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Femme fatale: A visual/textual reading of the figuration of Justine in Lawrence Durrell's *The Alexandria quartet*

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Abstract

This article considers the themes that shape the female character, Justine, in Lawrence Durrell's The Alexandria quartet. *Adopting a feminist Gothic position, I shall consider how Justine's portrayal as a* femme fatale *makes her a vehicle for Durrell's articulation of a misogynistic perspective throughout his tetralogy. Throughout the article, my contention will be that Durrell's deployment of certain Gothic motifs, in this instance the vampire, automaton, marionette and doll, alongside the trope of the* femme fatale, *fashion Justine's embodiment as a monstrous-feminine Other and the locus of masculine fears. My reading will also adopt the rather unconventional position of reading art images into Durrell's narrative, in order to become a critical interpreter of his textual-visuality.*

During an interview conducted with the French critic Marc Alyn (1974:61), Durrell claimed that *Justine*, the first novel in the *Alexandria quartet*, was a 'spiritual butcher shop with girls on slabs'. This is perhaps the most accurate assessment of the nastiness of the representations of the female characters in the tetralogy and, in particular, that of the character Justine. Durrell wrote *The Alexandria quartet* between 1957 and 1960 and the four constituent novels originally appeared as separate works. The first three novels *Justine* (1957); *Balthazar* (1958a) and *Mountolive* (1958b) present the same events from different perspectives, which add to the entwinement of the narrative's plot. The final novel, *Clea* (1960), moves the action forward into the present and is structurally the least complex of the novels and perhaps the most pedestrian. Each novel adds a further layer to the story and with the narrative's reliance on the non-linearity of memory, the concept of sequential time-space is questioned whilst the multivocal narrative voice results in the fragmentation of reality, identity and truth. The novels are set in the polyglot Egyptian port of Alexandria prior to and during the Second World War and concentrate on a small group of people, at the centre of which is the figure of Justine. It is though the narrator-focaliser Darley's point of view that the reader encounters *Justine*, *Balthazar* and *Clea*, and these are the novels in which Justine is most vividly portrayed. As one of the main female characters, Justine is the dark queen whose presence infuses the tetralogy and magnetically draws the male characters to her through her indefinable allure, seductiveness, sexual profligacy and mystery. Represented as a powerful and fascinating force, Justine is the incarnation of the *femme fatale* who charms and ensnares her lovers for her own nefarious purposes. The reader eventually learns that she uses her lovers in the furtherance of her husband Nessim's gun-running plot that is aimed at overthrowing the Egyptian government and expelling the British from Egypt. It is Justine's apparent sexual profligacy and her *femme fatal* allure that inspire both fear and desire in Durrell's male characters. My contention throughout this article is that Durrell's penchant for representations of excess, violence, moral subversion and misogyny seem openly expressed in the construction of Justine, and appear to cloak a deep fear and dislike of the feminine. Accordingly, it is the male narrator, Darley, alongside other male focalisers, who portrays her as an abject and monstrous-feminine Other.

I employ a feminist theoretical approach in my analysis of Durrell's construction of Justine as an abject and monstrous *femme fatale*. Although a number of scholars, such as Christopher Reibling (1991); Claire Ellen Phillips-Peckosh (1989) and Jane Lagoudis Pinchin (1981), have attempted to engage with the *Alexandria quartet* from a feminist theoretical position, none of this research has engaged with the depth of violence and inherent misogyny present in the visual representations of Durrell's female characters in the *Quartet.* It is, however, the Gothic tropes, so visible in Durrell's richly baroque style, which have received no serious critical attention. My article thus briefly attempts to redress both the paucity of feminist theoretical scrutiny of Justine's characterisation as a stereotypical *femme fatale*, and tries to open up the rich possibilities Durrell's Gothic imagery offers for a critical reading of the tetralogy. I further intimate that Durrell's manipulation of Gothic themes, such as the *femme fatale*,

