

**FASHIONING THE GOTHIC FEMALE BODY: THE REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN
IN THREE OF TIM BURTON'S FILMS**

by

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submitted in accordance with the requirements for
the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in the subject

ENGLISH STUDIES

at the

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

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OCTOBER 2016

DECLARATION

I, Julie Lynne Smith, declare that “Fashioning the Gothic female body: the representation of women in three of Tim Burton's films” is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

I further declare that I have not previously submitted this work, or part of it, for examination at UNISA for another qualification or at any other higher education institution.



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ABSTRACT

This study explores the construction of the Gothic female body in three films by the director Tim Burton, specifically *Batman Returns* (1992), *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* (2007) and *Dark Shadows* (2012). Through a deployment of Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection, the intention is to indicate the degree to which Burton crafts his leading female characters as abject Others and embodiments of Barbara Creed's 'monstrous-feminine'. In this Gothic portrayal, the director consistently draws on the essentialised stereotypes of Woman as either 'virgin' or 'whore' as he shapes his Gothic heroines and *femmes fatales*. While a gendered duality is established, this is destabilised to an extent, as Burton permits his female characters varying degrees of agency as they acquire monstrous traits. This construction of Woman as monster, this study will show, is founded on a certain fear of femaleness, so reinstating the ideology of Woman as Other.

Key terms:

Tim Burton; Gothic; abjection; monstrous-feminine; The Angel in the House; Gothic heroine; *femme fatale*; virgin/whore; female Other; embodiment

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to acknowledge my supervisor Dr Allyson Kreuter for her tireless dedication and commitment to assisting me through the research process over the past three years. Regardless of her busy schedule, she was always willing to sacrifice her time, and her gift as a teacher and scholar is an inspiration to me.

I also wish to extend my deepest gratitude to my husband, Bradley, for supporting me every step of the way, always, and for listening to me endlessly talk of girl power.

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Introduction

The repressed, archaic, and thus deeply unconscious Feminine is a fundamental level of being to which most Gothic finally refers ... and all the blurred oppositions that are abjected onto monsters or specters by Gothic characters face their ultimate dissolution into primal chaos as they approach this feminized nadir that is both the ultimate Other and the basically groundless ground of the self.

Jerrold E. Hogle (2002: 11)

The Gothic, steeped as it is in theatricality and excess, has conventionally given rise to the exaggerated construction of gender, imagining hapless heroines and gallant heroes, wicked witches and cold-blooded villains aplenty. The marked gendered roles within the genre, where femininity is all too often represented as unsettling and Other, has provoked ample academic interest over the years.¹ Scholastic readings probing the female body have covered the scope of the Gothic tradition, from the first Gothic novel, Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), to the postmodern Gothic, with its subversion and revision of established staples of the genre.² Indeed, despite ebbs in popularity over the centuries, the Gothic tradition is still very much alive today. Celebrated Hollywood director Tim Burton, whose work spans more than thirty years, delights in deploying recognisable tropes of the Gothic. While Burton's work might be concerned with Gothic motifs, it also reveals a postmodern tendency to fuse genres, drawing on concerns inherent to fantasy, horror and comedy narratives. Idiosyncratic and largely inimitable in style, the director's films have become a veritable brand, labelled as 'Burtonesque' and characterised by "dark gothic atmospheres and quirky misfit characters" (Pereira 2012: 51). It is these peculiar, rebellious and even disquieting characters who pose interesting critical questions, especially as their eccentricity appears correlated with the construction of the female body. Strange and irregular, it is the framing of Gothic female corporeality which this study plans to explore in three of Burton's films. Employing a psychoanalytical feminist reading of *Batman Returns* (1992), *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* (2007), hereafter referred to as

¹ See Anolik (2014); Becker (1999); Heiland (2004); Hoeveler (1998a); Kahane (1985); Massé (1992); Wolff (1979).

² For examples of postmodern Gothic works, see: Auster (1985); Ellis (1991); Rushdie (1998); Yu (1998).

Sweeney Todd, and *Dark Shadows* (2012), my intention is to scrutinise Burton's portrayal of the heroine and *femme fatale*.

A mere cursory viewing of these three films will inevitably reveal Burton's attraction to those deemed monsters, misfits and outsiders. In crafting his weird and dangerous characters, the director's films repeatedly bring to life those othered by 'proper' society. For Burton, his 'monster movies' are a "form of myth" or folk tale, illustrative of "a kind of extreme, symbolic version of life" (Burton cited in Breskin 1992: 332). Just as the Gothic explores deep-seated and repressed societal fears, so Burton's narratives delve into that which is feared and decidedly Other. This dissertation, while examining these disconcerting figures in Burton's films, cannot be considered a film study per se. Instead, the focus is on the interpretation of Burton's narratives in the films under examination and their relation to the Gothic literary genre. The objective is to investigate the director's moulding of the female body as Gothic form, in a teasing out of narrative elements, such as costume and plot, rather than evaluating filmic constructs, such as camera angles and framing. While aware that the films under discussion in this dissertation are adaptations of other genres, I will only briefly mention this, as my work will not engage in an adaptation theoretical approach. Rather, my argument will focus solely on the manner in which Burton envisions feminine embodiment within his films. I will posit that his female characters can be seen as somewhat stereotypical, taking on the dualistic roles of the 'good' girl virgin and the 'bad' sexual predator, in order to argue that his work is largely founded on the fear of femaleness itself. In the films under discussion, Burton's construction of his female characters reveals a degree of gender essentialism, which can be understood as the attribution of traits to "some underlying and static 'essence'" (Phillips 2010: 46). Evidently, the director adopts a position regarding what constitutes 'femininity' or perhaps how society conceives women's bodies, and this standpoint is visually brought forth in his storyworlds. In the three films I have chosen to explore, I will maintain that not only his *femmes fatales*, but his 'good' girl heroines come to suggest that feminine corporeality is in some manner shocking and aberrant. It is, after all, Woman who has historically been associated with the body, and the body gone awry, at that. Raia Prokhovnik notes the "privileging of male over female in the male/female dichotomy" where this relationship "is entrenched by the mind/body duality" (2002: 11). It is women who are constructed as excessive, irrational and all too closely

affiliated with the unruly and 'improper' body, which remains opposed to the 'clean' and 'proper' male hierarchy. In his films, I consider that Burton evokes these preconceptions, as he positions his female characters as disruptive and, potentially, frightening bodies.

Animalistic, vampiric, spectral and hysterical, his women, both the heroine and *femme fatale*, can be understood as thoroughly liminal and borderline creatures. However, I will argue that there is a certain transgression of the construct of Woman as either 'virgin' or 'whore'. While his heroines might epitomise womanly virtue, beauty and innocence, I will demonstrate that they are stained with attributes associated with the *femme fatale*, so taking on this figure's excess and ambivalence. In contrast, I will suggest that it is only the *femme fatale* Catwoman of *Batman Returns* who retains traits of the 'good' girl. It is for this reason that I will argue that she is a composite figure, a woman not quite so stereotypically conceived as 'bad' by Burton. Alternatively, the *femmes fatales* of the director's other two films under study, *Sweeney Todd* and *Dark Shadows*, I will maintain, can be seen as emblematic of the 'real' *femme fatale*, an eroticised embodiment of moral excess and 'evil'. Yet, Burton, I will reveal, both celebrates and punishes his all-too-feminine monsters. Although the *femme fatale* is certainly frequently disciplined or killed off, this character possesses a measure of real agency, as she deceives, speaks out against and even violates those around her. Nevertheless, the female body, both that of the heroine and *femme fatale*, in Burton's films comes to signify a place of troubling and volatile bodily excess founded on the fear of sexual difference. My contention is that in Burton's work, the concept of the monstrous becomes tantamount to the essentialised construct of Woman as utterly uncontrollable and uninhibited, creatures more closely and stereotypically aligned with a perverse sort of animalism or borderline identity than men. As my opening quotation implies, Jerrold E. Hogle considers the Gothic to be plagued by the pull of "an overpowering femininity" (2002: 11). It is this putative 'feminised' realm of uncertainty, alterity and fear that Burton evokes in his films, as he embodies his female characters as frightening, visually alluring and powerful.

Gothic scholar Catherine Spooner notes that Burton is "a visually orientated director" whose "films look beautiful while their scripts are weak" (2013: 47-48). It is through this original and inventive visualisation that the director communicates his characteristic dark and eccentric Gothic tone, despite the use of plot itself remaining fairly

simplistic. For Murray Pomerance, Burton's deployment of "darkness always trumps color" (2013: 43). While I would suggest that Burton's employment of vivid colour is not to be overlooked, neither is his striking use of the darker hues, which allude to his referencing of the Gothic tradition. From the ghost of *Beetlejuice* (1998) in his pinstriped black and white suit, to the dark, gothicised Victorian village of *Corpse Bride* (2005), to the neo-noir black and white horror film *Frankenweenie* (2012), Burton can be seen to be obsessed with the shadow play between black and white. Such a penchant for the sombre and macabre is noted by Randall Chambers, who considers Burton's art to reflect "the feeling of the dark, morbid Gothic sensation" (2007: 12). Within his grim, yet distinctly tongue-in-cheek and fantastical films, it seems fitting that Burton so often falls back on the construct of normal/abnormal embodiment and the manner in which this dichotomy might be disrupted. As he imagines figures hovering on the border of life and death, the natural and unnatural, the human and animal, Burton's three films under study, and indeed his entire oeuvre, portray a consistent fascination with what it means to be a 'human' subject. In fabricating his Gothic worlds, Burton can be seen to delight in undoing the very notion of 'humanity,' crafting things which consistently traverse a range of fairly rigid physical and social boundaries.

It is these curious creatures, particularly those which take on a feminine form that I will investigate in Burton's films, *Batman Returns*, *Sweeney Todd* and *Dark Shadows*. Certainly, these films differ substantially, where *Batman Returns*, while representative of Burton's earlier work, also falls under the comic tradition. The characters of Batman, Catwoman and the Penguin can be seen as DC Comics staples, firmly established during the first half of the twentieth century. Consequently, for Burton, working within the comic tradition implies certain restrictions, such as refashioning Catwoman's illustrious catsuit or deploying the customary costumed villain. However, both *Sweeney Todd* and *Dark Shadows* are not original texts, as the character of Sweeney Todd stems from Victorian urban legend, while *Dark Shadows* is a comedic remake of a popular 1960s daytime soap opera. As a result, viewers of these later films also have particular expectations, in which *Sweeney Todd* should be sufficiently dark and grisly, while *Dark Shadows* should be melodramatic and overtly Gothic. So, Burton's three films do not operate in isolation and the director's choices are swayed by earlier versions of the narratives. For my purposes, however, the three films

which I have chosen have one salient similitude, the exploration of bodily liminality and alteration. In *Batman Returns*, mousy secretary and Gothic heroine Selena Kyle (Michelle Pfeiffer) dramatically mutates into Catwoman (Michelle Pfeiffer), an embodiment of the living dead with distinctive feline traits. Likewise, Burton recreates the Penguin (Danny DeVito), an animalistic and hybrid man raised by a group of penguins in the sewers. In *Sweeney Todd*, the only film devoid of overtly fantastical elements, the titular character, performed by Johnny Depp, undergoes a radical transfiguration in appearance and disposition as he morphs into a homicidal barber. Mirroring this transmutation, his wife, the heroine Lucy Barker (Laura Michelle Kelly), becomes mad and ends up a ragged beggar woman. Taking her place beside Sweeney Todd is the *femme fatale* Mrs. Lovett (Helena Bonham Carter), whose twisted morality and almost scandalous appearance parallel the barber's horrific metamorphosis. Finally, in *Dark Shadows*, Burton probes Barnabas Collins's (Johnny Depp) mutation into a vampire, which is contrasted with the bodily transfiguration of both of his sweet and innocent lovers. The heroine Josette DuPres (Bella Heathcote) returns to the narrative as a ghost upon her death, while her double Victoria Winters (Bella Heathcote) is transformed into a vampire. More than this, the film portrays the sorceress Angelique Bouchard (Eva Green) as the agent behind the narrative's corporeal chaos. The director's obvious interest in bodies that transgress the bounds of life and the very notion of human subjectivity can be seen as a Gothic motif addressed across his three films. It is this central concern which has prompted me to select these narratives, where my focus is on Burton's strangely othered women.

The intention of this study is to probe Burton's Gothic construction of his female characters through a deployment of Julia Kristeva's (1982) theory of abjection. In her pivotal work, Kristeva argues for the abject as "being opposed to I," but not constituting an object either (1982: 1). Rather, it is a 'something' that stands at the border of stable subjectivity, which the self attempts to expel in order to establish a sense of identity. This 'something' is seen as repugnant and a threat to the individuated self. By way of example, Kristeva notes abjection at work in food loathing, bodily wounds and the sight of the human corpse (1982: 2-3). Especially in the case of the corpse, this is what the 'I' withstands in order to survive. In essence, the abject is thus recognised as "what disturbs identity, system, order" and "does not respect borders, positions, rules" (Kristeva 1982: 4). While it is a threat to life, it

simultaneously fascinates desire, accounting for the morbid interest in the corpse or the monstrous body. Central to Kristeva's theory are the borders of the body, where what is inside and outside can be disturbed, so disrupting the stable human form. For this reason, bodily fluids that leak and ooze across these fragile corporeal boundaries are considered thoroughly abject as they upset the 'proper' self. For Elizabeth Grosz, these 'embarrassing' fluids "assert the priority of the body over subjectivity," requiring constant vigilance (1994: 194). She goes on to posit that the female body is culturally coded as possessing a "capacity for contagion," rife as it is with "draining, demanding bodily processes" (Grosz 1994: 197). Within the male order, Grosz argues that femininity has become conflated with viscosity and the fluid body, especially given the biological facts of childbirth and menstruation (1994: 195). Thus, feminine embodiment comes to signify a space of abject viscosity, representative of a profound threat to the phallogocentric sense of the 'proper' self. Kelly Hurley, writing on what she calls the 'abhuman' or abject body of the Gothic, argues that slimy substances which "seep from the borders" of these bodies are illustrative of 'Thingness' or a space where meaning breaks down (1996: 34). For Gary Farnell, the territory of the Thing is "not of the order of signifiers," but rather a location of "actual unnameability," or a realm both within and outside of language (2010: 7-8). The feminine body, constructed as too mutable, too "inescapably corporeal," too prone to revolting discharges and bodily filth, is a site of Thing-ness (Hurley 1996: 120). It is Woman who is seen as 'entrapped' within the uncontrollable body according to patriarchal discourse, standing in opposition to the male who is all 'mind'. She occupies an abject and unknowable corporeal domain, othered as she comes to represent the fear of sexual difference and the threat of bodily instability. Like the monster, who is "Thing-like through and through," the female body is marked as abhuman, the frightening and abject Other (Hurley 1996: 124).

While bodily fluids, wounds and corpses fill the Gothic, so do bodies which are not quite right, such unnameable Things as spectres, the living dead and all manner of human/animal configurations. These discarded beings, repulsive and yet fascinating, are utterly abject, as they cross borders and reveal "the ambiguous opposition I/Other, Inside/Outside" (Kristeva 1982: 7). As the opening quotation by Hogle (2002) attests, Kristeva's abject has become a useful critical framework through which to investigate these Gothic bodies. Likewise, Hurley draws on the abject in her work on 'abhuman' Gothic

embodiment, arguing that within the genre “the human body collapses and is reshaped across an astonishing range of morphic possibilities” (1996: 4). She goes on to maintain that the Gothic tradition has always been obsessed with “abominations” and a world where “no fixity remains, only an endless series of monstrous becomings” (Hurley 1996: 28). Hurley’s work relies on the patriarchal division of the human and non-human, the self and Other, so recalling the ambiguous abject. Given this scholarly reliance on the Kristevan framework when it comes to all ‘Things’ Gothic, I have elected to deploy this theory in my own study. The creatures of the tradition all too often navigate distinct social limits with abandon, shamelessly causing disorder, death and destruction. It is just such an abject disruption of both physical and cultural boundaries which can be seen at work in Burton’s films. Abounding with images of otherworldly beings who walk the line between life and death, human and animal, the director’s films can be said to offer sites of abjection. Exhibiting ghosts, vampires, witches, cannibals and the living dead, Burton’s three narratives, I will posit, teem with disruptive Things almost beyond classification, illustrative of “an unnameable void” within which the monster resides (Farnell 2010: 7).

Although such incomprehensible creatures frequently inhabit the Gothic genre, that which is considered monstrous is no stranger to other genres, such as horror, fantasy and even comedy. For Maria Beville, the monster is habitually described in critical circles as something “that cannot be named” or a Thing beyond normative taxonomy (2014: 1). Often visually disturbing, the monster, like the abject, is set apart from the self in some essential and irreparable way. However, alterity is not merely a matter of surfaces, as is certainly true in the case of the Gothic genre. Rather, as Stephanie Genz notes, gothicised embodiments of otherness encompass figures marked by “strangeness and excess” and “difference from the norm-ality of social, cultural, moral, physical, psychological and human mores” (2007: 68). Although deviant physicality is indeed an indicator of alterity, the creatures which prey upon the victims of the Gothic can also do so stealthily, hidden within their ‘human’ skins. While they might appear ‘normal’ at times, such as Oscar Wilde’s (1890) *Dorian Gray*, the bizarre beings within the Gothic tradition always “threaten the known with the unknown” in some fundamental way (Kearney 2004: 3). Thus, the monster of the genre, despite appearances, can be understood as an incarnation of abjection “which threatens the ego” (Kristeva 1982: 63). The monster as a disruptive force and a threat to the established order

is a concern addressed by feminist scholar Barbara Creed (1993). Although Creed's work explores the contemporary horror film rather than the Gothic, her investigation represents a gendered take on the monster. In addition, her argument is firmly rooted within the framework of abjection and so can be seen as critical for my purposes.

In her work on the female monster, or what she terms the 'monstrous-feminine,' Creed posits that "definitions of the monstrous" are based on what can be considered abject practices: "sexual immorality and perversion; corporeal alteration, decay and death; human sacrifice; murder; the corpse; bodily wastes; the feminine body and incest" (1993: 8-9). The monster, like the abject, signifies the breaching of limits and offers a site of disgust and horror, one which consistently rears its head in the Gothic genre. Abject images of corporeal filth and aberrance, death and decay are the very things that the Gothic relies upon. However, Creed's focus is the female monster, who she suggests can be traced as far back as the classical mythology of the Medusa and the Siren (1993: 2). Although Creed's argument centres upon the horror film, Susanne Becker indicates that "[t]he figure of the monstrous feminine is one of the strongest connecting forces within the web of gothic writing" (1999: 57). For Becker, this woman "enhances the horror of the story" (1999: 56). Like any monster, she can take a variety of forms, from the vampire, to the witch, to the primitive mother. However, what is critical is that her monstrosity is founded on her assumed sexual otherness. As Jane M. Ussher points out, the monstrous-feminine stresses "the reproductive body of woman [which] has provoked fascination and fear" and is "deemed dangerous and defiled" (2006: 1). This can be seen as closely related to Grosz's (1994) viscous feminine body, which has been constructed within the male order as somehow horrifying and abject. Similarly, Ussher posits that the monstrosity of Woman is grounded in her "fecund flesh, her seeping, leaking, bleeding womb standing as site of pollution and source of dread" (2006: 1). So, the monstrous-feminine is affiliated with abjection, filth, decay and the Thing-ness of Woman's corporeality, which is considered to be both loathsome and appealing. For Creed, the "phrase 'monstrous-feminine' emphasizes the importance of gender in the construction of her monstrosity" (1993: 3). While the monster is abject, the monstrous-feminine constitutes an abject embodiment of Gothic excess, where her sexuality is overemphasised. She is a powerful force, even while illustrative of the 'horrors' of the female anatomy, such as the overly sexualised sorceress or

the castrating woman. It is this feminine force which I will argue is apparent in Burton's films, especially as his *femmes fatales* become embodiments of Creed's *femme castratrice*, a woman representative of male castration anxiety (1993: 122). This variety of the monstrous-feminine relishes taking revenge on the male order to redress some injustice, where men "must be ever on the alert," bracing themselves for her deadly touch (Creed 1993: 138). Given the monstrous-feminine's specifically gendered context and her relevance to the Gothic genre, this figure will prove invaluable for my purposes, where I aim to deploy both Creed's work and that of Kristeva's abject in exploring Burton's Gothic female characters.

While the monster in all shapes and forms typically finds its way into the Gothic tradition, the genre is still considered by scholars to be a "contested site" (Punter 2012: 1). Regardless of the apparent ambiguity of the term, so-called Gothic tales tend to revisit certain stereotypical concerns, such as the haunted castle, the presence of the supernatural and the interplay between villain, hero and heroine. These established motifs are habitually brought to the fore in Burton's films, where the director imagines haunted houses, such things as spectres, vampires and werewolves, and beautiful heroines preyed upon by heartless and hideous villains. In employing these conventional tropes of the literary genre, Burton effectively brings the Gothic to the screen. This seems fitting given that the narrative tradition is "born in darkness" and so has "a natural affinity with the cinema" (Kaye 2012: 239). It is, however, not merely these stock devices which make the genre. For Fred Botting, the Gothic delights in that which is "constructed as negative, irrational, immoral and fantastic" (1996: 1). It celebrates excess, inviting audiences to be simultaneously horrified and thrilled. Villains brazenly stalk heroines; bodies morph and splatter and wake from the dead. It is a site of profound pleasure and disgust, showcasing Thing-like figures of abjection. This gothicised excess extends to the genre's treatment of gender, as the monstrous-feminine all too often threads the narrative together. Indeed, the female monster has consistently plagued the Gothic tradition, alluring, appalling and perhaps even inspiring over the generations. Yet, the irrational and unsettling creatures of the Gothic, regardless of their sex, can inevitably be seen as in some manner too 'feminine'. Certainly, this positioning is a construct of the male hegemony, where excessive becomings, like the feminine body, are founded on "uncontrollability," "contagion and disorder" (Grosz 1994: 203). It is this propensity for the monstrous breaching of borders which I will examine in

Burton's three films, as his female characters acquire distinct traits of Gothic excess. Thus, my contention will be that Burton's films reveal a fascination with the disruption of bodily norms and so-called 'abominations'. Time and again, the director conjures alternative worlds teeming with outlandish creatures, such as the colourful underworld in *Corpse Bride* bursting with eccentric and animated skeletons. In the films under study, *Batman Returns*, *Sweeney Todd* and *Dark Shadows*, I will suggest that the director styles his female characters as, to a certain extent, separated from 'proper' subjectivity and 'full' humanity. The monstrous-feminine is forcibly brought to life in these films, often quite literally being raised from the dead in order to haunt the narrative. Selena/Catwoman of *Batman Returns* and Josette and Victoria of *Dark Shadows* are resurrected following their deaths, becoming Things that overstep the bounds of the physical, so illustrative of a profound threat to the living. This threat is taken further in that Burton's fatal women can be seen as incarnations of Creed's (1993) *femme castratrice*, who tears and maims masculine embodiment. Disturbing, disruptive and even dangerous, the director's female characters in all three films are consistently presented as a challenge to the rational and scientific masculine hierarchy. So, the enigma and alterity that is Woman is vividly brought to the screen.

For Creed, the feminine body is associated with "the natural world" which stands in stark opposition to the 'clean' and 'proper' social order (1993: 49). She writes that the normative body "must bear no indication of its debt to nature" where 'nature' and 'culture' have traditionally been dualistically conceived (Creed 1993: 11). Given Woman's biological functioning, Creed remarks that she is constructed as closer to this natural order, which is frequently perceived as frightening within the Gothic tradition (1993: 11). This is true of Burton's films, which recurrently visualise female corporeality as disturbingly in touch with a terrifying natural world beyond masculine control. Thus, these abject female characters can be seen as Gothic Things of 'nature,' an essentialised and gendered location revealing man's deep-seated fear of otherness. I would go so far as to contend that the Gothic is obsessed with what it means to be 'feminine'. For it is Woman who is so often crafted as Other within the genre, whether she takes the form of the heroine under vicious attack or the fatal woman preying on innocents. Women, of course, have always been regarded as the male Other, despite their location as 'good' or 'evil'. Where Woman is the 'good' girl, she is forced to stand for passivity and purity and habitually subjected to violence and sexual abuse.

Alternatively, where she is seen as 'evil,' she is a man-eater and a debased erotic creature. Regardless of the stereotype which Woman is compelled to assume, she is always radically set apart from the man.

This obligatory dualistic location has come to be understood as the so-called virgin/whore dichotomy, "a mainstay of literary criticism and theory for the last several decades" (Gottschall et al 2006: 1). Similarly, Joshua Gamson remarks that this archetype of 'virgin' or 'whore' "has been, and continues to be, one of the central axes along which women's positioning in the public sphere has run" (2001: 158). Woman as Other, and as paradoxically either good or bad, has been a literary concern across the centuries, one which has been extensively explored within the Gothic genre. For Heather L. Braun, the tradition envisions "the duplicitous female temptress and her constant, domestic foil, the Gothic heroine" (2012: 55). In this dissertation, I plan to demonstrate that it is the stereotypes of heroine/*femme fatale* which Burton draws upon in his three films. However, while his heroines might evoke feminine innocence and helplessness, they are simultaneously fashioned as in some manner tainted. Acquiring characteristics of the 'bad' *femme fatale*, I consider that Burton allows his heroines a measure of agency so frequently denied to those within the Gothic tradition. On the other hand, it is only the *femme fatale* Catwoman who I argue can be seen to harbour traits of the heroine, which, to a degree, threatens to negate her powerful and subversive agency. This ambivalence, especially in the figure of the heroine, while calling into question the established binary opposition between good girl/bad girl, marks feminine embodiment as a site of excess and fear.

The vulnerable and persecuted heroine of the tradition first appeared in the earliest Gothic novel, Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), in the form of the character Isabella. Pursued by the villain Manfred, Isabella came to signify the hapless heroine of the genre, "half-dead with fright and horror" (Walpole 2014: 24). Cynthia Griffin Wolff describes this Gothic figure as "a relatively faceless heroine" (1979: 103). While she might be somewhat of a nonentity, Becker notes that she is also "the 'ideal feminine' of her cultural-historical context" (1999: 46). For Diane Long Hoeveler, the heroine's identity is characterised by "her inwardness, her silence, her extreme control of her emotions in public, her sexual inviolability and purity" (1998a: 40). Weak and all too often tolerating endless abuse, Burton's heroines epitomise this silent and restrained stereotype. Raped, murdered and

physically confined, his 'good' girls are terrorised and abjectly othered, even while remaining pure and beautiful. This emphasis on feminine physicality is fundamental to the Gothic genre, which Linda Dryden considers views "the female as victim, usually in a sexual or erotic manner" (2007: 4). Burton's films are indeed no exception, especially the narrative of *Sweeney Todd*, where the villain Judge Turpin (Alan Rickman) rapes the heroine Lucy and imprisons her daughter Johanna (Jayne Wisener), spying on her through a peephole. This motif of incarceration emerges time and again in the Gothic, so much so that Michelle Massé notes the heroine's consistent "immobility, and enclosure" (1992: 18). Scorned and yet simultaneously desired, the heroine is chased and trapped by strong men, to be subjected to violation and abuse. In Burton's films, this thematic concern is adapted, as the director explores alternative avenues of imprisonment, such as madness and spectrality. Nevertheless, the heroine is, above all, an innocent, and this trope continually emerges within Burton's work. Overlaid with almost otherworldly bodily appeal, the director's heroines are the quintessential golden-haired, blue-eyed 'good' girls, suggestive of the virginal heroine as set apart and angelic in nature.

Virtuous, pure, beautiful and, more often than not, exposed to a form of captivity, the Gothic heroine, I will argue, can be seen as intimately related to the quixotic figure of 'the Angel in the House'. It was the Victorian poet Coventry Patmore who initially conceived of this figure, celebrating this feminine ideal in his narrative poem *The Angel in the House* (1863). Patmore's verse is at pains to exalt this romanticised woman, referring to her as "Marr'd less than man by mortal fall,/ Her disposition is devout,/ Her countenance angelical" (1863: 49-50). For M. Jeanne Peterson, this Victorian standard of femininity signifies "domesticity, unworldliness, asexuality, innocence, even helplessness in matters outside the domestic sphere" (1984: 677). It is this figure who promotes the welfare of the family first, endlessly given to sacrifice and self-abnegation. My contention will be that 'the Angel in the House' can be seen as almost indistinguishable from the Gothic heroine. Like the stereotypical heroine of the genre, 'the Angel in the House' is pure, virginal and, above all, largely without agency and entrapped within a confining environment. As one who censured this narrow positioning ascribed to women, Virginia Woolf refers to this angelic figure as "immensely charming," "utterly unselfish" and proficient "in the difficult arts of family life" (1974: chapter 27). In addition, Woolf considers that purity "was supposed to be

her chief beauty” and that, in the Victorian era, “every house had its Angel” (1974: chapter 27). For Woolf, this ‘angel’ was a threat to her aspirations as a writer, setting up an ideal against the realities of a career woman. So, to a degree, the angel can be seen as monstrous, almost frightening as an unattainable paradigm of womanliness. By and large, women of contemporary society have somewhat obviated sheer domesticity, yet this stereotype of the innocent and virginal woman continues to haunt literature and popular culture today. In Burton’s films, I will maintain, this figure of ‘the Angel in the House’ can be considered as synonymous with the Gothic heroine, and is indeed a gendered category which the director repeatedly envisions. Ever so blameless, beautiful and almost ethereal, this woman is suggested through the director’s development of his passive and rather feeble heroines. For Marcia England, these passive heroines are plagued by “objectification,” indicating that the Gothic tradition is rife with “misogynistic overtones” (2006: 353). Likewise, Becker comments on the genre’s employment of “wildly distressed heroines” (1999: 46). It is this distress and victimisation which I will suggest emerges as distinct in Burton’s three films. While his heroines are murdered, raped and confined, this brutalisation also effectuates a certain subversion of their limited roles.

Unlike the figure of the Gothic heroine, the *femme fatale* can be seen as far more composite, and this complexity is visible in Burton’s films. Helen Hanson and Catherine O’Rawe point out the origins of this stereotype, noting that she is “as old as Eve,” but became solidified as a Western archetype in the late nineteenth century (2010: 3). Similarly, feminist scholar Mary Ann Doane writes that the *femme fatale* embodies “the fears and anxieties prompted by shifts in the understanding of sexual difference in the late nineteenth century” (1991: 2). A period of gendered ambiguity, given the rise of the New Woman who sought independence and education, literature and popular culture of the time envisioned the fatal woman as at once beautiful, but conniving and deadly. It is, however, during the height of the *film noir* narratives of the 1940s and 1950s that this figure became a cinematic icon. Regardless of her origin, for Julie Grossman, this deadly woman is “a product of cultural ideation,” one which is still very much alive today and which I will argue finds its way into Burton’s work (2009: 4). Although the *femme fatale* is often known for her erotic appeal, she emerges as far more than merely a pretty surface. Katherine Farrimond describes this fatal woman as possessing forceful sexuality, ambition, dubious morality,

gumption, guile and a “danger of death by association” (2011: 7). More than a lethal force, it is her inventive and purposeful deviance which distinguishes her, prompting Elisabeth Bronfen to remark that this figure “entertains a narcissistic pleasure” when duping the men under her power (2004: 106). It is just such a pleasure which Burton’s *femmes fatales* enjoy, as they shamelessly delude and plague those unfortunate enough to get in their way. Regardless of the temporary power which this figure wields, Braun notes her inevitable fate, where such “resistance often leads to her fictional demise” (2012: 56). For Doane, the power inherent in this woman is of a peculiar variety, as “she is not the subject of power, but its *carrier*” (1991: 2). By this, Doane argues that the *femme fatale* only has power insofar as she is a signifier of the overrepresented body and illustrative of the fear of castration (1991: 2). She is an erotic image for masculine pleasure, yet simultaneously threatens to destabilise his sense of self. While this might be true in many cases of literary and filmic narratives, I would posit that there is a space for the *femme fatale* to be more than a mere sensualised and anxiety-provoking symbol. Farrimond contends that the fatal woman suggests “male anxiety, backlash, and misogyny, but she equally offers female agency” (2001: 35). It is this opportunity for real agency and power which I argue emerges in the Gothic narratives of Burton’s films.

In the Gothic literary tradition, the *femme fatale* does not simply offer sexualised and dangerous appeal. Rather, she frequently takes an array of supernaturally-charged forms. From the demoness Matilda of Matthew Lewis’s *The Monk* (1796), to the return of the narrator’s deceased wife in Edgar Allan Poe’s *Ligeia* (1838), or to the beautiful female vampire of Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu’s *Carmilla* (1872), the Gothic abounds in images of the paranormal and powerful woman. Joseph Andriano traces the female spirits which haunt the genre, noting that the early nineteenth century saw the rise of the “demoness haunting a sensitive young man” (1993: 1). Similarly, Braun explores Gothic literary trends in the late nineteenth century, remarking on the consistent topos of “supernaturally seductive women” (2012: 7). Irrespective of her precise origins within the genre, the figure of the fatal, frightening and markedly hybrid woman can be seen as a staple of the Gothic, one who contrasts decidedly with the frail and ineffectual heroine. The Gothic *femme fatale* thus emerges as a far more forceful and mutinous figure than Doane’s (1991) conceptualisation of her as being unable to transcend her image. Consequently, in Burton’s films, I will argue

that his fatal female characters have access to real agency, driven largely by their inhuman characteristics. Animalistic and embodying the living dead, Catwoman enjoys a feline's mythological nine lives, while the sexy sorceress Angelique delights in using her dark magic to spark fires, shred houses and curse those around her. Even Mrs. Lovett, devoid as she is of supernatural faculties, is a liminal creature, appropriating power as she straddles moral boundaries. Physically dominant, shrewd and sensual, these disquieting and deviant women dominate Burton's narratives, so emphasising the notion of womanly otherness.

