

Aeternum: The Journal of Contemporary Gothic Studies

Volume 5, Issue 2

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EDITORIAL

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The Shape of the Contemporary Gothic

The articles in this issue of *Aeternum* represent the shape of the contemporary Gothic, the multiplicity of its forms and the breadth of its reach as a genre. Like the shape-shifting monster of lore, the Gothic has come to be defined by its ‘monstrous’ multiplicity, its ability to change shape over the years, embracing new forms and innovative ways to frighten. From classic novels to contemporary works, from poetry to a TV series and even a video game, each author explores a different form of the shape-shifting monster we call ‘Gothic’ in this issue, offering their own interpretation of the contemporary Gothic they find at work in their chosen texts.

In the first article of this issue, Allyson Kreuter analyses Spanish writer Jose Carlos Somoza’s novel *Clara y la penumbra* (2001), translated into English in 2004 as *The Art of Murder*, by exploring the representation of the protagonist Clara, who is a professional human artwork, as an abject Gothic site. The theme of ‘body horror’ continues in Gareth Schott’s article, which reads the surgical treatment of the body post-mortem in the US TV series *Six Feet Under* through the lens of the Gothic. James Tregonning, in the third article of this issue, turns our attention to yet another form of the Gothic in the award-winning 2009 video game *Batman: Arkham Asylum*, by examining the ways in which science and the supernatural are contrasted to evoke fear. In the fourth article, Lava Assad discusses the ecogothic in the war poetry of Isaac Rosenberg through his representation of the abject animal. While Laura Davidel, in the penultimate article of this issue, explores the representation of the vampire Armand’s experience of immortality in Anne Rice’s famous series of novels, *The Vampire Chronicles*. In this issue’s final article, Jeanette Laredo uses contemporary trauma theory to examine the representation of the Gothic heroine through a comparative analysis of Emily St. Aubert’s narrative in Anne Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho* with Catherine Moorland’s in Jane Austen’s *Northanger Abbey*.

Finally, this issue of *Aeternum* concludes with two book reviews of texts that have been published in the past year. The first review, written by Katharine Hawkins, is of the short story collection *Quartier Perdu and Other Stories*, written by Sean O'Brien, an award-winning poet and Professor of Creative Writing at Newcastle University. Published by Comma Press, *Quartier Perdu and Other Stories* is O'Brien's second collection of short stories. Inspired by the unnerving tales of the Victorian Gothic, the eighteen short stories of the volume are collected into three parts that together explore the violence the surreal produces when it is blurred with reality. The second review, written by Gwyneth Peaty, is of Simon Bacon's edited collection *The Gothic: A Reader*, published by Peter Lang. In this unique approach to a *Reader*, Bacon brings together twenty-eight short academic essays on the Gothic, from established and emerging voices in the field, that each explore the genre through the representative lens of a single text, from its origins in the eighteenth century to its many and varied contemporary forms.

Editor's Details

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Abject Artwork: The Representation of Clara in Jose Carlos Somoza's *The Art of Murder*

ABSTRACT

Contemporary Spanish author José Carlos Somoza's novel Clara y la penumbra (2001), translated into English as The Art of Murder (2004), is set in the near future and the plot concerns the world of "hyperdramatic" art, where human bodies are the canvases. The central protagonist, Clara Reyes, works as a professional human artwork and as such is a crafted image in which a Gothic move from interior depth to exterior surface is played out on the skin of her body, as a space for artistic discourse. The Art of Murder has drawn markedly limited scholarly engagement, which has not undertaken to explore the representation of Clara as an abject Gothic site, where subjectivity, image and corporeality are conflated to create the perfect canvas, aspects which will form the focus of my article. Whilst I acknowledge and am cognizant of the problems associated with accessing a work in translation, the technicalities and success or failure of the translation lie outside the scope of this article.

