the viewer the unimaginable nature of death through a defamiliarising perspective. Kristeva in her work *Black Sun* has called this a "death devoid of

pathos and Intimist on account of its very banality” (1989: 115). Through the banal description of Justine, the external focalising narrator has approached and indirectly symbolised the non-representable. In spite of the fact that Justine is not dead, this does not preclude her body offering intimations of death that evoke an abject sense of disgusted terror and of something beautiful or sublime. Justine, like the forms in the paintings, is distanced and withdrawn; this denies any attempt the viewer might make to access these figures. Yet, the visual representation in Brooks' painting and Durrell's text makes the female body an object of perverse pleasure and demarcates the voyeuristic subject from the prone female form.

The pleurably erotic voyeurism of Justine is furthered through Darley's focalisation of her in a textual image that bears a striking resemblance to the *Olympia* (1863) by Édouard Manet:

I always see her walking up the long staircase, crossing the gallery with its *putti* and ferns, and then entering the low doorway into this most private of rooms. Fatma, the black Ethiopian maid, follows her. Invariably Justine sinks onto the bed and holds out her ringed fingers as with an air of mild hallucination the negress draws them off the long fingers and places them in a small casket on the dressing table. (J: 121)

Though Justine is not nude in this image, there is an air of languor and an exquisite aura of luxuriousness. In Manet's painting the luxuriousness is contained not only in the interior decor with its rich ornateness figured in the expensive wallpaper, bedding and damask curtains, but in the air of the languorous Oriental odalisque associated with the nude figure of Olympia. Orientalism and the portrayal of the odalisque were prominent in painting of the late nineteenth century. Olympia herself wears intricate and expensive jewellery and tiny, elegant slippers and has a brocaded and expensive shawl draped alongside her.



Figure 21 Edouard Manet: *Olympia*

Olympia's black attendant is representative of her financial status. Similarly, Justine has an Ethiopian attendant, who is dignified with a name, Fatma. Both these attendants seem to share a close and curiously friendly bond with their mistresses. In Justine's case, Fatma's interaction with her mistress is one of disengagement, of vagueness, an air of being elsewhere. She does not focus a critical gaze on her mistress; rather she obeys her as in a dream and for Darley she is merely a foil to the image of Justine.

Olympia's maid differs, though the look she casts her mistress appears to be invisible, on closer inspection it can be seen that she looks at Olympia with a gentle, non-objectifying look, which is perhaps one of "mild hallucination" (Bal 1993: 399). However, like Fatma, Olympia's attendant is a figure placed to highlight the figure of her mistress. Justine and Olympia are women implicitly scorned by the male gaze that visualises and perceives them as little more than wanton courtesans. The objectifying and voyeuristic gaze is repulsed by Justine's raised hand and the placement of Olympia's hand that protectively shields her sex in the 'pudica' pose. By far the largest negation of this gaze is the look directed at the viewer by Olympia and Justine. This returned stare undermines the effort the voyeur is making to objectify these female figures. Montrelay has indicated that the returned stare of the *femme fatale* would scandalise (1978: 93). In the case of Olympia it did. So the confident playing out of both Justine's and Olympia's sexuality is an evasion of what Montrelay terms the structuring inherent in the desiring look (93).

The women's stares are sombre and black-browed with a disembodied and aloof impoliteness. They are not, as men would like them to be, casting a 'come hither and have me' look. Instead, theirs is a daunting and far from submissive stare. These women are

offering back to the voyeur what Justine termed a “*regard dérisoire*”, a derisive gaze, which challenges and simultaneously pushes the gaze away. This causes the gaze to be displaced onto the women’s sexuality and raises doubts about whether the women can be physically owned (Bal 1993: 397). The placement of the hand, combined with the stare, indicates the fact that the sexuality of the woman belongs to her, that it is her property, a part of her own body (397). Her sexuality is therefore hers to dispose of, or not, at her own discretion. It does not belong to the viewer, reader or focaliser who can only look from a distance, or read the words on the page. Getting any closer is liable to result in scornful dismissal.