The portrayal of Woman as the monstrous Other within Burton's films is an area which has not been extensively considered, especially where this investigation is informed by theories of the abject. Melinda Hall (2016), in her study of Burton's *Edward Scissorhands* (1990), investigates the director's treatment of the protagonist, who she argues is an embodiment of abjection, yet simultaneously a monster with whom the audience identifies. Nevertheless, this study of *Edward Scissorhands* (Johnny Depp) does not adopt a feminist stance when seeking to probe Burton's conception of the male monster. The films which I have selected in this research have seldom, if ever, been scrutinised through a deployment of Kristeva's (1982) concept of the abject and Creed's (1993) notion of the monstrous-feminine. *Batman Returns*, perhaps partly on account of being the oldest film under study, has occasioned the most academic attention. In terms of studies of deformity, Alan Gregory (2014) explores the topos of bodily abnormality in the film, concentrating on the male character of the Penguin. The leading female character in the narrative, the *femme fatale* Catwoman, has likewise been widely examined, given her radical construction and corporeal transmutation. For Spooner, Catwoman's costume is used by Burton to "explore his perennial preoccupation with the outsider" (2013: 48). Similarly, Ryan Weldon, discussing Catwoman's dramatic and powerful self-fashioning, calls her alter ego, the secretary Selena, an "abject Other" in her largely invisible role as heroine (2014: 35). Evidently, critics have repeatedly noted the director's fixation with bodily alterity in *Batman Returns*, although in the case of Weldon's study, this is not directly related to Kristeva's theory. On the other hand, Carolyn Burns (2012) does connect the tale of *Sweeney Todd* to Kristeva's abject. However, Burns's research considers Stephen Sondheim's (1979) musical based on the legend of the barber, where her focus is the use of voice, rather than engagement with the monstrous-feminine. Correspondingly, Derek Andrew Domike associates Burton's cinematic

rendition of the narrative with the abject, observing his use of images of “[a]bjection, the grotesque, and a masochistic aesthetic” (2009: 12). His study, however, concentrates on the director’s depiction of masculinity and recommends a similar investigation be conducted regarding femininity “or lack thereof” in the director’s work (Domike 2009: 79). Finally, Burton’s *Dark Shadows* has received very little in the way of critical attention. The earlier soap opera by the same name, however, has been extensively analysed, apparent in Harry M. Benshoff’s *Dark Shadows (TV Milestone Miniseries)* (2011), which explores the show’s cult following. Ultimately, the intention of this study is to investigate what I consider to be a scholastic gap in examinations of Burton’s films to date. As far as I am aware, no work undertakes to canvas Burton’s gothicised portrayal of women, through recourse to both Kristeva’s abject and Creed’s monstrous-feminine. Concomitantly, my study will explore the director’s use of the stereotypical figures of the ‘virgin’ and ‘whore,’ while showing how he undermines this binary through his crafting of his female characters as signifiers of the aberrant beings of the Gothic.

In my first chapter, I will focus on the director’s early film *Batman Returns*. In this chapter, I intend to examine the degree to which Burton fashions the heroine Selena and her alter ego, the resurrected *femme fatale* Catwoman, as Gothic embodiments of corporeal irregularity. As will be the case throughout this study, my analysis will be informed by Kristeva’s (1982) concept of abjection, in order to demonstrate how Selena/Catwoman evolves into a representation of the monstrous-feminine. While I will maintain that Burton seems to adhere to the dualistic essentialised split between the ‘good’ woman and ‘evil’ woman, I will also show that the director disrupts this binary through the unnatural Gothic embodiment that Selena/Catwoman assumes. In the process, the ‘good’ girl turns bad, but traces of ‘the Angel in the House’ remain. Even prior to her supernatural transformation, I will argue that Selena takes on certain ‘aberrant’ Gothic traits. It will be suggested that excess overlays Selena/Catwoman’s form, as the heroine/*femme fatale* becomes illustrative of aggressive sensuality and feline agility across a split and fragmented identity. Ultimately, I will posit that Burton’s narrative tends to propagate the idea of Woman as different and deeply unsettling, even while affording his characters a disconcerting degree of agency.

In my second chapter, I seek to explore Burton’s Gothic fashioning of his central female characters in the film *Sweeney Todd*. The heroines of this Victorian narrative, Lucy

and her daughter Johanna, can initially be seen as indistinguishable from Patmore's (1863) domestic angel, far more so than the secretary Selena. Fair-haired, sweet and innocent, they come to suggest the purity and charm of the typical Gothic heroine. However, I intend to indicate that they are tainted through their stereotypical embodiment as sufferers from hysteria, a traditionally 'feminine' disease in the nineteenth century. Again, I will suggest that Burton, while setting up a good/evil dichotomy with respect to these characters, challenges this binary as his heroines are seen to be in possession of an instability and irregularity normally associated with the *femme fatale*. Although Lucy and Johanna might be permitted to play the 'bad' girl to a degree, they also come to symbolise objects of profound desire or disgust, as they are othered into irrational beings, thereby distanced from the clean and sane hierarchy of the 'male' world. Of course, this subversion of 'proper' femininity pales in comparison to the *femme fatale* Mrs. Lovett, who clearly embodies the abject and horrifying monstrous-feminine. Conflated with images of human flesh, blood and gore, this *femme fatale*, while not supernaturally-empowered, I will suggest is representative of a fundamental breach of the social order. She emerges as far more frighteningly hybrid than the heroines, fusing, as she does, signifiers of cannibalism, greed and forceful sensuality. Once again, my aim is to indicate that the heroine and *femme fatale* are illustrative of Burton's representation of troubling sexual difference, which he nevertheless seems to employ to provide them with a certain level of agency in their transgressions.

In my third chapter, I will scrutinise Burton's leading female characters in *Dark Shadows*, again demonstrating the extent to which the director shapes them into atypical creatures. Embodiments of feminine innocence and otherworldly beauty, the heroines Josette and Victoria are initially envisioned, in true Burton style, as quintessential 'angels'. This portrayal, however, is founded on a distinct sense of Gothic unease, as the heroines appear to be doubles, to such an extent that I will refer to them as Josette-Victoria, the separator acting as my own narrative mirroring device. This disquiet is furthered when Burton reintroduces the character Josette into the film as a spectre, so fostering the stereotype of the lingering female who haunts Gothic narratives. Alternatively, the living heroine Victoria is initially confined in an asylum on account of her relations with Josette's ghost. Moreover, ultimately, Victoria chooses to be transformed into a vampire. So, the

director permits these characters not only limited agency, but also allows them to subvert the role of 'good' girl heroine. This transgression, I will show, is no match for the eroticised *femme fatale*, the witch Angelique, who dominates the film. I will suggest that Burton's essentialism is visible in that he affiliates her with the frightening forces of a powerful 'Mother Nature,' even while representing her as apparently 'unnatural,' a lethal and dangerous murderess. Seductive, devious and deadly, this monstrous-feminine, I will posit, epitomises not only Gothic liminality, but also the real power afforded to the gothicised *femme fatale*. As the director constructs Angelique, as well as his weaker heroines, into fantastical beings, my contention will be that the female form is set apart as a space of terrifying alterity.

Finally, in my conclusion, I will demonstrate the degree to which Burton's female characters in each of the three films discussed acquire the distinctive stereotypical traits of the domestic 'angel' and *femme fatale*, respectively. Yet, as Burton imagines each Gothic filmic narrative, he overlays certain features of the genre upon his female forms. Irregular, disquieting and utterly different, the body spaces of Burton's heroines and *femmes fatales* both frighten and intrigue. My conclusion will ultimately posit that Burton's women enjoy a certain freedom as they are crafted into figures of Gothic anxiety. Still, at the heart of the director's interpretation of the monstrous-feminine, there exists a gendered unease, where the very 'essence' of femininity itself is seen as frightening and Other. Nevertheless, though Burton's female characters might provoke the abject oscillation between dread and fascination, I will argue that they unequivocally rattle the male hegemony of the films as well as their own gendered cage.

Chapter One: *Batman Returns*

As I was saying, I'm a woman and can't be taken for granted.

– Catwoman in *Batman Returns*

When asked to describe the artistic inspiration behind his surreal and macabrely dark films, director Tim Burton says that “[e]verything is under the umbrella of life and death and the unknown, and a mixture of good and bad, and funny and sad, and everything at once” (Burton cited in Breskin 1992: 247). Burton believes life to be “weirdly complicated” and it is this ambiguity and uncertainty which can be seen to arise in his film *Batman Returns* (1992) (Burton cited in Breskin 1992: 247). More than evoking the underlying concerns in his cinematic narratives, Burton’s comment resonates with the Gothic tradition within which his films find expression. The Gothic represents a plethora of encounters with the unknown, the unidentifiable, the strange and the excessive. Such encounters proliferate in *Batman Returns*, his second adaptation of DC Comics’ Batman. The film centres upon the interactions of the superhero Batman (Michael Keaton), the deformed figure of the Penguin (Danny DeVito), business mogul Max Shreck (Christopher Walken) and heroine Selena Kyle (Michelle Pfeiffer), who, following her death, is reincarnated as Catwoman (Michelle Pfeiffer). The plot entails certain stock Gothic roles. There is the Gothic villain, the Penguin, discarded into Gotham City’s sewerage system by his parents due to his corporeal abnormality. He is raised by a flock of penguins and befriends a motley carnival crew of delinquents. Thirty three years later, he attempts, like any evil villain, to obtain power through an untrustworthy alliance with a criminal businessman, Shreck. Selena, in her role as Gothic heroine, is Shreck’s secretary, and discovers her merciless employer’s plot to drain Gotham City of power in an attempt to create a stockpile for his family to monopolise the energy market. Shreck murders Selena because of her discovery and the consequence is her supernatural resurrection, aided by an array of mewling alley cats, into the famed superheroine, Catwoman.

As a strong female figure, Catwoman poses interesting possibilities for this study, as not only is she moulded to conform to masculine preconceptions of sensual appeal, but, I argue, is also an active agent empowered through her hybrid embodiment. Excessively sexualised and recurrently depicted in relation to her body, Catwoman exemplifies the

femme fatale, a stereotype who has always been desired and feared by men. My intention is to approach Burton's *Batman Returns* through a reading that examines how Catwoman signifies an excessive and oftentimes 'evil' woman. Alternatively, the mousy secretary Selena, I contend, is situated by Burton as representative of the conventional Gothic heroine or 'the Angel in the House,' a figure suggesting passivity, vulnerability and innocence. As the 'good' girl of the Gothic tradition, I discuss her in relation to the idealised notion of the domestic angel and show how in this guise she acts as a foil to the *femme fatale* Catwoman. Through this exploration of these two opposed figures, I mean to demonstrate Burton's reliance on the age-old stereotype of Woman as inhabiting one of two positions – that of the 'virgin' or the 'whore'.³

The result of this duality is that the film elicits a degree of essentialism, whereby Woman is figured as 'naturally' embodying certain traits, such as the innocence of the 'virgin' or the overt sexuality of the 'whore'. For Elizabeth Grosz, the term essentialism, in relation to the gendered body, "refers to the attribution of a fixed essence to women," where traits of Woman are considered "given, universal" and often connected with biological functioning (1990: 334).⁴ Consequently, such essentialist discourse ensures that women are stereotypically conceived, as they are thought to embody a set of fairly fixed characteristics. In Burton's film, this essentialising of gender is apparent in his construction of his female characters, yet this representation lacks the rigidity of the dualism associated with the stock Gothic characters of the heroine and *femme fatale*. The transformation of Selena into her own supernatural alter ego Catwoman results in a fragmentation of her identity into 'good' and 'evil'. This gives rise to an alteration in the 'new' Selena's behaviour as she takes on particular traits associated with Catwoman, such as a provocative sexiness. On the other hand, Catwoman still retains elements of Selena's morality and hesitancy when it comes to transgressing certain social boundaries. In this chapter, I maintain that the binary representation of women is challenged in Burton's film through this melding of traits in a single, if split, embodiment. In my examination of these characters I will employ themes associated with the discourse of the Gothic, particularly those related to transgression, excessiveness and the monster and their relation to the Kristevan (1982) concept of

³ For studies on the stereotyping of women along a good/evil axis, see: Adler & Lecosse (2013); Dijkstra (1988); Langland (1995); Noddings (1989).

⁴ See also: Fuss (1989); Rahman & Jackson (2010); Stone (2007); Witt (2011).

abjection. I will contend that these Gothic themes render the female characters as abject Others. Their otherness will be seen as exemplified by liminality and alterity through their establishment as the frightening 'monstrous-feminine'. Conceiving of this term in her influential work, Barbara Creed considers the monstrous-feminine as "what it is about woman that is shocking, terrifying, horrific, abject" (1993: 1). Likewise, my study of Burton's film will interlink the concept of abjection and the monstrous-feminine as I seek to explore how the director envisions women simultaneously as embodiments of innocence and dangerous femininity.

As a genre concerned with the prominence of dreadful bodies, the Gothic repeatedly raises physical forms which are frightening, inexplicable and excessive in order to arouse sensations of unease and even fear in the reader or viewer. Gothic scholar Fred Botting sees the genre as "[a]esthetically excessive" and "[t]ransgressing the bounds of reality and possibility" (1996: 4). Botting goes on to consider the figures which emerge in the Gothic as projections of "an uncontrollable and overwhelming power," which undermine societal order and boundaries, even while firmly re-establishing these 'proper' cultural limits (1996: 5). Transgressive and beyond physical and social borders, Gothic figures are at once both frightening and alluring. As subversive bodies, they represent embodiments of abjection, as they stand outside of what is deemed 'proper' and 'correct'. When steeped in images of debased feminine monstrosity, these depictions I consider to be renderings of the monstrous-feminine. It is this portrayal of feminine bodies assuming traits of Gothic excess, grounded in conceptions of femininity as fearful, which I will explore in Burton's film. The director, in fact, calls on an array of typically Gothic bodies in order to craft his narrative, deploying images of the monster, the villain, the supernatural, the hapless heroine and the dangerous *femme fatale*.

Burton's depiction of unusual corporeality, however, is not entirely fear-provoking, as indicated in Xavier Aldana Reyes's comment that Burton relies "on a specific type of dark imagery that aligns itself more with fantasy and fairy tales ... than with horror" (2014: 388). I consider *Batman Returns* as departing from the fully-fledged horror of the Gothic, exploring, instead, the fantastic and the outlandish. Rather than a focus on horror, the director injects

his characteristic, comic eccentricities⁵ and in true Burton style, the film exemplifies an excess of “the odd minglings of humour and fear [found] in Gothic fiction” (Lewis 1989: 27). *Batman Returns*, despite evoking the genre of fantasy, nevertheless still constitutes part of the Gothic filmic tradition, which Misha Kavka calls an “avid, unashamed plagiarizer of earlier, literary forms of the Gothic” (2002: 209). Kavka goes on to indicate that such films are pervaded with “recognizable elements based in distinct *visual codes*,” such as the ruined castle (2002: 210). In Burton’s film, these visual codes are evident in the dark and sinister environment of Gotham City, the portrayal of irregular and ambiguous embodiment and the concern with death, pain and victimhood. For Botting, Gothic atmospheres are “gloomy and mysterious” (1996: 1). Gotham City can be seen as just such a Gothic space, abounding with “dark Gothic shadows” and strange Gothic bodies (Weldon 2014: 31). It is these excessive bodies which I will scrutinise in this chapter, principally focusing on Burton’s female characters.

The characters of Selena and Catwoman are central to Burton’s narrative, created as they are to suggest the Gothic motifs of the strange and complex, the ambiguous and transitional. Their bodies, while alluding to the impermanence of identity, are also steeped in discourses of ‘proper’ and ‘improper’ femininity. I suggest that the representation of both the heroine and the *femme fatale* in Burton’s film recalls the genre’s inherent fascination with femininity. This fixation with women is noted by Cynthia Griffin Wolff, who remarks that the literary Gothic “has come to be dominated by women – written by women; read by women; and choosing as its central figure a young girl, the Gothic heroine” (1979: 98). This naïve and mostly feeble heroine is continually subjected to “pursuit, imprisonment, [and] violation” within the genre (Botting 2007: 170).⁶ Burton teases out such concerns in his film, where Selena is forced to endure the gravest form of physical violation when she is murdered by her male employer. While the idiosyncratic heroine, the passive, virginal and innocent ‘good’ girl, is central to the Gothic, her ‘evil’ counterpart, the *femme fatale*, is also an established figure.⁷ A woman of sexual and moral excess, she stands in stark contrast to

⁵ Botting recognises the prevalence of comedy within the Gothic tradition, noting the genre’s meld of “the supernatural and the ridiculous, the magical and the nightmarish, the fantastical and the absurd” (1996: 3).

⁶ See Mario Praz’s *The Romantic Agony* for elucidation on the “persecuted maiden” of the Gothic tradition (1951: 97).

⁷ For a thorough understanding of the representation of the heroine and *femme fatale*, see: Braun (2012); Doane (1991); Hoeveler (1998a); Meyers (2001).

the heroine, fostering the preconception of Woman as either virtuous and virginal or evil man-eater. This duality is frequently seen in the Gothic, as noted by Susanne Becker who considers that these characters “have, throughout the gothic romance tradition, been narratively separated and functioned as foils” (1999: 216). In *Batman Returns*, Catwoman operates as a foil for her weaker counterpart, the heroine Selena. Her radically altered disposition and appearance upon her supernatural mutation reveal the acute social rage which she feels towards a society she views as unjust. As the *femme fatale*, the viewer witnesses her wielding her body and sensual prowess in an attempt to wreak destruction on male-dominated society and to avenge her murder. However, Selena is Catwoman, and so these figures cannot be neatly and definitively segregated into heroine and *femme fatale*. Abused and ignored for too long, Selena’s concealed feelings are brought to light through the actions of her alter ego, who I contend is an embodiment of her unconscious. For this reason, the leading female character of Burton’s film is complex, an incarnation of the concept of the double and the epitome of what it means to be liminal and transgressive. Her cat-like, Gothic form is hybrid, irregular and indistinct, making her a fascinating figure for a feminist critical study.

Across Burton’s oeuvre, there are copious instances of strange and liminal bodies. For Judith Halberstam, the Gothic is concerned with “the horror of particular kinds of bodies” (1995: 3). It is bodily otherness which terrifies and intrigues in the Gothic, where the figure of the monster takes on all the traits which the stable subject seeks to disavow. Marie Mulvey-Roberts sees the “making of the Gothic world” as reliant on the “formation of a monstrous alterity” (2016: 3). The result is the generation of a distinct polarity between self and Other. In *Batman Returns*, I assert that what is monstrous is intimately linked not only to bodily alterity, but also to sexual difference. In this film, Catwoman comes to be seen as the sexual Other, in her embodiment which negates classification. Claire Kahane, writing on Woman’s conventional construction as occupying an othered location, argues that Woman is considered to be “part of Nature” and represents “the mysterious not-me world, with its unknown forces” (1985: 336). She is stereotypically positioned as irrational and somehow too ‘corporeal,’ as opposed to the man who connotes law and order. Of course, such conceptions of women are highly essentialist, in their intimate connection of Woman to the natural world. Yet, mysterious and enigmatic, Catwoman, I consider, personifies this notion

of an unfathomable natural order, where her altered, cat-like form with its nine lives is not only baffling, but also highly sexualised. Through Catwoman's excessive and supernatural resurrection Burton suggests that Woman and so-called 'Mother Nature' are one, a gendered location quite at odds with the 'masculine' realm of rationality and science. Selena can also be seen as tied to this natural order, not only during her eerie and otherworldly transfiguration, but also, as I will show, in her relegation to little more than a domestic animal within Shreck's masculinised boardroom. As a genre relying upon the arousal of fear, the Gothic stirs up images of an uncontrollable natural world, radically divergent from cultural sanctions regarding the 'proper'. Improper feminine embodiment in Burton's film becomes a representation of a frightening and alien realm. The director's visual amalgamation of bodily apprehension and fear of femininity, I assert, validates Kahane's claim that "both men and women maintain an uneasy relation to femaleness" (1985: 336). This unease is triggered as a result of Woman's social exclusion and positioning as the male Other, an excessive and even uncontrollable being. In Burton's film this disquiet regarding a location in the sexual hierarchy comes to the fore as the female characters seek to distance themselves from their own constructions as overtly feminised bodies. For instance, at the film's close, I contend that Catwoman feels a deep sense of anxiety regarding her highly gendered role as *femme fatale* and her stable identity is shown to be dramatically unravelling.

While Burton's film might develop a profound sense of apprehension in relation to womanliness, within the Gothic as a whole the otherness of femininity is fraught with motifs of dread, apparent in the fashioning of the figures of the heroine and *femme fatale*. Subsequently, the rendering of feminine embodiment has garnered much scholastic attention, where critics argue for women in the genre as ostracised, subjugated and connected with myriad monstrous and strange configurations.⁸ In Burton's film, while Catwoman is certainly suggestive of alterity and liminality, the heroine Selena can also be considered as partaking of this discourse of the marginal body. Burton initially locates Selena as the prototypical Gothic heroine, yet, through her metamorphosis, he permits her to transcend this position. The 'new' Selena is a saucy secretary by day and a fatal and

⁸ For an in-depth understanding of gendered representations in the Gothic genre, see: Heiland (2004); Hoeveler (1998a); Horner & Zlosnik (2014); Kahane (1985); Williams (1995).

costumed superheroine by night. Burton graphically reveals her otherworldly resurrection into Catwoman, which arouses feelings of disquiet in the audience, as she morphs into an embodiment of the living dead. However, even before this supernatural change occurs, I will argue that Selena demonstrates marked masochistic tendencies, revealing a subversive passive aggression and intentional crossing of boundaries, a typical strategy adopted by the Gothic heroine.⁹ Through the figures of both the heroine and *femme fatale*, I will therefore indicate that Burton crafts his female characters into irregular beings whose gendered difference is perceived as deeply unsettling.

The concept of Woman as inhabiting a body revelatory of frightening sexuality is the central concern of Creed's (1993) exploration into what she terms the 'monstrous-feminine'. Creed deploys the Kristevan (1982) theoretical framework of abjection as she investigates what it is about women that is horrifying and sickening in film. For Kristeva, the abject can be seen as that which is "contaminated, condemned, at the boundary of what is assimilable, thinkable" (1982: 18). It is that which the subject attempts to expel in order to achieve a sense of the proper, clean and whole self (Kristeva 1982: 2-4). Thus, the notion of the 'I' and the Other is established in this rejection process, as the subject attempts to delineate boundaries of 'proper' identity. Kristeva goes on to describe this procedure as involving claims of "[n]ot me" and a "'something" that I do not recognize as a thing" (1982: 2). The abject, at its most fundamental level, is about the navigating of boundaries, both corporeal and psychological. This traversing of social and physical limits is pertinent to the Gothic, where aberrant and unsettling bodies flourish and consequently critical research has engaged extensively with this area of study.¹⁰ For Steven Bruhm, the Gothic hinges on a concern with "the immediacy of the body" (1992: xi). The body, within the genre, is set up as a locus of meaning, depicted as a site of pain, as is the case for the Gothic victim, or as a space for the exploration of what it means to be culturally debased and deviant. Probing the liminal body of the Gothic tradition, Halberstam sees the role of the monster "as a kind of trash heap for the discarded scraps of abject humanity" (1995: 143). For Maria Beville, likewise, the 'abjections' of the Gothic help to define the 'proper' self, "hence we feel

⁹ For studies on female masochism, see: Bonaparte (1935); Deutsch (1930); Freud (2000); Horney (1935); Meyers (2001).

¹⁰ For a thorough investigation of this concept, see Becker (1999); Beville (2009); Botting (1996); Farnell (2009); Hogle (2002); Hurley (1996); Mighall (2003); Punter (2001); Spooner (2006); Wenk (2008).

mysteriously attracted to them while casting them off as ‘others’” (2009: 40). In *Batman Returns*, the narrative entails a confrontation with these ‘cast off’ creatures, especially in the at once alive and dead, human and animalistic figure of Selena/Catwoman.

While this hybrid woman can be seen as an embodiment of otherness, she also comes to signify what Creed terms the ‘monstrous-feminine’. For Creed, the female monster is closely related to the abject, as both provoke a frightening fascination and dread. Woman, on account of her sexual and gendered difference, is a figure feared and rejected by men, while simultaneously arousing interest and temptation. Creed consequently views the monstrous-feminine “as constructed within/by a patriarchal and phallogentric ideology” (1993: 2). The result for Creed is that horror films expose the fear at the root of notions of what constitutes ‘femininity,’ where this fear is made all too literal in films where female monsters parade their deviant subjectivities. Portrayals of the female Other are common enough in the Gothic genre, where horror is triggered by “the encounter of this ‘monstrous-feminine’” (Becker 1999: 56). Within the Gothic of Burton’s film, apprehension is provoked through just such an encounter, where Catwoman becomes emblematic of what Creed calls the *femme castratrice*, a variant of the monstrous-feminine. As the name implies, this ‘unnatural’ and transgressive female monster is a castrating woman, one who seeks appalling and bloody revenge on men.

While Catwoman might be a castrating monster who prowls Gotham City at night, her alter ego, the heroine Selena can be seen as intrusively meddlesome from the film’s outset. Positioned as the Gothic heroine by Burton, Selena represents what Diane Long Hoeveler calls this heroine’s indulgence “in what we would recognize as masochistic gestures for effect” (1998b: 114). Hoeveler points out that these heroines “not only tolerate all manner of abuse; they actually seem to seek it out” and so “pursue trouble” (1998b: 114). As a passive-aggressive woman, Hoeveler considers the Gothic heroine an arch manipulator of situations who, nevertheless, retains her status as the ‘good’ girl (1998b: 115). This can be seen, to a certain extent in the scene where Selena is killed as a direct result of her snooping into her employer Shreck’s affairs. While she might be regarded as an innocent victim, the manner in which she approaches Shreck is decidedly passive-aggressive. For Hoeveler, the heroine is persistently enticed by “anti-bourgeois values” and the destruction of “authoritarian strictures” (1998b: 121). While she would never admit to

it, the heroine can be seen as fascinated by the lure of chaos. In *Batman Returns*, Selena seems to indicate this tendency, marked in the scene where she is taken hostage by one of the Penguin's painted clowns. She remains utterly helpless while captured, but once Batman saves her, she comments upon their exceedingly brief interaction, saying, "Well, that was very brief. Just like all the men in my life." The comment suggests her lack of any real fear and the secret thrill which she gains from precarious circumstances. This is perhaps made more evident as, once Batman departs, she shocks the clown with his own weapon, giggling in glee and casting her eyes about to ensure that no one is watching.

While evoking the comic, the presence of the clown in Burton's film, as Schuy R. Weishaar observes, also signifies a "grotesque "otherness"" which represents a "malicious, often sadistic, violent threat" (2012: 58). I contend that Burton uses the sense of otherness and perilous threat raised by the presence of the clown to taint Selena's image as heroine as well as hinting at her own inherent otherness. The Gothic, and indeed Burton's film, delights in this interplay between humour and horror. For Catherine Spooner, Burton's work explores "the sinister [which] is continually shading into the comic and vice versa" (2006: 69). Likewise, Scott Freer, discussing *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* (2007), sees Burton's film as conjuring up images of "wild violations of anarchic degeneration" (2008/2009: 53). I would argue that the same can be said for *Batman Returns*. Selena's hidden aggression, both in the scene with the clown and in that of her murder by Shreck, indicates more than a mere curiosity on the part of the heroine. While what can be thought of as her prying nature might be mildly amusing, it also suggests a dangerous need to subvert social limits. Ultimately, this characteristic results in her death. I contend that this propensity in Burton's heroine marks her as conforming to the heroine of the Gothic literary genre who traverses boundaries and sees the attraction in chaos. This violation of cultural limitations and navigating of borders comes to suggest precisely the space of abjection. Selena's semi-covert attraction to actions that are contrary to what is 'proper' can be considered to be a form of Gothic excess and reveals a "fascination with transgression" and an anxiety concerning "cultural limits and boundaries" (Botting 1996: 1). Consequently, I argue that Selena's masochistic conduct, while indicative of the appeal of rupturing her social role as the 'good' girl, is also redolent of her position as an irregular

being. Her passive-aggression comes to represent a form of boundary crossing and an inversion of social mores and rules that expose a profoundly subversive otherness.

While she might be an agent of veiled aggression, Burton also situates Selena as the film's 'Angel in the House,' so drawing on the stereotype of Woman as innately pure. Elizabeth Langland traces this figure's conception, noting that "[m]id-nineteenth-century tracts collaborated in the construction of ... the middle class "angel" or moral salvator, summarized famously in Coventry Patmore's verse sequence *The Angel in the House*" (1995: 62). Patmore's vision of this woman is plainly evident on reading a couple of lines from his contentious poem: "I praised her, but no praise could fill/ The depths of her desire to please" (1863: 257). Patmore sees her as a figure of excessive virtue, endlessly given to self-sacrifice, while safely within the confines of her domestic sphere. The implication is that these traits are somehow natural to women, rather than a position forced upon them by men. Through this discourse, Woman comes to signify a figure of almost ethereal goodness. For Nel Noddings, this idealised being is "credited with natural goodness, an innate allegiance to "a law of kindness"" (1989: 59). Ellen Jordan, similarly, considers this mythological woman as "living the life of continual selflessness and self-abnegation" (1999: 53). Despite the high ideals attributable to this figure, Noddings argues that "[u]ndertones of sadism run throughout Coventry Patmore's hymn to the angel who is in reality a prisoner in the house she graces" (1989: 59). The subjugation and obsequiousness propagated by this essentialised woman propelled Virginia Woolf to suggest killing 'the Angel in the House' by way of a "battle with [this] ... phantom" (1974: chapter 27). In *Batman Returns*, Selena's transfiguration can be understood in this light. Burton appears to advocate killing 'the Angel in the House,' as the heroine's dramatically altered subjectivity disrupts the dictates of 'proper' femininity. As Woolf indicates, this is evidently a battle for the 'old' Selena, as traces of her placement as the 'good' girl remain, even when disguised as Catwoman. Prior to her resurrection from the dead, however, Burton aligns Selena far more markedly with this paragon of goodness, where her gendered body is made to take on certain characteristics of this romanticised 'angel'.

Allusions to the figure of 'the Angel in the House' repeatedly surface in the Gothic literary tradition in the form of the heroines of such tales. Narratives frequently entail defenceless heroines in precarious predicaments, especially as they are exposed to the

harrowing brutalisation of domineering villains and father-figures. Jerrold E. Hogle considers the Gothic a space for “the oppression and “othering” of the female” (2002: 10). While women might be oppressed physically by the male characters of the Gothic, I argue that they can be seen as othered in the process. Like the Gothic, Burton marks his heroines with the putative stigma of their gender, evoking the sense that men fear women for their potential to subvert the social hierarchy. The solution to the assumed enigma of Woman seems to be her persecution, apparent when Shreck murders Selena in the film. The Gothic seeks to tame the female, forcing her into passivity and docility, while concurrently implying that there is something deeply disconcerting about her gendered body. Consequently, while the men of the Gothic tradition dominate frail, pitiful and virtuous heroines, this violence is remindful of the fact that women are viewed as being in opposition to men and positioned as the monstrous-feminine. While subjected to maltreatment, the heroines of the Gothic genre, rather than women of agency, are habitually all too helpless or what Mary Ellen Snodgrass calls “swooners and hand wringers or wailing wraiths” (2006: 240). Like ‘the Angel in the House,’ the ‘swooners’ of the Gothic tradition reveal a tendency for weakness and self-renunciation. These innocent and vulnerable creatures serve to essentialise women in much the same way as the myth of the wholly selfless ‘Angel in the House’. Hoeveler points out that the Gothic heroine “always triumphs over evil because she is totally good; her motives are always utterly pure; her conduct and speech always above reproach” (1998a: 95). Thus, the virtuous and angelic heroine and ‘the Angel in the House’ are almost indistinguishable as figures of excessive goodness, overlaid with images of a masculine fear and violence raised by Woman’s alleged otherness.

In Burton’s film, Selena initially emerges as the conventional heroine, closely resembling the ideal of ‘the Angel in the House,’ although this is challenged as the film progresses. For Hoeveler, the heroine of the Gothic genre is characterised “by repression and silence, acceptance or at least the pose of complaisancy” (1998b: 116). It is this silence and apparent acceptance of Woman’s inferior position in society which materialises in the character of Selena in her opening scene. The audience’s first encounter with Selena is in Shreck’s expansive male-dominated boardroom, where a meeting is in progress. The viewer initially glimpses Selena walking towards the businessmen, who lounge in their leather chairs about the boardroom table. The shot conceals her face, and instead, depicts her from

behind, approaching the men who face the camera. The image foregrounds Selena, but reveals her lack of power, as the audience initially neither wholly observes her nor hears her voice. Rather, the viewer witnesses the rear of her moving body, seeming to sexualise and objectify her form. She is the meek and mild 'Angel in the House,' forced to perform a domestic role while tiptoeing around the men who engage in 'real' work. This introduction to her character raises the notion of her troubling sexual otherness. She is portrayed as radically distinct from the men, thus setting up a gendered binary founded on certain engrained and time-honoured preconceptions of women. Peripheral to the action of the meeting, Selena is consigned to her "servile performance" as secretary, a traditional role allotted to women (Weldon 2014: 35). The scene swiftly moves to focus on Selena's face for the first time, as she pours coffee for Gotham City's mayor and Shreck. Her body is an image of deferential nervousness, as she serves the drinks clumsily, bent low, seeming to express her self-abnegation and inferior position to the male hierarchy. She is fashioned as an outsider, not permitted to partake of the discussion, but to function as an exemplar of servitude in the manner of the silent 'Angel in the House'. Anne Williams, writing on the Gothic, considers that the genre's "real reason for being is to provide its record of suffering – the pain of a lonely, vulnerable, isolated young woman" (1995: 139). Burton appears to craft Selena as just such a woman. Her vulnerability and isolation are visually communicated through her servile disposition and cringing attempts at invisibility. An alienated being, Selena is denied 'full' humanity by the men in the boardroom. Instead, her submission locates her as man's invisible 'helper' alluding to her status as almost animalistic, akin to a dog: 'man's best friend'.

Selena's bodily meekness, evident in her obviously nervous movements, appears to emulate what Sandra Bartky (1988) indicates is central to the gendered body. Bartky argues that "women are more restricted than men in their manner of movement and in their lived spatiality" (1988: 97). Citing Iris Young's (1980) study, Bartky maintains that "a space seems to surround women in imagination which they are hesitant to move beyond" (1988: 97). In the boardroom scene, Burton seems to suggest that his heroine experiences a similar hesitancy in relation to her body in space. Situated as "the passive center" of the scene, Selena comes to signify restraint and docility through her comportment (Massé 1992: 18). More than her timidity, her bearing suggests the presence of fear and imminent flight for

which the Gothic heroine is renowned, especially marked when she pours coffee for Shreck. The shot reveals Selena bending beneath Shreck, so that her ungainly movement produces a clanging sound as the spout of the pot meets his cup. In response to the noise, Shreck glowers both at his cup and at his employee. Selena has overstepped her boundary as 'the Angel in the House' – a figure seen, but not heard. Burton, I consider, uses Shreck's derisive glance to position her as outside the normative male business world, a being cast aside. She comes to exemplify what Kristeva calls "the ambiguous opposition [of] I/Other" (1982: 7). Hesitant in her role as Shreck's secretary, Selena's conduct also alludes to the unease and anxiety associated with the heroine. In Burton's film, the establishment of apprehension is communicated through visual and aural cues, such as the clipping of Selena's heels on the floor in this scene. The clanging of the cup as she pours coffee for Shreck, clearly audible above the business discussion, is another aural cue which hints at Selena's agitated state. Her evident wariness of Shreck serves to presage the terror which he will inspire prior to murdering her. Consequently, through the seemingly simple action of serving coffee, Burton filmically fashions Selena into a typical Gothic heroine, a figure marked by anxiety, helplessness and passivity.