Keywords: Gothic, corporeality, abjection, skin, Jose Carlos Somoza

The contemporary Spanish novelist Jose Carlos Somoza Ortega has produced a considerable body of work, much of which has not yet been translated into English. Somoza's novels are sophisticated and nuanced works that disregard genre categories and meld the thriller, noir mystery or crime fiction, science fiction and the literary novel, while engaging with philosophical concerns such as memory, art, narrative writing and reading, science, the body and human emotions. Nevertheless, it is the underlying sense of the terrible that haunts many of Somoza's novels that can be considered to provide his work with Gothic overtones. The Spanish Gothic and its cultural contexts and history in literature, but more particularly film, has only recently started to receive critical attention through studies such as those of Abigail Lee Six (2010), Ann Davies (2016) and Xavier Aldana Reyes (2017). However, unlike his contemporary Spanish writer Carlos Ruiz Zafón, whose work is located within a Spanish context and is considered inherently part of the Gothic tradition, Somoza's work focuses on a globalisation of collective fears, which Ann Davies, in her study on Spanish Gothic, considers inherently part of, what she terms, "transnational Spanish Gothic" which trades in Gothic cultural literary ideas (2016, 380). Many of Somoza's novels are not specifically set in Spain, but they have Spanish characters, often female leads, in plots that are premised on an underlying atmosphere of the sinister, of dread and abject repulsion centred on corporeality. Whilst, Somoza may not be a Gothic novelist per se, his work, in particular the novel my article examines, *Clara y la penumbra* (2001), translated into English as *The Art of Murder* (2004), is dominated by Gothic elements such as the double, transgressive corporeality and the deeply sinister. *The Art of Murder* is a sophisticated and multi-layered literary noir crime thriller that deserves more critical attention for its deployment of Gothic elements, which I suggest are as intriguing as those found in the oft-analysed work of Zafón. Premised on a science fictional future art world, *The Art of Murder* is a novel that has the reality of the reader's world combined with a world in which artists no longer work on two-dimensional, non-living surfaces, but use the human body as their canvas. The central protagonist of Somoza's novel is the young Spanish human canvas Clara Reyes. It is her ambition to become an artwork by the renowned hyperdramatic artist Bruno van Tysch. Clara is unaware, unlike the reader, of the fact that there is a spate of serial murders in which van Tysch masterpieces are being violently destroyed. The plot of the novel concurrently engages with the investigation of the murders and Clara's construction and development as an artwork. In my article, I will demonstrate that Somoza's evocation of Gothic and abject transgression is made visible in the construction of Clara Reyes' corporeality, which remains fundamental to the narrative of the novel.

In his book *Body Gothic: Corporeal Transgression in Contemporary Literature and Horror Film* (2014), Xavier Aldana Reyes has argued that the body is placed at the centre of Gothic fiction, so that the reading or viewing experience is focused on

corporeal embodiment or transgression (2014, 17). Aldana Reyes employs the term “body gothic” in his examination of the transgressive representations and constructions of Gothic embodiment and he emphasises the primacy of the body within the Gothic text and how the visceral nature of this body has been overlooked.¹ The representation of Clara’s body whilst central to the narrative is not visceral in Aldana Reyes’ terms, but instead functions to remove the visceral through an evacuation of the inner. However, this move from the inner to the outer is definitively transgressive as its aim is to make Clara as non-human as possible, transforming her into a mere surface for the use of paint and artistic creativity. Clara exhibits an ambiguous relationship with her body that is premised on an abject fear of her natural corporeal functions. Employing the concept of abjection formulated by Julia Kristeva in her book *The Powers of Horror*, I will argue that the abject is central to the representation of Clara’s corporeality in the novel as well as to her repugnance towards her body. However, Clara’s relation to her body is premised on the visual and in particular her gazing at her own reflection in the mirror. My article will briefly engage with a discussion of what psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan refers to as the mirror stage, specifically as it pertains to Clara’s relationship with her own reflection. During the course of this discussion of the mirror stage, I will suggest that Clara’s mirror-stage has gone horribly wrong, and she, like Narcissus, has fallen in love with her reflection, resulting in her own natural body becoming her abject Gothic Other. Most of the explorations of this novel have been undertaken by Spanish and French scholars, some of whom have examined Clara Reyes’s role as hyperdramatic artwork, whereas my article wishes to focus solely on the Gothic and abject representation of Clara’s body.² A site of almost inhuman embodiment, where surface replaces depth and inside becomes outside, Clara is rendered as no more than a skin canvas.