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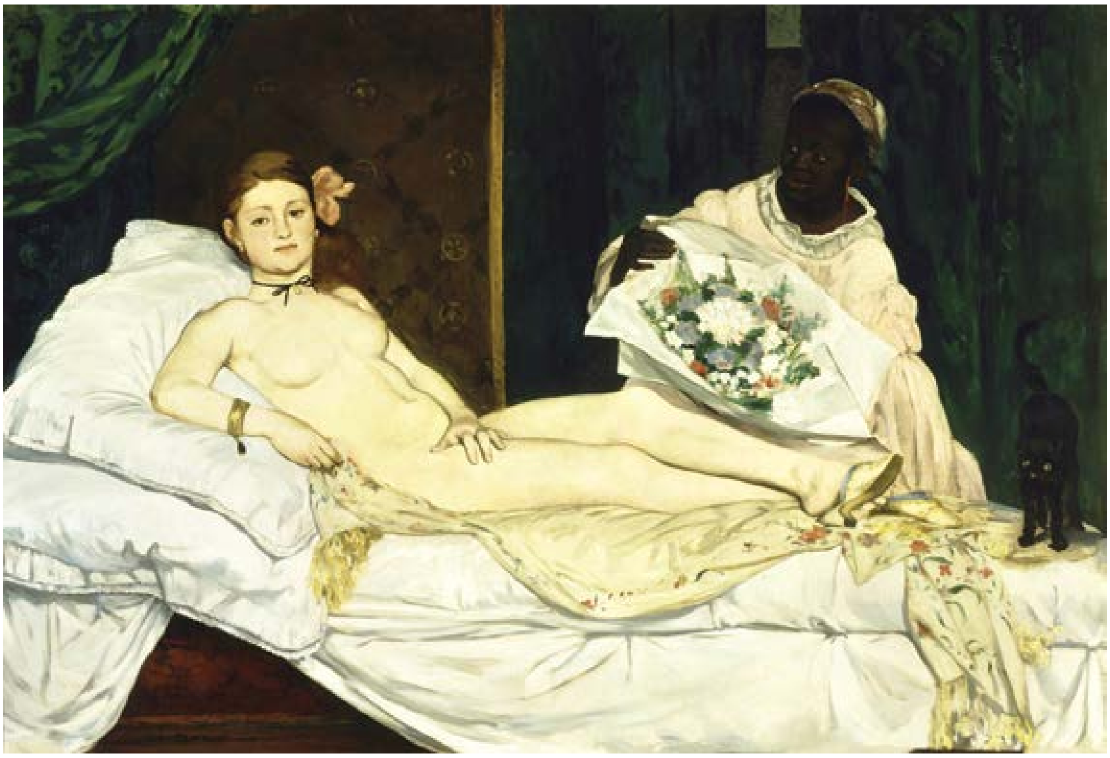
automaton, marionette and vampire, result in the transformation of Justine into a gothicised surface lacking interiority. I employ the term 'gothicisation' to refer to the process of the transfer, layering or superimposition of visual Gothic motifs onto Justine's corporeality. My contention is that Durrell moulds Justine into an artificial, fragmented and monstrous figure. She remains merely a vehicle for Durrell's articulation of hegemonic ideology, perspective and standpoints. An indication of the ominously dark and aggressively violent Gothic themes in the tetralogy is already alluded to in the quotations prefacing each novel, which are taken from the work of the Marquis de Sade. By referencing the Marquis de Sade Durrell subtly indicates his intention, which is to represent all the perverse desires found at the core of human interactions, and which result in an abject conceptualisation of *othered bodies*. With its connotations of dissolution of order, meaning and identity, the Gothic is closely aligned with Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection as well as Barbara Creed's conceptualisation of the monstrous-feminine. It is Justine's othering, brought about by the fear and anxiety of her sexual difference, which establishes her embodiment as a site of abjection and monstrousness. This article will employ both the concepts of abjection and the monstrous-feminine to analyse the othering and fragmenting of Justine's corporeality into a distorted and misogynistic representation of female subjectivity (Beville 2009:52).

My exploration of the visual/textual embodiment of Justine employs an interdisciplinary approach by establishing a dialogue between certain visual artworks and Durrell's textual imagery. In order to found my fairly unusual approach of confronting and juxtaposing certain pictorial artworks with Durrell's textual imagery, I plan to adopt the 'bi-textual' theory of Lorraine Janzen Kooistra (1995), which she bases on the binary opposition of the male text and the female image. Establishing a critical dialogue between the opposition of Durrell's textuality and the visuality of the selected artworks will allow me to highlight the Gothic aspects of Durrell's sexual and misogynistic representation of the figure of Justine. Though the relationship between the selected images and Durrell's text may seem distant and perfunctory, I have assumed the role (much like the illustrators of Victorian novels that Kooistra discusses) of an 'interpretive reader' of Durrell's narrative. In my analysis, I attempt to avoid privileging the text over the image. In this instance, the artworks chosen were not specifically drawn as illustrations for the text, nor are they mentioned in the text. Rather, I would suggest, their dialogue with the text produces meaning while acting as a critical visual commentary on Durrell's narrative (Kooistra 1995:3). This form of text–image dialogue, which Kooistra terms a 'marriage' (whether felicitous or not) remains a new and unusual attempt to interrogate the Gothic aspects of the visual/verbal representation of Justine as a fragmented and mutilated female form.

The representation of Justine within Lawrence Durrell's narrative in *The Alexandria quartet* is, as Mieke Bal (1997a:142) explains, offered from a certain angle in which a specific and subjective point of view is presented to the reader. Determining how and from where events or characters are being visually constructed is what Bal terms 'focalisation'. Bal (1997a:146) indicates that the 'relation between the vision and that which is "seen"' determines focalisation, and refers to the characters from which the events are viewed as focalisers (Bal 1997a:146). The focaliser is not necessarily the narrator, and in Durrell's novels focalisation works on a number of levels. Consequently, the narrator-focaliser Darley is dependent on character-focalisers such as Justine's lover, Ludwig Pursewarden, for alternate representations of her, which Darley then filters and offers to the reader. Character-bound focalisers such as Pursewarden can be seen to bring bias and limitation into the narrative (Bal 1997a:146). The act of focalisation can also apply to the reader or viewer who, it can be argued, is imbricated with the meaning that both the visual and verbal nature of Durrell's narrative produce through what Lorraine Janzen Kooistra (1995:2) refers to as a 'contingent, interactive relationship'. In consequence of this, I consider the visual depiction of Justine as stemming from a masculine viewpoint, with its attendant bias and concomitant agenda. Her personification as a *femme fatale* ensures that Justine exemplifies a form of evil – one that Michelle Montrelay (1978:93) associates with the *femme fatale* 'playing out of her sex' in a flaunting of her sexuality that men consider to be scandalous. Her defiance of her socially accepted role and of the rule of law is what makes Justine dangerous as a *femme fatale*.