Selena's construction as the traditional heroine of the genre, a position which she will undermine, is not merely accomplished by way of her actions in this early scene. Burton carefully chooses this character's physical features so as to align his heroine with stereotypical notions of the 'good' girl of the Gothic tradition. In the Gothic novel, *The Monk* (1796), the writer Matthew Lewis makes apparent the expected physical traits required of the quintessential heroine, in this case, the ill-fated character Antonia:

Her skin though fair was not entirely without freckles; Her eyes were not very large, nor their lashes particularly long. But then her lips were of the most rosy freshness; Her fair and undulating hair, confined by a simple ribband, poured itself below her waist in a profusion of ringlets; Her throat was full and beautiful in the extreme; Her hand and arm were formed with the most perfect symmetry; Her mild blue eyes seemed an heaven of sweetness, and the crystal in which they moved sparkled with all the brilliance of Diamonds. (2010: 6)

Lewis's portrayal of Antonia is illustrative of any Gothic heroine's purity, youth and ethereal bodily appeal. His diction, such as the use of "perfect symmetry," "heaven of sweetness" and "brilliance of Diamonds," captures the excess of the Gothic in the establishment of the ideal beauty of the flawless heroine (Lewis 2010: 6). In Burton's film, Selena appears fashioned so as to exemplify these bodily aspects. Her fair hair is fitted into a child-like ponytail, where blonde ringlets hang loosely, almost enveloping her face, giving the impression of virtue and youth. Her skin is milky and unblemished, while her delicate hands are revealed through her action of pouring coffee and her dress suit exposes her fair neck. She wears little make-up, although her lips are a rosy pink, while her spectacles seem to accentuate her wide blue eyes. Selena appears to be situated by the director as the innocent and beautiful heroine of the Gothic literary mode, an embodiment of passive and constructed femininity.

Despite this position, in a moment of boldness, Selena enters into the boardroom discussion, disrupting her docile and marginal role. Her polite suggestion indicates her hidden aggression and attempt to overturn the male order. Evidently startling the men, she offers a recommendation on the power plant under consideration. As she does so, she is still holding the silver coffee set as a visual reminder of the boardroom hierarchy and as a strategy of feminised defence. Her presumed inferiority is visible as there is an audible creaking of chairs when the men turn in silence to gape at her. This *en masse* stare is castigatory, dismissive and patronising, making manifest that Selena ought to remain silent. Her attempt at voicing an opinion and revealing agency is met with embarrassing consequences. Shreck nastily says, "I'm afraid we haven't properly housebroken Ms. Kyle." His remark serves to locate Selena in animalistic terms, through the use of "housebroken," evocative of a young domestic animal. Besides the inherent imperative that Selena ought to embody passivity, not agency, the comment dehumanises her, as Shreck evidently does not consider her 'fully' human. Selena is relegated to what Kelly Hurley terms the "abhuman subject," one that is "not-quite-human" and is "characterized by its morphic variability, continually in danger of becoming not-itself, becoming other" (1996: 3-4). The liminality of the abhuman, like the abject, is marked by the threat it poses to the sanctioned boundaries of the body. Hurley sees animalistic imagery in particular as raising the notion of the fluid, abhuman, Gothic body, where "to be simultaneously human and animal ... is to explode

crucial binarisms that lie at the foundations of human identity” (1996: 24-25). Shreck’s othering of Selena in a single word that implies she is a human animal is also apposite to her position as a woman. The suggestion is the unease which the female inspires and the male need to tame her as one would a beast. As a consequence of his remark, Selena’s body is made to connote something hybrid at the border of the human subject. The masculine laughter that Shreck’s comment provokes reinforces the idea that women should be seen and not heard. This social exclusion of women is taken further when Shreck derisively concedes that “she makes a hell of a cup of coffee”. Following this interaction, the men leave the boardroom and, alone, Selena berates her attempt at voicing an opinion and refers to herself as a “stupid corn dog”. Her use of “dog” recalls Shreck’s use of the word “housebroken” and further denigrates her feminine body as in some manner non-human. The statement also ironically foresees Selena’s reincarnation as Catwoman, where she will transfigure into a cunning, seductive, cat-like woman, far from the “stupid corn dog” she calls herself in this humiliating scene.

Burton further succeeds in establishing Selena as an agent of alterity in the scene when she returns to work later that evening. This eerie, night-time visit is occasioned as she has left the files regarding the proposed power plant at the office. Alone and defenceless, I regard Selena’s visit to the office as a means to connect her with what Hoeveler notes as the heroine’s typical conduct in that she “positions herself for the assault” (1998b: 115). As the scene begins Shreck is presented walking up a flight of stairs leading to the darkened office, where Selena is shown to be searching through a filing cabinet with her back to the camera. Her position to the camera is similar to the opening scene and hints at her forthcoming danger. Nevertheless her actions suggest Hoeveler’s critical take on Gothic heroines who “are forever rummaging through chests of paper, just happening to stumble on some secret, long lost document that explains a hidden and unsolved crime” (1998a: 61). In light of this tradition, Selena admits to her employer that she has opened his protected computer files, cracking his password, and discovering his secret to drain Gotham City of power through the proposed power plant. Her revelation seems a subtly threatening riposte to his public ill-treatment of her in the boardroom earlier that day. During her confession, Selena is located beneath Shreck, while he sits on a desk, in close proximity, staring down at her in an obvious ploy to intimidate her. She stumbles over her words and the dark lighting causes her

spectacles to shadow her face, intensifying her vulnerability. As Shreck draws near to the heroine, and the threat of violation becomes imminent, Burton presents the office as a dark claustrophobic space, which I consider likens the crime against Selena to that of the villain Ambrosio's in "Monk" Lewis's Gothic novel *The Monk* (1796). In Lewis's narrative, the heroine Antonia is raped by the monk Ambrosio within an underground crypt and subsequently silenced by his killing of her. Shreck's murder of Selena within the darkened space of the office therefore possesses similarities to the claustrophobic crypt. Both Gothic narratives are highly unorthodox in that they kill off the heroine, although Burton will bring her back to life as Catwoman. Shreck's violence can be seen as a merciless reaction to the threat she poses as the nosey heroine and represents a thorough violation of her embodiment.

Selena's daring admission to her boss appears to suggest that she gains a sort of thrill from perilous situations. It is almost as if she purposefully places herself in a position of danger, expressive of an ambiguous relation to pleasure and pain. Frances L. Restuccia, discussing the abject and its connection with masochism, writes that "abjection is indicated by a crossing of borders" while masochism reveals that "the line between inside and outside is traversed in both directions by pleasure and pain" (2000: 66). Masochism is symptomatic of a disturbance to what is deemed the 'correct' manifestation of pleasure and pain, where the limits of both emotions are transgressed and subverted. I consider that Burton portrays Selena as a being who gains pleasure from frightening and potentially dangerous circumstances, revealing a degree of masochism on her part. Her conduct intimates her attempt to undermine her role as wholly pure and passive. Despite her boss's obviously threatening position, Selena continues her confession undeterred, emulating the heroine's habitual curiosity. In response, Shreck asks, "What did curiosity do to the cat?" This question, while an allusion to her approaching mutation into Catwoman, also augurs her murder, implied in the answer to his question. Prior to her deadly fall, in an attempt to subdue his threat, Selena apprehensively says, "I mean it's not like you can just kill me." In reaction, Shreck answers, "Actually, it's a lot like that," after which he violently shoves her through the office window. This conversation between the heroine and villain is used by Burton to imbue Selena's body space with suggestions of her pending death, so connecting her with the corpse. For Kristeva, the corpse is the zenith of abjection, as "the most

sickening of wastes ... a border which has encroached on everything” (1982: 3). Selena’s death alters her embodiment and establishes her as the chilling and subversive living dead.

With a terrified and protracted scream, Selena falls to the snowy ground and dies. A distancing aerial shot displays her corpse, her left leg jutting out at an unnatural angle and blood on her forehead. Following ministrations by a band of supernatural alley cats, Selena is resurrected, evoking the consistent Gothic trope of the living dead. The life-giving cats meow as they encircle her dead body, climbing upon her corpse with apparent fervour. Evidently in the process of rebirth, Selena’s body begins to twitch and a close-up reveals a cat gnawing at her bloody fingers. Her pallid face then fills the screen as her eyelids flicker open to expose the whites of her rolling eyes. Startling the audience, her eyelids abruptly open to unveil her blue eyes and the freakish and superhuman figure of Catwoman is born, although she still needs to craft her notorious catsuit. Liminal and utterly abhuman in her ‘new’ embodiment, she comes to represent a borderline being, both “living and not living” (Hurley 1996: 24). This bizarre transfiguration should not be wholly unexpected, given that Selena’s name references the goddess Selene who personifies the moon (NicMhacha 2005: 58). The cyclical nature of the moon can be seen as symbolic of life, death and rebirth, a cycle which Selena undertakes in her transmutation. More than this, the moon has historically been paired with the feminine Other, an essentialist position intrinsically connecting Woman to conceptions of the natural world, in this case primarily through her menstrual cycle. Discussing the monstrous-feminine, Creed considers women as associated with “polluting objects which fall into two categories: excremental and menstrual” (1993: 10). Selena’s name consequently takes on associations with what it is about Woman that is supposedly corrupt and abject. The intimation is that Woman is excluded from the ‘clean’ body, as a being linked with cyclical change, a putatively mysterious and savage natural realm and bloody emissions. She comes to stand in opposition to man, who is gendered as embodying social law, order and stability. This image is furthered as Burton’s use of an array of alley cats in the resurrection process relates Selena’s altered form to the witch, another figure who Creed sees as representative of the monstrous-feminine. Cats are habitually portrayed as a witch’s familiar, foreshadowing Selena’s newfound affinity with Woman as inhabiting suspect embodiment and in possession of potentially frightening powers. These powers will see her threaten the male order and transgress societal limitations, as she seeks

revenge for her unjust death. As she is reborn into a figure illustrative of the menacing female monster, her fragmented form becomes a troubling meld of death with life.

For Hogle, the Gothic body mixes “features from different realms of being, often life and death” (2002: 2). It is this fusion which is seen in the character of Selena, as she mutates into a thoroughly liminal creature. Her body becomes frightening, inexplicable and outside of recognisable meaning. In her discussion on the Gothic body, Hurley draws on the notion of ‘Thing-ness,’ where to be a Thing is to occupy a body without any “definite form” (1996: 31). For Bill Brown, the word ‘thing’ hovers “over the threshold between the nameable and unnameable, the figurable and the unfigurable, the identifiable and the unidentifiable” (2001: 5). Alive and dead, human and not quite human, Selena evades classification and breaches the borders of the body. Rather, she is a Thing, a monster who navigates corporeal limits and who will also subvert societal boundaries as she seeks revenge. Selena/Catwoman becomes a figure in opposition to the human, who is presented quite differently from Batman by Burton. While Batman is also a master of disguise with his mechanical extensions and a creature of the night, his otherness does not disturb the viewer as Catwoman’s does. Instead, Batman is portrayed as decidedly masculinised, in that he is seen as the hero of Gotham City. He remains an ambiguous figure who, nevertheless, stands for social order in his gallant role as the city’s male protector. While Batman comes to signify the positive traits of the hero, Catwoman embodies all the unease and fear associated with the *femme fatale*. Like the alley cats which aid her rebirth, Catwoman is a shadowy, unnerving figure, intent on destruction and death. Burton styles her as emblematic of Woman as dangerous and he superimposes a forceful sexuality upon a hybrid and peculiar physicality.

This image of strange and excessive feminine embodiment is furthered once Selena reaches the safety of her apartment, following her resurrection from the dead. Her forehead is smeared with blood, her hair is disorderly, her mouth is agape and her face is waxen, exhibiting prominent black rings under her large, seemingly vacant eyes. Unsteady on her feet, she drops her keys and jersey onto the floor and bumps over a lamp. This intimation of an inner turbulence is developed as she spills milk onto the floor while attending to her black cat’s bowl, eerily alike a witch’s familiar. In discussing abjection, Kristeva refers to Mary Douglas’s study on societal purity, where Douglas considers milk as “marginal stuff of the most obvious kind” which has “traversed the boundary of the body”

(2002: 150). While milk is associated with the cat, it is also connected with that which negotiates the borders of the body, so tying Selena's form to irregularity and the violation of bodily limits. Drinking from the milk carton, Selena allows the substance to trickle down the front of her dress. Burton's marked use of milk spilling onto Selena's 'new' body appears to be an effort to reiterate her alterity, as a union of the feline and the human. She has come to symbolise "something beyond human," in her excessive melding of superhuman traits (Bernardo 1994: 18). Furthermore, her evident clumsiness and strange behaviour is suggestive of the imminent rupturing of her subjectivity. In this scene, the audience witnesses Selena violently attempting to sever herself from her past and expel all traces of her former self. Woolf, in discussing the quixotic figure of 'the Angel in the House,' writes, "It was she who bothered me and wasted my time and so tormented me that at last I killed her" (1974: chapter 27). Burton seems to elicit a similar sentiment in the character of Selena, who effectively kills 'the Angel in the House,' assuming instead the characteristics of the *femme fatale*. For Selena, her role as the 'good' girl has only caused her murder at the hands of a man. Her motivation is made apparent by Burton as this exorcism transpires. After she hears a Gotham Lady perfume advertisement on her answering machine, which promises that, "One whiff of this at the office and your boss will be asking you to stay after work for a candlelight staff meeting for two," she screams in fury and throws the milk carton at the machine, breaking it. The perfume is stocked at Shreck's department store and evidently the loaded sexual overtones, the implication of a woman's role in the workplace and the reminder of her employer's crime against her are more than Selena can bear. As a result, Catwoman will set fire to this department store, in her first act of vengeance and brutality against Shreck.

As she transcends her weak role as heroine, Selena's destruction of symbols of her former self is ruthless. She stabs and grinds up her stuffed toys with disturbing glee, smashes her pictures and mirror with a pan, denting her pink walls, and tosses her possessions about. Selena's pink house mutates into a gothicised space, as she spray-paints it black, accentuating the alteration to her image. Philip Brey comments that pink "symbolise[s] femininity, along with associated traits like sweetness, cuteness, passivity," traits which Selena seeks to reject (2005: 66). She blackens her pink walls, her pink pyjamas ironically featuring two cats, and her doll's house, a quintessentially feminine gift for little

girls, coercing them into their future roles as wives and mothers. Black, of course, has always been associated with evil and consequently this colour suggests Selena's attempt to disavow her location as the 'good' girl. The witch's familiar is also traditionally a black cat and so this colour further reinforces her affiliation with unruly and threatening women, while recalling her own link with the cat. For Glennis Byron, the Gothic raises the opposition of Woman as good/evil, in order to "stabilize the notion of proper femininity by identifying the sexually aggressive female ... as something alien and monstrous" (2012: 193). However, Byron sees this dualism as continually challenged within the genre, where "the pure woman repeatedly metamorphoses into the evil" (2012: 193). A similar motif appears to surface in *Batman Returns*, where Selena represents the 'good girl gone bad,' so calling into question the dictates of 'acceptable' femininity. In the process, her apartment is left in tumult, indicating an anarchic site of abjection, where the borders of her living space and her identity are transgressed. Burton makes this all too literal as Selena is shown smashing her pink neon lighting which reads "Hello there". A later scene reveals the signage to proclaim "Hell here" – a signifier of Selena's new and supposedly evil embodiment. Through a reverse fairy tale transmutation, Selena expels 'the Angel in the House,' rupturing both her identity and corporeality. In the course of this collapse and revision of her subjectivity, her relation to Gothic hybridity, alterity and the monstrous-feminine is dramatically established.

This radical alteration in Selena's engagement with her social role as a woman calls to mind the enduring virgin/whore axis along which women have traditionally been positioned. In locating the 'new' Selena, especially in her disguise as Catwoman, as a typical *femme fatale* and alter ego to the 'old' Selena, Burton's film rehashes this time-worn dichotomy. For Wolff, "men may perceive the world as a place inhabited by two kinds of women" (1979: 98). Wolff sees the 'virgins' or 'good' girls of this binary as idealised, asexual figures, while the 'whores' are wholly sexual creatures, given to excessive licentiousness (1979: 98). In Burton's film, while Selena embodies the virginal, but undesired woman, Catwoman exemplifies Woman as dangerously sexualised and erotic. However, this representation is complicated by the fact that they are essentially still a single entity. Selena has indeed disrupted her role as the 'good' girl, but, as Catwoman, traces of her goodness remain. Catwoman's later killing of Shreck, rather than a moment of triumph, becomes an incident fraught with ethical complications for her. Instead of a facile good/evil opposition,

Burton's female character(s) raises a challenge to this duality in her split embodiment. Nevertheless, Burton still crafts Catwoman with recourse to the quintessential *femme fatale*, forcing her to take on what Elisabeth Bronfen describes as this figure's lack of sexual reticence, independence and cold-blooded ambition (2004: 106). While the *femme fatale* has surfaced across the cinematic tradition, from *film noir* to the contemporary 'chick flick,' the Gothic mode has always reserved a space for this fatal woman, be it in literature or film. Within the Gothic, where horrifying bodies reign, while the *femme fatale* is excessively sexual, she is also indicative of a sexuality gone 'wrong' and the frightening breach of eroticised bodily borders. Halberstam sees the monster of contemporary horror as a being which "tends to show clearly the markings of deviant sexualities and gendering" (1995: 4). Embodying an erotic appeal which is forceful and aggressive, Catwoman certainly tends to display a deviant sexuality. Yet, I would add to this that she is fashioned as an abject Other by Burton just as much due to her abhuman hybridity as her 'atypical' sensuality. In the process, she comes to signify a force of Gothic excess and violence, separated from what constitutes the 'fully' human.

The viewer's first glimpse of Catwoman is after Selena's destruction of her apartment. Emerging from the chaos and visible through her darkened apartment window, the *femme fatale* finally appears arrayed in her legendary and self-fashioned catsuit. Accompanying her are the paranormal cats who breathed new life into her corpse. As if by way of thanks, Catwoman says, "I don't know about you Miss Kitty, but I feel so much yummiier." In response the cats meow, solidifying the merger between Catwoman and what can be seen as her familiars. Considering Burton's use of costume, Spooner comments that clothing within his work becomes "a means of displaying what is inside on the outside, a visual index of emotion" (2013: 51). Rendered erogenous and dangerous in her skin-tight catsuit, Catwoman's calculated choice of attire emphasises her rebellion. Her resolve for retribution is denoted through her wholly black costume, consisting of a figure-hugging leather body suit, stiletto boots, gloves and a leather mask with cat ears. Burton uses Catwoman's clothing to veil her body in motifs of eroticism and ruthless revenge, but the blackness of her apparel, I posit, also raises the notion that she might be hollow within. As the living dead, the limits between inside/outside have been breached, as the inner workings of her body are not consistent with the 'normative' human subject. Her nine lives

suggest an internal form which is devoid of the usual makings of the human body. Her clothing also comes to suggest her appropriation of hybridity through the deployment of cat imagery. This is significant in that it evokes the historical connection between the feminine and the feline. Within ancient Egyptian discourse, when this correlation was conceived, such imagery was not construed as negative. Their polytheistic beliefs engendered the goddess Bastet, who, as Terrie Waddell explains, “was most often imaged as a cat-headed woman” and was “the deity of motherhood and the hunt, and ... acted as a psychopomp guiding the dead to the underworld” (2003: 82). The figure of a cat-like goddess thereafter emerged in Greek and Roman mythology, where Bastet’s counterparts were “Artemis, Hekate, and Diana” (Hubbell 2001: 107). It was only during medieval times that this construct of Woman as cat altered with the collapse of these polytheistic beliefs. Rather than seen in a positive light, this relationship became an “ideological tool to assign negative traits such as being treacherous, fickle, sexually deviant, and wicked” to women (Lecker 2007: 13). Hecate came to be figured as “the witch who did evil in the dark hours, accompanied only by her cat” (Hubbell 2001: 108). As a consequence of this nefarious association, Catwoman’s costume serves as a veil of meaning with weighty ideological overtones. The inference is that, as a representative of subversive feminine embodiment, she shares traits with this supposedly sly animal and is rendered part-human and part-animal as a result. Her body signifies a threat to what Hurley suggests is “the crucial opposition between animal and human” (1996: 29). This challenge to the ‘fully’ human indicates that her Gothic body acts as a space for the potential proliferation of evil, where attention is drawn to her alterity as a woman. Alan Gregory remarks that the Gothic is concerned with “the horror of physical difference” and it is this monstrous-feminine difference that constructs Catwoman’s physicality (2014: 27).

While her choice of clothing alludes to her intentional linkage with the crafty and potentially dangerous cat, it is also hastily fashioned in a fit of rage. Dominic Lennard comments on the “Frankensteinean stitching” of the catsuit which “sutures and divides a hypersexualized body” (2013: 229). This reference to Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1816) is of interest, as Catwoman’s birth, I assert, can be seen in a similar light to that of the monster in Shelley’s tale. While Shelley’s creature is fashioned by young science student Victor Frankenstein, Catwoman is resurrected by a band of uncanny cats. Yet, it is her own conscious decision to embody alterity. For Halberstam, Frankenstein’s grotesque creation is

a “formation out of bits and pieces of life and death, of criminals and animals, animate and inanimate objects” (1995: 36-37). The body of Catwoman is likewise conceived from an amalgamation of life and death, the human and animal and a bodily mask of culturally debased dress. As Frankenstein’s monster signifies a disturbing territory beyond definition, so Catwoman’s rebirth suggests an unknowable and indefinable realm. Both creatures, similarly, become intent on seeking revenge. While Frankenstein’s monster hunts his maker, Catwoman pursues her former employer and killer. More than this, her radically abject form is enhanced by her cat mask, which forces her body space into the sphere of animalism, while permitting her to become an enigmatic, sensualised symbol. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, discussing the Gothic veil, considers it an article which obscures and constrains sexuality, while simultaneously being saturated with it (1981: 256). Like the veil, the cat mask can be seen as a decorative item which conceals, while at the same time steeping Catwoman with erotic and embodied sexual appeal. Halberstam calls the Gothic monster “a master of disguise” whose “impermanence and fleeting sense of reality precisely marks him as monstrous” (1995: 59). Her mask might betray a dark sexiness, but it also points to Catwoman’s transient subjectivity, where she comes to represent a liminal creature, one who navigates social and physical boundaries and whose otherness is accentuated by her hybrid embodiment.

This dark sexiness with its suggestion of transgressive liminality is further communicated by Burton as Catwoman’s prominent eye make-up surpasses what is ‘appropriate’ and recalls the ‘Goth’ subculture. Her lips, painted a lurid red, connote blood and perhaps serve to constitute a linkage with the vampire, another form of the living dead. For feminist scholar Joanne Entwistle, while “fashion [is] obsessed with sex,” it is also “the visual form of our intentions” (2000: 35; 182). Burton in his characterisation of Catwoman knowingly plays with these conventions, putting her highly sexed body on display as a means to appropriate power. George E. Haggerty sees the Gothic as generating fear, “specifically erotic fear” (2006: 22). It is this fear in the face of aberrant and potentially dangerous eroticism which Catwoman provokes. At this early point in the film, the audience is not entirely sure of what she is capable, but it is apparent that she is an abnormal figure armed with her sexually-charged embodiment and a cat-like prowess. Writing on the female body, Grosz observes that the traditional binary of mind/body in philosophical discourse is

set up against “the opposition between male and female” (1994: 4). While man is mind, Woman is all body. Grosz considers this mind/body dualism as representative of the “distinction between reason and passion, sense and sensibility, outside and inside, self and other” (1994: 3). Ideologically, women are located as the Other, too closely connected to the body and plagued with excessive passion and sensibility. Catwoman’s costume, with its intricate attention to detail and ability to heighten her sensual appeal, foregrounds her body. However, while the traditional gendered duality of mind/body is invoked, Catwoman uses this binary for her own ends, intentionally deploying her physical charm to overcome her enemies.

Her obvious overhaul of her appearance, for the purposes of enhancing her dangerous sensual appeal, is revelatory of her intention to play the part of the *femme fatale*. Cary Elza sees this figure as one who “has power, has the ability to drive men wild and make them spend money, but ... lacks agency” (2011: 120). Elza goes on to remark that this woman’s “only recourse is to *use* her image, to assume masks of femininity” (2011: 120). In a similar manner, feminist scholar Mary Ann Doane considers that this fatal woman has “power *despite herself*” (1991: 2). Contrary to Elza and Doane, I view Burton’s portrayal of Catwoman as offering both agency and power in the film. Although some of this power stems from the employment of her body as a ruse to distract men, her hybrid form is the primary source of her agency. Her cat-like body permits her to return repeatedly from the dead, affording her real power. This proves more than useful, in that she can recover from her numerous deaths in the film and can ultimately kill Shreck in a horrifying conflation of her own suicide and his murder. Her new body has surprisingly flexible strength, which, coupled with her amplified aggression, renders her an archetypal villainess whose vengeance has valid purpose. Her altered body might provide her with the sought-after agency denied to the *femme fatale*, but it also securely positions her as what Beville calls the “indefinable” monster of Gothic literature and film (2014: 1). Beville sees this monster as permitted a space within the Gothic “wherein it can exist free of direct representation as the ‘Thing’” (2014: 11). The ‘Thing’ is beyond taxonomy, and it is this indecipherability which Catwoman’s form takes on, as she runs rampant in night-time Gotham City seeking retribution.

During the day, however, Catwoman removes her disguise and appears freely as Selena. While her portrayal is tempered by Burton, she does acquire certain qualities of the *femme fatale*, suggestive of the symbiosis of the characters of Selena and Catwoman. Her identity has fragmented, but still retains elements of solidarity, as Selena is both like and unlike Catwoman. Gail Weiss, writing on distorted body images or bodies that “resist normalization,” includes “individuals with multiple personality disorders” in her classification of irregular embodiment (1999: 90). While Selena/Catwoman might not have such a disorder in the strictest sense of the word, her identity has undoubtedly been subjected to a severe disruption. Consequently, her embodiment can be seen as distorted and aberrant in that her stable subjectivity is breaking down and fissuring. Regardless of her inner turmoil, Selena exudes sensuality and self-assurance. In her daytime scenes, such as when she returns to Shreck’s office as his ‘undead’ secretary, she wears her hair down in short, wild curls. While alluding to her newfound freedom as Catwoman, the style also recalls a lion’s mane, reiterating her appropriation of an animalistic body. Far from the innocent ponytail of the heroine in her earlier scenes, her hairstyle suggests independence and wanton eroticism. Gone are her spectacles, as she requires no such visual assistance anymore. Instead, her eyes are accentuated by darker make-up, expressive of her ‘bad’ girl sexuality. Burton crafts the ‘new’ Selena as a figure who is forced “to inhere even more closely to the body” in comparison to her prior representation (Doane 1991: 2). Her clothing draws attention to her body, remindful of Woman’s placement in the mind/body and male/female duality. Yet, the *femme fatale* uses her appearance in the power struggle and so consciously puts her body on display. While not akin in erotic implication to the leather catsuit, her choice of attire is subtly indicative of an awakened sexuality. In the scene where she meets Bruce Wayne, Batman’s alter ego, in the city’s streets, she wears a white and black fur coat. Through this item, I consider that Burton evokes her liminal, “simultaneously human and animal” embodiment, which, along with an underlying carnality, alters the viewer’s perception of her (Hurley 1996: 25). Throughout the film, the new and doubled version of Selena possesses a sensually-charged self-awareness coupled with a witty confidence, including ribald, sexualised commentary. Unlike her counterpart, the inconspicuous secretary, the revamped Selena is not afraid to use her voice, regardless of the audience. Nevertheless, her appearances as the new Selena are far less aggressive than the *femme fatale* Catwoman. Like Wayne, Selena seeks to hide her true identity for most of

the film. For Halberstam, this motif of “doubling and disguise” is fundamental to the Gothic tradition and Burton appears to probe this concern in *Batman Returns*, rendering his heroine, hero and villainess masters of transient and liminal façades (1995: 60).

As Catwoman, however, she takes her image as the *femme fatale* beyond that of the ‘bad’ sexual woman into what Creed refers to as the *femme castratrice*, a category of the ‘monstrous-feminine’. Creed defines this figure as the “woman who seeks revenge on men who have raped or abused her in some way” (1993: 123). This figure includes women, such as Selena, who have been murdered. Creed goes on to argue that the castrating woman is “usually a sympathetic figure – [who] is rarely punished” (1993: 123). Perhaps it is for this reason that Catwoman escapes death at the film’s conclusion, as she is partially regarded in a sympathetic light. It appears that her course of vengeance is deemed just and so she is permitted to evade the punishment usually meted out to the *femme fatale*. Unforgiving and merciless, Creed sees the *femme castratrice* as associated with the “modern-day version of ancient Sirens,” alluding to her manipulation of men through the use of her alluring image and charm (1993: 128). As a woman whose sole ambition is to avenge her own murder by killing Shreck, I consider Catwoman as exposing an affinity with the goals of the *femme castratrice*. Not only does she rather strikingly murder Shreck, but she also incites conflict between herself and the other male characters in the film, including Batman. In addition, the Penguin teams up with her largely due to her erotic appeal and the implicit sexual reward which he will gain from her. Similarly, Batman seems drawn to her on a sensual level, despite her evident desire to challenge him. The male characters in Burton’s narrative might find her fascinating, but she is also figured as one deeply opposed to the established order and therefore disquieting. For Creed, the abject, like the monstrous-feminine, disregards the “demarcation lines between human and non-human” (1993: 8). As *femme castratrice*, Catwoman takes on this role, blurring the boundaries between the ‘proper’ and ‘improper’ human subject, thereby posing a threat to male identity.

In her first act as *femme castratrice*, Catwoman rescues a victim from an attempted sexual assault in a deserted and dark alleyway. Challenging the male assailant and, on the brink of combat, Catwoman says, “Be gentle, it’s my first time.” The erotic connotation contained in this statement satirically underscores her transgression of masculine expectations of sexual innocence and passivity. The comment also relates to her need to

exact revenge on men, where the implication is that there will be further displays of violence, as this is only her “first time”. Discussing the abject, Kristeva defines it as that which “does not respect borders, positions, rules” and goes on to mention, by way of example, “the criminal with a good conscience, the shameless rapist” (1982: 4). In this scene, Burton contrasts precisely these two abject beings, opposing them in combat. Catwoman, as a figure who undertakes vigilante justice, is redolent of the criminal who has a conscience. On the other hand, the male accoster, evidently intent on raping his victim, whom he calls a “pretty little thing,” is also a deviant figure of transgression. While Catwoman’s intentions are outside the law as she viciously attacks the man, they are also laudable, in comparison to the rapist, whose motivation is entirely lacking in honour. However, as part of the male hierarchy, he apparently feels entitled to such displays of violence against women. Rightfully taking offence at this barbaric show of power, during the conflict, Catwoman slashes the culprit’s face in a criss-cross fashion with her claws and knocks him unconscious. Not only does this action reveal her physical prowess, but it also alludes to what Hurley calls her “border identity midway between animality and humanity” (1996: 24). She hisses as she unveils her claws, indicative of her wrath and her positioning as the cat-like monstrous-feminine.

The slashes she inflicts draw streams of blood and these wounds can be likened to a form of castration, merciless injuries intended to debilitate and disempower male subjectivity. Shaped like the slit of the female sex, the gashes provoke the fear of a woman’s ability to threaten masculine identity by othering him. In discussing Sigmund Freud’s theories of castration anxiety, Kaja Silverman explains that “the little boy apprehends woman as radically and unpleasurably other” and fears taking on, what he considers to be, this sexual otherness (1988: 17). While Woman can be a source of erotic pleasure, her embodiment is also a site of anxiety, as men are afraid of becoming like their sexual Other. The infliction of slit-like wounds on the male body can consequently be seen to evoke this fear of sexual alterity. The narrative situates Catwoman quite literally in the role of *femme castratrice*, as the lesions she produces on the male body figure her as one who could undoubtedly castrate a man. Once the man is unconscious, Catwoman pushes her hand into the face of the female victim, pinning her to the wall behind her. She uses the opportunity to admonish the victim on her acceptance of Woman’s conventional passive role. In her

catsuit and supernaturally empowered, Catwoman undoubtedly invokes bodily otherness. However, she is also fashioned as a figure of mystery by Burton. Rather than a typical hero, who would never dream of reprimanding the victim, Catwoman is offended by the woman's conduct, surely as it recalls her own past and lack of agency. As a result of this encounter, the audience is not entirely sure what this inscrutable character will undertake hereafter and she comes to signify what Ruth Binstock Anolik calls the Gothic's evocation of "all types of mysterious difference" (2010: 3).

As the film progresses, it emerges that Catwoman's principal objective is to kill Shreck. In typical feline fashion, she first seeks to tease her prey, by obliterating his department store. With sinuous agility, she cartwheels and bounds through the premises at night, halting in the 'Sporting Goods' department, perhaps an allusion to the game which she is playing. Using a black whip, she severs the heads of the store's female mannequins. This action is significant, given that the mannequin is a lifeless embodiment whose feminine contours are exaggerated. The figures exemplify static lack of agency – a trait of 'the Angel in the House' and the perceived ideal which Catwoman has eschewed in her refashioning of self. As she wreaks havoc, her red mouth is open, denoting a measure of solitary, aberrant sexual gratification. Her seeming pleasure can be related to Kristeva's argument that "jouissance alone causes the abject to exist" where "one does not desire it, one joys in it" (1982: 9). Kristeva considers this form of orgasmic pleasure as both violent and painful. In Catwoman's glee-filled severing of the heads of the dolls resides a violent and abject reaction to her previous identity as the passive Selena. The act of ferocious decapitation becomes an ecstatic encounter. It is one that both breaches rules and destroys Catwoman's relationship with the past subjectivity of Selena. By conjoining erotic satisfaction with the savage, the *femme fatale* displays a *jouissance* of Gothic excess in her destructive spree.