In *The Art of Murder*, the reader is introduced to the hyperdramatic world of art that consists of human canvases that are described by one character as “paintings which sometimes move and look like human beings” (Somoza 2004, 38). A distance between the reality of human corporeality and that body as a commodity whose value resides in its monetary worth, is established. A canvas is not considered human; it is only valued through the name of the artist it bears, and its subsequent selling price, and this is particularly the case for the van Tysch foundation. This foundation is set up in the name of the current master of hyperdramatic art Bruno van Tysch, and the novel opens with the gruesome and violent murder of one of van Tysch’s masterpieces, a very young female canvas. The resulting criminal investigation that occurs is more focused on the monetary loss associated with the destruction of the canvas than with any acknowledgement of the canvas as a human being. As April Woods, one of the characters investigating the loss of the van Tysch artwork, indicates “paintings are paintings [...] *they are not people*”, thus callously denying the murdered

¹ See also Marie Mulvey-Roberts *Dangerous bodies: Historicising the Gothic Corporeal* (2016). Mulvey-Roberts adopts a historicist approach to build on the idea of the Gothic body, showing how the body has been demonised as Other through acts of persecution, war and torture within historical reality, which she argues underpin the horror and terror of the fictional Gothic.

² See Séguin (2011); de Coca (2009); Calvo (2007-2008); Sustaita (2008); and Ortiz-Hernández (2009).

girl any humanity and establishing human artworks as no more than objects (ibid, 137). It is apparent that all agency or consent is denied any painting as they remain artefacts made valuable by the fame of the artist's name with which they are branded since "Art is money" (ibid, 84). All the human artworks in the novel are thus symbolic objects created by the name of the artist in what Pierre Bourdieu considers the replacement of the work-of-art-as-fetish with the "fetish of the name of the master" (1993, 258). It is in order to bear the 'name of the master' that Clara willingly allows herself to be constructed as "an artefact whose foundation can only be found in an *artworld*, that is, in a social universe that confers upon it the status of a candidate for aesthetic appreciation" (ibid, 254). In Somoza's novel, this social universe has been fostered by the van Tysch Foundation, whose paintings are considered immortal masterpieces because they bear the name of Bruno van Tysch. Paradoxically the immortality offered, which is what Clara craves, is one of ephemerality.

A hyperdramatic masterpiece is continuously substituted by a newer human model, because the "original" canvas can be "got rid of" as there will always be "another one" to replace it (Somoza 2004, 57). The constant replacement of the original human canvas assumes what Umberto Eco calls "the immortality of duplication" in a simulation of the absolutely fake (1987, 6, 8). The hyperdramatic artworld is founded on the idea that "everything of value is consumed, used up, disappears", but at the same instance the used-up items can be copied *ad infinitum* in a hall of mirrors (Somoza 2004, 53). The human artefacts or artworks in Somoza's novel become what Warwick and Cavallaro refer to as "regimes of signification" in a culture that accords value to what appears upon their surface and this surface can be considered to "conceal not a presence but an absence, not a depth but a vacuum" (1998, 133). The directing of the reader's attention to the surface of the human art object or artefact emphasises the excessive nature of the artefact's constructed position as (de)humanised merchandise (Séguin 2011, 3). Yet, the aesthetic appreciation for these works remains founded on an abject ambivalence, because the artworks both attract and fascinate people, whilst simultaneously shocking and repelling them. One character attending a van Tysch exhibition is described as "slack-jawed with shock", but still fascinated (Somoza 2004, 32-33). Throughout the novel the human paintings are portrayed as monstrous and grotesque yet compellingly seductive as the boundaries between art and the human body are entirely blurred (Eco 1987, 8).