Confined to her body, Justine represents both excess and deadliness. However, Mary Ann Doane (1991:2) notes that the *femme fatale* remains an ambivalent figure because she is both active and passive. She retains power, but a power that is not subject to her will so that she lacks any agency. Such power without agency leads to the *femme fatale*'s representation as the embodiment of the masculine fear of loss of identity. This results 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). A symptom of male fears, the *femme fatale* is visually projected as a monstrous-feminine Other. According to Bal (2006:277), visual projection results in a 'gendered act of fictionalization' and an 'act of interpretation' that constructs sexual difference or gender from absence. Barbara Creed (1986:44) coined the term 'monstrous-feminine' to define the masculine response to sexual difference. Creed (1986:46) argues that the monstrous is often associated with 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. These aspects of horror and fear are associated with what Julia Kristeva (1982) defines as abjection. Kristeva's abject is closely aligned with the monstrous and the literary Gothic, which in its 'obsession with abominations … 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' (Hurley 1996:28). Horror, disgust and monstrous abomination are all aspects of abjection associated with the female body and its construction as a site of dangerous sexual otherness. For the male characters in Durrell's *Quartet*, it is the terrifying sexualised nature of Justine that leads them to embody her as a monstrous, gothicised feminine form. Durrell's narrative discourse visualises Justine in many Gothic guises, from the monstrous-feminine *femme fatale* to the vampire, the non-human automaton, the marionette and doll that, I suggest, are aimed



1 Edouard Manet, Olympia (1863). Oil on canvas, 130 x 190 cm. Musée d'Orsay, Paris (RF 644). http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Edouard_Manet_-_Olympia_-_Google_Art_Project_3.jpgWeb (accessed 9 December 2014).

at enforcing phallocentric power and control over Justine's apparently threatening image.

Darley's representation of Justine also subtly associates her with the *femme fatale* figure of the courtesan. In one striking textual image Justine seems to bear a resemblance to Edouard Manet's 1863 painting *Olympia* **(1)**. Picturing Justine, Darley says:

> 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. (Durrell 1957:121)

Though Justine is not nude in this image, there is an air of languor and an exquisite aura of luxuriousness about her.

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 of Olympia's nude body. Olympia herself wears intricate and expensive jewellery and tiny, elegant slippers and has a brocaded and expensive shawl draped alongside her. The nameless black attendant in the painting is representative of Olympia's financial status. Similarly, Justine has an Ethiopian attendant, who is dignified with a name, Fatma. Both 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, Fatma merely acts as a foil to the visualisation of Justine. In my interpretative reading of the similarity which I deem to exist between the painting by Manet and Durrell's descriptive textual image, I attempt to establish an interactive exchange between text and image. This interactive relationship creates what Kooistra (1995:4) terms an 'imagetext', and I argue that the dialogue enacts an intertextual cultural conversation between reader, image and text.

Justine and Olympia are women implicitly scorned by the visualising masculine gaze, which positions them as little more than sexualised wantons. However, the objectifying gaze is repulsed by the look directed at the viewer by both Olympia and, throughout the novels, by Justine. This returned stare undermines any effort to objectify these female figures. Montrelay (1978:93) indicates that the stare of the *femme fatale* could scandalise. In the case of Olympia, it did, and Justine's stare acts to disturb the male characters who encounter it. So the confident playing out of both Justine's and Olympia's sexuality is an evasion of what Montrelay (1978:93) terms the structuring inherent in the desiring look. These female forms possess an 'unfeminine' independence that undermines the male right to look, and to objectify and possess the female object. As ostensible courtesans, Justine and Olympia are considered improper embodiments because, as Creed (1993:38) observes, women who express their sexuality are considered abject, lustful, carnal and aggressive. The image of Justine becomes one of ambivalence. She appears to flaunt an excessive femininity and to use her body for personal gain. Portrayed as a carnally aggressive and sexually predatory creature, Justine is perceived to conform to an old truism:

> 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. (Durrell 1957:67–68)

This condemnation very unsubtly alludes to an underlying moral deprecation of Justine's liberal sexual appetite. This again implies that Justine is a whore and she is associated with the 'great' hetairae of the past before she is, backhandedly, denigrated as a mere 'shallow reproduction'. This establishes a further dialogue between Justine's figuration in the text and the visual image of Manet's Olympia, a painting considered morally reprehensible and a shallow copy of the artist Giorgione's *Sleeping Venus* (c.1510) and Titian's *Venus of Urbino* (1538). In the textual description, 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 associated with two predecessors. From the examples cited, the name Charis stands out. Charis was not a courtesan but one of the Graces or *Charites*, and she represented beauty, grace and kindness. The ambivalent metaphorical association of Justine with Lais and Charis attributes to Justine both the *femme fatale* qualities of the very expensive, beautiful courtesan Lais, and the good qualities of Charis, thereby adding to the ambivalence of her representation.

The narrator Darley's memories of his obsessive and adulterous love affair with Justine reveal his ambivalent and abject response to her, being simultaneously captivated by her alluring mystery and repulsed by her perceived monstrous-feminine otherness. Transforming her into a terrifying, phallic castratrix whose sexuality threatens to swallow his identity, Darley considers 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' (Durrell 1957:18). The name Arsinoë belonged to three queens of Egypt but, I posit, it was Queen Arsinoë II who represented the man-eater, due to her powerful personality and her scandalous, incestuous and 'ammoniac' marriage to her brother Ptolemy II. 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 associated with urine. Figuratively relating Justine to Arsinoë and the attributes of a man-eating cat, Darley envisages Justine as part human, part animal – a dangerous hybrid. Justine's predatory deadliness is caught in Darley's description of her laugh that 'shows magnificent white teeth', the teeth of a large savage cat or a vampire (Durrell 1957:17). Visually compared to animals throughout the narrative of *Justine*, the first novel in the *Quartet*, Justine is bestialised, denigrated and consigned to the state of monstrous otherness. She is portrayed gazing around like 'a half-trained panther' (Durrell 1957:26); spitting olive pips into her gloved hand 'like a cat' (Durrell 1957:28); offering blows from a hand 'like that of a leopard's paw' (Durrell 1957:75); she is described as a 'marvellous creature caught in the Pleistocene stage of her development' (Durrell 1957:65) and is 'free as a bat to flit around about the town at night' (Durrell 1957:37).