Justine and Olympia reveal what would be considered an ‘unfeminine’ independence that undermines the gaze and its right to objectify and possess the female object. As ostensible courtesans they are considered improper because, as Creed observes, female forms which express their sexuality are considered to be abject, lustful, carnal and aggressive (1993: 38). This perceived transgression is fixated on the lack covered by Olympia’s hand. Visual representations of the feminine as castrating and castrated Other, Justine and Olympia become in male fantasy, what Pollock has called “the perfect image of savagery that lurks in the heart of civilization” (1988: 101). At the same time, they conform to the portrayal in popular imagery of figures of Orientalism that Doane associates with *femme fatales* such as Salomé and Cleopatra (1991: 1). Justine shares some of the attributes of the odalisque-like figure of Olympia, but she is a construction of far more malevolence. Rendered in the guise of a Woman of the Orient, Justine is envisioned by Durrell’s male characters as a redoubtable force driven by perverse sexuality and the desire for power.

Justine’s husband, Nessim, stereotypically embodies her with elements of Gothic Orientalism through his belief that “oriental woman is not a sensualist in the European sense; there is nothing mawkish in her constitution. Her true obsessions are power, politics and possessions” (M: 202). Justine is banally fashioned by Nessim into the shibboleth of the demonic Oriental woman devoted to excesses without rationality or the ability to be taught. She is considered a barbarian whose sexual voraciousness demands male vitality as sustenance. These qualities are fuelled by Justine’s perceived obsession with power, both sexual and political, attributes that make Nessim: “thrilled and a little terrified, recognizing in her the perfect submissiveness of the oriental spirit – the absolute feminine submissiveness” (M: 202). This submissiveness is conceptualised as savagely primeval and

Justine is seen with a “barbaric resolution gleaming in her eyes” (221). Justine’s masculine drive for power, combined with the bestial softness of her submissiveness, makes Nessim feel both desire and repulsion for her. His terror results in his deft construction of her as a power-hungry, sexualised and treacherous monster – a demonic *femme fatale*. Sex with her seems to offer an engagement with castration and death. Justine, like a vampire, appears to sap the vitality of the men with whom she is involved. It is the male’s “divine *afflatus* that inflates her, like a blow-up rubber doll that fills itself with the knowledge, dreams and seed of men” (Pinchin 1981: 32). In consequence, Justine metaphorically assumes the role of a female Dracula, only far more dangerous and evil in the eyes of Durrell’s male characters.

Gothic vampire

Justine’s most powerful personification as a vampire occurs during the spectacle and masquerade of the carnival celebrations depicted in the novel *Balthazar*. Darley is the focalising narrator who describes the events and vitality of this night of transgression synonymous with upheaval, madness, ambivalence and the destruction of social mores. In this atmospheric mood of violence and suspense, Justine is seen as the dark queen. In the room where the carnival ball is to take place, she stands “framed among the portraits” in which the “faces painted in oils matched by human faces lined by preoccupations and maladies of the soul – all gathered together, made one in the classical brilliance of candlelight” (164). Appearing to blend with these portraits, Justine partakes of the “maladies of the soul” of the living faces lit by the brilliance of candlelight. The uncanny portrait in Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Grey* is evoked, except that the maladies of the soul that were confined to Dorian’s portrait are emphatically revealed in the human faces surrounding Justine. Her appearance, in contrast, seems agelessly corrupt like a vampire, mirroring the description of Leonardo da Vinci’s *Mona Lisa* by the writer Walter Pater: “she is older than the rocks among which she sits; like the vampire, she has been dead many times, and learned the secrets of the grave” (2010: 70).

Justine is portrayed as predatory and barbaric, appearing to feed off the atmosphere and the semi-darkness. A figure of excess, her whole figure becomes visualised as death bringing and vampiric. Pursewarden, in a snide diary entry, makes it abundantly clear that men are like “moths attracted by the flame of personality. So are vampires” (B: 98). The

implication is that the personality of Justine batters upon and drains the men to whom she is attracted and, as such, she is a dangerous vampiric other. Pursewarden's allusion to the ambivalent nature of Justine's character mirrors the description of the desires of the vampire that Botting terms an "irruption of unavowable energies from the primitive past of human sexuality, the vampire remains disturbingly ambivalent" (1996: 145). Pursewarden's allegorical story, told during the carnival ball, intimates at Justine's perverse desires and primitive nature. Employing a clever frame narration, Pursewarden recounts a story in which another nameless narrator is telling his own adventure. During the course of the story, this unnamed narrator comments: "I felt that I was living in a Gothic novel" (B: 166).