It is in this seductive blend of human and artwork that Clara Reyes is first introduced to the reader as "Girl in front of a Looking Glass". Her entire body is painted "titanium white" and is focalised as:

Standing completely naked, her right hand covering her pubis and the left one out to the side, legs slightly apart, painted from head to toe in different shades of white. Her hair was a dense mass of deep whites, her body gleamed with brilliant glossy tones. In front of her stood a looking glass almost two metres tall, inserted directly into the floor without a frame (Somoza 2004, 12).

In the *prudica* position, Clara's right hand is placed over her pubis and her left hand is held outwards, as though to hold a garment in what seems to be a reference to the sculpture called the Aphrodite of Knidos. The unframed looking glass acts like a pool of water, and the myth of Narcissus and the painting of Narcissus by Caravaggio appeared to be referenced. Narcissus fell in love with his own image reflected in still water, and this, ultimately, led to his death. His tragedy is not excessive love of self, but the realisation that what he is seeking does not exist. There is a failure to distinguish self from Other and Narcissus falls in love with an image without a body (Bal 2001, 241). My argument will consider how Clara is indeed a female version of Narcissus, caught in her image in the mirror, she has imputed an ideal bodily existence to what is only a visual reflection. In so doing, I suggest she condemns her own material corporeality to be the abject and monstrous Other.

The mirror in this artwork acts to provide a sense of her body being extended in space, adding temporality to the stasis of the reflection (Bal 2001, 241). Clara's body is reflected in the watery light of the mirror so that her skin and hair, in gradating shades of white, ensure that her shimmering bodily surface becomes one of purity, in what Mieke Bal has referred to as light-writing (2001, 225). Clara remains completely immobile, her face impassive, exactly like a statue sculpted from white marble, but as Steven Connor argues "the ideal of white skin was the ideal of pure luminosity, of a skin so refined that it was itself vanishing from view, and letting light come from within" (2004, 161). The shiny-white coated surface of Clara's skin constitutes her body as hard, apparent in the word "titanium", and its mica-like glow enforces her marmoreal stillness and impenetrability. The abject vulnerability of her skin seems to have become inviolable so that it acts as a physical shield where the "luminous skin-substitutes reduces the voluminous body to the spill and shimmer of light across a surface and therefore immaterializes it" (Connor 2004, 53). Connor relates the body whose skin shines to the nature of a mirror with its "depthlessness and invisibility (the mirror offers everything to the eye but itself, for you can only ever look *in* a mirror, never *at* it)" (Connor 2004, 54). Like a mirror, Clara's body offers everything to the eye, yet at the same time it reflects the gaze, ensuring that she never gives of herself, but lies permanently on the boundary between self and Other.

A corporeal object, Clara represents an excessive fantasy that remains both touchable yet untouchable, a corporeal surface that seems to lack inner substance (Bal 2001, 224-225). Clara is aware of the critics appraising her and criticisms she regards as not "of her, of course, but of the work" (Somoza 2004, 17). Yet she is aware that they are staring at her thighs, buttocks, breasts and her unmoving face, as well as the looking glass. She feels the gaze of the "public like cold acupuncture on the body" which excites her in a "shudder of emotion" (ibid, 117). This objectification for Clara is not about her body, but about her as an artwork, though she is aware that there are what she considers "crazy" people who are not interested in the artwork but only in the "naked woman on show" (ibid, 17). As a work of art, Clara no longer regards any of the nude nooks and crannies of her body as sacred because a canvas has "nothing of its own: mind and body were dedicated to creating and being created, to becoming

transformed" (ibid, 48). It is the plasticity and surface of Clara's skin that is the excessive object on display, a canvas surface transformed into a work of art. A corporeal object caught in the reflection of the mirror, Clara represents an excessive fantasy that remains both touchable yet untouchable, a surface that seems to lack inner substance (Bal 2001, 224-225). It will become apparent that mirrors are of central importance in Somoza's narrative as they act as a Gothic device and a psychoanalytical one. It appears that something has gone wrong with Clara's image of her body that involves an encounter with a mirror and the image reflected there.