The focalisation of Justine in all these metaphoric images contains a sense of the ancient essentialism of Woman and her conflation 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 ratiocination capacities. Darley's memories metaphorically colonise Justine's body, mapping its surface with a gothicised and belittling mixture of the monstrous-feminine and the animal-primitive. Writing on the horror of Gothic bodies, Judith Halberstam (1995:105) 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'. Durrell's representation of Justine, I posit, resembles Halberstam's description of the monstrosity associated with the Gothic body. Justine's monstrosity is located not only in her gender, but also in her class origins and race – she was originally a poor Alexandrian Jewess. These are important aspects in the establishment of the hybridity Darley's visualisation attributes to her.

For the male characters, sex with Justine seems to offer an engagement with castration and death because, rather like a vampire, Justine appears to sap the vitality of the men with whom she is involved. According to Pinchin (1981:32), it is the male's 'divine *afflatus* that inflates her [Justine], like a blow-up rubber doll that fills itself with the knowledge, dreams and seed of men'. In consequence, from the viewpoint of Durrell's male characters, Justine metaphorically assumes the role of a vampiric succubus, a dangerous and evil figuration of the *femme fatale*. The most powerful personification of Justine as a vampire occurs during the spectacle and masquerade of the carnival celebrations depicted in the second novel of the tetralogy *Balthazar*. The carnival with its vitality is synonymous with the transgression of social mores, and Justine is the dark queen of the carnival. In the room where the carnival ball is to take place, Darley describes her as she stands 'framed among the portraits' in which the 'faces painted in oils' are 'matched by human faces lined by preoccupations and maladies of the soul – all gathered together, made one in the classical brilliance of candlelight' (Durrell 1958a:164). Appearing to blend with these portraits, Justine gothically partakes of the 'maladies of the soul' of the living faces lit by the brilliance of candlelight. In a manner reminiscent of the character Dorian Grey, in Oscar Wilde's *The picture of Dorian Grey* (1891), Justine seems agelessly corrupt, like a vampire, mirroring the description of Leonardo da Vinci's Mona Lisa by the writer Walter Pater (2010:70): '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'. Justine is visualised as a predatory creature that appears to feed off the atmosphere, the paintings and the semi-darkness. The writer Ludwig Pursewarden, Justine's illicit lover, in a snide diary entry makes it abundantly clear that men are 'moths attracted by the flame of personality. So are vampires' (Durrell 1958a:98). The implication is that Justine's personality battens upon and drains the men to whom she is attracted and, as such, she is a deadly succubus. Pursewarden's allusion to the equivocal nature of Justine's character mirrors the description of the vampire's desire which according to Fred Botting (1996:145) is an 'irruption of unavowable energies from the primitive past of human sexuality, the vampire remains disturbingly ambivalent'. It is Justine's apparent primitive sexuality and disturbing ambivalence that Pursewarden represents as pernicious. During the carnival ball, he deftly disparages Justine through the telling of an allegorical story concerning a vampire.

Employing a clever frame narration, Pursewarden recounts a tale in which another nameless narrator is recounting his own adventure. During the course of the story, the unnamed narrator comments: 'I felt that I was living in a Gothic novel' (Durrell 1958a:166). Pursewarden's fiction, 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, rather it was Byron's personal physician, John William Polidori, who wrote, arguably, the first vampire story entitled *The vampyre* (1819). In Polidori's story the evil vampire is male, whilst Pursewarden takes great delight in making his vampire female. To add to the tension Pursewarden goes on to indicate that 'carnival is the one time of year when vampires walk freely abroad' (Durrell 1958a:166). In Pursewarden's story, the vampire becomes the count's last, rather Sadean, lover and in his description of this woman, the count mentions to the narrator that all he saw was 'an impression of white teeth' (Durrell 1958a:167). The reference to the vampire's teeth recalls a description of the 'magnificent white teeth' ascribed to Justine (Durrell 1957:17). However, on revealing his body to the narrator, it is seen to be 'covered with great bites, like the marks of a weasel's teeth' (Durrell 1958a:167). The relation of the vampire to a weasel associates the lover with the cunning, aggressive and stealthy tirelessness of this mammalian hunter, and adds emphasis to the concept of the female vampire as animalistic. The count's life force is drained by the perverse desires of his faceless and stealthy lover, until he dies. This sucking out of the life force resembles the manner in which Justine is seen to exhaust and deplete the men with whom she is involved.