Pursewarden's story, in the manner of "Byron or Baudelaire", tells of a count who meets the perfect masked woman during carnival. She proves to be a vampire. The oddity is that Byron never wrote a story about a vampire. Instead, it was Byron's personal physician John William Polidori who wrote, arguably, the first vampire story entitled *The Vampyre*. In this story, the evil vampire is a male, whilst Pursewarden takes great delight in making his vampire a woman. To add to the tension Pursewarden goes on to indicate, "carnival is the one time of year when vampires walk freely abroad" (B: 166). Bakhtin regards the carnival body as a grotesque one that is "not separated from the world by clearly defined boundaries, it is blended with the world" (1984: 26). This ambivalent double nature is hidden beneath the masquerade costume, which allows for "utter anonymity: the anonymity conferred by the grim black velvet domino which shrouds identity and sex, prevents one distinguishing between man and woman, wife and lover, friend and enemy" (B: 159). This double body can indulge in licentious pleasures and the infliction of pain or death because the domino hides the body that in daily life conforms to societal norms. The domino provides the perfect cloak for the double body of the vampire with its unavowable desires and ambivalence.³⁸

In Pursewarden's story, the masked vampire becomes the count's last, rather Sadean, lover. In his description of this woman, the count mentions that all he saw was "an impression of white teeth", but on showing his body to the narrator, it appears "covered with great bites, like the marks of a weasel's teeth" (B: 167). This reference to the white teeth recalls Justine's "magnificent white teeth" (J: 17). The count dies drained by the

³⁸ For an exploration of the City as Carnival in the *Alexandria Quartet*, see Anne Zahlan (1980).

perverse desires of his faceless lover. Durrell does not disrupt the heterosexual basis in this story; all he does is change the predator from male to female. In doing so, he enforces the abject nature of the feminine, showing the female vampire as transgressing societal laws through her aggression, disruption of identity and her lust for blood. Her sexual conduct is ungoverned by phallogocentric hegemony and her bloodlust makes her abhuman - a "weasel". Because she is neither human nor animal, the vampire remains a liminal creature that inhabits the boundary between the states of the living and the dead, a terrifyingly abject creature. For the male narrator, a female vampire epitomises woman as evil incarnate, a monstrosity. Consequently, the narrative moulds her body to conform to male fears of loss of identity and castration, where the mouth of the vampire and by allusion that of Justine, like the snakes on Medusa's head, represents the *vagina dentata*. Justine is, I contend, the female character upon whom Pursewarden models the vampire in his story. Pursewarden's tale is a malicious attack aimed at censuring her perceived carnal voraciousness and sexual difference. Writing the story represents Pursewarden's disavowal of the castrating potential of the feminine principle as represented by Justine.

This disavowal is apparent in his continual denigration of Justine's sexuality. Talking about her he refers to her as "a tiresome old sexual turnstile through which presumably we must all pass - a somewhat vulpine Alexandrian Venus" (B: 96). Using the word "vulpine", Pursewarden equates her with a fox, a sly, cunning creature, one symbolic of transformation, of evil and the devil. Justine is co-extensive with an animal and figured as a body in excess, revealing the beast contained in woman. Pursewarden continues to insult her terming her a "bloody tiresome obsessive society figure" (B: 106), "imbecile with the soul of a clerk" (98), "a pious old sin-cushion" (98) and a "whining Arab" (104). He slaps her, makes her feel like a whipped dog, and mocks her. He eviscerates her personality as that of "inflamed self-pity" (B: 102), "ridiculous" (B: 97), "self-important", "impertinent", "foolish" (97). Contrary to what Balthazar says, this is not a case of "honeyed-insults" (105). Balthazar retells these cruel and belittling diatribes, but with such self-satisfaction that the reader is appalled. For Pursewarden, Justine is merely a degenerate and sexual beast-woman. He treats and sees her as inanimate, "a pious old sin-cushion", where the ambivalence of her nature is contained in the conjunction of "pious" and "sin", and finally as an animal. He puts her out of his room like "a pet cat" (105), implies she is related to apes, sees her as "a

ruffled black dove" (98), and makes her feel like a "whipped dog" (99). These are all images of violence projected by the phallogentric subject over the animalised feminine object.

This verbal violence is at times physical when Justine, slapping Pursewarden across the face, feels "at once the stinging retort on her own cheek" (B: 99). Literary scholar Naomi Segal considers that this form of verbalised violence possesses ideological menace, but is not dangerous (1994: 143). I would disagree with Segal's assessment because textual verbalised violence can easily transgress Symbolic restraints of discourse. In this sense, the violence of Pursewarden's response acts as an assault. Pursewarden's extreme bullying is a correction applied to an object perceived as lesser, stupider and sexualised. Sex and violence, I suggest, work in unison. The sadistic cruelty in Pursewarden's returning her slap is an action fuelled by a horrifying rage and immense misogynistic dislike of 'Woman' and, in particular, of Justine. Pursewarden's physical and verbal assault manages to place Justine into the position of masochist and thus outside the limits of the feminine ideal.