As a young child Clara has an encounter with a mirror and her own reflected image. Entering the attic of her parent's house, she feels "the horror was calling out to her" and it is this horror that can be considered the pivotal psychological moment that defines Clara as she glimpses:

A slight movement, a shadow lit by the brightness outside the room. She turned to face it, strangely calm. Her sense of terror had grown to such a pitch she felt about to scream [...] It was a little girl. A girl who lived in the attic [...] Her skin shone like marble. She looked like a corpse, but she was moving. Her mouth opened and shut. She was blinking continuously. And she was staring at Clara. Her flesh crawled with terror [...] she realised in that split second that the girl in the attic was the most dreadful sight she had ever seen, or would ever see. It was not horrible, but unbearable[...]then it dawned on her [...] the girl's haircut was just like hers, that her features were exactly the same [...] (Somoza 2004, 52).

This encounter with the mirror and reflected image allows Somoza to play with the concept of the spectral Gothic double as well as more directly with the Lacanian concept of the mirror stage. In the mirror stage, Lacan argued that the child transitions from a non-unified image of the body to a body image of unity or totality. This image, or imago, is predicated on the narcissistic sense of satisfied self-discovery of the infant. In this state of primary narcissism, the infant takes itself as its own love object, because wholeness cannot be accomplished without the infant's own image (Slatman 2007, 193). This recognition of the specular image is not a genuine recognition because though the infant recognises him/herself in the mirror, there is no ability to see the difference between him/herself and this image (Weiss 1999, 13). This lack of differentiation between self and the otherness of the image causes a confusion of self with the image.

For Maurice Merleau-Ponty this misidentification and investment in the reflection is a condition of human visibility, where the body "sees itself seeing; touches itself touching; it is visible and sensitive for itself. [...] It is a self through confusion, narcissism, through inherence of the two who sees in that which he sees" (1964, 162-163). The child, in this instance Clara, participates in this form of double seeing, she is seeing herself and having herself return her look and she becomes captured by her own visual image. Yet there are difficulties in seeing, as Lacan indicates:

The *imagos* – whose veiled faces it is our privilege to see in outline in our daily experience and in the penumbra of symbolic efficacy – the mirror image would seem to be the threshold of the visible world [...] if we observe the role of the mirror apparatus in the appearances of the double, in which psychological realities [...] are manifested (1977, 3).

Clara is initially not able to recognize the young girl as her own reflection, as her vision is shaded by fear, she struggles with the light and dark in the room and becomes caught in the “penumbra of symbolic efficacy”. This misidentification of her image causes her to confuse the spatiality and solidity of her real body with that of the reflection in the mirror. Who is seeing and being seen, who is reflecting whom and what is real and what fictional results in Clara being unable to distinguish self from the reflected other, resulting in her lack of a sense of self.³ The mirror becomes not a boundary but permeable and Clara falls in love with the image without a body, her ideal image. For the mirror stage to be successful, the child needs to escape from this primary narcissistic identification with the mirror image and displace this image back onto the body in a realisation of self. It is this displacement that I suggest does not occur in the case of Clara. Rather, she remains caught in her image held in the mirror unable to recognise the mirror image for the illusion that it is, which results in her establishing her own physical body as her Other. The fascination, terror, and revulsion that Clara feels towards her mirrored reflection, whose skin is seen to shine like marble, represents a disturbance of identity, the overflowing of boundaries, the space where the self dissolves into meaninglessness. Confronting the nausea of abjection, a subject can experience a sense of “*jouissance*”, repugnance and fascination that vie with one another (Kristeva 1982, 9). The reflected visual image is imputed with a bodily existence and Clara’s true, natural body is denied and objectified, so that she becomes a study in Gothic petrification. The immobility and empty canvas surface of the art work replacing Clara’s lived body experience.