Her elated ruination of the store is temporarily interrupted by a pair of Shreck's guards and it is then that her overt and entirely calculated feminine pose is brought to the fore. Coolly swinging her whip, she stands with her legs apart and marginally sways her hips. The guards are evidently incredulous and mesmerised, as one queries "Who is she?" which is followed by the response "What is she?" This use of "What" establishes her as something unidentifiable, contrary to the social sanctions of femininity and indeed humanity. The response of the guards is revelatory of their engrained reaction to an erotically challenging

but alien female form. Despite their hesitancy, one of the guards admits, "I don't know whether to open fire or fall in love." This comment accents the power of the *femme fatale*, to drive men beyond reason into lustful passion, but simultaneously to embody all their subconscious fears of Woman's threat to male identity. Both men chuckle at the remark, indicating their belief that any woman, no matter her alterity, can be controlled with relative ease. Instead, Catwoman, wields her whip to disarm and dismiss them, as they scramble away in terror. She flawlessly executes her role as *femme fatale*, a persona who Katherine Farrimond suggests has always been one "of the most potent images of female power and agency in mainstream cinema" (2011: 2). Through her unnatural ability and aided by her gothicised tools, in this case the whip, Burton takes Catwoman beyond the merely sensualised *femme fatale*. Although this figure might acquire a degree of agency, Burton's *femme fatale* positively exudes freakishly abnormal physical power. This she uses, coupled with her charm, to challenge and threaten the prevailing male order.

Her enactment of this potent allure and physical power is furthered when Catwoman encounters Batman and the Penguin for the first time outside Shreck's department store, just prior to it exploding. Following this meeting, as can be expected, she fights Batman on a rooftop. As is habitual in such battles between 'good' and 'evil' in the comic book tradition, both figures are costumed and disguised. More than a 'moral' battle, Burton suggests it as a battle of the sexes, as seldom does a superhero take on a female antihero, and one, at that, who is trying to fight for gendered justice. While Catwoman is the sleek, cat-like villainess, Batman also partakes of hybridity with his obvious conflation with the bat. Conventional boundaries are thoroughly blurred, as both characters represent a fusion of human and animal. A seeming embodiment of 'masculine' physical strength in this scene, Catwoman appears to call into question the borderline between man and woman, as the two opponents disdain established gendered interaction. Besides the allusion to fluid social limits, the fight conjures a sadomasochistic fantasy. Catwoman's whip infers the role of dominatrix and becomes a sexualised and gothicised fashion accessory. For Rictor Norton, the Gothic explores "sexually subversive themes" and the terror of "pent-up desire" (2006: ix-x). Burton's film suggests the presence of an undisciplined and subversive desire in the interplay between Batman and Catwoman. However, rather than preying on an unwilling recipient with her black whip, Batman seems to welcome Catwoman's aberrant sexual

attention. Carol Siegel identifies the sadomasochistic tension in this relationship, and considers the characters as “morally compromised,” in that sadism can be understood as an “enactment of evil impulses and the sadist as monster” (2013: 207-208). As the limits of pleasure and pain are traversed, both Batman and Catwoman can be seen as borderline figures who contravene sexual taboos and embody ‘abnormal’ desires. Writing on the excess of the Gothic, Botting notes that the genre focuses on “[u]ncertainties about the nature of ... sexuality” (1996: 3). Burton draws on this tradition, crafting liminal creatures who not only challenge the notion of the ‘fully’ human in their cat/bat attire, but who also reveal profoundly ‘improper’ sexual appetites. Catwoman might incite unease on account of her embodied otherness, but her erotic desires also serve to situate her as an abject and excessive being. I would suggest that Burton constructs her as a deviant body by merging what Halberstam calls “a wide variety of signifiers of difference,” one of which is her ability to inspire and embody ‘improper’ sexual fantasies (1995: 3).

The playing out of these sadomasochistic desires results in Catwoman managing to hang Batman over the edge of the building with her whip. She cheekily says, “Life’s a bitch, now so am I.” Burton cleverly uses this line in order to call attention to her thirst for revenge, while evoking her self-deprecating reference to herself as a “stupid corn dog” in her opening scene as Selena. Her use of “bitch,” however, is no longer demeaning, but a recognition of the strength she embodies as the *femme fatale* with superhuman abilities. Batman escapes his predicament and succeeds in placing Catwoman in a situation of comparable peril, where she is forced to scramble up a slanted rooftop. His stereotypical masculine response is to rescue her and the altered, romantic music cements their equivocal relationship. Perhaps sensing his desire for her, Catwoman commences her artful seduction. The shot focuses on her leather-gloved, clawed hand caressing his costume in a sensual effort to locate his body. Her sharp claws, however, hint at her menacing and highly atypical physicality. She detects Batman’s body beneath the armoured suit and his reaction makes clear his desire for her. He smiles slightly, although hesitantly, as if recognising her threat. There seems to be a conflation of desire and fear in Batman’s reaction that Linda Williams sees as central to gendered interactions, where men position Woman both as “an object of desire and an object of horror” (1996: 21). For Williams, the monster and Woman are strikingly similar, as “biological freak[s] with impossible and threatening appetites”

(1996: 20). Burton figures Catwoman as a freak of nature, where her perceived monstrous-feminine embodiment horrifies the male protagonist, perhaps even more so as she is a woman. However, she also inspires desire in the men she encounters. The director codes her as excessively sexual even in her otherness, where erotic appeal is conventionally gendered as being feminine and suggests a sexual enticement that men both crave and fear. In order to nullify Batman's threat and advance her own, Catwoman uses his attraction against him, stabbing him with her claws. By this action, she establishes her overt and deliberate feminine iniquity, as well as what Hurley calls her "not-quite-human" form (1996: 3). In the process, her claw is detached, revealing the constructed nature of her self-fashioning. Following her underhanded attack, Batman shoves her off the building, subjecting her to further bodily violation in a similar manner to Shreck.

Humiliated by Batman, Catwoman decides to enlist the assistance of the Penguin to plot Batman's demise. In an excessive exhibition of her physical attributes, Catwoman rests on her side on the Penguin's bed as their meeting commences. His assistant announces her arrival, stating, "Oswald, there's somebody here to see you." The man stresses the word "body," which I consider to be a ploy by Burton to reiterate Catwoman's intimate association not only with bodily deviance, but also with sexual difference. Hélène Cixous points out that "[m]ore so than men ... women are body" (1976: 886). This comment raises the notion of the mind/body binary and Woman's placement as the male Other. Catwoman uses this construction knowingly in the prominent display of her body to manipulate the Penguin into doing her bidding. Her pose is redolent of the classical figure of the reclining *Venus pudica*, which John E. Malmstad defines as "one of the oldest subjects of Western art ... who stares at the viewer while covering her sex with one hand" (1996: 164). As good as nude in her skin-tight catsuit, Burton appears to select this pose for Catwoman intentionally, seemingly to reduce her to a desirable art object for the Penguin's contemplation. She comes to signify an intertextual referent, redolent of Venetian artist Titian's reclining *Venus of Urbino* (1538) and the French artist Édouard Manet's *Olympia* (1863). In typical *femme fatale* fashion, she successfully uses her charms, enticing the Penguin to shuffle towards her, grunting suggestively. His choice of exceedingly sexist language, ironically, accentuates her triumph. Deploying an obvious pun, he declares, "Just the pussy I've been looking for." Instead of outrage, she smiles alluringly and moves about on the bed, mimicking a cat in

heat. The implication is a cross-species sexual encounter, between penguin and cat, where elements of their humanity remain intact. This sets up a subconscious uneasiness in the viewer, as this implies a transgression of social and biological norms. The sexual perversity of this monstrous-feminine is taken further, as Burton places a black cat beside her on the bed. Recalling a witch's familiar, this allusion also brings to mind Woman's traditional association with the feline. Bram Dijkstra, in relation to the visual arts, has noted that the consistent portrayal of women accompanied by animals, whether "bear, tiger, lion, or domestic cat," emphasises "the affinity between woman and her pet" (1988: 294). The image is a subtly playful reminder by Burton of the assumed sexualised kinship between women and animals. The shot reiterates the dominant belief that women are unruly, primitive, lascivious and depraved animals. It alludes to Catwoman as somehow not 'fully' human, intimating her feline embodiment. In the process, Catwoman is set up as in possession of a degenerate sexuality. Halberstam sees the role of the monster as marking "the distance between the perverse and the supposedly disciplined sexuality" of the 'normative' human (1995: 13). Through Catwoman's brief, yet highly provocative mimicking of the sexual act, and her previous sadomasochistic erotic encounter with Batman, Burton visually establishes her monstrous-feminine embodiment and Gothic sexual excess. This obvious gendered and sexualised otherness offers a frisson of the horror and disgust associated with the abject. My contention is that in portraying Catwoman in this manner, Burton situates her not only as an image for masculine pleasure, but also allows her agency. In classical *femme fatale* fashion, she purposely uses her embodiment and sexuality to manipulate the Penguin into helping her exact revenge.

In the climactic scene of the film, however, Catwoman's overt erotic appeal and appetite is largely mitigated. Presented by Burton as at odds with the suave, composed character of the *femme fatale*, Catwoman's appearance has altered dramatically. This is the result of an altercation with the Penguin during their denunciation of Batman as an apparent murderer before the populace of Gotham City. After Batman leaves the scene, the Penguin expects that the seemingly promised sexual favours be bestowed upon him by Catwoman. She, foolishly, indicates how he disgusts her and the Penguin ensures that she falls to her 'death' through the glass roof of a building, damaging her costume. Given her own hybrid body, it is of interest that she recoils from the Penguin, another figure marked

by human/animal liminality. These monsters are created quite differently by Burton, where Catwoman is still physically appealing, despite her alterity, while the Penguin is grotesque in appearance. She emerges as the typical flirt who ultimately refuses to sacrifice her body sexually, coding her firmly within the discourse of the stereotypical *femme fatale* who promises without fulfilment. Her 'death' at the hands of the Penguin can be seen as an exaggerated form of rape, given the Penguin's need in this scene to meld violence with lust. Resurrected, Catwoman locates Shreck who has been captured by the Penguin and imprisoned in the underground space of the city's abandoned zoo, 'Arctic World'. Blonde hair sprouts from her mask, while her tatty costume is torn to expose her bare shoulders. Her previously provocative and distinctive make-up appears somewhat smudged around the eyes and her lips are a paler shade of red. Her image lends itself to the idea of a sexual assault, as her ripped clothing recalls that of a rape victim. More than this, her appearance is positively savage, expressive of her rage and need to exact revenge on the men who have abused her. From the sensual *femme fatale*, Burton morphs her into a literal female monster, as her excessive corporeality betrays her emotional turmoil and hybrid otherness. Writing on the monster, Richard Kearney sees them as figures "[o]ut there ... "where the wild things are."" (2004: 83). Dishevelled and distressed, Catwoman seems to be one of these wild things, a being come to stray on human territory.

Prior to this final showdown between Shreck and Catwoman, Selena and Wayne had discovered each other's covert identities as Catwoman and Batman, respectively. This discovery, and their mutual romantic interest, complicates Catwoman's scheming. As the scene with Shreck attests, she is struggling to decide whether to go through with her plan to murder her employer. Symbolic of the male moral order, Batman urges Catwoman not to kill Shreck. Instead, Batman proposes reporting Shreck to the police and asks her to accompany him "home together". In response to Batman's romantic offer, Catwoman utters tearfully, "I would love to live with you in your castle forever, just like in a fairy tale." Revelatory of her wavering intent, Catwoman's statement seems to suggest that she is swaying from her course of revenge. The *femme fatale* has always been an unstable, fickle character and it is this tendency which Burton appears to expose in Catwoman. However, the comment also relates to the fight between good and evil within Catwoman/Selena's joined persona. Like her costume, Catwoman's identity is being torn asunder to reveal an

abject figure whose frail “border of subjectivity” is dissolving, exposing a volatility simmering beneath (Kristeva 1982: 67). The conscience of the heroine Selena is challenging the amoral nature of Catwoman. It is the heroine within her who longs for the fairy tale ending. Consequently, Burton subverts the duality of good woman/evil woman, as Catwoman is portrayed as a *femme fatale* with a desire for romance and a propensity to forgive. In the end, the villainess within her wins, as she forcibly refuses Batman. In a ferocious show of rejecting any role which allows male dominance, Catwoman scratches him with her claws. The abrasions which this violent action produce are once more representative of Catwoman’s capacity to castrate as the monstrous *femme castratrice*. As she assaults him, she shouts, “I just couldn’t live with myself. So don’t pretend this is a happy ending.” Ryan Weldon calls this cinematic moment in Burton’s film a “rejection of the standard roles available for women” (2014: 43). Rather than becoming a wife or mistress, with the fairy tale castle ending, Catwoman continues to transgress socially imposed expectations. While she might dismiss Batman, her unruffled front is undermined by her tears and her bodily stance changes to that of an emotionally damaged figure. As she stands by her original resolve for justice, Catwoman becomes a villainess whose actions, without her consciously willing it, will help to save Gotham City.

Following her rejection of Batman, Catwoman removes her mask in order to confront Shreck. Her employer attempts to take control of the situation by shooting at Batman. He then turns the gun on Catwoman, shooting her five times, although his bullets are exhausted by his final shot. In a blatant display of her hybridity, she eerily counts as Shreck reduces her nine lives. Upon reaching her sixth and seventh lost life, Catwoman sings, “Six. Seven. All good girls go to heaven.” Her use of “good girls” is significant in that, while it is a belittling term generally reserved to denigrate women to the state of a child, it is also a location which Catwoman has seemingly overcome. The lyrics of the song which Burton selects recall a childhood nursery rhyme, which coupled with Catwoman’s wild appearance, represent a decidedly uncanny and insane reaction to Shreck’s gunfire. Joanna Faulkner connects madness with abjection, seeing them both as related to a “dissolution of order, of identity, and of time and space” (2010: 119). Burton’s use of the nursery rhyme consequently promotes Catwoman’s image as an irregular and enigmatic body. However, her reversion to the nursery rhyme is also illustrative of her temporary loss of ordinary

speech, as she seems to return momentarily to a child-like subjectivity. For Kristeva, abjection borders “the frail identity of the speaking being” (1982: 67). As her stable subjectivity and speech are disrupted in this scene, I consider that Burton aligns Catwoman even more with bodily abnormality, as the audience witnesses the dissolution of her identity. This threat is taken further as she lurches toward Shreck, thus effectively remaining an animated corpse. Kristeva writes that the corpse “is death infecting life” and “something rejected” which “beckons to us and ends up engulfing us” (1982: 4). Embodying the living dead, Catwoman’s form is thoroughly contaminated and typical of the engulfing liminality of Gothic monstrosities. I argue that Burton uses this scene to confront the viewer with the full force of Catwoman’s supernatural ‘undead’ otherness, particularly as she goes on to kill Shreck through a perverse act of power.

Wielding her electric weapon, Catwoman offers to kiss Shreck, indicative of the wiles of the *femme fatale*, but also her underlying deadly intentions. In order to kill Shreck and execute her revenge, Catwoman chooses to commit a bizarre mutual suicide. She places the phallic-shaped electrical weapon between both their mouths as though performing an oral sex act, while simultaneously wrenching a power cable conveniently hanging above them. The result is an explosion that kills them both in a satirical emulation of sexual *jouissance*. Shreck is left charred, his eyes and mouth agape and his white hair on end. Rather than the smooth and successful businessman, his corpse is utterly grotesque and reflects his inner monster. Through this murderous act, Burton affords Catwoman real power and active agency, something which Doane (1991) and Elza (2011) deny the *femme fatale*. It is her ‘undead’ embodiment with its cat-like nine lives that provides her with this agency and allows her to subvert the standard male/female power dynamic. In the wake of the act, Catwoman absconds with one life remaining. For Halberstam, the Gothic genre concludes by resolving “boundary disputes” and “killing off the monster” (1995: 36). Burton, however, does not kill off Catwoman, redolent of the empathy he feels towards deviant and abject beings. Instead, his films usually end devoid of the clichéd and clear-cut triumph of good over evil. However, in the following chapters, I will discuss how Burton’s *femmes fatales* in *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* and *Dark Shadows* (2012) die upon the resolution of the film’s narrative. It might be that Catwoman lives because of the goodness she retains in her split embodiment as Selena. Certainly, she is morally compromised as a

result of the evils of a male-dominated society, but the references to her residual 'morality' ensure that she is not entirely a stereotypical *femme fatale*.

While Catwoman is not killed, Burton does present her as a lingering threat to Gotham City, one who is banished from society. In the final scene of the film, Batman is shown to be safely within the confines of his chauffeured vehicle. He glimpses the shadow of Catwoman on an alley wall, a shot which Burton uses to evoke her elusive nature. As a result of her forceful rejection of Batman and her ferocious murder of Shreck, Catwoman has become a figure of excess located outside of societal rules living in the liminality offered by the dark with its shadows. On investigation, Batman only discovers a black cat amid the snow, which he carries, symbolically, to his car. Again, Burton uses the imagery of a cat to reiterate Catwoman's departure from 'full' humanity and civilisation. Perhaps the cat also suggests the final 'death' of the identity of Selena, as Catwoman now lives completely outside of the law in her catsuit and has eschewed all traces of her former self. The film concludes with the Bat-Signal shining in the night sky, while Catwoman, standing upon a building with her back to the camera, looks up at it. The shot rather stereotypically insinuates that she still harbours feelings for Batman and that their separation is due to their divergent natures. This projection in the sky recalls Batman's status as a sort of sky god, the saviour of the city. Alternatively, Catwoman stands on a building, fixing her to the earth in her position as the dark, transgressive woman. Bronfen points out that the *femme fatale* habitually "loses her power both on the diegetic level (she dies) and on the visual level (she falls into shadows, diminishes in size, has no voice-over of her own)" (2004: 113). Nevertheless, for Bronfen, "the disturbing power she embodies remains through the end" (2004: 113). Like Bronfen, I consider that the *femme fatale* habitually loses much of her impact upon narrative conclusion, even while a sense of the threat which she raises endures. In *Batman Returns*, the sheer force which Catwoman comes to signify is diminished, in that, although she lives, Burton pushes her into the prevailing darkness of Gotham City. However, while she might be relegated to the shadows, her unsettling power and threat to social order is not totally stripped away, as her obscure presence in this final scene accentuates the agency that she continues to possess. For Hogle, Gothic terror resides in the establishment of "suspense about threats to life, safety and sanity kept largely out of sight or in shadows" (2002: 3). Catwoman seems to reflect this Gothic fear, as she is

illustrative of a threat to societal safety, residing out of sight in Gotham City's obscure underworld. The twist, however, is that as the *femme castratrice*, her target is the male populace, where their violence will be met with the full force of her monstrous-feminine power.

The typical Gothic concern with creatures of alterity is noted by Anolik, who calls this confrontation an "encounter with the unknown" (2007: 1). In this chapter, I have sought to explore this encounter in Burton's *Batman Returns*. My contention is that Burton fashions femininity so as to tie the female body to Gothic motifs of corporeal inscrutability and sexual otherness. My reading of the film has deployed the concept of abjection, together with that of the monstrous-feminine, in order to explore Burton's construction of Selena and Catwoman. In crafting his leading female characters, Burton seems to portray these figures in accordance with the preconceived dualistic essentialising of women as either 'good' or 'evil'. However, I suggest that Burton simultaneously sets out to undermine this dualism through an exploration of how boundaries of gender stereotyping and identity can be transgressed. Within the framework of Burton's narrative, the focus is on contested feminine embodiment, and I have argued that both Selena and Catwoman's representation ensures that they are intimately affiliated with the Gothic topos of physical excess. Their positioning as the sexual Other consequently comes to the fore in Burton's narrative. For Kahane, the Gothic reveals a "fear of femaleness itself" (1985: 347). It is this fear which seems to emerge in Burton's film at the sight of the monstrous-feminine and what it is about Woman that is Other. However, Catwoman is a composite figure, a fusion of the *femme fatale* and the heroine Selena and a blend of both moral and amoral. Consequently, these characters can be seen to transcend limits as Burton disrupts the good/evil dichotomy of women. As a result, Burton both draws on and refutes gendered binaries in his portrayal of Selena and Catwoman. Still, what does emerge is Woman as an abject figure: excessive, frightening and a threat to the men in the film. The following chapter plans to explore how the central female characters in the film *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* are constructed, like Selena and Catwoman, as irregular bodies. My focus will again be an exploration of both the heroine as 'the Angel in the House' and the *femme fatale*, where I will argue that Burton imposes motifs of the 'improper' and 'unclean' on his characters as he moulds them into embodiments of the abject monstrous-feminine.

Chapter Two: *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*

I could eat you up, I really could.

– Mrs. Lovett in *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*

Renowned for his narratives which centre on bodily deviance and alterity, Gothic film director Tim Burton consistently crafts characters who can aptly be described as “strange, monstrous, alienated, and othered” in his films (Lackner 2013: 163). As a result, his narratives frequently stray into the territory of the supernatural, apparent in his film *Batman Returns* (1992), explored in my preceding chapter. Produced fifteen years prior to *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* (2007), hereafter referred to as *Sweeney Todd*, *Batman Returns*, as I argued, establishes the subversive figure of Selena/Catwoman as an abject yet threatening monstrous-feminine heroine. Unlike this earlier film, *Sweeney Todd* departs from the director’s recurrent onscreen visualisation of the supernatural Gothic. Set in London in 1846, Burton’s film, based on Stephen Sondheim’s (1979) Broadway musical by the same name, recreates the fable of the homicidal Victorian barber Sweeney Todd. The narrative follows the bloody vengeance of barber Benjamin Barker (Johnny Depp) upon villain Judge Turpin (Alan Rickman).¹¹ Intentionally and unjustly convicted of a crime, Barker is expelled from London by Turpin, who desires Barker’s wife, the Gothic heroine Lucy (Laura Michelle Kelly). Barker returns fifteen years later intent on revenge. He transfigures into the serial killer Sweeney Todd, who is committed to slitting the throats of the men of London, and ultimately to killing Turpin. *Femme fatale* Mrs. Lovett (Helena Bonham Carter) aids Todd, and also informs the barber of Turpin’s acquisition of Todd’s daughter, the heroine Johanna (Jayne Wisener), as his ward. The hero of the film, rather than Todd himself, is fellow sailor, Anthony Hope (Jamie Campbell Bower), onboard the same ship as Todd when he returns to London from the Australian penal colony.

Todd’s immersion into the underground criminal world, I consider, represents a form of bodily mutation, strikingly presented by Burton through his accompanying physical alterity. Consequently, I argue that this film is comparable to *Batman Returns*, in that both

¹¹ The Gothic tale of the character Sweeney Todd was originally formulated in the penny dreadful serial *The String of Pearls: A Romance* (1846-47). The narrative has been repeatedly re-envisioned over the years, particularly on stage and in film, demonstrative of the consistent appeal of the Gothic horror intrinsic to the story of the murderous Victorian barber.

narratives visually probe bodily difference and the thematic concern of revenge. In *Batman Returns*, it is the character of Selena/Catwoman who is intent on retribution, seeking justice for her own murder at the hands of her employer Max Shreck. Alternatively, it is the male character of Todd who is bent on vengeance in *Sweeney Todd*. Nevertheless, both films tease out the interplay between the ambivalent forces of good and evil, whereby revenge can be thought of as partially justified in each case. In the process, I see this concept of ambiguous justice as intricately related to the embodiment of the leading characters as physically irregular so as to reflect a certain inner disruption. Additionally, the course of vengeance is largely driven by strong women in each of the narratives. Catwoman, in *Batman Returns*, kills her nemesis upon narrative conclusion, despite Batman urging her to take the moral 'high' road. In *Sweeney Todd*, Mrs. Lovett emerges as a *femme fatale* intrinsic to the barber's murderous plans, as it is her idea to dispose of the victims' flesh in her grotesque pies. So, Todd is freely able to murder the men who visit his barbershop, as he has a means by which to get rid of their corpses. The gendered similarities between the films extend to Burton's deployment of the figure of the Gothic heroine. In my previous chapter, I contended that Selena is established as the vulnerable and othered Gothic heroine savagely killed by her employer. However, while Burton sets her up as the heroine, he also permits her to transcend this passive persona. Likewise, in this chapter, I will assert that in *Sweeney Todd* Burton draws on the stereotype of the Gothic heroine in his characters Lucy and her daughter Johanna. They are subjected to victimisation by Turpin, the male enforcer of societal law. While Lucy is raped by Turpin and subsequently falls into madness, Johanna is imprisoned both in his London residence and later in an asylum. Just as Selena subverts her gendered location as she emerges as a monster, so I will argue that Burton allows Lucy and Johanna to transgress the role of heroine to a limited extent. Rather than idealised femininity, their bodies become sites of otherness and demonstrate a certain rupturing of the gendered sanctions imposed on Woman. Consequently, I assert that they can be seen to take on aspects associated with the *femme fatale*, a figure who has always sought to stand in opposition to obligatory passivity and virtue.

While in my first chapter I argued that Selena and Catwoman are illustrative of Burton's tentative use of the traditional virgin/whore dichotomy, so I will maintain that the female characters in *Sweeney Todd* represent a degree of gender essentialism. The film, like

Batman Returns, situates women along a good/evil axis, where the implication is that Woman can either naturally take on the purity of the 'virgin' or sexual excess of the 'whore'. For Momin Rahman and Stevi Jackson, essentialism "explains aspects of human behaviour and identity as part of human 'essence'" and as "immutable and *pre-social*" (2010: 17). When this essentialism is gendered, the assumption is that women inhabit certain traits prior to cultural inscription, such as the innocence of the 'good' girl or the moral obscurity of the 'bad' woman. The result is that women are rendered as stereotypical figures and it is this impression which I contend Burton's film elicits. Mrs. Lovett, while perhaps not as erotically embodied as Catwoman in her skin-tight catsuit, is conceived by Burton as the time-honoured figure of the *femme fatale*. A strong woman, fiercely opposed to the masculine hegemony, the *femme fatale* is seen as an embodiment of frightening sexuality and is simultaneously feared and desired by men. In my reading of the film, I will maintain that Burton fashions Mrs. Lovett through recourse to this figure of feminine sexual and moral excess, who signifies a threat to the male hierarchy. Yet, her grotesque production of pies from human flesh will take her beyond the 'normative' form of the *femme fatale* and into the dreadful realm of animalism and the monstrous-feminine.

In contrast, I will show how Burton sets up Lucy and Johanna as foils to Mrs. Lovett, where they come to suggest the Gothic heroine, a figure I will align with the blameless, beautiful and docile 'Angel in the House'. While these characters can be seen as the 'good' girls of Burton's film, the director does not simply rehash the gendered good/evil binary. The film represents a challenge to the dichotomous stereotyping of women, in that both Lucy and Johanna assume characteristics of the 'evil' *femme fatale* as they transgress their roles as heroine. This can be seen chiefly as Lucy morphs into a mad beggar woman and Johanna is detained along with the insane women of London in an asylum. My intention is to indicate the extent to which all three female characters, Mrs. Lovett, Lucy and Johanna, become affiliated with Gothic motifs, especially as these are related to excess, subversion and curious corporeality. Like my previous chapter, I will found this discussion of Burton's film within the Kristevan (1982) framework of abjection and Barbara Creed's (1993) notion of the 'monstrous-feminine'. Just as I argued that Selena/Catwoman is a hybrid agent of alterity, so I will demonstrate that the leading female characters in *Sweeney Todd* come to embody liminality and a fearsome otherness.

That which is liminal and which breaches borders emerges as the central concern of *Sweeney Todd*, which entails gory depictions of murder and the processing of human flesh for human consumption. While Burton's narrative might be said to form part of the tradition of the horror film, it is also firmly located within the Gothic. Burton calls on certain stock motifs of the Gothic genre, including the confined heroine, her evil captor, the liberating hero and the savage murderer who chillingly stalks the urban landscape.¹² The narrative is rooted in myth, but the director's interpretation succeeds in gothicising the past, apparent in his creation of a dark Victorian London. This urban setting is crawling with characters who are quite literally coded as morally ambiguous through Burton's insistent choice of dark clothing. This, the director contrasts with the lurid splashes of red blood which gush from the necks of Todd's victims. While these grisly displays signify the excess of the Gothic, they also act to frighten and trouble the viewer. Xavier Aldana Reyes sees the function of Gothic horror as "scaring, disturbing or "grossing out"" (2014: 388). It is this tendency to 'gross out' which emerges in Burton's film, strongly enforced in the opening credits.

Opening with an ominous storm over the darkened city of London, Burton showers the urban space in droplets of rain intermixed with falling globules of blood. In this lengthy introduction, the director firmly establishes the Gothic tone of the film, which will be both violent and visually excessive. Blood trickles down windows and the walls of buildings, gradually oozing onto heavy machinery which slowly turns and creaks. Rivulets of blood gush through a dim underground sewerage system, recalling the bloody production process which Todd and Mrs. Lovett will initiate in this space. The unsettling introduction calls to mind William Blake's eminent poem "London," a text decrying the city's urban decay, with images such as "blood down palace walls" (1982: 27). Blake's mention of blood serves to indict governmental authorities for the innocent blood on their hands and is intended as a backlash against their involvement in wars rooted in greed and power struggles. The image suggests unnecessary violence and the sheer wastage of human life. While Burton's narrative does not centre on government per se, Turpin can be seen as an agent of the law in his position as magistrate. His violence will see Lucy raped and Todd driven to bloodied revenge. As a result of his unjust incarceration and his wife's alleged murder, Todd wreaks

¹² While this portrayal is fictional, it is also based on the legend of the barber Sweeney Todd. For Catherine Spooner, Burton's film "works to provide a Gothicized version of history" (2013: 57).

havoc on London society in response, killing innocent men with the aid of his partner-in-crime Mrs. Lovett. Far from the traditional Gothic setting of the isolated castle, Burton moves this Gothic transgression and excess into the city, a device he similarly uses in *Batman Returns*. While Gotham City in the Batman narrative is a dark and tenebrous fantasy space, in *Sweeney Todd* London is envisioned as a gothicised neo-Victorian topography. More than rooting the narrative deeply in motifs of the warped urban space, the introduction is profoundly entrenched in images of the disruption of the borders of the body. Blood frightens and appalls, but it also indicates a breach in the limits of the body, one that can be potentially horrifying. The cityscape which Burton creates in the opening credits, I argue, consequently raises the notion of the broken and disrupted human form. This, in turn, I see as relating to the embodiment of the film's female characters, who take on aspects of the violence and corporeal disorder and instability hinted at in this graphic introduction.¹³

The rupturing of the borders of the body is pertinent to the Gothic, which consistently witnesses the emergence of a variety of monsters representative of both bodily and psychological irregularity. For Maria Beville, the role of these figures is to terrify us with an "alien presence" which we are simultaneously drawn towards (2014: 2). In Burton's film, while Mrs. Lovett is horrifying as she churns human flesh and stuffs her gruesome pies, the audience is, at the same time, fascinated by her. Her charisma and brazen avarice which transgresses the sanctity of human life are both repellant and oddly alluring, as she incites the viewer to laugh even while disavowing her. Beville goes on to call such othered and unstable bodies "the unnameable monster" which can also be thought of as the Thing (2014: 2). The Thing is illustrative of that which is unknowable and a site, like the abject, where meaning breaks down and identity is eroded. For Gary Farnell, the Thing represents "the signifying gap" and it is this inscrutable location which the monster occupies (2011: 602). While Mrs. Lovett might be horrifying almost beyond words, as she subverts rather unyielding social taboos against cannibalism, the heroine Lucy, as she falls into madness, I argue, can also be seen as a Thing, beyond understanding and reason.

¹³ This aspect of the city and its relevance to the film's Gothic construction, while of interest, cannot be more thoroughly explored, as it is beyond the scope of this research.

The result of Thing-ness and this utter borderline subjectivity is a loss of the stable self, which indicates the space of what Julia Kristeva (1982) calls abjection. As I have indicated in my previous chapter, the abject is that which is “radically excluded” and the “place where meaning collapses” (Kristeva 1982: 2). It is illustrative of a breach of the borders of the body and a disruption of fixed identity. Such fragmentation of the body space abounds in the Gothic, which functions to showcase societal “fears, desires and anxieties” (Beville 2009: 39). The genre is about setting up a threatening and potentially dangerous abject Other against which the self can be favourably compared. Gail Weiss, discussing the Kristevan framework, explains that “abjection is necessary to create the boundaries that will individuate the self” even while revealing the fragility of these boundaries (1999: 92). For Kristeva, this individuated self is produced by a revolt against both an unknown outside and an inside which has been ejected (1982: 1). This object becomes one of fascination and repulsion, which in its rejection establishes the ‘I’ and the Other. The abject is conceived as loathsome, the ‘not me,’ the unrecognised ‘something’. It is the constant resistance and importuning of the abject that solidifies the boundaries that found the self. However, the loathsome nature of the abject is located in repulsion for the Other, for waste, for filth, for blood, which the ‘I’ rejects in order to exist. For Creed (1993), as she studies the female monsters of horror films, it is this framework which proves invaluable, as her monsters come to be seen as creatures of profound disgust, both alluring and repellent.

Creed (1993) argues that it is this monster’s specifically female body which is foregrounded in rendering it strange and frightening. In Burton’s film, I contend that such a construction is at work. The fear incited by the female characters is that of gendered difference, where what is Other about Woman is made marked. This is evident, for instance, in Lucy’s madness, where she is forced to take on associations with hysteria, a traditionally female malady. The result of these unstable feminine bodies in Burton’s narrative is to reiterate that Woman is compelled to connote the body in the gendered mind/body duality. For Janet Price and Margrit Shildrick, the body, viewed as feminine in opposition to the masculinised mind, has always been regarded “with suspicion as the site of unruly passions” (1999: 2). I consider that as Burton crafts his female characters into distorted and aberrant figures, while they might attain a degree of agency, they are also made to signify the unruly feminine body.