Automated Machine

The comparison of Justine to a sexual turnstile establishes her as a thing, a revolving mechanical gate. This refers back to the image of her as a blow-up doll, but here she is the female automaton. An inanimate thing, Justine lacks all volition of her own unless linked to an active masculine presence. She is a body used by men on a rotational basis – and Pursewarden indicates that all of them have to experience her at least once. This image of Justine as a mechanical body references the automata that fascinated the Surrealist artists. The Surrealists automata turned woman into an uncanny commodity. Foster writes "the machine and the commodity were often seen as demonic, disruptive as they were of traditional social practices" (1991: 51). Visualised as part-woman and part-machine, Justine's body is reified and fragmented. In this representation, Justine becomes not only a transgressive machinic hybrid but, conflated with animalistic imagery, a beast. This automaton and animal figuration are central in the repertoire of the Surrealists. Foster argues, "becoming animal is much more common ... and such grotesques primarily address a redefining of the human in terms of sexual drives and unconscious conflicts" (52). Sexualised, Justine is an ambivalent mechanical and animalistic commodity, a fetishized Gothic body. Using the order of symbolic discourse the male characters inscribe a repellent

masculine fantasy of abject desire and repulsion, of transgression of boundaries, a horror of hybridity, and the taboo of desiring it across Justine's body.

In similar manner, Justine's depiction in *Balthazar* is as a mannequin. Her marriage to Nessim results in his attempts to control her by

penetrating the affective armour of his beautiful tacit wife; the wife he had married and hung up in a cobwebbed corner of his life by the wrists, like a marionette on strings! (B: 107).

The images in this passage are excessively violent and the use of the word "penetrating", when associated with a woman, has sexual overtones connected to an act of force. The violence necessary to penetrate armour is indicative of a battle, where the male is trying to overcome the female. This image can, according to Bal's reading of Chardin's painting *The Skate*, be regarded as one of visual penetration (1997b: 50).

Justine is deprived of a voice, as the word tacit means "silent". However, this word also implies complicity: she is a passive, willing object in this battle. Depicted through images of violent, indeed, sadistic subjugation, Nessim imaginatively envisions Justine "hung up in a cobwebbed corner of his life by the wrists". Not only is she associated with the myth of Arachne, but there are also the Sadean overtones in the portrayal of her hanging by her wrists. This specific image brings to mind the art of *strappado*, with its Inquisitorial overtones of torture and is reminiscent of an etching by William Blake called *Flagellation of a Female Samboe Slave* (1793).



Figure 22 William Blake: *Flagellation of a Female Samboe Slave*

In this etching the female slave is standing under a tree with her hands bound by the wrists, her arms pulled upwards above her head and attached to a branch. The surface of her body bears a myriad bleeding slashes where the whip has penetrated. Perversely this image is erotic with its full frontal delineation of the slave's perfectly shaped body and breasts. The white cloth protecting her loins, rather like that associated with the figure of the crucified Christ, is flecked with blood from the wounds on her torso. This garment veils and is the marking device of the secret of her sex. However, the distress of her body is less about her being a victim and more about the voyeuristic and desirous gaze of the male viewer (Spooner 2004: 38). The white cloth is a primitive shift and thus an archetypal Gothic garment that defines the slave as it fragments her body. In the fragmentation of her beaten body, she becomes a reflection of the barbarism of the perpetrators of this act, who are visible in the background. Their uncovering of her, the removal of her civilising attire, has made her a representative of the natural world and opened her up to the brutal rape of the surface of her body through flagellation. With her feet off the ground and her one leg gracefully bent, she is a subjugated object of male power.