Under mysterious circumstances, Clara is again hired to become a human canvas. Details of who she will be working for, or in what capacity, are not provided, which adds to the growing sense of unease that Somoza develops in the narrative. Clara’s story parallels the continued killing of van Tysch masterpieces. The viscerality and gruesomeness of the violent scenes of murdered works of art are connected to the alienation and Othering of Clara’s own body in a disturbing yet alluring narrative (Aldana Reyes 2014, 16). This Othering of Clara’s corporeality is furthered through a specific medico-artistic intervention called “priming”, which provides a white base and then a “pale lemony-yellow colour” paint, offering the body a uniformity of texture and stability that results in a blemish free surface to receive and hold paint (Somoza 2004, 105). In order for this to happen a collapse between inside and outside is enforced as her body is medically peeled clean from vagina to urethra, anus, retina, follicles, sweat glands and breasts. The entire body interior and exterior is cleansed,

³ The Spanish title of the novel, *Clara y la penumbra*, seems to play with this Lacanian concept of the penumbra of symbolic efficacy.

remoulded and shaped so that she is converted into an abject, inhuman zero (Weiss 1999, 32). The priming of Clara's inner body, I suggest, acts as a repression of the unnameable abject domain of bodily fluids that reinforces her refusal of her interior corporeality. As she is told "we'd like to be a pure work of art like a piece of canvas or a lump of alabaster [...] But we are alive. And life is not art: life is disgusting" (Somoza 2004, 119). In order not to be disgusting and alive, Clara has to become non-living, a petrified, alabaster-like embodiment that avoids the horror of embodiment through an abjection of it. This rejection of the living body and Clara's attempt not to behave like life is founded on an act of expulsion, a purging of the self, in which "I expel myself, I spit myself out, I abject myself" (Kristeva 1982, 3). Julia Kristeva posits that this abjection of the self establishes a corporeal boundary between myself and what is not myself thereby actively constituting myself as entity (1982, 3-4). Clara is expelling both her bodily and subjective self in order to reconstitute herself as a dehumanised object. This dehumanisation is accomplished through pharmaceutical interventions where she takes pills so that her "menstruation [...] stopped as if by magic" and she is able to "control her bodily needs" (Somoza 2004, 13).

This designed corporeal alteration positions Clara as a posthuman and gothic figure because she is biotechnologically enhanced beyond the natural human body's functionality so that she is rendered as a type of human monster (Botting 2008, 46). Though Clara's posthumanity does not assume the shape of the accepted Gothic monster or cyborg, she has readily assumed a medically transformed body which denies her natural interior physicality. She considers what lies beneath the surface of the skin as abject and has a phobic horror and loathing for her bodily functions and self (Connor 2004, 170). It is the mirror of her skin's uninterrupted border and its defence against perforation and permeability which act as a boundary to control and deny the abject uncertainties of her body's borders (Kristeva 1982, 63). Clara's enforced loss of her corporeal identity and sense of self represents a Gothic "alienation of the self from itself" and a move from the reality of her body into an obsession with the fantasy ideal image of her specular double (Botting 1996, 157). The willing modification of her body disrupts the integrity of her individuated subjectivity and natural bodily functions reconstituting her as a denatured, posthuman object (Bolton 2014, 2-3). Clara's skin can be seen to act as a complex threshold between the self and the non-self, between human and the non-human and it assumes the role of a Gothic disguise that renders the notion of subjectivity a surface effect dispersed through a continuum of artistic reinventions (Spooner 2004, 5).