While the female characters in *Sweeney Todd* come to suggest fearful embodiment, I will propose that Burton calls on the conventional Gothic stereotypes of women as he develops them into deviant beings. Mrs. Lovett, like Catwoman, is the *femme fatale*, a woman who subverts the male hierarchy at every turn. Unlike Catwoman, she is not supernaturally-empowered, however, her bodily transgression, I plan to show, is just as notable. As in *Batman Returns*, Burton visually contrasts this figure with the stereotype of the innocent and pure heroine, in this case Lucy and Johanna. These women, perhaps more so than Selena, can be seen as constructs of Coventry Patmore's (1863) 'Angel in the House,' an idealised Victorian figure of passivity and goodness. For Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, the "angel in the house is a woman in white," where both her attire and "pure white complexion" denote "feminine purity" (1979: 615-616). In Burton's film, I see this usage of white as critical in the director's establishment of the heroines as virtuous and good. With their fair skin and hair and their oftentimes pastel clothing, they come to exemplify the domestic feminine angel. However, I consider that Burton permits his heroines to transgress their roles to a degree, through an assumption of certain darker stains associated with corporeal abnormality and otherness, thereby calling into question the traditional binary. As a result they are provided with a manner of subversive agency by Burton and a certain depth of character. Nevertheless, this rendering of the good/evil woman is set up in the narrative and diverges quite significantly from *Batman Returns*. While Selena/Catwoman is essentially one person, the female characters in *Sweeney Todd* are separate entities. In the film, Lucy and Johanna come to suggest the quintessential blonde 'good' girls, in comparison to Mrs. Lovett, their dark-haired, murderous and mercenary antithesis.

Lucy and Johanna might be the 'good' girls of Burton's film, but the director also ensures that they are imaged as deviant, through partaking of the condition of hysteria or madness. Such hysterical conduct on the part of the Gothic heroine is hardly unexpected, given her conventional propensity for histrionics and fainting spells. For Ed Cameron, "time and again ... many Gothic heroines have been dubbed hysterics" (2010: 1). This tendency indicates the fear which the villain, usually male, inspires, but also points towards the mind/body duality which I have formerly discussed. Hysteria suggests a being too closely affiliated with the unruly body, and consequently too intimately acquainted with the feminine, according to the gendered binary. Amanda du Preez notes this connection,

commenting on the “etymological roots in the Greek *hysteria*, meaning ‘womb’” where the disease was initially tied to the medical concept of the wandering womb (2004: 47). Hysteria with its myriad symptoms and causes, represented rather a stretch of the imagination by the medical men examining their patients.¹⁴ For Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, in fact, hysteria was so deeply gendered that “the hysterical woman [was] the embodiment of a perverse or hyper femininity” (1972: 653). Hysterical women were seen as “disobedient, rebellious, or in open protest against the female role” (Showalter 1980: 172). As a result, hysteria came to be conflated with the construct of the uncontrollable woman, who the male hierarchy sought to control and sunder from the urges of her suspect embodiment. The *femme fatale*, a figure who openly defies male authority and who is in touch with her own erotic appeal, could consequently be labelled a hysteric. However, in Burton’s film, it is Lucy and Johanna, the Gothic heroines, who the director intimately associates with the disease, both within the asylum and on the grimy streets of the Gothic urban space. Given that the film is set in Victorian London, this fixation with hysteria and madness is of interest, because Victorian medicine represents the heyday of the medical focus on female hysteria. The heroines might be wronged by Turpin, where their reactions are in response to his violence and oppression, but they are also steeped in social perceptions of women as somehow irrational and excessive.

This concept of hysteria, Creed sees as related to the monstrous-feminine through intimations of the sufferer’s “monstrous female womb” (1993: 56). The womb has always been a biological space simultaneously feared and desired by men. While the womb is a signifier of sexual differentiation, the wandering womb of hysteria is suggestive of the feminine body as an abject site of horror and flux. As a result, Lucy and Johanna take on aspects of the monstrous-feminine in their association with this female malady. Lucy, however, surpasses the wilfulness and disobedience of hysteria and becomes instead a symbol of insanity. Her identity has wholly unravelled following her rape, indicating what Kristeva calls the mad person who “has lost his totality and no longer coincides with himself (sic)” (1980: 83). In this manner, Lucy’s loss of identity can be seen as expressive of her abject otherness, as a being who is “in-between” and ambiguous (Kristeva 1982: 4). For

¹⁴ For a detailed account of hysteria and its various presumed manifestations, see: Beizer (1994); du Preez (2004); Foucault (1965); Schull (2009); Showalter (1987).

Sylvia Huot, insanity can be connected with abjection, as the mad person is emblematic of the “unclean, the site of shameful bodily drives, a disturbing and disruptive presence” (2003: 23). In Burton’s narrative, madness and hysteria can be seen as affiliated with that which is unclean and ‘improper’. Nevertheless, for Lucy, her severance from stable subjectivity also permits a certain degree of autonomy, as she raves through the streets of London as a beggar woman. In contrast to her mother, Johanna is not mad, but is detained within an asylum by Turpin, because she is viewed as an ‘unruly’ woman, when she attempts to flee his clutches. Within this space, Johanna is radically set apart from the figure of the beautiful heroine which she occupies at the film’s commencement. Rather, she is portrayed in rags, akin to her beggar mother, and is dirty and physically passive. Her identity as the pure Gothic heroine consequently becomes disrupted, as she is situated as a hybrid being who strays into the territory of a seeming animal.

For Huot, the insane person blurs “the boundaries separating human and beast” and it is this liminality which I consider Johanna and her mother Lucy to evince (2003: 10). Both of these heroines become representative of Woman as Other, beings ruled by a shameful and fluid body, in need of taming, as one would a beast. In this manner, I argue that these female characters can be considered “abhuman” or ‘almost’ human (Hurley 1996: 3). While this representation is stereotypical, it also permits the heroines a measure of agency. Johanna is depicted by Burton as rebellious, in that she is preparing to take flight with the hero when she is confined to the asylum. Evidently, she refuses to abide by male law, although she does require a man, Anthony, to rescue her. It is her mother, Lucy, who, more so than her daughter, is permitted agency by Burton, as she wanders the streets of London begging for alms. She is totally separated from stable subjectivity, but in this detachment she is free to speak her mind, however unhinged, and enter the public sphere, far from the domestic realm of ‘the Angel in the House’. Nevertheless, I consider the agency afforded the heroines to be rather minimal, as is the case with Selena, who is only truly empowered once she is, ironically, murdered by a man.

This limitation of agency is typical in the figure of the Gothic heroine, who Mary Ellen Snodgrass calls “frail, lovely, and good-hearted” in contrast to the “imperious, darkly emotional femme fatale” (2005: 119). Burton juxtaposes Mrs. Lovett with Lucy and Johanna, ensuring that these heroines are stained by certain traits of this dark lady of the Gothic

tradition. For Linda Dryden, the Gothic *femme fatale* is “a merciless, libidinous and murderous female monster” (2007: 162). I argue that Burton’s *femme fatale* acquires these characteristics, becoming a figure who thoroughly immerses herself in a murderous scheme which fuels both her greed and lust for the barber. She is presented by Burton as a mercenary working-class woman, who, although rather loquacious, remains enigmatic, as the audience cannot be sure what her next move might be. Her morals are ambiguous at best, implying a certain mystery which shrouds her character. For Mary Ann Doane, this inscrutability is fundamental to the *femme fatale*, whose “most striking characteristic, perhaps, is the fact that she never really is what she seems to be” (1991: 1). While she might be somewhat furtive, Burton establishes her as a woman evidently driven by erotic desire. She is crafted as overtly sexual in her frilly black attire which obviously accentuates her body. Her passion for Todd will see her mislead the barber into thinking that his wife is dead, a deception that will later result in Mrs. Lovett’s demise at Todd’s hands. Her obsession with him will also cause her to conspire, and fail, to kill orphan Tobias Ragg, nicknamed Toby (Ed Sanders), whom she allegedly views as her own child.

Burton consequently presents her as a woman all too closely affiliated with the passions of the body, so positioning her as the Other who is perceived as being unable to control her lascivious urges. In the end, unlike Catwoman, Mrs. Lovett is killed rather shockingly, as Todd shoves her into her own oven. Burton depicts her being burnt alive in this space, recalling the evil witch of fairy tales who habitually meets a similar demise. Thus, she comes to accord with Doane’s position that the fatal woman is “situated as evil and is frequently punished or killed” (1991: 2). Yet, I consider that within the Gothic, there is scope for the *femme fatale* to be more than an eroticised and inscrutable threat. Given the genre’s insistent concern with the subversion of physical and psychical boundaries, the fatal woman of the Gothic can morph into a hybrid body, one who thoroughly threatens the male order and who harbours real power. While Catwoman can be seen as a liminal figure whose supernatural power provides her with agency, Burton portrays Mrs. Lovett as a woman of means, albeit without the aid of paranormality. Her appalling production of pies suggests that she is a woman not to be taken lightly, who eschews passivity and who occupies a space of alterity, midway between ‘full’ humanity and monstrosity. As the *femme fatale*, she does not simply rely on her image to achieve her ends. Instead, she takes definitive and

frightening action within the structures of the male hierarchy, in her quest for love and money. In the process, she becomes engrossed in an activity which incites “anxiety about bodily borders and limits,” so rendering her an abject creature in opposition to the ‘clean’ and ‘moral’ perceptions of the heroine (Burns 2012: 9).

The masculine hegemonic structure, as I have indicated, has given rise to the conventional construction of Woman as situated as either evil man-eater or virtuous virgin. Mrs. Lovett is located by Burton at the evil end of this spectrum, melding sensuality with excessive moral decay. On the other hand, I consider that Lucy and Johanna are initially positioned as the ‘virgins’ of this dichotomy, although this is a role which they will challenge. I argue that Burton’s heroines in *Sweeney Todd* are made to resemble Patmore’s (1863) ‘Angel in the House,’ an idealised Victorian figure who constitutes impeccable femininity. Self-sacrificing, noble and utterly high-minded, Patmore calls such ‘angels’ “queens of sweetness” and considers that “[t]he fount of honour is her smile” (1863: 39-40). This, of course, cements the stereotype of Woman as the ‘fairer’ sex, a location in stark opposition to the ‘bad’ or fallen woman. While this angelic woman is seen as wholly good, she is also constructed as passive, asexual and entirely under the control of the social hierarchy. For Nina Auerbach, ‘the Angel in the House’ is a “selfless paragon” consumed by domestic responsibility and “defined by her boundaries” (1982: 67; 72). Likewise, Nel Noddings observes that Woman is seen as angelic so long as her “sphere of activity remains severely limited” (1989: 88). Consequently, this mythical woman is virtuous, but her construction also reveals the male need to control the female Other.

In *Sweeney Todd*, as is typical of the Gothic genre, this evocation of ‘the Angel in the House’ as heroine is visually represented through this figure’s habitual unblemished physicality. On the occasion of the audience’s first visual encounter with Lucy and the adult Johanna, both are seen to possess curly blonde hair and light eyes. These physical aspects contrast markedly with the dark-haired, dark-eyed *femme fatale* Mrs. Lovett, thereby establishing the perception of Lucy and Johanna as pure and innocent. I consider that a comparison can be made between Burton’s heroines and the heroine of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, Elizabeth Lavenza:

Her hair was the brightest living gold, and despite the poverty of her clothing, seemed to set a crown of distinction on her head. Her brow was clear and ample, her blue eyes cloudless, and her lips and the moulding of her face so expressive of sensibility and sweetness that none could behold her without looking on her as of a distinct species, a being heaven-sent, and bearing a celestial stamp in all her features. (2012: chapter 1)

In Shelley's (1818) novel, Elizabeth is adopted by the Frankensteins and is evidently considered a woman of superior physical beauty, like any Gothic heroine ought to be. In Burton's film, similarly, the director cleverly augments the bodily appeal of the heroines Lucy and Johanna, making them seem almost ethereal, marked especially in their opening scenes. While Selena is crafted as the blonde-haired, blue-eyed heroine in *Batman Returns*, Lucy and Johanna transcend even this beauty, almost glowing in their youthful good looks. As Burton envelopes their forms in bright light in their respective opening scenes, their golden hair is unmistakable, almost constituting "a crown of distinction" in comparison to the wild, dark curls of the *femme fatale* (Shelley 2012: chapter 1). Like Elizabeth, the director fashions his heroines as "distinct species," almost "celestial," women with whom the men in the film cannot help but fall in love (Shelley 2012: chapter 1). In glaring opposition to Gothic London, the heroines initially connote an incomparable sweetness as Burton renders them into virtuous and innocent otherworldly beings.

The audience first glimpses Lucy during Todd's retelling of his tragic tale to fellow sailor Anthony, before their ship docks in the port of London. Consequently, Burton initially depicts Lucy through Todd's memory of his wife, making her seem all the more like a character in a fairy tale. Time is significant in the narrative, where scenes from Todd's past, when he was known as Barker, take on the idealisation of memory. Burton achieves this by symbolically basking them in hazy sunlight and employing cheerful and bright colours. This stands in contrast to his grim and dark shots of Gothic London, where the gloomy present-day topography serves as a signifier for the barber's despair and thoughts of cold-blooded revenge. As Todd relays the story of his past to Anthony, he sings of "a barber and his wife and she was beautiful." The visuals which Burton deploys during this song depict a blissful familial scene where Todd, then Barker, strolls with Lucy and their infant child through a flower market. The flashback is filled with chromaticity and soft light, which I consider are

indicative of Todd's elevation of his wife and their marital felicity to a rosy, almost utopic state. Although Todd mentions her virtue, his song primarily stresses her beauty, a characteristic which the visuals reinforce. Jill A. DeDominicis remarks that Lucy "quite literally glows in Todd's initial flashback" in her peachy-white dress and bonnet which "casts a halo-like light around her face" (2008: 56). She comes to suggest 'the Angel in the House,' a figure of impossible goodness and grace, who is styled as the beautiful heroine of the Gothic tradition. Burton bathes her face in sunlight, embellishing her golden ringlets which, I suggest, recall Elizabeth's hair of "the brightest living gold" (Shelley 2012: chapter 1). Like Elizabeth, Lucy is portrayed as the fair 'good' girl, almost angelic in her construction.

More than her beauty, Burton uses this scene to present Lucy as conforming to the role stipulated for Victorian women, that of wife and mother. It is Lucy, not Todd, who picks up their cherub-like child, clothed in a white lacy dress, bonnet and booties, the colour of which alludes to the future innocence of the heroine. Todd seeks to entertain the child, but Lucy carries the baby, remindful of the gendered idea of the 'maternal' nature of Woman. This, of course, is an essentialist position, one which Burton appears to deploy in order to suggest Lucy's goodness. As Diane Long Hoeveler notes, the Gothic heroine "positions herself as the image of femininity" (1998b: 48). In this scene, Burton locates Lucy as the traditional feminine ideal, a woman both beautiful and nurturing. Yet, in raising this concept of Woman as fluid, maternal body, I consider that Lucy also comes to represent the construct of Woman as closer to the 'natural' order than men. For Grosz, the 'woman-mother' indicates the intimate tie to the body that marks women as beings "on the threshold between nature and culture" (1989: 79). In contrast to the man, conceived as immersed in culture and things of the mind, Woman, according to such ideology, is connected to nature and the body. While only subtly implied in this scene, Burton will develop this association as the narrative progresses, closely relating Lucy to the body, both through her rape and subsequent slip into madness.

In this initial encounter, while Burton sets Lucy up as a locus of joy for Todd, he also injects a measure of unease into the idyllic scene. The Gothic, after all, is about the creation of anxiety and this is centred on the figure of Turpin as he spies on Lucy from the shadows of the flower market. A sense of fear is further intimated by Burton as Todd's song repeatedly makes use of the word "was," suggestive of their happiness as a thing of the

past. As Turpin leers at Lucy, there is the promise that something dreadful is awaiting her. The scene alters significantly at this point, as policemen dressed in black enter the market. One of them strikes Todd on the head with a baton and drags him away. His unjust detention will see him sent to an Australian penal colony by Turpin. As is typical of the heroine, Lucy is shown to be helpless, merely looking on while holding the crying baby Johanna in her arms. Todd's memory concludes with Turpin placing his arm around the hapless Lucy, stressing that "the heroine – her body, her money, and so on – presents an object of value for the villain's desires" (Becker 1999: 46).¹⁵ In this case, it is Lucy's body which the villain craves and her role as mother to another man's child becomes meaningless, except as a taboo for Turpin to transgress. Lucy's location as Gothic heroine will see her innocence as an insufficient defence against the excessive nature of Turpin's evil desire. By raping her, he will destroy her identity and transform the pretty little Gothic heroine, who has been rendered an object of abjection through male desire. As Burton's narrative progresses, Lucy's body comes to signify a site of perverse desire, trauma, violation and the destruction of her role as mother. Turpin, of course, becomes Johanna's guardian, further severing Lucy from her maternal function, and, in a manner, claiming her right to 'birth' or 'creation'.

Within the Gothic tradition, the mother-figure is habitually discarded, often through death. For Angela Wright, "the absent mother haunts Gothic fiction pervasively," repeatedly acting as an uncertain presence shaping both the story and the young heroine (2007: 119). However, in Burton's film, rather than Lucy dying at the outset, so as to haunt the heroine, she is retained in the narrative and haunts the heroine from the streets outside Turpin's residence without her knowing it. Her location is altered radically in the process, where she disappears into a state of solitary madness, as a result of the violation of her identity. Rather than the absent mother, Lucy is still present in the narrative, but tainted on both a mental and corporeal level through her sexual ravishment by the masculine villain. Turpin's rape serves to breach the borders of Lucy's body, while simultaneously severing her from her former stable identity. Consequently, her rape desubjectifies Lucy, so that after the event she is not capable of experiencing herself as either object or subject, but rather as abject,

¹⁵ Turpin's lust for Lucy and his punishment and disposal of Todd, I consider, suggest a similarity with the biblical narrative of King David, who lusted after Bathsheba and sent her husband, Uriah, to the front lines of battle, so as to see him killed.

the midway space between self and Other (Martin 2015: 123). This Burton reveals through her evident confusion and meaningless ramblings, coupled with moments of profound truth, such as her awareness of the concealed nature of Mrs. Lovett. The utter defilement of Lucy's identity, through her rape, is an unusual occurrence for a heroine within the Gothic tradition. The only similar incidence of a violation of this magnitude is found in Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* (1796), in which the monk Ambrosio rapes the heroine Antonia and then murders her.

Incapable of coping with the rape, Lucy chooses to drink arsenic, which fails to kill her, as she evidently had hoped. The outcome, according to Mrs. Lovett, who eventually tells Todd of his wife's fate in the final scene of the film, is that Lucy is left "weak in the head". As a result, the heroine is committed to Bethlehem Royal Hospital, known as Bedlam, London's infamous asylum. As the audience does not see her in this space, Lucy has clearly managed to escape her detainment somehow. Instead, Burton shows her wandering the dirty streets of London, where she is located as a mad beggar woman. This portrayal, I consider, recalls Michel Foucault's reference to Pieter Bruegel the Elder's *Dulle Griet* (1562), which he suggests demonstrates "the face of madness [which] has haunted the imagination of Western man" (1965: 15). While Bruegel's Mad Meg is a deranged peasant woman set to pillage hell, Lucy comes to signify a mad beggar woman intent on calling attention to the hellish activities transpiring in the underground bakehouse beneath Mrs. Lovett's pie shop. Not only does Burton portray Lucy as insane, but her physical attractiveness and the suggestion of her purity are profoundly sullied. Like Catwoman's mutation, Lucy is no longer 'the Angel in the House,' as both characters fail to conform to the stipulations for the 'good' girl. Yet, while Catwoman is perceived as dangerous, Lucy, rather, is seen by the audience as disquieting and potentially frightening. Of course, Catwoman's subversion of this role is conscious as she delights in her new image as *femme fatale*. Lucy, arguably, does not have control over her body, as she is sundered from her sanity. As in *Batman Returns*, Burton sets up the notion of split embodiment, where Lucy is seen by the viewer to possess quite a different corporeal space after her rape. Just as Catwoman is depicted by Burton as immoral and dangerous after her murder, I argue that Lucy comes to take on certain traits associated with the figure of the *femme fatale*. For instance, her relative independence on the streets of London and the suggestion of her sexual excess hint at her tainted form. I consider there

to be a degree of freedom in her embodiment as she rejects the dictates of proper femininity. As Grosz observes, madness can be seen as one of those “privileged moments of ... transgression” (1989: 70). Lucy, I contend, is no longer subject to societal laws, as no one evidently cares much for a beggar woman’s opinion or situation. Yet, in some manner, she is also a disruptive force in the narrative, in that she attempts to call attention to the pie shop and acts as a threat to male oppression and violence, should anyone really listen to her tale. Although she is a far lesser threat than Mrs. Lovett, she is still indicative of a liminal and subversive femininity and consequently a monstrous-feminine threat to law and order. Like the *femme fatale*, she dies as a direct result of the danger she poses to Todd, as the barber suspects that she might know too much.

Lucy can be seen as the ‘good girl gone bad,’ where, in this case, her madness causes an abject fissuring of her stable subjectivity. In this role, Burton presents her quite differently from her former self, the beautiful and innocent ‘Angel in the House’. Her attire has dramatically altered, as she appears in the dark rags of a beggar and wears a hat to conceal her scarred face. The implication is that something loathsome and Other resides under what can be thought of as a form of veil.¹⁶ Her fall into madness is evidently accompanied by a decline in her social class, suggestive of the mad person as residing outside of society. Her body is no longer a site of beauty, but a locus of disgust where the “dread of difference [is] articulated” (Mulvey-Roberts 2016: 2). This alterity might be the physical fear of her sullied and shabby form, but it is also intimately related to her specifically feminine otherness. Burton’s construction of Lucy can be seen as bordering on the animalistic as she takes on what Hurley calls Woman’s alleged “liability to pathological mental states” (1996: 120). For Hurley, this essentialised construction “renders the woman a Thing: a body that is at best imperfectly animated by a “human mind” and a “human spirit”” (1996: 120). Representative of the Thing, Lucy takes on the traits of the monstrous-feminine as she borders on ‘full’ humanity. She becomes a signifier of the excessive and abject Woman, whose embodiment is located in a physical and mental otherness that threatens the ‘high’ ideals of stable subjectivity.

¹⁶ For Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1991), the Gothic veil can be seen as overlaid in motifs of subtly hidden sexuality, as I indicated in my first chapter in relation to Catwoman. However, in the case of Lucy, this usage of the veil is intended by Burton to have the opposite effect, in that the veil reinforces what Laura Mulvey calls the “enchantress/hag” dichotomy (1991: 147). Lucy’s form, instead of mutating into something beautiful and enchanting when the veil is removed, will remain physically repellent and hag-like.

This relegation into the territory of Thing-ness is caused by her inability to process her sexual violation, which she deeply represses, along with her past. Elisabeth Bronfen sees hysteria as pertinent to the Gothic and asserts that “the hysteric suffers from a psychic trauma whose origins she does not know or has repressed” (1994: 172). Burton presents Lucy in a similar light, making it apparent that she cannot recall her past. This is especially marked when Lucy finally reunites with her husband in the final moments of the film. Todd does not recognise her, indicative of her altered and crone-like form. Creeping into Todd’s barber shop for the sole purpose of attempting to expose Mrs. Lovett, Lucy says, “Hey, don’t I know you, mister?” I suggest that Burton uses this line as a further means to render Lucy as a subject in flux and quite apart from her previous role as ‘the Angel in the House’. Lucy can be compared with Kristeva’s melancholic, who is entrapped in “an abyss of sorrow, a noncommunicable grief” and occupies the territory of “living death” (1989: 3-4). Her inability to recall her own husband speaks of the pain of the repressed past which has resulted in the breakdown of her subjectivity. This locates her embodiment as a Gothic space of abjection, which Kristeva points out entails the borders of our condition as living subjects (1982: 3). Lucy is depicted as rupturing this border, becoming a monstrous madwoman who even her own husband cannot identify. An unpredictable threat, however welcome, to Todd and Mrs. Lovett’s schemes, Lucy, like Charlotte Brontë’s (1847) mad Bertha Mason in the attic, should be prevented from meddling in and disrupting society. Consequently, Todd kills her, ironically unaware that she was his beautiful and pure wife. This murder represents the first time that Todd has killed a woman in the narrative, so exposing the manner in which he is swaying from his course of revenge against the men of London to one that is psychopathic.

The audience first sees Lucy in her altered form when she approaches the hero Anthony begging for alms on the streets outside Turpin’s residence. Anthony, having just observed Johanna for the first time, asks who owns the house, to which Lucy replies that it belongs to “the great” Turpin. She is also able to name Johanna, although she seems unable to recall her association with both of them. I consider it noteworthy that she is shown by Burton to be lingering outside the property, as if she cannot fully disengage herself from her past. Lucy tells Anthony, “So don’t you go trespassing there. Or it’s a good whipping for you.” It appears that she still affiliates Turpin with violence, despite having evidently

forgotten his crime against her. For Michelle Massé (1992), the Gothic heroine is entrapped in a cycle of the repetition of trauma. Massé employs the protagonist of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892) as an example, whom she argues "recreates and relives her situation" and "immerses herself in her madness" (1992: 35). Located near Turpin's residence and telling Anthony that Johanna is "all locked up," Lucy comes to signify the Gothic heroine who cannot transcend her trauma. Depicted by Burton as eternally split from her former self, yet holding on to her 'old' identity to a degree, Lucy is constructed as Thing-like, a creature situated on the abject border between reality and insanity.

While she warns Anthony of Turpin, she touches his jacket suggestively, as she tells him not to trespass should he have "mischief on his mind". Burton makes apparent her meaning in that Anthony looks appalled as she touches him, as it becomes obvious that she is soliciting. Unhinged by her rape, Lucy seems to think her body only fit as a site for potentially violent male pleasure.¹⁷ This, in turn, I see as related to her location as the hysterical woman, who is too closely connected with the so-called unruly body. For Marie Mulvey-Roberts, hysteria was affiliated "with sexual excess" (2016: 107). By including this brief exchange between Anthony and Lucy, Burton, I argue, suggests the fallen heroine as a hysterical being of sexual excess, so aligning her with the realm of the erotic and othered *femme fatale* who is driven by the urges of her body.

This portrayal as the horrific Other is taken further when the audience views Lucy's radically altered face. The scene depicts the former heroine raving outside Mrs. Lovett's pie shop, where her song is shrill and chant-like, indicative of her rage, hysteria and insanity. I suggest that Burton crafts Lucy in a similar fashion to William Shakespeare's mad Ophelia of *Hamlet*, who sings such seemingly nonsensical ditties as "Hey non nonny, nonny, hey nonny" (2008: 103). Ophelia's fall into madness is as a result of her father's death and Hamlet's cruel romantic rejection and sexualised verbal abuse. Like Ophelia, Lucy has moments of near lucidity, such as her repetition of "sign of the devil," "witch" and "mischief" outside the pie shop. While Lucy is portrayed as an abhuman being, both in body and mind, she is also presented by Burton as aware of the full extent of the horrors of the

¹⁷ Sondheim's (1979) original lyrics make clearer Lucy's sexual offering to Anthony, mentioning "a little muff," "a little jig jig" and "a little bounce around the bush". For Burton's use of the original lyrics, see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=un2ID3dGY4E>. However, the director chose to cut these lyrics from the final cinematic portrayal.

pie shop. However, she is unable to communicate this knowledge to the authorities, as her madness has effectuated a lack of coherent speech. For Janet Beizer, the hysteric's inability to employ the voice in a 'proper' manner signifies "the negative double of accepted patriarchal speech" (1994: 44). As Catwoman reverts to nursery rhymes in *Batman Returns*, so Lucy slips into a communication gap, portrayed by Burton in her jarring ranting regarding the pie shop. Her use of speech has unravelled and no longer conforms to accepted patterns of speech. Instead, her incoherent cries represent a breach in her stable subjectivity. In this manner, she can be seen as associated with glossolalia or speaking in tongues, which, according to prevailing discourse, "means nothing, or alternatively, signifies alienation" (Ciobanu 2009: 192). This establishment as the mad monstrous-feminine is symbolised on a corporeal level by Burton who fashions her body in stark opposition to his presentation of her when the film commences. Lucy's face has come to be deeply scarred and her eyes seem darker and desperate. Dressed in dingy, ragged clothes, her drab, blonde hair falls across her frighteningly transformed face. For Judith Halberstam "monsters mark difference within and upon bodies" (1995: 8). This otherness is communicated by Burton both within and upon Lucy's body, as she is now both mentally disturbed and physically grotesque. Rather than the beautiful 'Angel in the House,' Lucy comes to represent the abject Gothic Thing, which exists between sanity and insanity, human and non-human. Unlike Catwoman, whose mutation sees her take on traits of animalistic sexuality and prowess, signifying a site of desire and terror, Lucy's form is a locus of disgust and loathing.

While Lucy becomes repugnant as the film progresses, her daughter Johanna takes her place as the stereotypical 'good' girl of the Gothic tradition with her golden curls, pale skin, green eyes and rosy lips. Jennifer L. Jenkins comments on Burton's positioning of Johanna, calling her "a figure of absolute and nearly unattainable beauty, not unlike the barber's wife in Sweeney's flashback" (2014: 183). Located as an embodiment of ethereal beauty, I argue that Burton depicts Johanna as the typical heroine who is subject to male confinement. Under lock and key, Johanna is a prisoner in Turpin's London residence, where he plays an ambiguous role as her father/husband. Such a thematic concern is a convention in the Gothic, which Kate Ferguson Ellis sees as using structural incarceration, such as the imprisoning Gothic castle, as a metaphor "for women's lives under patriarchy" (2001: 258). This motif of imprisonment within the hierarchy is shown by Burton in Johanna's opening

scene, where her form becomes superimposed with notions of the 'damsel-in-distress'. Singing a ballad in which she yearns for freedom, Johanna compares her life to that of the caged bird beside her. While the exchange renders her helpless, as the Gothic heroine so often is, it also conflates her embodiment with that of an animal. As in *Batman Returns*, where Burton strategically and consistently positions Selena/Catwoman alongside a cat throughout the film, I see the same device at work in *Sweeney Todd*. In the process, Woman is intimately connected with those negative and allegedly feminine traits of the animal, such as unruliness and feral excess. While Johanna is located as rather far from Catwoman in the good/evil duality, her position beside the caged bird suggests that Turpin sees her as little more than an animal, something to be tamed and controlled. Thus, Burton marks Johanna's form as somehow animalistic and Other. Certainly, she is not the hybrid creature that her mother Lucy is, yet Burton will later show her in a liminal position, as she becomes imprisoned within another Gothic space, that of the asylum.

Situated within her bedchamber, Johanna's only interaction with the outside world is through a window, where she gazes longingly onto the streets of London. Burton's portrayal of a blonde and imprisoned beauty beside a window, I consider, recalls Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm's fairy tale figure of Rapunzel with "magnificent long hair, fine as spun gold" forcibly restrained in a tower beside "a little window" (2013: 8). Like Rapunzel, Johanna's song lures the hero Anthony and prompts him to rescue her. While Burton calls on the figure of the Gothic heroine who always requires a hero to save her, he also provides Johanna with a degree of agency. The sailor Anthony evidently falls in love with her at first sight, a scenario typical to Gothic romance. Johanna is aware of this and uses it to her advantage. In the later scene where she furnishes Anthony with a key to the property, she smiles down at the lovesick hero in the streets below. As she does so, her long blonde hair hangs loosely and her breasts are exposed in her peach and ivory-laced dress. Although located as innocent by Burton, the director reveals Johanna is not afraid to use her beauty as a tool to subvert and manipulate men. In this manner, she is comparable to the *femme fatale*, who uses her image for gain. Consequently, Burton sets up the notion of frightening corporeality, where women have the erotic potential to lure men in and do them harm or challenge their authority. However, this insinuation is subtle, as Johanna certainly does not possess the prowess of the fatal woman. Nevertheless, Anthony is injured as a result of his infatuation

with Johanna, when Turpin instructs his lackey Beadle Bamford (Timothy Spall) to beat the hero with a walking stick. While Turpin's possession of Johanna forces her beauty to take on dangerous connotations, the heroine, I suggest, is still principally located as 'the Angel in the House' in these initial scenes.

However, as the film progresses, Johanna's form alters dramatically as she seems to assume traits of hysteria. Upon discovering Johanna's plan to escape his clutches with the hero Anthony, Turpin responds by detaining his ward within an asylum. Unlike Lucy, Johanna does not lapse into madness. Nevertheless, her gender is used against her, in that Turpin evidently sees her as an uncontrollable woman. Contrary to the ideology of the rational and upstanding man, I argue that Burton establishes Johanna as the female Other, one stereotypically conceived as excessive and irrational. In Burton's dimly lit Gothic asylum with its barred rooms to which Johanna is confined, the film reveals only entrapped madwomen. Constructed as unruly and prone to mental instability, these filthy women, who cry and cower like animals, can be seen as abject Things, beings beyond adequate explanation. For du Preez, in historicising hysteria, "the terms *female*, *femininity* and *hysteria* actually became interchangeable" (2004: 47). The disease came to represent a perverse and exaggerated femininity. Within the asylum Burton strikingly presents the otherness of femininity in a manner which genders his female characters as horrifying and dangerous. Certainly, madness has always been "a consistent theme in Gothic fiction," yet, in the film, I argue that the director intricately relates this motif with what it is about women that is abject and unsettling for men (Spooner 2004: 14). Rather than illustrative of the 'proper' woman, these hysterical beings are doubly othered and removed from polite society. Representative of the monstrous-feminine, their embodiment inspires disgust and loathing in the viewer. While Johanna is not insane, she is disobedient and therefore indicative of the monstrous woman who attempts to subvert societally accepted behaviour. In the process, Burton compares her body with those of the madwomen of London, so forcing her own body to become in some way expressive of a site of abjection.

For Foucault, the classical period saw madness "become a thing to look at" (1965: 70). The fact that Anthony poses as a wigmaker to gain access to the asylum, where he allegedly intends to appropriate blonde hair from the women for his wigs, reveals such a concern. The captured madwomen are seen as little more than animals, things to look at

and to touch. In discussing medical discourse and its relation to sexuality, Foucault (1978) indicates the power at work in 'correctly' sexualising the body. Such power "set about contacting bodies, caressing them with its eyes, intensifying areas, electrifying surfaces, dramatizing troubled moments" (1978: 44). Foucault further argues that medical discourse "trapped the sexual body in its embrace" (1978: 44). This medical discourse seems itself to partake of a level of Gothic excess linked to a rather perverse need to sexualise embodiment, most notably that of women. In Burton's *Sweeney Todd*, Johanna is depicted as entrapped by such sexualising and gendered male discourse, where her body is quite literally confined and on view so as to render her docile and passive. Her refusal to tolerate Turpin's oppression results in an accepted masculine exercise of power aimed at disciplining her sexualised embodiment. Overwritten with the Gothic trope of madness, Johanna becomes symbolic of excess and the "traditional patriarchal association of women with monstrosity" (Braidotti 1997: 64).