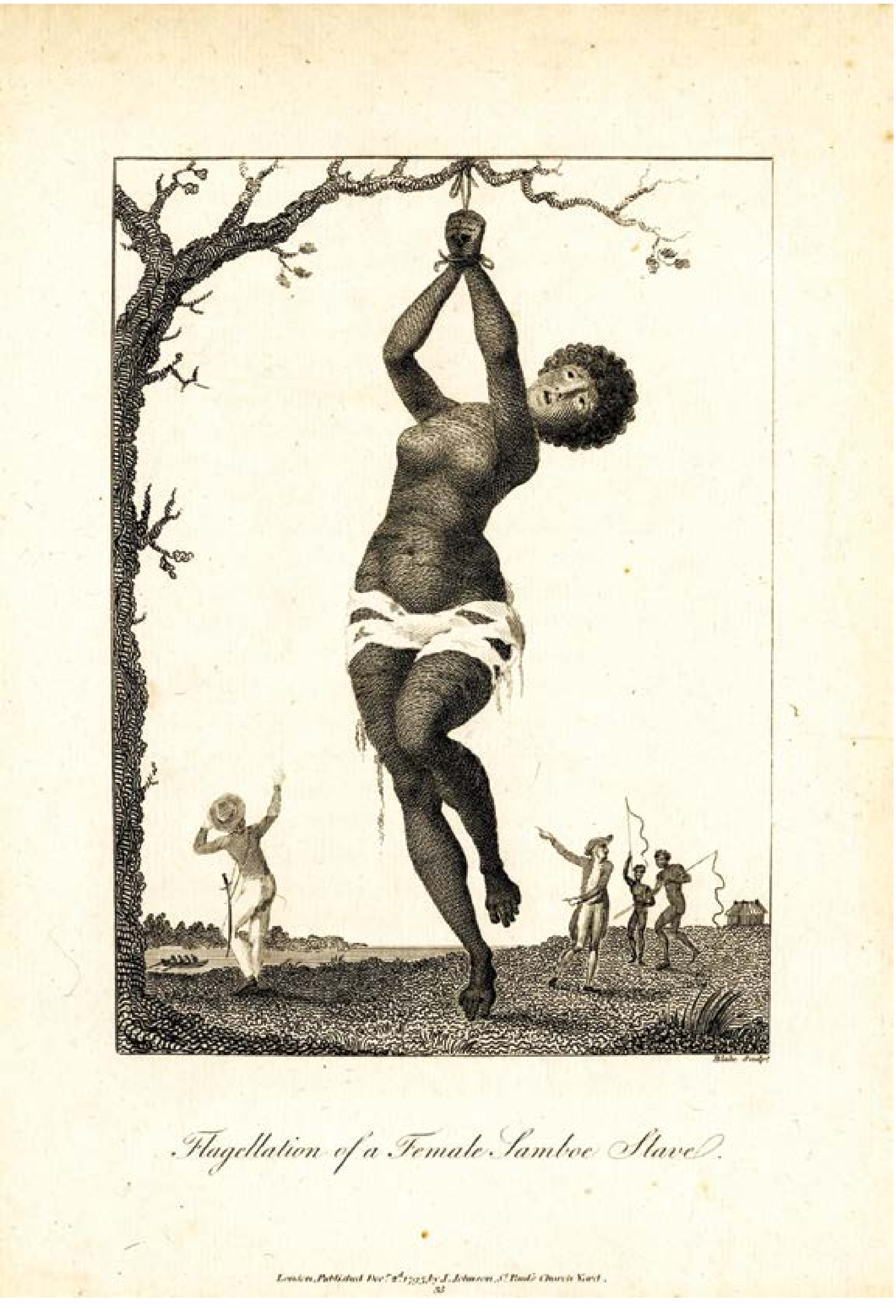
Unlike Bram Stoker's novel, *Dracula* (1897), Durrell does not disrupt heteronormativity in this story. Instead, he merely changes the predatory vampire from male to female, thereby enforcing heterosexual values. In doing so, he emphasises the abject nature of the female vampire's aggression, her disruption of identity through the penetration of the male body and her lust for blood as a transgression of phallocentric laws and ideology. The vampire's sexual conduct is ungoverned because she is neither human nor animal. Instead, she remains a liminal and terrifyingly abject creature that inhabits the boundary between the state of the living and the dead. For the male narrator in Pursewarden's story, a female vampire epitomises woman as evil incarnate, a monstrosity. Consequently, his narrative moulds the body of the vampire, and by association Justine, to conform to masculine fears of loss of identity and castration, where the mouth of the vampire, and that of Justine, represents the *vagina dentata*. My contention is that Justine is the female character upon whom Pursewarden models the vampire in his tale, which is a misogynistic and malicious attack aimed at censuring Justine's supposedly predatory carnal voraciousness and the otherness of her sexual difference. Reciting the story allows Pursewarden to project his fear of the abject and monstrous-feminine onto Justine's embodied female form in a disavowal of her apparent threat to his subjectivity.

Pursewarden's disavowal and projection are apparent in his continual denigration of Justine's sexuality during the course of the love affair between them. Talking about her, he refers to her as 'a tiresome old sexual turnstile' (Durrell 1958a:96). Comparing Justine to a sexual turnstile establishes her as a thing, a revolving mechanical gate. Inanimate, Justine lacks all volition of her own unless she is associated with 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 Surrealist artists. The Surrealists turned woman into an uncanny mechanical commodity so that in their work, as Hal Foster (1991:51) notes, 'the machine and the commodity were often seen as demonic, disruptive as they were of traditional social practices'. Visualised as part-woman-part-machine, Justine's body is reified and fragmented. Metaphorically, Durrell figures Justine as a transgressive machinic hybrid and, in so doing, I would suggest, adopts aspects from the Surrealists' repertoire. Foster (1991:52) argues, concerning the Surrealist's representation of the fragmented and machine-like, or bestialised, female body, that 'such grotesques primarily address a redefining of the human in terms of sexual drives and unconscious conflicts'. Sexualised, Justine is an ambivalent and monstrous Gothic body over which the male characters inscribe a repellent fantasy of abject and grotesque desire and repulsion, as well as a horror of hybridity, and the conflictual taboo of desiring it.