In the novel, these artistic reinventions occur subsequent to the priming phase, in a process known as sketching. Clara does posing exercises designed to test "the canvas' physical capabilities" (Somoza 2004, 233). Positioned in severely contorted positions for hours, Clara knows "nothing better than an uncomfortable position [...] to force her out of her own humanity" and in this extreme state of bodily discomfort she is "stripped of memories, fears, complicated thoughts" as she forced to concentrate "entirely on the masonry of her muscles" (ibid, 234). To become a human canvas Clara has learnt to endure and force her body and mind through pain aided

by a dissociative state called “quiescence” and the drugs she takes so as not to be “at the mercy of any of her inner organs” (ibid, 12, 163). This combination of dissociative state and medication has become part of her self-alteration and the artifice of her performance as painting. Clara’s attitude towards her body establishes it as the “not me and abject other” and her inner being is negated as she seems to forcibly dissolve the boundary between interior and exterior, undermining her embodiment in order to transcend it. I would suggest that Somoza is constructing Clara’s corporeality as one of both transformation and deformation as her body image is modified and she no longer appears entirely human (Reyes 2014, 4). Alienating herself from herself, Clara’s response to pain is contrary to Elaine Scarry’s contention that pain has no object and is not willed or directed (1985, 161, 164). Instead, Clara wills and directs her pain to objectify and other her own body and, in the process, becomes monstrous as her normal body is forced to mean and be different through a Gothic shifting and transgression of its boundaries (Aldana Reyes 2014, 7). Pain becomes a ‘framing event’ that maps the corporeal terrain of Clara as a canvas and extends her so that she loses all sense of an inner existence: “it was wonderful to cease to be Clara and become an object with scarcely any sense of pain” (Somoza 2004, 234). Dissociated from her body through an abject exclusion of her inner natural functions, Clara is transformed into a depersonalised and empty surface as her body’s image is altered past the point of an understanding of human corporeality as evinced in the ordinary viewers’ response to human works of art as both fascinating and disturbing. Nevertheless, this transformation is regarded as not extreme enough by the male sketchers, so they stage the enactment of a rape late at night.

Clara is woken from sleep with arms being flung around her. Her wrists are clamped above her and a heavy body forcibly pins her to the bed. Her hair is savagely tugged and when she fights, she is slapped hard enough to stun her. This violence is an exertion of power aimed at constructing her as a docile body, a surface that is only there for the projection of the desires of the artist. Michel Foucault’s conceptualisation of the idea of a ‘docile body’ is one constructed by power where the body is “subjected, used, transformed and improved” (1977, 136). The docile body is not only acted on by an external power, but the power is internalised to produce “the boundaries of a subject” as well as to pervade “the interiority of the subject” (Butler 1997, 89). The enacted rape seems aimed at expunging any inner resistance that Clara might retain, thus enforcing an internal docility that matches the external docile othering of her body. Rather than submit, Clara fights back and the sketcher withdraws, leaving Clara with a deep-seated lack of completion. She regards herself as “nearly drawn” and “messed up” made into a “paper ball” and tossed “*in the shit*” (Somoza 2004, 268 italics in text). The sense of abjection located in the word ‘shit’ with its implications of corruption and impurity, along with idea of being crumpled into a paper ball, generally thrown into the rubbish bin, reveals Clara’s fear of corporeal imperfection. This fear of deficiency is exacerbated when she learns that she is set to become a canvas by the great Bruno van Tysch.