In attempting to force Johanna into the passive role of the Gothic heroine, I consider that her body takes on aspects of animalism and the abhuman. Like the caged bird in her opening scene, the men of authority in the film want to see Johanna restrained and domesticated. Foucault views madness as intimately connected with animalism, where the mad person "could be mastered only by *discipline* and *brutalizing*" (1965: 75). Burton clearly reveals this rationale in the film, where the male doctor Jonas Fogg (Philip Philmar) evidently treats his female inmates reprehensibly. As he shows Anthony his blonde patients, given that the women are segregated according to hair colour, as if they are beasts on show, his ill treatment of them is made subtly apparent. Deriving pleasure from their cries, Fogg mockingly physically charges the women, who cringe and scatter. In this depiction, Burton strongly aligns the female detainees with the traditional notion that madness requires control through force, and brutal force at that. In the crowd of cowering women, Johanna becomes overlaid with motifs of abject servility and lack of cleanliness, as her body is constructed as simultaneously human and inhuman. On a visual level, Burton has stripped her of her role as the pure and flawless 'Angel in the House'. Instead, like Lucy, she is clothed in tatty and filthy attire, which is accentuated by her long, dirty and loose hair that has lost its golden blonde beauty. Her arms are bound, as her sleeves are tightly secured together with a padlock which rests against her back. This radically dissimilar portrayal, I

contend, takes Johanna into the realm of the 'bad' woman, who has attempted to thwart male expectations. Burton appears to present the subversion of the ideal female image through dress, where shabby clothing is indicative of Lucy and Johanna's fall from grace. So, their inevitable and presumed 'nature' as the threatening Other is set up through dress, establishing mother and daughter as gothically bivalent creatures who can either be 'good' or 'evil'.

Johanna's captivity within the asylum might be as a result of her own plans to escape her oppressor, but Burton still depicts her as a passive heroine in need of rescue. Unlike Catwoman, who takes matters into her own hands when challenging male domination, Johanna remains caught in the Gothic heroine's helpless role. As Anthony enters her place of detention, she initially almost shies away from him, bowing her head and seeming afraid to meet his eyes. The action serves to illustrate Fogg's harsh disciplining techniques, but, I contend, also further marks her as somehow not-quite-human. Her action seems to mirror that of an abused creature. The hero ultimately succeeds in his rescue endeavour by wielding a gun at Fogg. Leaving Fogg to the mercy of the remaining women, who, like bacchantes, threaten to tear him to pieces, the hero and heroine conveniently escape. Following her rescue, Johanna is compelled to dress as a boy, so as to remain disguised and undetected. While this might be necessary, it also constitutes a transgression of Victorian norms, and reveals Johanna as inherently rebellious and possessing a desire for agency. For Doane, "[c]lothes make the man," where the assumption of male attire permits the female to "pretend that she is other" than she is (1991: 24-25). The implication is that masculine clothing acts as a means to facilitate both disguise and agency for a woman. It is perhaps of interest that the audience never again sees Johanna in the beautiful dresses of 'the Angel in the House'. As Lucy dies in her rags, so Johanna is last seen in male apparel. Burton, I assert, uses dress to signify their altered embodiment, where they can no longer be called the 'good' girls. However, the suggestion in the film is that Johanna attains the happy ending associated with the Gothic heroine, by marrying Anthony, her liberator and hero. Although nearly killed by her father Todd, her life is strangely spared, which is contrary to the other female characters in the film, who die at the barber's hands. In permitting her to live, I consider that Burton intends to mitigate the degree to which she transgresses the male order. She might disobey Turpin, but hers is a just cause, similar to that of Catwoman.

Sundered from her image as 'the Angel in the House,' her time in the asylum renders her as liminal, an embodiment of the monstrous-feminine. However, unlike Lucy, Johanna retains her sanity and her happy ending suggests that Burton still characterises her as the stereotypical innocent, yet more worldly-wise, heroine. Though Johanna is overlaid with motifs of the abject Other, this is insignificant when compared to the frightening fall of Lucy, or the magnitude of *femme fatale* Mrs. Lovett's amoral pie-making.

In fact, it is Mrs. Lovett, the film's infamous *femme fatale*, who Burton aligns most noticeably with the notion of the monstrous-feminine. Upon the viewer's first visual encounter with this character, Burton makes clear her feminine excess, which acts in opposition to the 'good' girl or 'Angel in the House'. Todd meets Mrs. Lovett upon his return to London, when, fresh from the docks, he enters her darkened, grim pie shop. The *femme fatale* is seen cutting up ingredients for her pies in the dim space, an image which Burton cleverly contrasts with the sunlit, variegated introduction to the heroine Lucy in Todd's flashback. While Lucy is initially a Victorian lady, Mrs. Lovett is certainly not, instead forming part of the working class. Her shop, rather than sunny and welcoming, is presented by Burton as a murky and confining space of Gothic excess, exhibiting the "prevalence of claustrophobia," a central concept associated with the genre (Punter 2012: 1). Burton, I suggest, employs this sense of claustrophobia as an aspect of his monstrous embodiment of his *femme fatale*. The shop with grimy windows and a gloomy interior of brick and wood is clearly in need of care. The door squeaks as Todd walks in, while cockroaches scuttle about the floury surface upon which Mrs. Lovett is working. For Ruth Bienstock Anolik, "[t]he locus of the Gothic is the shadowy, mysterious and unknowable space inhabited by the inhumanly unknowable Other" (2010: 2). I consider that Burton renders this space as a visually unsettling site for Gothic transgression, evident as Todd attempts to exit unseen. Mrs. Lovett, as the film progresses, will come to signify the inscrutable Other, as she takes on her grotesque pie-making scheme. More than the appearance of the shop, Burton depicts the *femme fatale* to be an incessant talker. Todd cannot escape her labyrinth of words, as she literally pulls him inside and forces him to sit at one of her tables. Burton reveals her as a woman unafraid to invade another's body space, a concern which he extends as she develops her frightening plans. Upon initially seeing Todd at the door, Mrs. Lovett aggressively stabs her knife into the wooden chopping board, leaving her ingredients to

attend to her customer. Through this action, Burton playfully hints at her forthcoming involvement in murder, where she will dismember the bodies of Todd's victims for mercenary gain.

In establishing her in opposition to the figure of the Gothic heroine, Burton presents Mrs. Lovett's embodiment as an extension of her shop, where she assumes the darkness and excess of this space. Clothed in dark, frilly attire, the director again uses dress to indicate bodily transgression, where Mrs. Lovett becomes crafted as the 'dark' lady. For Maisha L. Wester, the Gothic opposes "the dark lady/temptress whose passion dooms and/or destroys the masculine hero" with "the fair, virtuous (usually blonde) heroine" (2012: 22). With her exaggerated dark curls, twisted into an irregular hairstyle upon her head, Burton starkly contrasts Mrs. Lovett's form with that of his blonde heroines. Her passion, as befits any *femme fatale*, is depicted as excessive, in that she neglects to tell Todd that Lucy lives. Rather, she leads the barber to believe that his wife died through imbibing poison, even while not explicitly lying about what consequently happened. However, this is not to say that Mrs. Lovett's passion dooms Todd; instead she is murdered by him at the film's close. Nevertheless, it is her suggestion that the pie shop be converted into a cannibalistic and borderline place that subverts moral taboos. While her passion for Todd is pronounced, Benjamin Poore and Kelly Jones argue that the figure of Mrs. Lovett "is the very opposite of a siren" (2009: 10). Mentioning her "motley dress sense, eccentric hairstyle, and inept dancing," they see her as inciting laughter despite "her callousness as an accessory to murder" (Poore & Jones 2009: 10). While she is indeed amusing, I argue that Mrs. Lovett is modelled by Burton as overtly sensual and a woman who is unafraid to flout societal rules. She might not be beautiful, as Lucy or Johanna are, but, like the Siren, she is a danger to the men in her proximity, as they might just end up in her pies. Although not possessing the supernatural prowess or the erotic appeal of Catwoman, Mrs. Lovett is portrayed by Burton as perhaps even more of a monster. Similar to Mary Shelley's makeshift monster in *Frankenstein* (1818), both Catwoman and Mrs. Lovett are atypically conceived, where their otherness is marked by a fusion of irregular traits. In *Sweeney Todd*, Burton superimposes otherness on Mrs. Lovett's form through a variety of physical signifiers, including her dishevelled hair, heavily made-up face and dark, motley and revealing dress. In comparison to the other female characters in the film, her appearance closely resembles

that of mad Lucy, suggestive of another unhinged personality. This, of course, Burton further explores as the character moves through the narrative and prepares her ghastly pies.

More than a physical kinship with the altered Lucy, Mrs. Lovett can be seen as “startlingly similar” to Todd, with his pale face, darkened eyes and unusual hairstyle with its white streak through the black hair (Poore & Jones 2009: 10). Both villain and villainess are presented by Burton as physically dark and unsettling doubles. While not given to obvious bodily horror, as the traditional supernatural monster of the genre, their exterior embodiment reflects a sinister emotional interior. Where Todd is figured as frightening, however, Burton injects humour into Mrs. Lovett’s obvious deviancy. Her loquaciousness and misguided illusions of romance with Todd locate her as a woman in excess, the butt of the joke. While she is comically grotesque, she is also undeniably dangerous. Actress Helena Bonham Carter says that her portrayal of Mrs. Lovett’s character sought to emphasise her sexuality, while revealing her position as “a tough, pragmatic survivor” (Salisbury 2007: para. 7). Her need to survive, both financially and romantically, will see her wielding metallic machines in the underground bakehouse, so as to sever body parts for her gain. Like Catwoman, this *femme fatale* comes to signify Creed’s (1993) *femme castratrice*, where, although not undertaking the killing herself, she does not hesitate to slice into men’s flesh once they are dead. As a castrating woman, her motive, unlike Catwoman, is far more superficial, centred on physical desire and greed. For Julie Grossman, the *femme fatale* is defined in terms of her “commitment to fulfilling her own desires” (2009: 3). Burton, I contend, renders Mrs. Lovett as a woman unreasonably and amorally committed to her own ends. In the process, she oversteps the mark of ‘proper’ femininity, instead occupying a Gothic space of monstrous-feminine excess.

As she subverts the characteristics associated with the ‘good’ girl, Mrs. Lovett becomes intimately aligned with what Sandra Barkty (1988) calls the ‘loose’ woman. Barkty sees this looseness as not only founded on a certain moral laxity, but apparent in this woman’s “manner of speech, and quite literally in the free and easy way she moves” (1988: 97). For Barkty, the loose woman, like the *femme fatale*, is all about employing her body for personal gain. In Burton’s film it appears that the director purposely, or not, conflates Mrs. Lovett with the highly essentialised figure of the loose woman. Not only is she given to

morally ambiguous behaviour, but she enjoys a certain freedom in her movement and dress. Unlike the heroines, who initially typify the 'prim and proper' Victorian woman, Mrs. Lovett's speech is coarse and her manner brazen. In her opening scene in the film, she insists that the barber eat her pies, despite denouncing them as "the worst pies in London". In a relentless stream of confessions, she tells Todd that "times is hard" and that her pies are "revolting," "greasy and gritty". This use of incorrect grammar is deployed by Burton to reinforce her as a hardened, uneducated working-class woman of London, a far cry from his beautiful heroines. More than her garrulity and the crude manner of her speech, Burton portrays her as loose in her physical movements. Killing insects with her bare hands and booted feet, she is figured as something "greasy and gritty" as she works to make her "revolting" pies. Domineering in her greeting of Todd, she shamelessly kills the cockroaches scuttling about her ingredients. As she kneads the dough for her produce, she wipes her brow obviously and accidentally encloses an insect into a pie, all the while grumbling persistently to Todd of business concerns. While the action of killing insects presages her involvement in murder and dismemberment, it also locates her as the distasteful Other, quite outside of acceptable femininity. For Kerry M. Mallan, the construct of 'proper' femininity entails cautioning against "making a spectacle" (2000: 1). Positioned in opposition to this, Burton reveals Mrs. Lovett as quite at ease with being excessive and 'improper'. While she can perhaps be seen as the loose and therefore 'evil' woman, these actions are also intended by Burton to incite unease in the audience. She comes to take on the Gothic gloom of her grimy pie shop, and her revolting bodily movements within this space serve both to fascinate and repulse the viewer. By way of this initial scene, the audience is not sure of what she is capable and consequently Burton sets her up as a fluid Gothic body, one which transgresses norms and is both "familiar and unfamiliar, same and other" (Kearney 2000: 85).

In crafting her as the female Other, Burton succeeds in accentuating her gendered difference, by heightening the sensual effect of her body. As she works the dough for her pies in this early scene, her breasts are obviously exposed and, I consider, she comes to suggest the common whore of the Victorian period. While Catwoman is far more erotically-charged, her costume conceals the flesh, even while stressing her feminine curves. In the case of Mrs. Lovett, she is fleshier, as her breasts, neck and arms are revealed through her

clothing. Considering the film's interest in human flesh, this stylising of feminine corporeality is apt, as Mrs. Lovett will come to represent a monstrous craftswoman in the field of human body parts. For DeDominicis, Mrs. Lovett's attire signifies "gothic sexiness" (2008: 56). Tight-fitting, frilly and dark, with lacy black fingerless gloves, her dress is chosen by Burton to emphasise the manner in which she takes on the sexualised excess of the film's evocation of a Gothic London. Black, of course, has always been associated with evil. As with Catwoman's costume, Burton uses this colour as an external symbol for what is within. Nevertheless, she remains positioned as sensual, fit for the grungy world of urban London in which she resides. However, it is not this eroticism or 'fleshiness' which attracts Todd to her character; instead I suggest that it is Mrs. Lovett's shrewd businesswoman capabilities that allow her to manipulate Todd. She cleverly relays the dire history of the former owner of the upstairs barbershop, all the while suspecting that Todd is the previous owner, Barker, and has returned to his premises. As a result, the pair teams up and eventually embarks on the appalling pie-making scheme. If not for her overt familiarity with the barber, such as her use of "dearie" and "love," and her prying into his harrowing past, this monstrous doubling up of villain and villainess might not have transpired. Yet, unlike Catwoman, Mrs. Lovett's apparel, while sensually inviting, is not gothically unsettling. Catwoman is a hybrid monster, where her costume hints at the feline traits which she has supernaturally appropriated. Alternatively, Mrs. Lovett, I argue, is marked by what Halberstam calls the modern Gothic monster's "proximity to humans" (1995: 23). She might be portrayed as a doxy of the period, but the audience can only grasp the full extent of her monstrosity once she begins her business scheme with Todd.

Burton's fashioning of her abject form is heightened once the audience witnesses her reaction to Todd's first murder. On visiting rival barber Signor Adolfo Pirelli's (Sacha Baron Cohen) travelling barber shop, Todd manages to defeat Pirelli in a shaving contest. Humiliated and enraged, Pirelli visits Todd and reveals his true identity as Davy Collins, who was apprenticed to Todd as a boy. Consequently, he is aware of Todd's identity as Barker. As a result, he threatens to divulge this information to the Beadle, who will naturally ensure that 'justice' prevails, as Todd has escaped his imprisonment. By way of a bribe, Pirelli demands half of Todd's profits to keep his secret. In response, Todd promptly kills Pirelli by dramatically slitting his throat, so committing the first of his murders in London. On seeing

the corpse, Mrs. Lovett denounces Todd as “barking mad,” a playful pun by Burton on the character’s real name. However, when she learns the reason for the murder, Mrs. Lovett casually says, “Oh, well that’s a different matter then. For a moment there I thought you lost your marbles.” The ease with which she brushes off the murder, while highly amusing, also indicates her as inhabiting “a place of corruption” and moral liminality (Halberstam 1995: 2). While the heroine of the Gothic would likely shriek or faint, Mrs. Lovett grabs Pirelli’s money. In a move which is typical of the *femme fatale*, she sets aside any moral qualms and takes the opportunity to see to her needs, exhibiting a greed for which this figure is infamous. More than this, the retention of a dead man’s money pouch, I consider, serves as the first of Burton’s visual techniques to connect her with the corpse and markedly abject materialistic gain. Of course, far more lurid images will follow. For Claire Kahane, the centre of the Gothic gives rise to a space “where life and death become confused” (1985: 338). In seizing Pirelli’s money pouch, Mrs. Lovett becomes a composite figure of life and death, as she hangs on to an object violently and abjectly obtained through murder. Although perhaps blinded by avarice, the *femme fatale* does not fail to notice the quantity of blood. Regardless, she still touches the bloody corpse, as she is curious rather than fearful. Creed considers blood to be “an abject substance” which is used to nimiety in the horror film (1993: 62). Through the action of brazenly feeling the bloody corpse, Burton seems to establish Mrs. Lovett’s association with death and abjection. She takes on the role of the castrating monstrous-feminine who embodies those “borderline experiences of uncontainable excess” (Kearney 2004: 3).

This excess is heightened by Burton as, initially as a means to dispose of Pirelli’s body, Mrs. Lovett suggests that her pies henceforth be stuffed with human flesh, starting with his corpse. She will welcome Todd’s forthcoming killing spree as a channel to obtain meat for her pies. These serial killings commence following an incident where the barber wastes a chance to execute Turpin, although he will later succeed in this endeavour. Infuriated, Todd vows revenge on the world through a plot to murder his future customers. Yet, Mrs. Lovett’s rationale for the pie-making scheme is that, “Business needs a lift” considering the exorbitant “price of meat”. For Katherine Farrimond, the *femme fatale* is habitually characterised by an “ambition to improve her circumstances,” which is coupled with a certain moral laxity and ambiguity (2011: 7). Burton situates Mrs. Lovett as just such

a *femme fatale*, taking this image further as she becomes embroiled in a grotesque murder scheme. Rather than shocked by her suggestion, Todd is thrilled, even deigning to dance with her. In a display of uncharacteristic affection, he says, "Mrs. Lovett, how I've lived without you all these years, I'll never know," even calling her "my love" and "my pet". Mrs. Lovett is delighted, considering her deluded romantic obsession with him. As in *Batman Returns*, where Catwoman and Batman engage in displays of lurid eroticism and ambivalent desire during their sensual rooftop fight, this scene where Todd and Mrs. Lovett dance together, I consider comes to signify an abject merger of desire and death. Her proposal, while horrifying and indicative of her monstrous positioning, is also, of course, criminal. For Kristeva, crime is associated with abjection, in that it "draws attention to the fragility of the law," where "premeditated crime, cunning murder" are worst of them all (1982: 4). Murder indicates a crossing of fairly rigid social, moral and physical limits. While Mrs. Lovett does not commit the atrocities herself, she wholly embraces Todd's violence, as it is an opportunity to garner a reputation through sales of her pies.

As Mrs. Lovett and Todd become entirely absorbed in the grandeur of their vicious plan, they quite literally engage in what I suggest to be a "frightful dance of death" (Freer 2008/ 2009: 64). Burton depicts this dance as almost romantic, as their bodies spin about the room and they stare into each other's eyes. While desire is hinted at, so are violence and death, as Mrs. Lovett brandishes a rolling pin and Todd a blade. Burton consequently fuses images of food, desire and bloody death, redolent of the Gothic's typical tendency to undermine established boundaries. For Scott Freer, the final dance scene of the film acts as what he calls "a feeding frenzy of Dionysian intoxication" (2008/2009: 74). Detailing the Dionysian festival of ancient Greece, Freer mentions dancing as a means to induce "a state of self-abnegation" and "self-abandoning ecstasy" (2008/2009: 63-64). Such celebrations of Dionysus, the god of fertility and wine, Freer sees as entailing a "frightful dance of death" (2008/2009: 64). While dancing can indicate jubilation and transgression, it can also, according to this position, be seen as something to be feared. I would add to Freer's argument by positing that this early dance scene in Burton's film also resembles an act of Dionysian excess. It is the over-embellishment and wild exuberance in this scene that allows Burton to establish both Todd and Mrs. Lovett as utterly shocking and chilling monstrous beings. Evidently, their dark and perverse sexuality is prompted by envisioning the

forthcoming violence and death which they will generate. The *femme fatale* has always personified a corrupt and debased sexuality, making her an abject figure both desired and feared. While Mrs. Lovett might not embody Catwoman's striking eroticism and tendency for relational sadomasochism, her sensuality is certainly suggested by Burton to be, in a manner, deviant. The physical and psychological union of Todd and Mrs. Lovett in this scene reveals their abjuration of the moral order and its taboos, where they slip into a space of Gothic degeneracy, becoming embodiments of frightening alterity.

While their plan entails serial killings, it is undoubtedly rendered more repulsive on account of the cannibalism intrinsic to the dark deeds. Todd might be seen as monstrous for his crimes, but it is Mrs. Lovett who forces clandestine cannibalism on her clientele. Writing on cannibalism, Kristeva states: "I give up cannibalism because abjection ... leads me toward respect for the body of the other, my fellow man, my brother." (1982: 79) As she compels her customers to take up this position as unknowing cannibals, Mrs. Lovett, I argue, can be seen as a gruesome mother-figure, feeding human flesh to others in a display of utter disrespect for the living and the dead. Thus, she becomes instrumental to the cannibalistic cycle, as she grinds the body parts to bake her pies. Burton fully exposes this macabre space to the audience in the scene where Mrs. Lovett teaches the orphan Toby how to go about pulverising the meat. In this tenebrous underground space that lies beneath her shop, Mrs. Lovett grinds the wheel of a great metallic machine, propelling human flesh to ooze from it as it is processed. The machine creaks as it is worked by her, which, together with the squelching sound of the seeping flesh, incites horror in the viewer. Certainly, her absorption in this repulsive space demonstrates her morally dubious and fiercely determined ambition as the Gothic *femme fatale*. She is determined to better her financial and romantic position, even transforming her bakery into a sickening locus of decay and death. Through her association with this space, Burton conflates her embodiment with the leaking and rotting flesh, thereby securing her location as the terrifying and castrating monstrous-feminine. Toby comments on the smell of the place, to which Mrs. Lovett responds that the grates in the floor lead to the sewers of London. Besides the sewers, she mentions the dead rats which also contribute to the stench, although, in fact, the odour is attributable to the corpses which litter the place. Toby is yet to discover the true nature of this space. This connection to bodily waste, I contend, is intentional on Burton's part, as he ties Mrs. Lovett

to that which is unclean and expelled. For Kristeva, corporeal waste such as faeces is intimately related to the body and the abject, a position which Mrs. Lovett takes up as she commands and is physically part of this gothicised factory of human flesh (1982: 69). However, her immersion in this grotesque role also links her to Kristeva's commentary on animal-like practices. Far removed from the dictates of 'proper' womanhood, Mrs. Lovett becomes fused with the hideous processing of human flesh. Akin to a wild animal, she is unrestrained, as she is imaged, like a bacchante, tearing the human body to pieces. Kristeva sees the animal kingdom as potentially "threatening" and constructed as symbolic of uninhabited "sex and murder" (1982: 13). Cultural taboos and customs consequently seek to cast off this unruly side of 'nature,' in establishing humanity as 'clean' and 'pure' (Kristeva 1982: 13). In defiance of the social hegemony, Mrs. Lovett is a creature who engages in disgusting and barbaric practices. While the innocent heroine would never dare to become involved in such a violent scheme, the *femme fatale* is not afraid to get her hands dirty, quite literally in Mrs. Lovett's case. In this manner, Burton establishes her as the evil and bloody monstrous-feminine, the Other who eschews the social order and whose human subjectivity is dramatically challenged.

Such allusions to her location as an excessive body are heightened by Burton through the portrayal of her interactions with the orphan Toby. As the narrative proceeds, the boy comes to distrust Todd, suggested in his poignant song where he pledges his loyalty to the *femme fatale*. In his youthful voice, he sings, "Nothing's gonna harm you, not while I'm around," referring to her as "mum". Clearly concerned for Todd, Mrs. Lovett attempts to bribe the boy with a coin to purchase toffees. In the process, Toby observes that she possesses his former master, Pirelli's, purse. Naturally, in fine *femme fatale* fashion, Mrs. Lovett lies and attempts to placate the child, saying that the purse was a gift from Todd. Rather than relieved, Toby sees this as proof of Todd's crime against Pirelli and wishes to notify the Beadle in order to take legal action. In a further attempt at pacifying the boy, Mrs. Lovett praises the murderous barber and sings gently, "Nothing's gonna harm you, darling." Her eyes glistening with tears, she leads Toby into the underground bakehouse on the pretext that he is to assist with the pie-making. As she leaves him in this gothically sinister space, Mrs. Lovett locks the door, even while calling him "son". In a display of something akin to maternal emotion, she leans heavily against the locked door, clearly upset.

Nevertheless, despite considering the child a “son,” she swiftly discards her apparent maternal instinct and informs Todd of the incident. This deed belies the essentialised gendering of women as nurturing and maternal. By this action, she is established as in dramatic opposition to the heroine Lucy, who is seen to assume the stereotypical position of Woman as wife and caring mother. For Grosz, the maternal body correlates women with excessive “corporeality” and “animality” (1989: 79). Likewise, Creed argues that maternal functioning and the biological make-up of women serve to construct femininity as “associated with the world of nature – and consequently denigrated” (1993: 165). The result is that the maternal body, steeped in notions of the natural order, is feared by men, thereby further othering Woman. Nevertheless, in the earlier scene with Lucy and baby Johanna, Burton portrays the mother-child bond in a positive light. Lucy is the only true mother in the film and the director celebrates this role, as the heroine conforms to societal stipulations regarding women’s allegedly ‘natural’ inclinations. Of course, the Gothic heroine always strives to take up this essentialised position, often being married off at the end of the narrative, where the hope is family and children. Alternatively, Doane notes that the *femme fatale* is situated as “the antithesis of the maternal” (1991: 2). Rather than toe the gendered line, this figure transgresses expectations regarding motherhood and is therefore seen as barren and consequently ‘evil’. Mrs. Lovett is only a pseudo-mother to Toby, yet she blatantly sets aside her so-called maternal duties to the boy. Her abjuration of this role, to protect her love interest with Todd and possibly her own prospering business, adds to her depraved construction. She might be troubled regarding locking Toby up, but this does not hinder her from assisting Todd in hunting the boy down, in order to kill him. Fortunately, the pair is unsuccessful. The fluid and bloody maternal body, constructed as a thing closer to nature and so illustrative of the body/mind gendered binary, is indeed abject. Yet, I argue that the woman who rejects motherhood, especially in a shockingly selfish display of violent self-preservation, is located as far more frightening. In a monstrous-feminine show of preying on a child, Mrs. Lovett becomes an abject and borderline being, one who would be considered entirely ‘unnatural’ according to dominant gendered discourse.

For Halberstam, the Gothic monster is characterised by “monstrous sex and gender” where the fearful hybridity of the creature is seen as relating to “sexual pathology” (1995: 24). In the case of Burton’s *femme fatale*, I posit that she takes on these aspects of the

sexual monster, transgressing not only expectations of her gender, but also the 'correct' manifestation of sexuality. Consequently, she seems to be portrayed as a corrupted and abjectly horrifying embodiment. Mrs. Lovett, in her infatuation with a violent and unstable serial killer, becomes the fatal double of Todd. Rather than see him endangered, and so perhaps herself, she will go to great lengths to kill those who threaten him, even a child. Thus, she is crafted by Burton as a woman whose misguided passion and bodily urges negate her logic, reason and morality. Bronfen comments that the *femme fatale* is always a "sexually aggressive woman" constituting a male fantasy rooted in desire and fear (2004: 106). It is this forceful eroticism which Mrs. Lovett possesses, as her sensuality and romantic obsession trump her morality and perhaps even her very humanity. The essentialised and gendered duality of mind/body is reinforced in this framing of Mrs. Lovett, where, as Grosz indicates, the body is constructed as a feminine space of passion and animalism (1989: xiv). My contention is that through this shocking act of conspiring to kill Toby, Mrs. Lovett becomes a signifier of the castrating monstrous-feminine, a *femme fatale* who has taken her heightened sexuality too far. Destabilising moral and social rule, she is entirely led by her passions, revealing a profound sensual 'sickness' where the barber is concerned. A sexually-governed creature, her embodiment can be seen as exposing the "mutability of the human body, its liability to abhuman becomings," so marking her identity as fluid and abject (Hurley 1996: 77).

While Mrs. Lovett is positioned by Burton as an abject and grotesque being, so too, as I have argued, is Lucy. The final few scenes of the film will see both of these women killed by Todd, while Johanna will find her happy ending with the hero Anthony. Moments prior to her death, Lucy appears at Todd's barbershop searching for the Beadle, apparently intent on reporting Mrs. Lovett's crimes. It is here that she reunites with her husband, after more than fifteen years of separation. However, Todd does not recognise her, indicative of her shocking bodily mutation. Distraught and confused, she searches the barber's shop, while shrilly singing "beadle" repeatedly. As she does so, she spins about the room like a top, in a physical display of her mad inner state. Upon coming face-to-face with Todd, Lucy attempts to warn him of Mrs. Lovett, whom she calls "the devil's wife," unintentionally and ironically insinuating that Todd is the devil. In a close-up of her face, Burton reveals the fallen heroine as possessing scars and putrid sores around her mouth, perhaps an allusion to a sexually

transmitted disease and implied prostitution. Her hair remains dull, partially concealing her face, and her flesh is dun. Far from the ethereal and beautiful heroine, Lucy is a creature whom her own husband cannot identify, telling of her embodiment as “mobile and hybrid,” a loathsome and frightening being (Stallybrass & White 1986: 9). In a moment of lucidity, she seems to transcend her repressed past and questions if she knows Todd. In response, he promptly murders her with his barber’s knife. The clean sweep of his blade produces a sheet-like flow of blood that pours from her neck. As this substance flows down her body, she comes to signify the corpse and is presented by Burton as symbolic of death and deadly wounds. For Kristeva, such images of abjection are “what life withstands,” where the corpse represents the stomach-turning height of the abject, further marking blood as an ‘impure’ discharge (1982: 3). While the wound is “a sign of abjection,” it is also related to the “woman’s reproductive functions and her alliance with the world of nature” (Creed 1993: 82-83). As Lucy is drenched in her own blood, the construct of Woman as a fluid body and as the unknowable Other is reaffirmed. Through this image, Burton establishes her as even more removed from her former self, where she takes on Thing-ness that incites disgust and fear. This is reinforced as Todd drops her body through the trapdoor in the floor of his shop and the audience witnesses her corpse hitting the floor of the underground bakehouse beneath.

It is at this point that Mrs. Lovett, busy in the bakehouse, sees Lucy’s corpse. Clearly recognising Lucy, she says, “You,” following which she attempts to dispose of the body secretly in the furnace. As she drags the corpse across the floor, Lucy is well and truly established as a Thing, something to be hidden and removed. She comes to constitute “a threat to the integrity of the human subject” as she is located as a bloody, slimy and abject corpse (Hurley 1996: 35). Hers is a double threat, not only as the disgusting corpse, but also as a threat to Mrs. Lovett’s subjectivity and romance with Todd. This female corpse thus emerges as far more horrifying than those of the men in the film. Evidently desperate to purge the underground bakery of the corpse’s presence to safeguard her relationship with Todd, Mrs. Lovett does not bother to process the body parts for her pies. However, Todd enters the bakehouse before Mrs. Lovett can incinerate the corpse. Smearred in blood, his appearance constitutes a shocking visual reminder of the gruesome crime committed. I consider that Burton uses this image to stress the duo’s dreadful fall from ‘full’ humanity. In

these final moments of the film, Todd discovers that he has inadvertently killed his own wife and that Mrs. Lovett has, through omission, indulged in the typical treachery of the *femme fatale*. Oddly, when Lucy's corpse is illuminated by the fiery blaze of the furnace, Burton portrays her as somehow more beautiful. Her face seems less scarred, her hair blonder, and traces of her prior youthful appeal resurface. As can perhaps be expected, Todd's reaction to this discovery is to murder Mrs. Lovett, so exposing his allegiance to Lucy and his lack of any depth of feeling for the *femme fatale*. This disposal of the fatal woman is a literary and filmic convention, one which Burton takes further than his relegation of Catwoman to the shadows of Gotham City in *Batman Returns*. Instead, Mrs. Lovett is killed, and appallingly at that. For Doane, the *femme fatale* is habitually destroyed on narrative conclusion in a moment of "textual eradication," whereby the male subject can reestablish control (1991: 2). In Burton's film, this eradication on the part of the threatened male is horrifying and deeply graphic. In response to grasping the extent of her true nature and her obsession with him, Todd reacts cunningly, intent on regaining control. In a show of deceit, equal to her own, he summons her into his arms, feigning forgiveness. As he dances with her, he wields his knife, an image which mirrors their preceding dance of death, but which Burton uses differently, in that it foreshadows her imminent demise. Outwardly affectionate, Todd calls Mrs. Lovett "my pet" and mentions that one ought to "learn forgiveness and try to forget". As she smiles adoringly at him, he twirls her about the room, while she goes so far as to recall her utterly delusional fantasy of residing with him in a seaside cottage. Todd remarks that they ought to "just keep living it [life]" and while they both sing of such sentiments, he forcefully shoves her into the oven, putting a swift end to both her fantasies and life.

While Burton depicts Mrs. Lovett's demise as especially nasty in relation to the other murders in the film, her death, I suggest, is also an allusion to her location as a witch. In the popular fairy tale by the Brothers Grimm *Hansel and Gretel* (1812), the cannibalistic witch is subject to a comparable fate when Gretel shoves her into her own oven, as she prepares to eat the children. In *Sweeney Todd*, while Mrs. Lovett abstains from eating human flesh, she does force cannibalism on others, physically packing the detestable content into her pies. Like the witch of the fairy tale, she does not hesitate to kill children and is similarly punished by being thrust into her own oven. Fire has always been a means by which to purge society of the witch, where the stake has been the site for such practices. Burton presents Mrs.