Durrell's description of Justine emulates the pose of Blake's female slave. However, I consider this portrayal of Justine is compounded by her representation as a marionette. Forcibly dominated by the power of the male imagination, Justine becomes a representation marked by a lack of ability to offer resistance. Masculine desire controls and manipulates the strings of her behaviour and representation. Justine's marriage to Nessim assumes uncanny and perverse overtones, which, in turn, causes it to become what psychoanalytic theorist Michelle Massé has called a traumatic denial of identity (1990: 688). Justine's trauma is that of becoming Nessim's property and her depiction as an "it". The imagery ensures that she exists as nothing more than a silent, masochistic puppet with no volition. Robert Belton has pointed out that the confusion of animate and inanimate is one of the primary foundations for the uncanny according to Freud (1995: 106). However, this relation of Justine to an inanimate jointed mechanism is immanently brutal. In the work of the Surrealists, this relation of the female body to the mannequin or mechanism was a very prevalent theme.

The mannequins of Giorgio de Chirico were the starting point for those of Salvador Dali, Yves Tanguy, Rene Magritte, André Masson, Hans Bellmer's dolls and the works of

photographers such as Eugène Atget and Umbo (Otto Umbehr). Man Ray's mannequin *Portmanteau* later used as a *Dadaphoto* (1920) represents the fusing of human and mannequin:



Figure 23 Man Ray: Portmanteau

This photograph presents an object that amalgamates a female human form and a mannequin display stand. The photographer hereby creates a half-human and half-mannequin creature contained within a black space that is mysterious and uncanny. The whiteness of the living body and the paper cut-out of the mannequin's face, arms and shoulders foregrounds this figure. The fact that the viewer can see the living woman's breasts, torso, the triangle of dark pubic hair, hips and legs enhances both the sexual and mechanical aspect of the photograph. One leg appears missing because it is hidden in a black knee length sock. As a result, she appears mutilated like the veterans returning from the First World War.

The living woman's face and arms are hidden behind those of the mannequin. The doll's face has wide cartoon-like eyes and a small puckered mouth, rather like Betty Boop. The long reticulated wooden arms are outstretched in order to hold coats. From the wooden base, a metal pole splits the woman in half. The photographer's control over the image is paramount, presenting as he does the female body as commodity and sexual object. Used later as an advertisement, the photograph was entitled *dadaphoto* and placed in the only issue of the *New York Dada* magazine. Shown in this manner in a magazine, the mechanical and commercial nature of women, as merely purchasable items, was enhanced.

In similar manner to the embodiment of Man Ray's mannequin, Justine becomes uncanny through the description of her as the living double of an inanimate mannequin. Freud considered dolls to be the uncanniest of objects. The poet Rainer Marie Rilke who felt repulsion for and fear of dolls shared this belief. Freud suggested the figure of the doll inspired fear of castration and death. Walter Benjamin indicated that the motif of the doll and the *femme fatale* shared a resemblance as both "possess the concept of a woman-machine, artificial, mechanical, at variance with all living creatures, and above all murderous" (1999: 696). Benjamin added that psychologists would probably explain this doll and its nature as related to death and sexuality and find "each ambiguously intimated in the other" (696).

The nature of the mannequin is that of the uncanny simulacrum. Nessim eroticises and strips Justine of her identity in a projection of his masculine anxiety. His need for Justine is what critic J. Hillis Miller has called "a reciprocity in which the same loves the same" (1990: 4-5). Concerned with his own subjectivity, Nessim moulds Justine to reflect his own needs and to bolster his identity and masculine power. The sadistic voyeurism suggested by Nessim's fantasies of domination and control of Justine's image is, according to art historian Amelia Jones, "always already masculine if not necessarily male" (2002: 953). Justine's corporeality is gothicised through this metaphoric embodiment as an inanimate mannequin, automaton or *femme fatale* doll and the perverse image becomes what Robert Stoller calls "the erotic form of hatred" (1986).

This erotic form of hatred is taken further in the novel *Clea* when Darley returns to Egypt and goes to see Justine. During a conversation, he has with Nessim and Justine about their current life he sees Justine "holding up her wrists at me, her face carved into a grimace. She held them joined together as if by invisible manacles. She exhibited these imaginary handcuffs for a long moment before dropping her hands back into her lap" (C: 46). This image references the image of Nessim hanging his wife "up in a cobwebbed corner of his life by the wrists". In the complicit scene with Darley, Justine exhibits her wrists like those of a slave in handcuffs or manacles. This perverse image is similar in tone and atmosphere to an untitled 1930 photograph by the Surrealist Jacques-André Boiffard. This photo shows a woman manacled with handcuffs in the pose of strappado, but with her head covered and her hands in long gloves.