This perverse metaphorical rendition of Justine's embodiment is further suggested when she is visualised as a marionette. Justine's marriage to the rich Egyptian banker and landowner, Nessim Hosnani, results in his attempt 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!' (Durrell 1958a: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 man is trying to overcome and dominate the woman both physically and psychologically. This image can, according to Bal's (1997b:50) reading of Chardin's painting *The Skate*, be regarded as one of visual penetration and I would propose, in this description of Justine, is an implied rape. Throughout this battle, Justine is deprived of a voice, as the word tacit means 'silent'. However, this word also implies complicity: she is, it seems, a passive, willing object in her subjection. Depicted through images of savage (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 malevolent overtones in the portrayal of her hanging, as this textual image appears to reference the art of strappado, an Inquisitorial method of torture known to the Marquis de Sade. This form of punishment is depicted in William Blake's 1793 etching entitled *Flagellation of a Female Samboe Slave* **(2)**.

In Blake's 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 a slave owner's 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 a 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 mutilation of her beaten body, the slave becomes a reflection of the barbarism of the perpetrators of this act, who are visible in the background of the etching. 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 by flagellation. With her feet off the ground and her one leg gracefully bent, she is a subjugated object of male power.

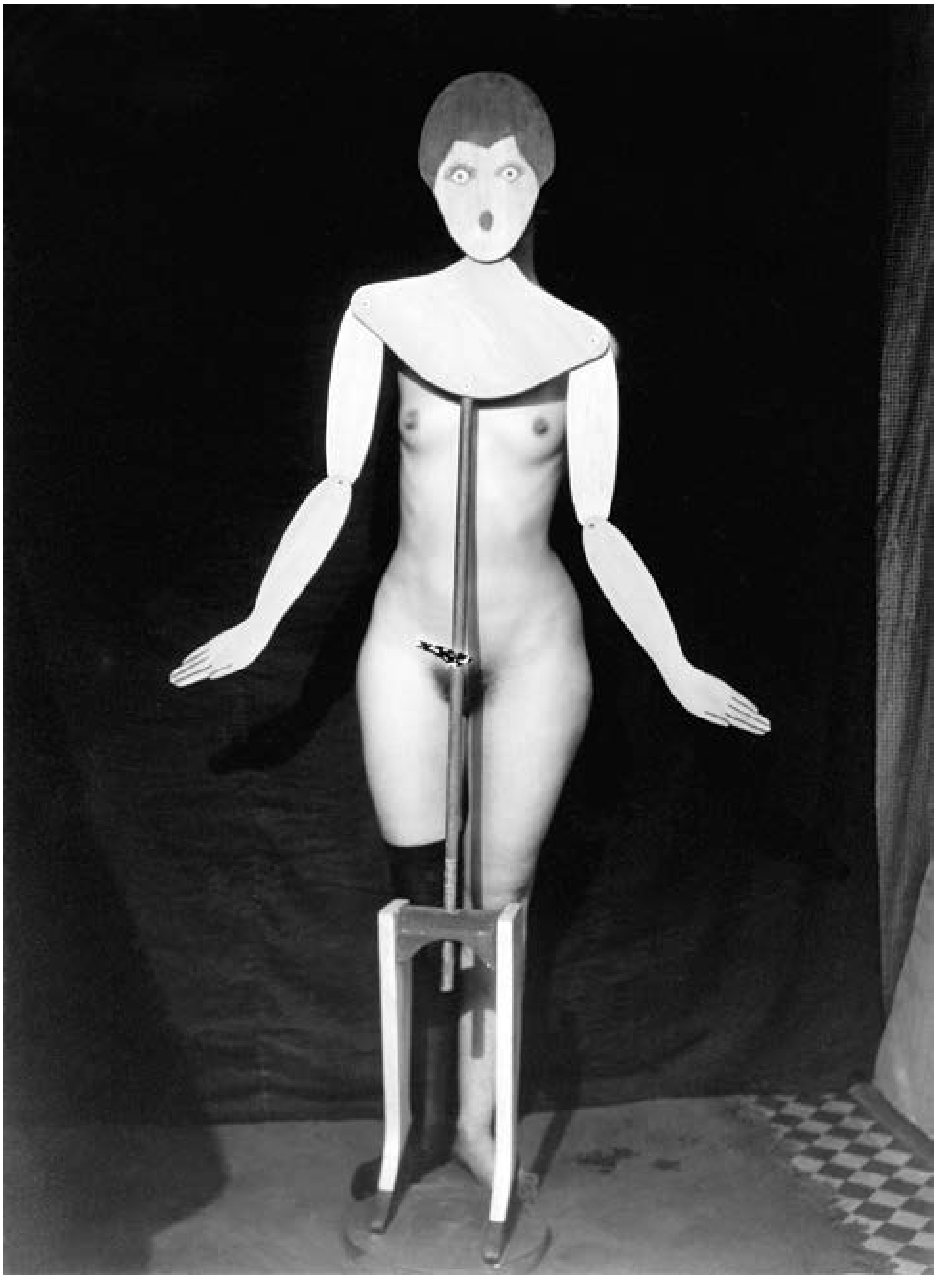

Flagellation of a Female Samboe Slave.

2 William Blake, *Flagellation of a Female Samboe Slave* (1793). Plate facing p. 36 of the first volume of J.G. Stedman's *Narrative of a five years' expedition against the revolted slaves of Surinam* (London 1796). Etching, 25.4 x 19.5 cm. © The British Museum.

Durrell's description of Justine emulates the subdued pose of Blake's female slave, but Durrell's image lacks the impact of the visibly bleeding wounds and the garment that marks and simultaneously attracts attention to the slave's hidden sex. However, I consider that the representation of Justine, as a marionette, is equally abject, misogynistic and malicious. Where Blake's slave has a human form, Justine is visualised as an inanimate and controllable wooden creature, marked by an inability to offer any resistance.