Lovett's death quite differently from Todd's usual habit of slitting his victims' throats. Even Lucy is subjected to the same treatment, despite her death being a pivotal moment in the film. Mrs. Lovett's demise is fashioned so as to 'fit the crime,' becoming a spectacle which the viewer watches in morbid fascination. Recalling the punishment for sinners in Dante's fourteenth century visualisation of a hellish and fiery inferno, the fierce flames lick her body, while she shrieks, writhing about in agony with her eyes wide in terror. Hardened to her cries, Todd closes the weighty door of the oven and the shot portrays his steely glare through the hole in the oven door, as he watches her burn. Burton's punishment of his *femme fatale* is wholly ruthless and complete, as she is dramatically and visually destroyed. While this figure is often killed off upon narrative conclusion, the director metes out her punishment in a manner that cannot be described as entirely typical. Instead of a swift and perhaps even 'tidy' end, Mrs. Lovett's final execution is almost uncomfortable to watch, but perhaps her torment is fitting given Burton's representation of a very dark and Gothic London. In its explicit detail, her death carries Burton's Gothic thematic "obsession with death" to the final minutes of the narrative (Beville 2009: 11). Like Catwoman, Mrs. Lovett works as a patchwork monster, composed of different signifiers of anxiety in much the same way as Shelley's (1818) monster of *Frankenstein*. In Shelley's narrative, Victor Frankenstein's monster pledges to incinerate himself following his creator's death upon a "funeral pile" of "torturing flames" (2012: chapter 24). Certainly, it is not Mrs. Lovett's intention to be burnt alive, but the motif of fire evidently emerges as a suitable death for the threatening Gothic monster. For Kristeva, fire functions in the "pure/impure distinction" in that the 'clean' animal is traditionally sacrificed in a biblical sense to purify that which is impure (1982: 92). In this final scene, I maintain that Mrs. Lovett's death takes on the appearance of a purification ritual. Thus, fire acts to purge the "abject other" in order to see the storyworld of the film "reborn without the taint of defilement" (Weiss 1999: 95).

The film concludes with Todd holding Lucy's bloody corpse in his arms, singing of "a barber and his wife". The words, sung by Todd earlier in the film, recall the couple's former marital felicity, so radically accentuating their dreadful fall from bliss. The orphan Toby, still entrapped in the darkened underground space, approaches the barber ominously from behind as he sings. Prior to the closing scene, the boy finally discovers the secret ingredient in Mrs. Lovett's pies, following an incident where he plucks a concealed fingertip from his

mouth, as he consumes a pie while trapped in the bakehouse. The child then witnesses the sordid workings of the trapdoor leading to Todd's barbershop, as the barber kills the Beadle, whose corpse falls onto the ground before Toby. Consequently, the orphan emerges as heroic, in that it is he who slits Todd's throat from behind, cleansing society of the barber's dark deeds. Interestingly, Todd appears to welcome death, pausing during his song and seeming to expose his neck to the blade. As he dies, his head flops forward and blood from his neck wound streaks across Lucy's pallid face, pooling onto the floor. Husband and wife are finally reunited in a grisly and bloody embrace, and it is with this image that Burton concludes the film. This graphic and abundant show of bright red blood recalls the film's opening credits, so enclosing the narrative and symbolising the end of the cycle of death and violence. Their mingled blood, while suggesting their eternal bond, I also see as redolent of the monstrous positions to which they both have fallen. A bloodied mirror image of each other, the final visual is both poignant and repulsive. However, their child Johanna lives, and has escaped Turpin's malevolent and corrupting authority, unlike her parents. Positioned as the Gothic heroine, despite her limited transgression and attempt at agency, Johanna remains pure in relation to the other women in the film. So, Burton grants her the fairy tale ending with her hero, killing off the villains and villainesses in the process. Like so many Gothic tales, the film's conclusion involves a distinct separation between good and evil, proving "deeply conservative in the end" (Holland & Sherman 1977: 286).

The Gothic genre, according to Kahane, is a site "where boundaries are explored and transgressions allowed expression" (1985: 351). This navigation of limits and manifestation of transgression are undoubtedly brought to the fore in Burton's Gothic musical *Sweeney Todd*. In its exploration of the murderous undertakings of a disturbed barber and his co-conspirator, the *femme fatale* Mrs. Lovett, Burton's film abounds with graphic images of decay and death. In this chapter, I have sought to indicate the degree to which Burton crafts his female characters with recourse to images of monstrousness, abjection and transgression. Consequently, I contend that these women come to take on the excessive embodiment associated with the Gothic. Like *Batman Returns*, Burton deploys the good/evil duality in fashioning his female forms, so recalling the Gothic tradition of the 'good' girl heroine and the depraved and oftentimes sensual 'bad' monstrous *femme fatale*. However, as I have argued, his heroines subvert their positioning and destabilise their normative roles,

as they take on certain traits of the *femme fatale*. Lucy and Johanna, I have maintained, can initially be seen as representative of the typical innocent Gothic heroine, a figure intimately related to Patmore's (1863) idealisation of 'the Angel in the House'. Yet, Burton permits these female characters to challenge this role, as they disrupt the stipulations for the 'good' girl. In the process, their embodiment becomes conflated with the discourse of hysteria and madness, so forcing their bodies into a space of alterity. Ragged and filthy while 'afflicted' with gendered 'mental illness,' Burton, I assert, ties both mother and daughter to notions that Woman is all body, signifying the unruly and excessive Other. It is Mrs. Lovett, however, who is most expressive of monstrous excess, as she crosses physical and psychological boundaries in her appalling pie-making business. For Halberstam, the Gothic gives rise to "deviant subjectivities opposite which the normal, the healthy, and the pure can be known" (1995: 2). Indicative of an irregular subjectivity, Mrs. Lovett increasingly comes to be associated with degeneration and a frightening corporeality as the film progresses. However, the 'normal' female characters, while acting as foils to Mrs. Lovett, also become steeped in images of bodily abnormality and difference. In a Gothic horror teasing out motifs of cannibalism, imprisonment, bloody murder and barbaric vengeance, it seems that Burton has not shied away from establishing all of his characters, male and female, as hybrid and abject Others. The focus of this chapter, however, has been Burton's heroines, Lucy and Johanna, and his memorable *femme fatale*, Mrs. Lovett. Through her death, the director comes to evoke the customary Gothic overthrow of the evil woman, while permitting the young heroine Johanna to attain the sought-after 'happily ever after' ending. In my next chapter, I will continue this exploration into the representation of the feminine body, through an examination of Burton's portrayal of the female characters, both good and evil, in his more recent film, *Dark Shadows* (2012).

Chapter Three: *Dark Shadows*

If I can't have you, my love, I'll destroy you!

– Angelique Bouchard in *Dark Shadows*

Produced after both *Batman Returns* (1992) and *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* (2007), hereafter referred to as *Sweeney Todd*, Tim Burton's *Dark Shadows* (2012), I contend, again explores the motif of the female body as somehow strange and set apart from the 'normative' human subject. Based on the American Gothic soap opera by the same name which aired from 1966 to 1971, the film, like *Batman Returns*, reveals the director's fascination with the genres of fantasy and the Gothic. In envisioning his fantastical and oftentimes humorous storyworld, Burton creates supernatural beings, both good and evil, who haunt the 'real' world of 1970s America. For David Punter, the Gothic is concerned with the "fiction of haunted castles, of heroines preyed on by unspeakable terrors, of the blackly lowering villain, of ghosts, vampires, monsters and werewolves" (1996: 1). In *Dark Shadows*, Burton evidently calls upon such notoriously Gothic tropes, as embodiments of the vampire, witch, werewolf and ghost are brought to life in his narrative.

Not only is the main character Barnabas Collins (Johnny Depp) transformed into a vampire, but the heroine Josette DuPres (Bella Heathcote), his innocent love interest, returns as a waif-like ghost after her murder. Her modern double Victoria Winters (Bella Heathcote) is ultimately also transfigured into a vampire. These irregular bodily alterations can be traced back to the witch Angelique Bouchard (Eva Green) and her perilous romantic obsession with Barnabas. Set in 1972, the action of the narrative is triggered by the vampire Barnabas, who escapes the confines of his coffin after being enclosed in the space for one hundred and ninety six years. Following an affair with his servant Angelique in the eighteenth century, Barnabas foolishly informs her that he does not love her and proceeds to flaunt his love for the heroine Josette before her. Unbeknown to Barnabas, Angelique practises witchcraft and retaliates by killing Josette and cursing Barnabas with immortality as a vampire. While she enforces his mutation, the sorceress also, in true *femme fatale* fashion, contains him in a coffin for almost two hundred years, so revealing her power and subversion of male dominance. However, Angelique's plans are frustrated, as Josette returns to the 'real' world as a ghost in the twentieth century. Her mission is evidently to

guide Victoria, her contemporary double, to the Collins's family home. Bearing a noticeable resemblance to the dead Josette, Victoria is taken on as a governess by the Collins family, just prior to Barnabas's escape from the coffin and return to society. As can perhaps be expected, he falls in love with the heroine Victoria. His new romantic attachment only serves to infuriate the immortal Angelique, who now reigns over the sleepy town of Collinsport, a town founded by Barnabas's family, and who continues to harbour a dangerous and erotic affection for the vampire.

Critical reception of the film has varied, with one account tepidly calling the narrative "a reasonably, moderately,whelmingly good film" (Bradshaw 2012: para. 1). While it might be said to lack the dark appeal of *Sweeney Todd*, for my purposes *Dark Shadows*, with its comedic Gothic overtones and recourse to bodily alterities, provides ample scope to probe the director's crafting of the female body. Like both of the films under study in the preceding chapters, *Dark Shadows* similarly reveals Burton's interest in bodily otherness and the thematic concern of revenge. In *Batman Returns*, it is Selena/Catwoman who seeks justice for her own murder, while in *Sweeney Todd*, the barber becomes entangled in a bloody vengeance scheme, with the aid of the corrupt and conniving *femme fatale* Mrs. Lovett. Both films explore the need to exact justice, although the protagonists arguably take their retribution too far. Yet, in *Dark Shadows*, the witch Angelique uses her powers to harm and even murder anyone Barnabas loves, be it romantically or platonically. As a result, Burton takes the motif of revenge further in this film, as, although heartlessly spurned, Angelique's vengeance seems disproportional to Barnabas's 'crimes'. Burton again relates this concern to corporeal liminality, where Angelique's violence is magnified on account of her supernatural abilities. As she wreaks havoc, she can be seen to multiply the incidence of distorted body images, turning, as she does, 'full' humans into vampires, werewolves and ghosts. Consequently, like *Batman Returns* and *Sweeney Todd*, the film largely centres upon the passions and violence of a strong woman, in this case the witch Angelique. While she is an agent of potency and transgression, I argue that she is presented by Burton as a monstrous-feminine Other, one who is both frightening and alluring. As I have indicated in my previous chapters, Burton seems to draw on the good/evil stereotyping of women in his films and *Dark Shadows* is certainly no exception. Acting as 'good' counterparts to Angelique, Josette and Victoria take on the role of the Gothic heroine, a figure who is

frequently subjugated and abused by men. However, in *Dark Shadows*, in an inversion of traditional Gothic tropes, it is the witch who causes their suffering, rather than the male villain. Nevertheless, as is apparent in *Batman Returns* and *Sweeney Todd*, Burton permits his heroines a degree of agency, even while this remains relatively circumscribed in comparison to the sheer force that is Angelique. Burton's heroines, although embodiments of the feminine ideal, also subvert this construction as they become atypical and even unnerving beings. In this rendering of the heroines by Burton, I consider that they are offered a certain freedom and rejection of passivity, active traits customarily associated with the dark figure of the *femme fatale*.

Feminine embodiment emerges as central to Burton's film, where unease regarding what women might do is communicated as early as the first scene of the narrative. In this initial sequence set in 1760, the camera pans onto a ship in the docks, while Barnabas's voice-over eerily talks of the bonds of blood and family.¹⁸ It becomes apparent that the ship will transport the Collins family from Liverpool to Maine, as they seek opportunities in the New World. As the shot moves around the ship, Burton reveals a wooden Nereid figurehead on the prow of the ship, an image which already hints at what is Other about women. Immediately thereafter, Angelique and her mother are seen on the dock and it becomes clear that they occupy a menial position and are employed to serve the Collins family. Demonstrative of her boldness, Angelique stares at the very young Barnabas, causing her mother to reprimand her. By this action, Burton establishes Angelique's imminent passion for him. This desire will later result in the two of them having an affair, but Barnabas spurns Angelique in 1776, preferring the innocent and virginal heroine Josette. In a fit of jealous rage, Angelique employs her powers as a witch to curse Josette, causing her to fall to her death from Widow's Hill, a cliff near Barnabas's family manor, Collinwood. More than the dynamics between the *femme fatale*, heroine and hero, the film's cast is dominated by an array of strong, deviant women. Such a show of female power stands in stark opposition to *Batman Returns* and *Sweeney Todd*, where the narratives are largely populated by forceful male characters.

¹⁸ The 1760s saw the rise of the Gothic novel, with the publication of Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), which largely established the Gothic tradition and stock motifs of the genre.

Indeed, Barnabas is almost entirely surrounded by women in the film, including Elizabeth Collins Stoddard (Michelle Pfeiffer), the protective matriarch of the Collinwood mansion, her rebellious daughter Carolyn (Chloë Grace Moretz), whom Angelique cursed with werewolf morphing abilities as an infant, and their resident psychiatrist Dr. Julia Hoffman (Helena Bonham Carter), who turns herself into a vampire. This demonstration of female influence is pulled through the film, where, at its culmination, Angelique is defeated by the spectral mother of David, the nephew of Elizabeth. Unlike the male characters of *Batman Returns* and *Sweeney Todd*, touched on in my preceding chapters, Barnabas can be considered a weak hero. His status as a vampire proves utterly ineffectual when faced with the implacable wrath of the witch Angelique. While this portrayal of forceful femininity is intended to incite unease in the viewer, Burton's film is, above all, a dark comedy. As has always been the case with the Gothic tradition, the film is about excess and the merger of horror and laughter. More than a narrative fitting neatly under the Gothic umbrella, *Dark Shadows* can be seen as a postmodern blurring of the boundaries between the genres of fantasy, horror, comedy and the Gothic. Rather than truly frightening, the film is amusing and overstated, reminiscent of the soap opera tradition from which it originates. As with all fantastical tales, Burton presents the witch Angelique as disturbing, but also immensely droll. Her monstrous-feminine transgression of accepted gender norms will see her punished by way of a painful and humiliating death. In the process, the unsettling Other is rejected from the 'clean' and 'proper' male order, which comes to be purified of her malefic influence.

While Burton evokes the witch of traditional fairy tales in his representation of the *femme fatale*, he also draws on the 'good' girl of the Gothic tradition in constructing Josette and Victoria. As I have argued in my previous chapters, Burton's three films under study seem to indicate the extent to which the director draws on the time-honoured stereotypes of women. A dichotomy is set up in his films, where Woman can be seen as occupying a conflicting pole in the good woman/evil woman binary. Josette and Victoria, as Burton's heroines, reveal the director's propensity to deploy a set of fairly fixed physical characteristics by which to communicate their goodness and virtue. Like Selena, Lucy and Johanna, the heroines of *Dark Shadows* are pale, fair-haired beauties whose 'whiteness' signifies "the angel virgin's ... purity" and tantalising "female vulnerability" (Gilbert & Gubar

1979: 616). In opposition to this location, Angelique stands as an incarnation of evil. Her witch-like prowess renders her an erotically-empowered woman, so augmenting the perceived threat of the 'whore' to any man who gets in her way. Unlike *Batman Returns* and *Sweeney Todd*, Angelique is not overly associated with the colour black, as Catwoman and Mrs. Lovett come to be. Although she certainly does wear this colour, a symbol of her assumed depravity, she is an apparently blonde-haired beauty. Consequently, she offers a contrast to Catwoman, who wears a black mask covering her blonde hair and Mrs. Lovett, who is a dark-haired villainess. Nevertheless, Angelique, I consider, emerges as far more of a threat to sanctioned society, harming and beguiling everyone and everything in her path.

As a result of this deliberate fashioning, Burton once again reveals a tendency to render his female characters as essentialist constructs. For Drucilla Cornell, gendered essentialism entails viewing "Woman as a set of identifiable properties" (1999: 4). The 'virgin' of such discourse is considered to embody Woman's 'natural' traits of purity and innocence, while the 'whore,' likewise and ironically, takes on Woman's 'natural' excessive eroticism and degeneracy. However, while I see Burton as employing such stereotypes, I also contend that he undermines this dualism in the film. Just as Selena morphs into Catwoman and Lucy and Johanna demonstrate varying degrees of the alleged manifestations of hysteria, so the heroines of *Dark Shadows* transgress their roles. Josette, far removed from the idealised heroine, transfigures into a translucent, blue-toned ghost. On the other hand, Victoria takes on associations with mental illness, as she is committed to an asylum on account of her relationship with the ghost Josette. Ultimately, she is transformed into a vampire. While they can be seen as destabilising the gendered binary, as they subvert their locations as 'good' girls, they also suggest the director's consistent exploration of borderline corporeality. Excessive and somewhat rebellious, his leading female characters, I assert, come to signify the abject Others of the Kristevan (1982) theory and, as such, act as embodiments of Barbara Creed's (1993) 'monstrous-feminine'. As Burton situates his female characters in *Batman Returns* and *Sweeney Todd* as liminal creatures evoking alterity, so I will argue that the heroines Josette and Victoria and the *femme fatale* Angelique come to suggest a Gothic hybridity, haunting and violating culturally accepted boundaries.

The motif of the Gothic can be seen as a central thread throughout Burton's dark comedy. For Maria Beville, the Gothic tradition involves the employment of an "ominous atmosphere" and an "archaic, mysterious abode" (2009: 42). Burton draws on such staples of the genre, visualising the gothicised mansion Collinwood, Barnabas's family home. Built in the eighteenth century, the mansion recalls the traditional Gothic castle, a trope consistently deployed in the earliest Gothic novels, which first emerged during this century. A mass of overgrown gardens, dark spires, great staircases and gloomy rooms, the mansion offers an ideal space for the manifestation of certain "supernatural haunting[s]," in particular that of the ghosts Josette and the mother of the young boy David (Beville 2009: 42). The Gothic tradition has always celebrated and simultaneously feared the haunted house, where such tales have become integral to the genre. However, while Burton positions the figure of the ghost in this space, he also uses the structure as a refuge for a range of hybrid creatures. For Jerrold E. Hogle, Gothic fiction entails a blurring of the boundaries between "the earthly laws of conventional reality and the possibilities of the supernatural" (2002: 2). It is the supernatural, and that which is not entirely human, which haunts the Gothic and its eerie and portentous structures, a concern which Burton explores across his oeuvre.

Within the mansion of *Dark Shadows*, Burton portrays an array of liminal beings, providing a space for the ghost of David's drowned mother, the spectral heroine Josette, as well as the werewolf Carolyn and the vampire Barnabas. There is a certain rupturing of corporeal limits within this structure, where the borders between the living and dead, the human and animal are compromised. The figures which arise within the narrative can consequently be seen as somehow on the border of 'full' humanity or what Kelly Hurley calls "between species" (1996: 10). Rather than clearly definable, they emerge as Things not quite nameable. In her role as witch, Angelique embodies an enigmatic superhuman physicality, even while retaining elements of her humanity. As the narrative progresses, however, it becomes apparent that she is quite literally physically hollow, indicative of a radical slippage from 'proper' humanity. This position between species and beyond taxonomy is a location which Josette and Victoria similarly occupy. Presented as eerie and irregular beings, Burton aligns these characters with the discourse of the spectre, the double and the vampire. Like the *femme fatale*, they come to take on Thing-ness or what Bill Brown

terms a lack of “phenomenal form” (2001: 5). In this evasion of classification, I argue that Burton’s female characters become embodiments of “the Otherness of the monster,” a figure unlike the ‘fully’ human and therefore both repulsive and potentially dangerous (Beville 2014: 6). However, while these women incite disquiet in the audience, they are also, I suggest, constructed by Burton as signifiers of desire, because not only are they beautiful, but they also provoke curiosity. There is a certain fascination with the ghost of Josette, who intermittently drifts through the mansion, and with the heroine Victoria, who unnervingly resembles her.

This arousal of desire and fear when confronted with the Other is a concept fundamental to Julia Kristeva’s (1982) notion of abjection, where fascination and repulsion vie with each another. Within Burton’s fantasy world of *Dark Shadows*, the director fashions figures both ‘impossible’ and ‘unthinkable’. While such manifestations habitually incite fear within the Gothic, Burton tempers this portrayal through his customary use of humour throughout the film. The result is that his creatures, while unsettling, also provoke laughter and intrigue, such as Barnabas’s polite and regrettable vampiric consumption of human bodies. Always one to identify with the outsider, Burton goes so far as to present even his villainess Angelique in a somewhat sympathetic light. Rather than truly terrifying and stereotypically ‘bad,’ she is amusing and witty, a technique which the director similarly employs when crafting Catwoman and Mrs. Lovett. Her comical intellect can be seen in her response to Barnabas following his escape from the coffin within which she imprisoned him. In reaction to Barnabas’s rage, Angelique casually tells the vampire to “Get over it” and that his confinement was “only a hundred and ninety-six” years, rather than two centuries.

This continual conflation of fear and allure, I argue, indicates that the film works to portray images of abjection throughout the interplay between witchcraft, vampirism, werewolves, spectres and even a mansion which comes to life, fissures and bleeds. For Kristeva, as I have demonstrated, the abject is that which is “ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable” (1982: 1). The Gothic is crawling with such borderline figures and it is this Kristevan framework which Hogle (2002) consequently employs in his exploration of Gothic embodiment. Hogle considers that the liminal beings imagined within the genre can be seen as “culturally associated with the otherness of femininity” (2002: 10). Discursively, the body is a feminine realm, where strange bodies

become all the more 'feminine' as they contravene the alleged 'masculine' space of 'proper' rationality and culture. For Beville, the Gothic presents otherness as "a form of the unrepresentable" (2009: 41). In this portrayal, the beings of the Gothic genre provide a space where "the boundaries between self and other dissolve" (Beville 2009: 41). This collapse of limits constitutes a site of abject disgust and terror, all too often conflated with the unruly female body and its horrifying fluids. Given this connection between frightening corporeality and Woman, Creed (1993), in probing the female monster of horror films, closely connects this figure to Kristeva's argument pertaining to abjection and the transgression of bodily borders.

For Creed, the 'monstrous-feminine' is a figure "defined in terms of her sexuality" (1993: 3). It is her otherness which is foregrounded and her 'alien' biological functioning which is stressed in the construction of her bodily deviance. Such a focus on the otherness of femininity, I contend, is apparent in Burton's film. The *femme fatale* is portrayed as a witch, a figure who has always been a woman and who comes to embody male fears about the sexual Other. Not only is Angelique an aggressively erotic creature, but she epitomises the jealous shrew and one who calls upon the elements to do her bidding. So, Burton essentialises her gendered representation, conflating her with discourses of Woman as nature. Even Burton's heroines conjure up images of sexual difference, being fashioned into liminal beings. Josette and Victoria are presented as otherworldly doubles by Burton, women separated by centuries, but somehow connectedly physically and spiritually. While this relationship is demonstrative of a monstrous-feminine disruption to the social order, it also recalls the motif of the other woman who haunts. Much like Charlotte Brontë's (1847) Bertha Mason, Josette is illustrative of the woman who lingers just out of sight, watching her former lover. Yet, unlike Brontë's novel, these women can be seen as one being, a Thing beyond normative reason. Ultimately, they are supernaturally united upon the narrative's conclusion, when Victoria is resurrected as a vampire, a figure known for excessive and 'improper' lust. Consequently, Burton's heroines and his *femme fatale* can be understood as beings who subvert "the boundary between the body image and what is not" (Weiss 1999: 89). By this, I suggest that Burton takes their forms into a territory far removed from the 'appropriate' feminine role. In this rupturing of limitations, there is also a certain freedom in

that, as Creed contends, “the notion of the monstrous-feminine challenges the view that femininity, by definition, constitutes passivity” (1993: 151).

In her role as a sexualised sorceress, the character of Angelique, I consider, reveals Woman’s potential for undermining the male hierarchy. As the film’s *femme fatale*, she seems to deny Mary Ann Doane’s (1991) assertion that this figure occupies a position of ambiguity in cinematic discourse. For Doane, the fatal woman can be located “between passivity and activity” in that her power is “usually not subject to her conscious will” (1991: 2). In the case of Angelique, like Catwoman, she is supernaturally empowered, even while situated as erotically embodied. Certainly, she uses sensuality for her own purposes, flaunting her body as a weapon before Barnabas, much the same way as Catwoman does in the Batman narrative. However, this is taken further by Burton in the character of Angelique, as this *femme fatale* is a witch, a figure who is anything but passive, and who has always been associated with dark and demonic forces. As she employs her otherworldly abilities, the power which Angelique wields is certainly not, as Doane indicates, unconscious. Within the Gothic, I argue that there is room for the *femme fatale* to be far more than a projection of male fears pertaining to female desirability. Rather, as a witch, Angelique takes on what Creed calls the “one incontestably monstrous role in the horror film that belongs to woman” (1993: 73). As I will demonstrate in this chapter, Angelique readily adopts this role, as Burton crafts her as at once gothically excessive and in possession of a purposive and conscious agency. Intent on destabilising hegemonic structures and destroying anyone Barnabas loves, she emerges as a far more disruptive and anxiety-inducing figure than the fairly ineffectual male vampire. Yet, while she can be seen as frightening, she also offers an intriguing image of forceful sexuality. Even Barnabas, as much as he claims to hate her, cannot resist her appeal. Like Batman and Catwoman, the vampire and witch engage in sexual games, although allegedly ‘at war’ with each other. More than this, her embodiment is taken into Gothic excess as it becomes a sign of mysterious forces. Rather than viewing her body and powers as separate concerns, Burton seems to conflate her sensual form and dark magic. As a result, Angelique comes to be a far more dangerous figure than the hag-like witch, as her deviance is as much due to her aggressive eroticism as her black magic. Like Catwoman, it is her sexuality and supernatural

ability which construct her form equally, providing her with real agency, even while magnifying and mirroring her threat.

Standing in opposition to the powerful figure of the *femme fatale*, Burton offers his heroines a rather limited degree of agency, which nevertheless permits them to challenge their stereotypically weak roles. As I have indicated, Josette and Victoria can be thought of as a single being, a strange feminine form whom I will term Josette-Victoria. While she emerges as a fascinating incarnation, Josette-Victoria in her role as the conventional and rather weak ingénue, can be seen as utterly overshadowed by Angelique. Regardless, Burton brings Josette back to the world of the living as a ghost, permitting her a level of agency as she elides definitions and embodies the haunting Other. Free to float about unseen by all except Victoria, Josette uses her knowledge of the past to guide her double to Collinsport. To a point, she consequently drives the narrative, as she propels Victoria to Barnabas. While there might be a measure of liberty in her invisibility and dead/not-quite-dead status, she nonetheless appears trapped in this transitional state. Only once she enters Victoria's vampiric body, at the end of the film, can she attain her freedom and reunion with her lover Barnabas. Unlike most narratives featuring vampiric mutations, Burton presents Victoria as a woman wholly conscious of the extent of her decision to take on supernatural alterity. Insistent almost to the point of bullying Barnabas into biting her, Victoria is portrayed as a woman who actively eschews her passive role as Gothic heroine. In turn, her altered embodiment as a vampire, although largely unwitnessed by the audience, will permit her greater autonomy. Such independence on Victoria's part is developed throughout the film, especially as Burton reveals her flight from the confines of the asylum. As a child, her conformist parents commit her into this space, so as to see her 'cured' of her insanity. Rather than believe her claims that she can see the ghost Josette, ashamed and embarrassed, they turn their backs on her. Her escape from incarceration, while redolent of the Gothic heroine, who is always in flight, also indicates her attempt to reject passivity and persecution. It is of interest that this character is named Victoria, perhaps suggestive of the Victorian medical treatment meted out to the troublesome woman, while also reminding of her ultimate victory over Angelique. Of course, this is an area which Burton probes in *Sweeney Todd*, when Johanna is similarly wrongfully detained within an asylum. Recalling this earlier film, the heroine Josette-Victoria is also largely peripheral to the action of the

narrative, which is dominated by the magnetism of Angelique. Even so, I will argue that Josette-Victoria, like Angelique, assumes aspects of the monstrous-feminine, whose abject alterity unsettles accepted standards of normalcy.

While Josette as a ghost and Victoria as a vampire certainly destabilise hegemonic norms, Burton, as I have argued, also presents these female characters as doubles, a prevalent Gothic concern. Just as *femme fatale* Catwoman in *Batman Returns* is Selena's alter ego, and Johanna in *Sweeney Todd* bears a marked resemblance to her mother Lucy, so the heroine Victoria mirrors Josette. Rather than women presented by Burton as alter egos or engaged in a mother-daughter relationship, *Dark Shadows* represents the culmination of the director's exploration into the motif of doubling. Performed by actress Bella Heathcote, both heroines are essentially portrayed as one being, separated only by historical context and the boundary of life and death. For Judith Halberstam, "Gothic effect depends upon the production of a monstrous double" (1995: 54). While Josette and Victoria might be constructed as the ethereally beautiful heroine, their doubling takes them into the realm of something which is not entirely human. Their inexplicable and disquieting forms come to signify the excess and fear inherent to the Gothic and mark their femininity as somehow dreadful and abject. In his influential work on the concept of the double, Sigmund Freud argues that the double carries an "extraordinary degree of uncanniness" and can be seen as "the uncanny harbinger of death" (2003: 142-143).¹⁹ Freud bases his contention on ancient cultural practices of creating images of the self in the hope of attaining a degree of immortality (2003: 142). Surpassing this societal phase, the double, according to Freud, has come to stand for "an object of terror" (2003: 143). In Burton's film, I contend that Josette-Victoria could be illustrative of this terror, but she is perhaps more a representation of Gothic suspense, as her separate embodiment takes on attributes of the uncanny and death. This is especially true as one of the doubles in this case is, in fact, dead. Thus, their distinct bodies are strangely linked across the border of life and death, provoking a sense of disquiet within the viewer. This corporeal apprehension, I consider, is made all the more threatening on account of their fantastic monstrosity.

For Olu Jenzen, Freud's uncanny indicates a certain gendered bias, especially in his mention of "the repetitive 'haunting' of castration anxiety" and the "anxiety revolving

¹⁹ For a full account of Freud's concept of the uncanny, see *The Uncanny* (1919).

around female genitalia and the womb as uncanny” (2007: 4). While the double might not be particularly gendered, Jenzen’s argument suggests that the uncanny can be seen as affiliated with the ‘feminine’ pole of the male/female duality. The uncanny is about the return of that which is repressed, even where, as Vijay Mishra points out, the original is not specifically unsettling (1994: 76). Far removed from the rational and scientific, the uncanny cannot be neatly explained or identified. Instead, it opens up a space for that which is inexplicable, yet strangely and frighteningly familiar. In Burton’s film, while the heroine Josette is not disconcerting when alive, her return as a spectral presence indicates something uncanny, a curious hybrid being who disrupts and denies corporeal borders. As an embodiment of the Gothic return of the repressed, her similitude to Victoria takes this image further, as she occupies the position of the troubling and uncanny double. For Creed, the double “disturbs the boundary which establishes each human being as a discreet entity” (1993: 53-54). She considers such a disruption as intimately related to the abject, because “the uncanny also disturbs identity and order” (Creed 1993: 54). So, Josette and Victoria can be seen as abject and uncanny beings whose physical forms challenge the boundary of individual identity, thus establishing a deep sense of Gothic unease and disquieting repetition.

Hurley, in discussing the uncanny, sees this sensation as “a symptomatic response to liminal phenomena” (1996: 40). My contention is that Burton constructs Josette-Victoria as just such a phenomenon, doubled in the incarnation of two women radically alike, but separated by death. The alterity of the heroines is taken further on account of their unusual and otherworldly relationship over the years. Instead of fleeing from the presence of Josette, Victoria connects with the ghost and their relationship is established by Burton as something akin to an intimacy. Burton even goes so far as to depict Victoria playing dolls with the ghost Josette as a child and, as an adult, allowing herself to be guided to Collinwood by her spectral friend. The suggestion is the trust which Victoria places in Josette, who can be seen as a ghostly pseudo-mother replacing her own mother who so cruelly rejected her. For Kristeva and Katharine A. Jenson “passion between two women is one of the most intense figures of doubling” (1987: 148). In this friendship, there seems to be a certain passion and understanding of the ‘female’ role, taking their doubled body spaces into an even more uncomfortable and anxiety-provoking territory. While physically

alike, this doubling extends to the metaphysical, made apparent by Burton when Josette's soul becomes embedded within Victoria's body once she undergoes her vampiric resurrection. As I have indicated, while Josette might represent a sort of mother-figure, she is also illustrative of the other woman, a deceased former lover who chillingly watches over her partner with another woman. She comes to take on the servant Angelique's prior position as one who witnesses her ex-lover with a new woman, indicative of another degree of doubling in the film. The dynamic between Josette and Victoria, I consider, recalls Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* (1938), where the heroine is haunted by the previous Mrs. de Winter, her husband's former wife. For Catherine Spooner, the haunting of the heroine in *Rebecca* signifies a "complex and explicit threat to the heroine's sense of self" (2004: 134). In the same way, I suggest that Victoria's sense of self is eradicated by her doubling with Josette. Rather than free to control her destiny, Victoria's fate seems tied to a warped repetition of Josette's own life and romantic involvement with Barnabas. Consequently, their doubling takes on an even more ominous undertone, so stressing their uncanny construction.

As Burton positions his heroines as somehow removed from 'full' humanity, their bodies can be seen as transgressive to a certain extent, in that they come to subvert the dictates of 'proper' femininity. Nevertheless, the heroine Josette-Victoria is still situated as vastly opposed to the 'bad' girl Angelique, so establishing the dualistic stereotyping of women. For Vernon Lee "women, hitherto, have been as much a creation of men as the grafted fruit tree, the milch cow, or the gelding" (2013: 294). Lee's comment makes apparent the constructs at work in 'defining' Woman. More than this, she argues that the Victorian woman, who was compelled by the male hierarchy to remain a passive 'good' girl, can be understood as "a piece of property" or a doll-like plaything for men (Lee 2013: 270-271). The relegation of Woman to little more than a doll, an inanimate simulacrum signifying idealised femininity, is suggestive of the denial of agency ascribed to the so-called 'inferior' female. Within feminist studies, much has been written on this emblematic Victorian woman, a figure who has become synonymous with the concept of 'the Angel in the House'. For Elizabeth Langland, this woman is "a tenuous construction," one who is located as the "passive domestic angel" in contrast to "the active, public man" (1995: 62). Largely limited to life, and even death, within the Gothic manor, the heroine Josette-Victoria, I consider, comes to represent this faultless Victorian woman. While Victoria, in her

role as governess, is responsible for child-rearing, Josette is entrapped within the domestic sphere until she can reunite with her former lover. Through the use of these fairly rigid roles, Burton seems to recall romanticised notions of Woman as wife and mother. This stereotypical position of the heroine the director contrasts with Angelique, who is anything but maternal and gentle in her domineering role as erotic aggressor and shrewd businesswoman. As I have indicated in my previous chapters, it was Coventry Patmore's (1863) verse sequence that first cemented the construct of the so-called 'Angel in the House'. For Patmore, this woman is naturally in possession of a "meek and royal mind" and consistently offers humankind at large "[t]he simple gift of her free grace" (1863: 41). Seemingly flawless, as Nina Auerbach remarks, she "is an angel, immune from the human condition" (1982: 64). In Burton's film, however, while the director draws on this essentialist position, he simultaneously challenges this figure's purity and self-abnegation. Josette apparently has rather self-interested motives in guiding her double Victoria to Barnabas, while Victoria unapologetically communicates with this ghost and forces Barnabas to convert her into a revenant. Their innocence, I suggest, is consequently called into question, in much the same way as that of the heroines of *Batman Returns* and *Sweeney Todd*.