Figure 24 Jacques Andre-Boiffard: Untitled

Anthropologist Michel Leiris in his article “Le Caput Mortuum ou la Femme de la l'Alchimiste” (1931) published in the journal *Documents* said of Boiffard’s photographs of leather masked and restrained women:

It is not a question of a particular person, but of Woman in general, who can easily stand for the whole of nature, the whole external world that we are able to dominate. Over and above the fact that she suffers beneath the leather mask, that she is harassed and mortified (which must satisfy our desires for power and our fundamental cruelty), her head - the sign of her individuality and her intelligence - is thus affronted and denied. Before her, the male partner ... finds himself in a position to make use of (and with what sacrilegious pleasure!) a simple and universal erotic mechanism. (1930: 25)

In the photograph under consideration, the figure of the woman stands facing the viewer, the mask making her face look like it is slowly dissolving into a skull. Her hands are manacled and pulled above her in long leathery looking gloves. The light comes from above and brings the mask and gloves into specific focus. Bright white patches highlight her elbows and her neck making them stand out strangely.

The image is, as Leiris implies, one of sado-masochistic fantasy and fetishistic desire, the mask and gloves highlighting parts of the body, fragmenting it and providing both a realistic and a non-realistic atmosphere. Leiris indicates this figure is merely an abstract representative of the essence of Woman that he, in conformance with phallogocentric

ideology, associates directly with nature, which men have always felt they can conquer and dominate. The picture has in effect deprived Woman of rationality, and cruelly presented her as a body there to be tortured and dominated to satisfy the male gaze and need for power equated with distanced and perverse erotic pleasure. The woman in the photograph is both less and more threatening because veiled behind the mask and the gloves. Her mouth is reduced to a wound, her eyes are holes and the landscape of her body, which is implicitly naked, is violated. Desire and violence are intertwined as are *jouissance* and torture. Pain and pleasure mingle and boundaries collapse. Such extreme realities appear to occupy a liminal or borderline space, the space of abjection.

The relationship between Justine and Nessim is charged with a similar atmosphere of violence, horror and sadism. They share a mutual disgust, and sex, like death, is marked by this repulsion. One-time Surrealist and theorist Georges Bataille (1995) related desire, sex, torture, *jouissance* and death to bodily wastes, disgust and terror in a theory that pre-dates the notion of abjection posited by Kristeva. Both have argued that certain religious rites and interactions have placed bodily functions and desires, particularly those of the female body, into the category of untouchable, taboo or abject. The disgust and terror associated with the sexual act and sexual difference is disavowed through sado-masochism, torture and the fetish, allowing for power and control over the other.³⁹

Desire, disgust and Hatred

Located in the internal soliloquy Darley conducts when faced with Justine are the fear, hatred and attraction that turn Woman into an abstract thing. In this internal monologue, he considers the nature of Woman, which reveals his misogynistic essentialisation of any woman as being the same:

Under all these masks there was only another woman, every woman, like a lay figure in a dressmaker's shop, waiting for the poet to clothe her, breathe life into her ... the enormous reflexive power of woman – the fecund passivity with which like the moon, she borrows her second-hand light from the male

³⁹ For an interesting interpretation of male *jouissance* (orgasm) and male sperm and how these contrast with the 'unclean' nature of female menstruation and sexuality see Murat Aydemir (2007). Also see Ernst van Alphen's exploration of the representation of masculine gender embodiment and the self/other in discourse (1992: 164-190).

sun ... my admiration for her more than ever – as a symbol of woman, so to speak – I was puzzled to explain the new element which had crept in here: a flavour of disgust for her personality and its attributes. The touch of the dark head against my knee stirred dim feelings of revulsion in me ... turning it from something once desirable to something which now stirred disgust? (C: 49)

Woman is not an autonomous entity; she depends on the “poet” to become a living entity. This masculine presence breathes his *afflatus* into her, much like a god. Belton, writing on the Surrealist relation to the conception of Woman, indicates that this group of artists considered that “woman is not born but made by men and by patriarchal culture” (1995: 82). Darley perceives creation to be a masculine province; woman remains a passive image for the male gaze. Woman cannot strive to be a subject. Instead, man (specifically the writer) constructs her to bolster his masculine subjectivity and identity through a narcissistic reflection of the illusion he wishes to see. Darley appears to structure the fantasy of Woman around dominant social relations and discourses on gender of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. His setting up of the rational/emotional and active/passive binary is in accordance with sexist patriarchal power structures, which found his fear of the castrating feminine and death. Throughout his monologue there is hidden sexual and mental sadism aimed at the image of Justine as the representative of Woman.