The description of Nessim's imagined response to his wife Justine has, in similar manner to Blake's slave, assumed uncanny and sadistic traits, causing it to resemble what Michelle Massé (1990:688) terms a traumatic denial of identity. Both the slave and Justine experience the trauma of becoming property and being visualised as an abject 'it'. The relation of Justine to an inanimate jointed mechanism that can be dismembered is sadistic. Robert Belton has pointed out that the confusion of animate and inanimate is one of the primary foundations of the uncanny, or for my purposes the Gothic, according to Freud (1995:106). Freud considered dolls to be the uncanniest objects, as did the poet Rainer Maria Rilke who was repulsed by and fearful of dolls. Freud indicated that the figure of the doll inspired fear of castration and death. Walter Benjamin, writing on the mannequin, indicates that the doll motif resembles that of the *femme fatale* which 'possesses the concept of a woman-machine, artificial, mechanical, at variance with all living creatures, and above all murderous' (Benjamin 1999:696). Benjamin (1999: 696) argues that psychologists would probably explain this doll and its nature as related to death and sexuality, and find 'each ambiguously intimated in the other'. The conflation of dolls and the *femme fatale* as gothically monstrous and abject is visible in Durrell's portrayal of Justine. The Gothic and monstrous-feminine nature of the female body as mechanical doll, marionette or mannequin is nowhere more noticeably explored than in the work of the Surrealists, where it is a prevalent theme. The mannequins of Giorgio de Chirico were the starting point for those of Salvador Dali, Yves Tanguy, René Magritte, André Masson, Hans Bellmer and the works of photographers such as Eugène Atget, Umbo (Otto Umbehr) and Man Ray. Man Ray's 1920 work *The Coat Stand* (*Port-Manteau*), later used as a *Dadaphoto* **(3)**, represents an early work using a mannequin that is part human and part non-human.

The 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 female body and the paper cut-out of the mannequin's face, arms and shoulders foreground this female figure. The fact that the viewer can see the living woman's breasts, torso, hips, legs and triangle of dark pubic hair acts to enhance both the sexual and mechanical aspect of the photograph. One leg appears missing because it is covered in a black knee-length sock and the figure appears mutilated like a veteran returning from the First World War. The living woman's face and arms are concealed 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, thereby fragmenting the image of her body and dividing her sexual characteristics in half. The photographer's control over the image is paramount, presenting as he does the female form 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 the female form, as a purchasable item, 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 or marionette. The nature of the mannequin or the marionette is that of an uncanny simulacrum of a woman. The representation of Justine at once eroticises her and strips her of any identity in a projection of masculine anxiety. I argue that it is precisely this masculine anxiety which is suggested by Nessim's fantasies of domination and control of Justine's image. He embodies her as a one-dimensional Gothic simulacrum in which the artificiality of the *femme fatale* is melded to the machine. Justine's corporeality is gothicised through this metaphoric incarnation as an inanimate marionette or *femme fatale* doll,



3 *Man Ray, The Coat Stand* (c.1920). Gelatin silver print, 40.4 x 26.9 cm. © 2015 Man Ray Trust/ADAGP, France; DALRO, South Africa.

and this perverse image becomes what Robert Stoller (1986) calls an 'erotic form of hatred'.

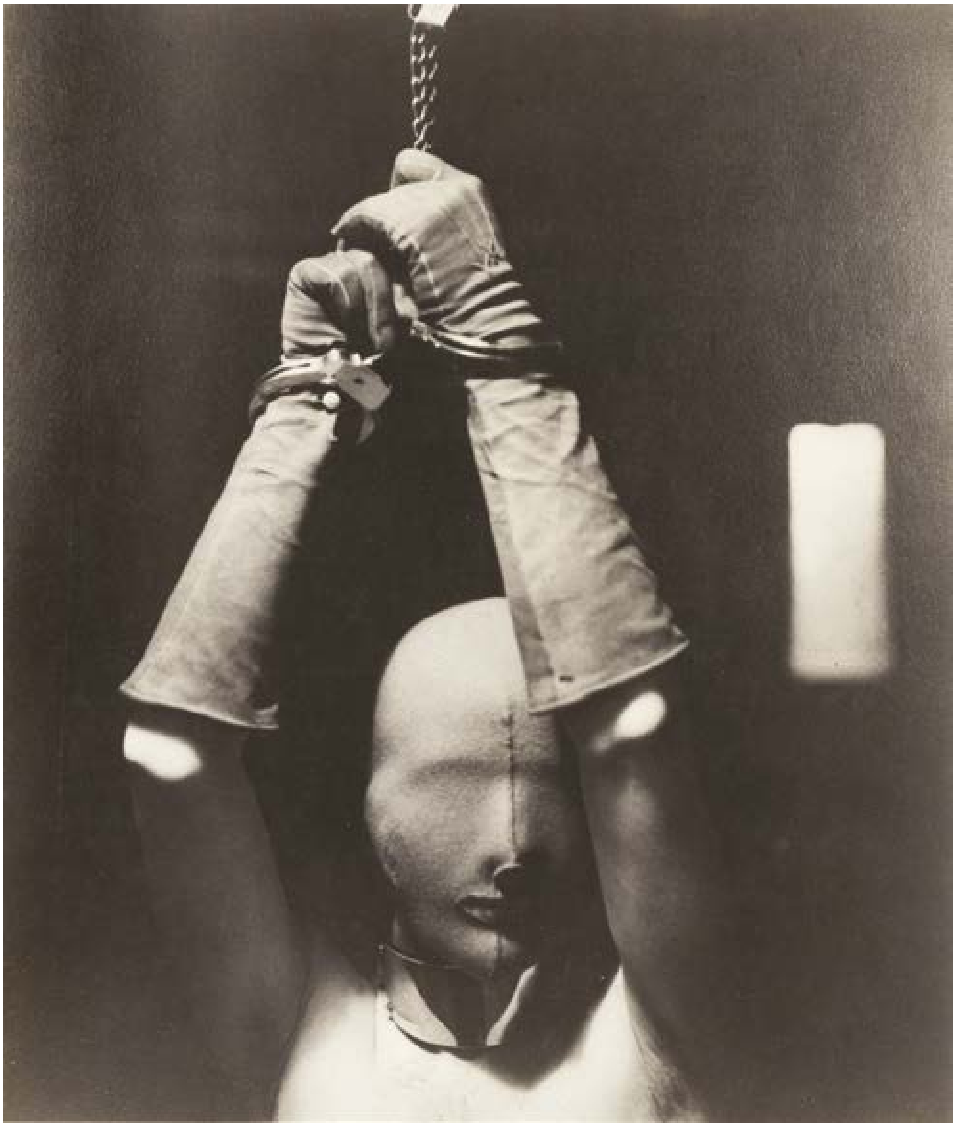
This erotic form of hatred is conspicuous in *Clea*, the final novel of the *Quartet*. In this novel, Darley returns to Egypt from self-imposed exile on a Greek island. He once more goes to see his ex-lover, and the obsessive object of his memory's desire, Justine. During a conversation he has with Justine and her husband, Nessim, about their current life together, 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. (Durrell 1960:46)