On Van Tysch's arrival to complete the painting, it becomes apparent that he is after Clara because of a luminosity he saw in her eyes in the catalogue containing "Girl in front of a Looking Glass". He wishes to capture this luminescence and swiftly realises that: "It's mirrors which produce that in your eyes [...] Look at yourself! [...] you look at yourself and you catch fire [...] Why are you so fascinated by your own image?" (ibid, 312-313). It is Clara's narcissistic identification with her image in the mirror and the abject fascination and terror that this inspires which produces the luminous light in her eyes. It is what her mirror image offers to her gaze that causes her, like Narcissus, to strive to subsume herself in her reflection. The body in the mirror lacks corporeality and as Kaja Silverman notes the object in the mirror "acquires the value of that without which the subject can never be whole or complete, and for which it constantly yearns" (1988, 7). For Clara, this image in the mirror is not just a disembodied phantom but possesses a materiality that is tied to her own corporeal experience. It is in this reverse convergence of subject and object in the mirror that Clara encounters a disembodied, abstract image of bodiless perfection. Clara's need to transcend her corporeal self, to remove the boundary between the mirror-self and the reality of her embodiment, represents a drive towards a point of total insignificance and an unbounded otherness (Kohlke & Gutleben 2012, 17). This loss of self almost becomes a reality towards the close of the novel.

To create his own eternal artistic immortality, van Tysch has ordered the serial killing of his most famous artworks. Clara is the final canvas needed to complete his self-obsessed masterpiece. She is kidnapped and faces the killer and imminent death and knows:

She was about to cross it.

The looking glass. At last.

She knew *the thing* she was about to see, that she was on the verge of seeing was *the horrible*. The finishing touch to her body in the art work that was her life. [...]

The horrible. At last. (Somoza 2004, 454-455 italics in text).

This is the ultimate experience of fear and the beckoning of the unknown that is reliant on the threshold of the mirror, its limits and its transgression. There is an element of the Gothic sublime in Clara's reaction to her prospective death, the need to cross over into the dark, unspeakable terror of the beyond. It is Clara's inability to describe her experience as more than 'The Thing' and 'the horrible' that indicates the fear and fascination that is held in the crossing of the limits between reality and non-reality that lie outside of the conceptualisation of her imagination and the reach of language (Beville 2014, 37). According to Gary Farnell, 'the Thing' is representative of the Gothic abject in that it is "the absolute otherness of the void at the centre of the real" that partakes of "the amorphous, chaotic, meaningless physical level beyond all reference" (2009, 113). Located both inside and outside the self, 'the thing' gives rise to the terror and pleasure at the prospect of encountering the void. For Clara, her pull towards the unreachable, unknowable place of horror and of the thing represents her fall into the

space of the mirror where “the abject is edged with the sublime” (Kristeva 1982, 11). The mirror has been the site of the trajectory of her body and its abject separation of her inner and outer being. Clara teeters on the borderline of abjection between the real of her corporeal existence and the unreal world of the mirror. It is the horror of the separation between her physical reality and the ideal image that leads to her need for self-transcendence (Becker 1999, 166). Embracing what the killer is offering, she knows will take her into the unknown and emptied-out self-as-other where no limits of bounded embodiment exist (Kohlke and Gutlben 2012, 35). In order to attain this perfect unbounded embodiment, Clara realises she needs to be killed to be turned into immortal Art (Gilbert & Gubar 1979, 17).

Clara’s rescue, just before she crosses into the mirror, results in her realisation that she has been “dreaming [...] But what happens when everything you are and have been forms part of the same dream” (Somoza 2004, 467). Having confronted her image in the mirror with its threat of abject dissolution of her identity, Clara has regained a sense of agency that confirms and shapes the ambiguous boundary of her embodiment and sense of self. Whispering to herself the words “Welcome to the world, Clara. Welcome to Reality” is an acknowledgement of the relinquishment of her narcissistic desire for her mirror image and an awakening to the reality of her embodied self (ibid, 468). My examination of Jose Carlos Somoza’s *Art of Murder* has attempted to demonstrate how Clara’s corporeality is constructed as a discursive site that is both Gothic and abject, whilst remaining a surface that can undergo constant reinterpretation, remoulding and re-presentation.

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