This is furthered by his reaction to her presence, the “flavour of disgust”, “revulsion” and the “once desirable ... which now stirred disgust”. There is a horror present in his physical aversion to her “unbearable perfume and smell of her body”, which he perceives as an olfactory excess, an improper and oppressive female excretion (C: 54). Darley recoils from Justine’s body regarding it to be “soiled and tattered, like a dead bird in a gutter” (C: 54). Darley’s rejection and horror of her image is complete and in his thoughts, “It was as if some huge iron door had closed forever in my heart ... I could hardly wait to be gone” (C: 54). The previous sexual thrill has turned to a *frisson* of terror with the need to flee and cast off both his previous memories and his current experience of her. Punished for her attempt to defy masculine control, the male characters relegate Justine to the position of a mechanistic, abject monster. Justine’s portrayal as something abject and grotesque calls the memories Darley has retained of her into question. He indicates he finds it “difficult to disinter the memory of that magical dark mistress of the past” (C: 45). Confronted with the

present vision, the fantasy image of the dark and magical mistress vanishes. The word “disinterred” with its connotations of death and the digging up of corpses suggests that the resurrection of Justine’s image is unlikely to recur, whether in reality or in Darley’s future remembrances.

However, Justine is very quick to point out how unreliable memory and visual perception are:

‘You see a different me’ she cried in a voice almost of triumph. ‘But once again the difference lies in you, in what you imagine you see! ... We are after all totally ignorant of one another, presenting selected fictions to each other! ... ‘I knew that you would always prefer your own mythical picture, framed by the five senses, to anything more truthful’. (C: 47-48)

Justine accuses Darley of creating the perception of an object through vision and the imaginative interpretation of what he sees. He remains unable to recognise that all visual creation is based on subjective perception and fantasy by means of which an attempt to regain the forever lost object takes place. Justine makes it plain that Darley’s previous image of her positioned her as a “mythical picture”.

Pollock has argued that this delusive and mythical fantasy is to eschew comprehension of lack thus permitting men to establish woman as visibly different (1988: 166-167). It was Darley’s construction of her dark beauty as an image of desire, a sex object, which established her as myth. His illusion allowed him to remain ignorant and now he is repeating the self-same error by constructing another illusion based on the selected fiction he has chosen to perceive. His search for truth has remained, as Justine points out, stuck within the limitations of his five senses. This expression “framed by the five senses” brings to mind the section *A Memorable Fancy* from William Blake’s *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. The two last lines of *A Memorable Fancy* state

How do you know but ev'ry Bird that cuts the airy way,
Is an immense World of Delight, clos'd by your senses five? (1985: 183)

Blake and Justine are commenting on the relationship between the senses and the imagination, between sense and perception. Darley has not been able to transcend his five

senses to emulate the “Bird that cuts the airy way”, with its flight of imagination that for Blake, and Justine, would open into infinity.

The “world of delight” represented by this imaginative flight has been lost to Darley in his striving after a limited conception of the ‘real’ and ‘truth’. This search has ignored the multiplicity of perception and how this visual space, according to philosopher Gilles Deleuze, “can be fitted together in an infinite number of ways ... because they are not oriented in relation to each other” (1986: 109). Darley has been and remains unable to comprehend that the ‘real’ is a matter of perspective and associations. Even Justine’s telling him that perception consists of “selective fictions” does not make him stop to think about the validity of his assessment of her. Unwilling to acknowledge that what she says contains any veracity; he refuses to recognise that what she is proposing remains imaginatively beyond the confines of the images of memory or his idea of truth.

Generally it has been the male characters who have described Justine and the effect she has on those around her. Yet, the final image of Justine provided in the novel *Clea* is through the words of Clea. In a letter to Darley, Clea presents Justine as monstrous, mechanical and death bringing when she writes, “It was as if, like some powerful engine of destruction, she had suddenly switched on again. She has never looked happier or younger” (C: 245). This opinion furthers the idea that Justine is not fully human, but, rather like a vampire, only cloaks herself in human form. Associated with the superficial and powerful aspects of nature, Justine’s self vacillates between the passively superficial and the powerfully aggressive. Conflated with the mechanical, Justine is fashioned into a being both alive and death-propelled.