This image references the previous image of Nessim hanging his wife 'up in a cobwebbed corner of his life by the wrists'. In this complicit interaction 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 attributed to both Man Ray and Jacques-André Boiffard **(4)**.

This photo shows a woman manacled with handcuffs in the pose of strappado, but with her head covered in a dark hood and her hands in long dark gloves. Anthropologist Michel Leiris, in his article 'Le caput mortuum ou la femme de l'alchimiste' (1930), published in the journal *Documents*, wrote 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



4 Man Ray/Jacques-André Boiffard, *Gloved Figure* (1930). Gelatin silver print, 22.7 x 18.7 cm. The Getty Museum. © 2015 Man Ray Trust/ ADAGP, France; DALRO, South Africa.

> 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. (Leiris 1930:25)

In the photograph, the figure of the woman stands facing the viewer, the mask over her face making it appear as if it is slowly dissolving into a skull. Her manacled hands are pulled above her head. The light slanting from above brings the mask and her long dark 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 phallocentric ideology, associates directly with nature and therefore available for masculine domination. The picture has, in effect, deprived Woman of rationality, and cruelly presented her as a body to be tortured and enslaved to satisfy the visual desire, the need for power and the perverse erotic pleasure of men. The woman in the photograph is both less and more threatening because she is veiled by 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. 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 related desire, sex, torture, jouissance and death to bodily waste, disgust and terror in a theory that pre-dates the notion of abjection posited by Kristeva (1995:128). Both argue that certain religious rites and interactions have placed bodily functions and desires – particularly those of the female body – into the category of the untouchable, taboo or abject. The disgust and terror associated with the sexual act and sexual difference are disavowed through sado-masochism, torture and fetish, allowing for power and control over the other. I contend that Man Ray's/Boiffard's photograph and Durrell's representation of Justine are a dialogue that establishes an inherently misogynistic portrayal of the female form as an abject and gothicised object. In a similar manner to the Surrealists' sadistic fragmenting and hybridisation of the female body, Durrell embodies Justine as an erotic 'wo-machine' that lacks any form of identity (Botting 2011:176). Consequently, the narrative images of Justine, whether in the guise of a vampire, a *femme fatale*, an automaton, or a restrained and fragmented object of perverse desire, remain indicative of a visual/textual violence located in fear of the feminine Other and her threat to masculine identity.

Writing on film, Sergei Eisenstein (1947:17) notes that 'a work of art … is [a] process of arranging images in the feelings and mind of the spectator'. Though talking about the nature of film and the spectator, this sentiment could equally apply to narrative imagery and its arrangement of the reader's response. Employing what Kooistra (1995:4) calls a critical visual/verbal theoretical stance, my analysis has been reliant not only on my response to Durrell's imagery, but on that of the reader's interpretation and positioning within the embedded intertextual network of Occidental discourse. My visual/textual analysis is predicated on a critical evaluation of how the dialogue between the selected artworks and the Gothic themes of the *femme fatale*, vampire, automaton and marionette serve to enhance Durrell's misogynistic and abject embodiment of Justine. The hybridisation and fragmenting of Justine's body, I have suggested, reveal the role the male viewpoint plays in establishing the phallocentric subjugation and othering of the female form as terrifying and monstrous in its sexual difference. The masculine portrayal of Justine as a *femme fatale* affiliates her with the phallocentric stereotyping of Woman as a lustful, dangerous and evil entity. Never in Durrell's narrative is Justine truly an autonomous being – she remains merely a symbol of the masculine construction of the archetypal monstrous-feminine face of Woman. In this role, Justine's abject embodiment is simultaneously alluring and anxiety-inducing, with its hidden threat to male identity and its promise of erotic delight. I consider that the feminist reading of the Gothic and visual/textual approach that I have proposed in this article is unusual, because it provides the possibility for a more nuanced critical examination of female corporeality in the oeuvre of Lawrence Durrell.

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