The rejuvenated Justine of the final pages of the novel *Clea* is in the process of resuming her role of dangerous juggernaut out to destroy. However, this is the last that we hear of Justine as she is elided or eradicated from the narrative. Her power has, in fact, been controlled and her deadliness negated. Sexualised, phallic and uncanny, Justine is ambiguous. Through the metaphoric representation of her as a mechanical automaton and mannequin, Justine’s image is reified, mutilated and fragmented. Durrell’s female characters, I argue, are fragmented, mutilated dolls irrespective of whether they are good girls or bad ones like Justine. An inherently sado-masochistic theme informs the Gothic motifs with which the female characters are inscribed. Automatons or fragmented,

mutilated bodies, Durrell portrays these women in the guise of the abject, monstrous-feminine whose sexualised otherness inspires fear, desire and loathing.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have examined the manner in which the narrative of the *Quartet* represents Justine as both the *femme fatale* and by extension the monstrous-feminine. I have exposed how Durrell visually and textually constructs Justine's anatomy through the application of Gothic themes. Justine is metaphorically associated with the vampire, the ultimately evil and abhuman *femme fatale* figure who castrates men by sucking them dry in a parody of sexual lust. She is also the non-human automaton, mannequin and doll. Darley's representation of her as the essence of Woman inscribes her with qualities of the natural, lustful, and evil. Justine is not an autonomous entity, but merely a symbolic construct of phallogocentric beliefs. She represents the archetypal monstrous-feminine face of Woman. Durrell's female characters are in essence little more than surface creations. Over these surface creations, Durrell places an excess of verbal and visual imagery to create a palimpsestuous effect of Gothic motifs such as the abject monstrous-feminine, Thing-ness, hybridity, vampires and sexual and social transgression. Durrell represents the gothicised form of his female characters in a manner that emphasises the terror and loathing associated with otherness and sexual difference.

Creed has indicated that horror and shock are associated with the perceived sexual difference of woman and its threat of castration (1986: 1). I have argued that Justine epitomises this threatening and dangerous female sexuality. Powerful and phallic, Justine embodies what Kristeva indicates is an important aspect of abjection: the disturbing of identity, borders and the order of law (1982: 4). The abject and the monstrous are closely associated through their construction by religious laws as exhibiting sexual immorality, perversion, abomination, murder and the female body (1986: 46). Justine's behaviour partakes of all of these aspects. She conducts illicit sexual relationships with more than one man at a time; she indulges in an affair with Clea; she is likened to a vampire and her body is compared to an automaton and a machine. Sexuality is her weapon, one that provides her with the appearance of power and freedom. Her body remains uncanny, simultaneously

alluring and repulsive for the male characters with its danger of castration and promise of erotic delight.

Focalisation, or the voyeuristic gaze, occurs only from the masculine point of view in the tetralogy. Even when Justine has the gaze, it proves to be an illusion granted to her by the overarching masculine voice and text of either Darley or other male focalisers. The agency of the gaze is fundamental in establishing Justine as an object that can be fashioned in accordance with different Gothic features. Superimposed on the surface of her body, these tropes assume the role of her personality resulting in her limited development throughout the novels. Durrell makes Justine the uncanny shadow of Clea, setting up a strange doubling. Botting, with reference to the Gothic, has called this type of palimpsestuous layering a “play of signs, images and texts” or the “darkly illuminating labyrinth of language” (1996: 14). Mere symbolic creations shaped by the narrator’s memories of time past and time present, Justine and Clea haunt the narrative of the novels brought back to life through remembrance. They represent the ghosts of representation and as such are the uncanny emblems of the Gothic.

In the next chapter, my discussion will focus on a figure seemingly at variance with the concept of abjection and the monstrous-feminine - the Gothic heroine. In the *Quartet*, this heroine is epitomised by the figure of Clea. Conceived to be passive and lacking in effective behaviour, the heroine’s role is one of acceptance and accordance with patriarchal laws. In many ways, the behaviour of the heroine reveals abject, masochistic tendencies. Abjection, in Clea’s case, resides in the representation of the transgressive lesbian relationship Clea has with Justine. Darley juxtaposes this relationship to Clea’s perceived innocence and purity. I shall further discuss the nature of Clea’s role as victim whose representation is dependent on an overlay of motifs. Appearing to be immune to the darker more perverse elements of these motifs, I will show how Durrell gothicises Clea through her transgressive, apparently lesbian, relationship with Justine, her status as victim, her abortion and her mutilation and metamorphosis into a part-human, part-machine. Her belief in the supernatural and fortune-tellers, her feminine masquerade and the return of her past to haunt and demand retribution, all ensure the superimposed play of different elements over the gothicised surface of her body.