The mythical figure of 'the Angel in the House' might be a Victorian ideological construct, but she is also a creature who consistently finds her way into the Gothic genre. For Mary Ellen Snodgrass, "the heart-thumping stuff" of the Gothic is the "victimization of tender, vulnerable, young women" (2005: 118). While continually subject to threat, the heroine would never dream of retaliating in a manner not deemed unreservedly pure and good. In fact, Ann B. Tracy considers this woman's virtue as almost "preternatural and Edenic" (1981: 9). As I have suggested in my previous chapters, the excessive incorruptibility and victimhood of the heroine bears a salient resemblance to the Victorian domestic angel, a woman similarly physically and psychologically confined. Of course, she must also be beautiful, a characteristic which Burton again provides to the heroine in *Dark Shadows*. With her soft blonde hair and big blue eyes, Josette-Victoria, like Burton's other heroines explored in this study, can be seen as representative of an almost ethereal presence. Fair, dainty and, more often than not, clothed in pastels, she is the quintessential heroine, one who embodies the ideals of 'correct' femininity. While the heroine is always good, she is also a figure circumscribed by male authority. Often physically detained within a Gothic

structure, such as the castle, abbey or haunted house, the heroine largely remains utterly helpless and hysterical. In Burton's films, however, this motif of confinement is frequently deployed somewhat differently, so as to take into account the modern context. Selena, in *Batman Returns*, for instance, is entrapped within the male business environment of Max Shreck's office. In *Dark Shadows*, this thematic concern is again altered slightly by Burton, as he ensnares the heroine in a new setting. For Josette, it is her status as a spectre which limits her, even while providing her with supernatural ability. Alternatively, Victoria is physically detained within an asylum as a child and escapes its walls just prior to the commencement of the narrative, only to be essentially reincarcerated within the Gothic mansion of Collinwood. Furthermore, Josette's liminal spectrality is overlaid onto the form of Victoria, where the two heroines come to represent one entity through a palimpsestic union of their strange embodiments. For this reason, I consider that while Josette remains a ghost, Victoria is bound to both her fate and her shadowy and haunting presence. It is only, ironically, once Victoria metamorphoses and metaphysically merges with Josette at the end of the film, that she is free to choose her own destiny. While these concerns in the narrative evoke the imprisoned Gothic heroine, they also taint Josette-Victoria, as she becomes associated with death, the double and the return of the repressed. Even so, Josette-Victoria is still crafted by Burton as an otherworldly beauty, the typical 'good' girl of his films who always offers a glaring contrast to his excessively sexual and forceful *femmes fatales*.

Described by Manohla Dargis as "a typical Burton Kewpie doll," Josette's physical characteristics, including her youthful face, wide blue eyes and blonde hair, connect her form with the angelic beauty typically associated with the Gothic heroine (2012: para. 3). For Karla Evans, Josette is shaped by Burton as "idealistic and romantic," an impression created during the audience's first encounter with this heroine (2012: para. 2). In a voice-over relating the circumstances which led to his being transformed into a vampire by Angelique in the eighteenth century, Barnabas remembers his "one true love" Josette. This technique recalls the flashback employed in *Sweeney Todd*, as the barber remembers his wife Lucy by way of a voice-over and a brightly-hued visual of the couple in a flower market. Likewise, in *Dark Shadows*, the vampire recalls happier times, as the viewer witnesses the young Barnabas standing with his lover Josette on the balcony at his mansion Collinwood. Burton places the heroine, clothed in a soft pink, lacy and bell-shaped dress, against the

backdrop of a pale blue sky with fluffy white clouds sitting on the horizon. Her blonde ringlets, pinned back and falling across her shoulder, are illuminated by the sunlight and so, I consider, evoke an angelic nimbus suggesting her 'natural' purity. Taking to her role as 'the Angel in the House,' Josette seeks Barnabas's pledge that they will "be together forever". For the domestic angel, it is the man who ultimately decides whether she is fit to be his wife and it is this sentiment which I suggest Josette's request raises. While perhaps romantic, the indication is Woman's role as passive, a creature who can only hope to achieve the lesser status of wife and mother. As birds twitter in the background, Barnabas offers Josette his eternal love and the couple kiss sweetly and rather chastely on the balcony. As in Sweeney Todd's flashback, this image of romantic bliss is short-lived, as a sense of Gothic unease is introduced into the scene. The camera slowly pans to reveal the unobserved figure of Angelique, Barnabas's servant and ex-lover, closely watching the couple. In her domestic and degraded role, she servilely cleans the floor on her hands and knees, wholly excluded from the frivolous activities of the upper class. Her expression, however, betrays her emotion, as her eyes reveal a demonic rage, giving the cliché "If looks could kill" a far more fearful meaning. For Beville, the Gothic genre probes "our own unconscious fears, terrors and anxieties" (2009: 11). In this scene, the fear brought to the fore by Burton emanates from the scorned woman, who is capable of untold horrors. It is her jealous rage that will ultimately destabilise a hierarchical system which she regards as unjust, unlawful and demeaning. In the process, she will cause Josette to fall, quite literally, ensuring that she takes on the liminal abjectness of the spectre.

In the scene which follows, Angelique, then a brunette, concocts a brew in a cauldron to curse her rival Josette to death. In her role as witch, Burton presents Angelique as capable of controlling the animate and the inanimate, the natural and the unnatural. To achieve her ends, the sorceress places Josette in a hypnotic trance and compels her through the stormy and wild Gothic night onto a clifftop high above the sea-battered rocks below. Josette's body hovers on the brink of life and death, taking on associations with the corpse, the most abject of wastes (Kristeva 1982: 3). Hogle argues that the Gothic teases out thematic concerns of dissolution and disorder (2002: 5). Simmering beneath the formal structures of society, Hogle suggests, lies a base of "chaos and death" which is both desired and feared (2002: 5). While, discursively, social law and order is coded as male, the chaos

beneath is constructed as belonging to the uncontrollable feminine realm, in this case the raging waters of the sea, into which Josette will plunge. As she employs her dark powers in this scene, Angelique comes to embody the potential and frightening forces of the monstrous-feminine Other, one who constantly seeks to undermine societal hierarchies. This underlying threat of chaos, as Hogle indicates, incites both fear and desire within the narrative, much like the abject which is simultaneously repulsive and attractive. Such a sense of ambivalent tension is apparent in Josette's strange form of suicide, as she seems to impel herself from the cliff, even while wishing not to die. Her action serves to locate her as one contradictorily both drawn to and appalled by death. However, while suicide signifies a desire for death, Josette's situation seems beyond her control. Driven by Angelique's powerful spell, Josette is evidently frightened in the face of death, although she avoids the usual histrionics associated with heroine. Prior to her fatal fall, Josette turns to Barnabas, who is attempting to save her, and seeks rescue. As the sea rages beneath and her hair is tossed about in the wind, she utters softly, although quite calmly, "Help me." Positioned by Burton as weak and passive, Josette comes to resemble the Gothic heroine who is "abused by a villain – and waiting for a providential hero" to liberate her (Schönle 2001: 64). However, Burton challenges this convention, as the villain in this Gothic tale takes the form of the *femme fatale* Angelique. In addition, the powerless hero Barnabas fails hopelessly in his rescue attempt of the hapless heroine. In his despair at seeing Josette's lifeless body spread out on the wet rocks below, Barnabas leaps off the cliff seeking to join his love in death. Yet, death is denied him, as his scorned lover Angelique punishes him with vampiric immortality. Sundered from his beloved, Barnabas is left to confront the trauma of his loss eternally.

While Angelique hopes to punish Barnabas perpetually, the introduction of Josette's double into the narrative complicates her scheming. Eerily alike Josette, Burton fashions Victoria as a mirror image of this 'Angel in the House,' a location which will be ruptured as the film progresses. In the audience's first glimpse of this heroine, she is seen travelling on a train to Collinsport, where she will meet Barnabas. As she sits beside a window onboard the train, soft sunlight illuminates her face, a technique which Burton similarly deploys when introducing her double Josette to the narrative. Her light brown, almost blonde, hair is flawless, curled out at its ends on her shoulders, while her pale face seems devoid of make-

up and is dominated by her wide blue eyes and pink lips. In contrast to Josette, Victoria is clothed in modern attire, which is nevertheless demure. Burton elects a soft blue, knee-length dress and white lacy stockings for the heroine, which ensures that very little in the way of any feminine flesh is exposed. Signifying innocence and virtue, Victoria is positioned by Burton as what Diane Long Hoeveler calls the “professionally feminine” or the gendered ideal imposed on women as the ‘good’ girl in their fashioning as essentialist constructs (1998b: 111). However, as the narrative develops, the audience becomes aware of the heroine’s transgressive conduct through her relationship with the ghost Josette. This eccentric belief in the supernatural, I consider, recalls the Gothic heroine Ianthe of John William Polidori’s short story *The Vampyre* (1819). Like Victoria, Ianthe can be seen as “a being, so beautiful and delicate” suggestive of Gothic “innocence, youth and beauty” (Polidori 2008: 7-8). However, this heroine, rather than interacting with spectres, insists on the existence of vampires. Ultimately, she is killed by a vampire, so bearing a strong semblance to Victoria, whose death results in her becoming a revenant.

As this initial scene progresses, the viewer becomes aware that the heroine might not be quite as innocent as she seems. Burton instils a sense of Gothic disquiet into the heroine’s introduction, as the audience witnesses a newspaper advertisement in her dainty hands. The clipping publicises a position as governess for the Collins family, a role which Victoria will occupy. While the profession might be suitable for the ‘good’ girl, it also, I argue, recalls the governess at the centre of Henry James’s Gothic tale *The Turn of the Screw* (1898). Resembling James’s governess and her interactions with the children Miles and Flora, Victoria is also moving to a strange mansion to attend to a problematic boy, David, who sees his dead mother as a ghost. James’s governess, who remains nameless, is a notoriously unreliable narrator who claims to see the children’s former governess, Miss Jessel, as a ghost. Likewise, Victoria engages in relations with Josette, Barnabas’s former lover, in her spectral form. Although she is not quite as untrustworthy as James’s governess, there seems to be something secretive and even unreliable about Victoria. On the train, the heroine is shown rehearsing her forthcoming introduction to the Collins family. While she is certainly anxious, this preparation goes beyond mere nerves into the realm of Gothic suspense. At first, it seems that she might use her real name, Maggie Evans, when she presents herself to the family. However, intent on concealing her identity, she resolves to

rename herself Victoria Winters, following inspiration from an advertisement fixed onto the train. The audience will later learn that the heroine has recently escaped the confines of the asylum. Yet, by this subtle action, Burton establishes her as a heroine with a hidden past, so crafting her as in some way unorthodox. This feeling of unease is furthered as Victoria avoids eye contact with two policemen when exiting the train station, covertly looking back at them warily as she passes. With its connotations of the Victorian ideal of womanhood, her choice of name also suggests the angelic image which she seeks to cultivate. Evidently, the heroine is determined to play the part of the quintessential 'lady' especially as she undertakes her 'maternal' employment with the Collins family. However, this role will be challenged as the narrative develops and Burton cements both Josette and Victoria as doubled and supernatural beings. So, they come to signify something on the border of humanity, setting up a disconcerting duality between the self and Other, where the monstrous Other comes to function as a reminder that "the self is never secure" (Kearney 2000: 3-4).

For Josette, this disruption of the stable self takes place once she dies in the eighteenth century and returns to the narrative as a ghostly Other almost two hundred years later. As a Thing hovering on the border of life and death, she represents the spectral body, one that Xavier Aldana Reyes sees as negotiating "the collapse of boundaries between shared notions of reality and the occult possibilities of the beyond" (2014: 389). In *Dark Shadows*, Burton envisions this 'beyond' through his various embodiments of the living dead. Otherworldly and yet eerily familiar, Burton conceives Josette as a transparent, blue-toned being, able to glide and float in a stereotypically 'ghostly' fashion. She can be seen as suggestive of what Hurley terms the Thing's "loss of human specificity" as the borders of her body are quite literally erased (1996: 30). Evidently, the director is fascinated by this motif of dead apparitions, apparent in his other films depicting the ghost, such as *Beetlejuice* (1998), *Sleepy Hollow* (1999) and *Corpse Bride* (2005). In the latter, the Corpse Bride Emily, although animated, also takes on blue tones, indicative of the oftentimes frightening and surreal 'underworld' of death. For Tom Ruffles, ghosts both "frighten us" and "console us, hinting that death might not be the end" (2004: 1). It is this ambiguity which I consider that Burton elicits in his film, where Josette is both disconcerting, yet relatively benign. More than this, ghosts, according to Vera Knútsdóttir, are figures "simultaneously present and

absent” indicating a “paradoxical state of being and non-being” (2012: 4). As a ghostly presence, Josette signifies this contradictory state. Although a metaphysical entity, Burton does not permit her any real agency in the film and it is only her double Victoria who can, in fact, see her. For Knútsdóttir, ghosts reveal “different degrees of presence” from “powerful, overwhelming even” to “weak, and almost completely invisible or inaudible” (2012: 10-11). Positioned by Burton as a weak spectral presence, Josette’s role even in death resembles the passive ingénue, who is largely denied agency. As a rather insipid and invisible ghost, I consider that Josette’s location as the Other is made all the more visible. Entrapped as a ghost, her only recourse is to appeal to her double Victoria and it is this relationship which serves to foster an augmented sense of unease regarding female intimacy and their bizarre mirroring.

Writing on the power of the ghost, Kevin Riordan notes “their uncanny and unexpected guidance, and how they move us – quite literally” (2014: 167). In Burton’s film, the director ascribes such power to the ghostly Josette, in that she manages to move Victoria to Collinsport for her own somewhat twisted purposes. It is Josette who shows Victoria the advertisement for the position of governess at Collinwood, all the while apparently planning her reunion with the vampire. Rather than a fearful presence, however, Burton depicts Josette sympathetically, as she can be seen to occupy the location of the mournful and mistreated ghost. For Colin Davis, “the dead return in part because their affairs on earth are not yet complete” (2007: 2). It is this concern which is at work in the case of the wronged heroine, as she endeavours to redress the injustice inflicted on both her and Barnabas by Angelique. In this, Josette demonstrates an unwavering resolve in her desire to be reunited with her lover Barnabas and so asserts a degree of agency and subversive power. Josette’s spectral return represents a “disturbance” to the “moral or epistemological order” which can only be rectified once justice is realised (Davis 2007: 2). As a borderline creature, Josette disrupts the established order encroaching on the world of the living in a pseudo dead/undead form. At the film’s conclusion, however, as is typical of his style, Burton does not neatly separate the worlds of the living and dead once more. Like *Batman Returns*, his liminal beings continue to haunt the storyworld of Collinsport, as Josette is shown to inhabit Victoria’s now dead/undead body. The ‘happily ever after’ ending reveals the Thing-like Josette-Victoria as a single entity reunited with the vampire

Barnabas. While this reunion might be romantic, it also suggests Woman's stereotypical positioning as the emotional, obsessive and excessive Other. Rather than threatening Angelique, who killed her, Josette uses her supernatural ability solely to reconnect with Barnabas, so consolidating her relatively static role as heroine. In a manner, this obsessive desire for her lover, even beyond death, recalls the obsessive nature of Angelique, whose superhuman powers are almost exclusively directed at Barnabas.

For Knútsdóttir, ghosts need not always be frightening and horrific, but rather can fulfil the role of establishing "a dialogue with living subjects" (2012: 23). In Burton's film, the spectre Josette, although eerie, does not truly scare the viewer or even the heroine Victoria, with whom she has a kinship. Knútsdóttir goes on to connect the ghost with "mourning and the process of learning how to live with dead others" (2012: 58). This is evidently a position which Victoria occupies, as she has been learning how to live with Josette since she was a child, even facing detention and medical scrutiny as a result. Instead of fear, Burton presents Victoria as seemingly desirous of communication with Josette, indicated in her comment at the Collins family dinner table once she is employed as governess. Before the entire family, Victoria says to David, following a remark on his ghostly mother, "Well, I think ghosts are just people who've moved into a slightly different dimension to ours. And I think some people just have antennas strong enough to pick them up." The matriarch Elizabeth is clearly unimpressed by what she considers to be Victoria's extremism. As she reiterates the general sentiment regarding the supernatural amongst 'normal' people, Elizabeth effectively silences her new governess on the subject. For Richard Kearney, supernatural beings are those creatures "[e]xiled to hell or heaven; or simply ostracized from the human community into a land of aliens" (2000: 3). Elizabeth's dismissal of the notion of ghosts, I contend, serves to relegate Josette to a curious community set apart from the 'fully' human. Stéphanie Genz argues that the Gothic monster signifies "strangeness and excess" and embodies the "reverse image of how *normal* people should be, look and act" (2007: 68). As she defends ghostly Others, including David's spectral mother, Victoria partakes of this Gothic excess, where she and her double Josette come to represent atypical beings. Consequently, Victoria's communication with Josette closely links Victoria to the monstrous-feminine and abnormal. Both the dead and living heroine, I consider, can be seen as distanced from normative ideals prescribed for women as human subjects.

Following this incident at the dinner table, the audience encounters the spectral Josette for the first time, as Victoria prepares for bed. Shrouded in a white sheet with two holes cut out for eyes, Josette suddenly materialises and stands on the threshold of Victoria's room. The heroine presumes the figure to be David, who attempted a similar ruse earlier, due to his preoccupation with ghosts and his deceased mother. On closer inspection, Victoria notices the stranger's chilling blue eyes and warily pulls off the sheet to expose the ghost of Josette, after which she gulps as if afraid. It is of interest that Burton portrays Josette as attempting to mimic David's ploy, almost as if trying to gain Victoria's attention and demonstrate her connection to the house and its occupants. The music accompanying this interaction is 'scary,' a cinematic convention used to indicate the presence of the paranormal. Rather than fleeing or screaming, however, Victoria listens to Josette's message, expressive of her empathy for the strange and supernatural. In comparison to the introductory scene where the heroine is illuminated by soft yellow light, Burton presents Josette against a dark background. Her pale blue dress complements the sickly, livid hue of her skin, which bears dark rings around her eyes. Almost translucent, Josette's altered form is used to communicate her position as "[n]either living nor really dead, neither material nor immaterial" (Grimes 2011: 102). A figure heralding an abject and mystical realm beyond ratiocination, Burton uses her colouring and the lighting in this scene to hint at her alterity. The director's deployment of darker colours and ominous shadows to contain Josette's form establishes her as a liminal Thing that is generally culturally repressed and feared.

However, Burton's inclusion of blue tones also alludes to Josette as a ghost in mourning following her violent death at the hands of Angelique. Rather than horrifying or gruesome, she appears melancholy as she stares solemnly at her double Victoria. Burton portrays her not so much as a dreadful apparition inducing sheer Gothic terror, but as a presence guiding the young heroine to some predetermined end. Eerily beautiful but simultaneously repellent, Josette's form becomes connected with the animal as translucent crabs scuttle about her body. Their appearance serves as a subtle reminder of her traumatic death on the seaside rocks, taken further as her hair floats up in the air. Standing before Victoria, Josette relays her message, disrupting the muteness habitually associated with the ghost, uttering, "He's coming" as a crab scurries out of her mouth. For Hurley, there has traditionally been a crucial discursive opposition established "between animal and human,"

one which the Gothic habitually calls into question (1996: 29). The creatures which emerge in the genre, more often than not, subvert this boundary, taking on characteristics associated with animalism. In Burton's films, Selena/Catwoman strays into the territory of the feline, while Mrs. Lovett dramatically transgresses moral norms, becoming savage and animal-like in the process. Even the heroines Lucy and Johanna partake of animalism, as they come to be seen as madwomen in need of discipline. In this scene, Burton's subtle use of the crab darting across Josette's spectral form, I consider, takes her embodiment into an animalistic realm, so negating whatever might remain of her humanity as the deceased heroine. As a scavenger, the crab frequently feeds on dead animals, thus linking Josette not only to death, but to something potentially menacing. Hers is the domain of a terrifying realm beyond human law, where 'unclean' and savage Things of the dark lurk, a site for the eerie monstrous-feminine. It is this inhuman space that Josette occupies, as her embodiment is seen to be both dead and not-quite-dead. Furthermore, the scene reveals Josette as in "possession of a knowledge that is greater than that of the living," which she is attempting to communicate to Victoria (Warwick 2014: 370). Once she has delivered her message to the heroine, suggestive of her limited agency, the ghostly, lucent form turns and floats towards the central chandelier of the house. Boldly, Victoria follows her double, almost seeking her guidance and trusting her prognostic abilities. The spectre then mimics her own deathly fall passing through the chandelier, thereby foreshadowing Victoria's fate, and repeats, "He's coming," following which she disappears as the floor ripples as if consisting of water.

For Julian Wolfreys, the haunted house is "the favored site for gothic narrative" (2002: 7). By visualising the disturbing and deeply unsettling manor of Collinwood, Burton evidently revisits this preferred Gothic site. As he plays with the concept of the return of the repressed past, he allows otherworldly apparitions to invade the mansion in order to obtain restitution. Josette's return is predicated on seeking justice, where reparation will permit her release and the 'happily ever after' ending that she desires with Barnabas. Nevertheless, Burton presents her as a being that simply will not stay in the grave, so embodying something all too like the corpse. Kristeva sees the corpse as a body "irremediably come a cropper" or fallen into dissolution (1982: 3). Like Catwoman, Josette can be considered as a form of the walking dead, a creature returning from a repressed past. Yet, in the case of

Josette, this past is nearly two hundred years before the narrative commences, so locating her as even more potentially frightening. For Freud, the uncanny is the return of something both familiar and fundamentally repressed (2003: 152). This is the position which Josette occupies, as she appears both like and unlike the human subject. She is indicative of a dead Other that refuses to remain in its place. She comes to embody the unconscious fears of society, even while situated as relatively benign in her interactions with Victoria.

As the narrative progresses, Josette continues to haunt Victoria, even repeating her night-time appearance in the heroine's doorway. Similarly, she utters, "Help me," before re-enacting her fatal cliffside fall through the chandelier. Just as the heroine Lucy in *Sweeney Todd* seems doomed to a chain of replicating the trauma of her rape and abuse, so I consider Josette to be entrapped in a form of cyclical trauma. Michelle Massé argues that traumatic repetition in the Gothic is a means by which the heroine comes to realise the "incredible and unspeakable that nonetheless happened" (1992: 12). Clearly unable to transcend the unspeakable trauma of her death, Burton establishes Josette as ensnared within a purgatory-like state of otherness. Like Lucy, she uses this state to haunt another woman whose life bears an uncanny resemblance to her own. While Johanna does not see her mother hovering on the streets near Turpin's London residence, Victoria certainly sees the ghost of Josette. For Creed, the Gothic horror film frequently entails a heroine "haunted by the memory of another woman, usually the husband's former wife, the symbolic mother" (1993: 54). As the other woman, Josette watches over her former lover with Victoria, so, I contend, becoming what Creed calls a symbolic mother. There is something sinister in this monstrous-feminine positioning, yet, in Burton's film, this is taken further on account of the Gothic motif of doubling. Victoria can be seen as a contemporary mirroring of Josette, made apparent when Barnabas first meets the heroine and mistakes her for Josette. More than this, during Victoria's childhood years in the asylum, the spectral Josette was her only companion and 'adult' mentor, a bizarre mother-figure of sorts. Gothic scholar, Claire Kahane argues that at the centre of the Gothic lies "a ghost signifying the problematics of femininity which the heroine must confront" (1985: 336). In *Dark Shadows*, this is quite literally the case with Josette-Victoria. This relationship, while an encounter with the indecipherable spectre, also represents a strange feminine physical and psychical doubling, one encompassing a pseudo mother-daughter relationship tainted by suggestions of the

other woman who haunts. It is a thoroughly disconcerting space, which I consider illustrative of a confrontation with the problematics of 'Woman,' a discursive location which has always incited a sense of unease and menace.

A figure positioned as a foil to the heroine Josette-Victoria, Burton crafts Angelique as the film's unforgettable *femme fatale*, a woman simultaneously appealing and terrifying. For Linda Dryden, the Gothic *femme fatale* can be understood as "a threat to the enthralled male, fatally dangerous because of her "unnatural" ability to subjugate the normally dominant male" (2007: 161). Likewise, Kate Davy sees the fatal woman as sensually appealing, but also characterised by "intelligence, ambition, independence, gumption, and guile" (1993: 65). Utterly witty and charming, yet also in possession of business acumen overlaid with deadly eroticism, Burton depicts Angelique as a woman of means. Determined to seduce Barnabas once more, she even succeeds in engaging in sexual relations with the vampire, despite his apparent hatred of her. So, she comes to epitomise the threat of the fatal woman, a figure who is able to destabilise the hierarchy and assert a degree of control, even as she is killed or stripped of power upon narrative conclusion. However, it is her destruction of the Collins family and their fishing empire that most reveals her feminine threat. In seeking to punish the vampire for his desertion of her, Angelique plans to kill everyone Barnabas loves, and she succeeds in this revenge in the case of Josette and his parents, whom she murders.

In 1972, when Barnabas returns to society, Angelique has overthrown his family's once-illustrious seafood corporation, Collins Canning Company, and has, through the centuries, established her rival company, Angel Bay Seafood. Using the Nereid with angel-like wings from the ship in the opening scene as her company emblem, Burton portrays Angelique as one who has triumphed over her humble beginnings as a servant to the Collins family. In addition, the play on her name is marked, though she is represented by Burton as anything but angelic. Rather, I consider that she elects this name for her company as a darkly humorous allusion to her hidden subversion of this image. In the modern context, the witch has altered her appearance to suit the times and has dyed her hair blonde, as if to assume the role of the heroine and her rival Josette. Unlike the heroine, however, Angelique is devoid of the obligatory virtues of this stereotype, instead embodying what Doane calls "male fears" regarding Woman's sexuality (1991: 3). These fears are founded on her

'unnatural' ability to lure men through her flagrant eroticism and powers of persuasion. Burton illustrates these frightening powers when Barnabas surrenders to Angelique sexually, following which he is wracked with remorse. Nevertheless, he seems to enjoy the encounter during the height of his desire, a circumstance quite unlike his chaste and relatively asexual interactions with the heroines. When engaged with the *femme fatale*, as can be expected, these sexual relations entail riotous displays of enacted carnality, fitting for the fatal woman who is constructed as a sexualised and therefore supposedly morally dubious being.

While a weak moment of 'giving in to temptation' on Barnabas's part, the sexual relationship between vampire and witch can be seen as somewhat sadomasochistic, where boundaries between romance, lust and hatred are blurred. Like the unorthodox and ambiguous relationship between Catwoman and Batman, there exists an undercurrent of both love and hate between Angelique and Barnabas. Enraged at her for killing Josette and cursing him with vampirism, Barnabas claims to hate the *femme fatale*. In addition, she entrapped him in a coffin for almost two hundred years and triggered the financial ruination of his once-affluent family. However, after the vampire returns, the family's financial prospects improve and it is for this reason that Angelique offers to purchase the family business from Barnabas. During this encounter, I contend that Burton exposes similar concerns to those in *Batman Returns*, where another 'cross-species' sadomasochistic relationship is enacted between Catwoman and Batman. In *Dark Shadows*, rather than a rooftop encounter, the witch and vampire meet in Angelique's office. Clothed in a dark blue coat which reveals her cleavage dramatically, Angelique looks the very part of the seductive and threatening *femme fatale*. As she sits behind her great wooden desk, she casually smokes a cigarette, made all the more forceful on account of her striking red lipstick and nail polish. Understandably, Barnabas rejects her business proposal and it is then that she succeeds in seducing him. According to Heidi Kaye, Gothic films, like Gothic fiction, are characterised by a "focus on sexuality" (2012: 240). It is this concern which I see emerging in Burton's amusing and exaggerated, yet rather unsettling encounter between Angelique and Barnabas in this scene.

For Tina Besley and Michael A. Peters, "[t]he body, especially the female body, has been hidden and constructed by mind/body dualisms" which can be understood as

gendered (2007: 65). It is Woman who is discursively seen as 'body' and it is this ideology which I consider Burton calls upon in this scene. While she is 'sexy,' Angelique's enticement of Barnabas takes their sexual intercourse into the realm of crude carnality, a sphere utterly detached from the 'moral' and 'clean' body. Therefore, I argue that Angelique assumes the role of Woman as sexually excessive body, and a frightening one at that. The strangeness of her form is communicated by Burton visually, but also verbally, as she bluntly tells Barnabas that they are "both monsters". Following this admission, she places his own hand firmly on her breast, forcing him to desire her. She proceeds to position her hands around his neck, even while speaking of the ruination of his family and her loneliness during the period Barnabas was confined. Although perhaps erotic, the placement of her hands around his neck, I suggest, is a subtle ploy which Burton uses to communicate both her power over the weak vampire and the sadistic element to her seduction. Instead of outrage, Barnabas is rather obviously capitulating and rolls his eyes, suggestive of his lust and corresponding masochistic tendencies. Considering the *femme fatale* in French Decadence, George Ross Ridge writes that "[w]hatever their appearance, they are sado-masochists" who offer a stark contrast to the figure of "the romantic heroine" (1961: 353). Sadistic in her cruel and violent nature, I argue that Burton simultaneously positions Angelique as in possession of masochistic propensities. In her obsessive desire for the vampire over the centuries, in spite of his rejection and hatred of her, there exists a tendency to endure and perhaps even seek out pain on Angelique's part. As a result, she is rendered quite unlike the 'good' girl, who always remains virtuous and asexual.

In the wild sex scene with Barnabas, I assert that more than a sadomasochistic creature, Angelique is portrayed as what Ruth Bienstock Anolik calls the Gothic genre's "sexual Other" who is dangerous, inescapable and frighteningly different (2007: 4). Physically powerful and sensually forceful, she incites anxiety in the vampire, who cannot seem to resist her womanly charms. While the sexual Other can certainly be human, I argue that Burton conflates her erotic appeal with her corporeality, as the scene forces the viewer to confront her as a non-human entity. Utterly unlike the 'normative' human subject, she takes on a sexuality that is corrupt and formidable. Her unsettling determination to seduce Barnabas is furthered in this scene when, situated behind him, she strokes his chest, while speaking of how she has missed him. Following this, she brazenly moves her hand toward

his genitals, intent on forcing his sexual compliance. The vampire attempts to resist her, but, when Angelique removes her jacket to expose a revealing, tight blue dress, Barnabas finally surrenders to her wiles. In a comment almost redolent of a child-like tantrum, Angelique threatens to “take everything you [Barnabas] love”. The violence inherent in this remark is met by the force of her seduction, as she rips Barnabas’s waistcoat and cravat off, tears his shirt open and lies on a couch with her legs raised rather obviously. The shot which follows portrays Barnabas located above Angelique, where only her thighs are exposed in the frame. As he places his hands on her knees, he promises to “defile your [Angelique’s] most intimate and womanly segments”. A white canvas is deliberately positioned by Burton on the wall behind them, which consists simply of a large splatter of red paint. I consider that this painting evokes blood and death, rather fitting given the deviant pair. For Kristeva, blood is a thoroughly abject substance, suggestive of wounds, death and what the human subject withstands in order to be considered ‘clean’ and ‘proper’ (1982: 3). Yet, it is also connected to the menstrual cycle and the wound of Angelique’s “intimate and womanly segments”. It is that which is seen as horrifying about Woman and so, I argue, is remindful of Angelique’s monstrous-feminine location. In addition, blood relates to violence, both in terms of Barnabas’s vampiric need for blood and Angelique’s destructive powers as a sorceress. As witch and vampire sexually engage in this scene, I suggest that the painting stands for a liaison both violent and deeply disturbing.

Discussing Richard Marsh’s *The Beetle* (1897), Hurley argues that the Beetle-Woman’s sexuality betrays her “embodiedness” and her position as an “imperfectly evolved and imperfectly acculturated” subject (1996: 142). The monstrous woman of the Gothic can consequently be understood as all body, driven almost mad by her depraved desires. Such is the case with Mrs. Lovett of *Sweeney Todd*, whose obsession with the barber forces her to take on hideous crimes and so eschew her humanity in favour of animality. In *Dark Shadows*, I contend that Burton overlays his *femme fatale* with similar concerns, as her voracious sexualised need for Barnabas drives her to the brink of what remains of her humanity. Desperate for his love, the witch has killed and cursed almost every member of his family. Her actions have disrupted her status as a civilised and even human subject and this degeneration is dramatically depicted in this scene. In a display of cross-species copulation, Angelique and Barnabas engage in intercourse while flying and crawling about

the room. Her office is left in disarray as a result, as glass shatters and tables break during their light-hearted, yet distinctly irregular interaction. Like Catwoman who slashes her victims with her claws, Burton positions Angelique as Creed's literal (1993) *femme castratrice*, one who blurs the boundaries between human and animal. Rather than injurious, however, Angelique claws at the aforementioned painting, walls and couch, tearing the surfaces in her pleasure. As something approaching an animal, she licks Barnabas's chest and neck, while lying on top of him in a predatory fashion. The shot reveals her tongue lengthening, appearing reptilian and redolent of the biblical serpent and Eve. Angelique is visually shown as evil temptress, where her position as female monster is exaggerated as she acquires animalistic characteristics.

After this hilarious and excessive sexual encounter, Barnabas again rejects Angelique, rather unfeelingly telling her, "I cannot succumb to your charms ever again." Certainly not one to accept his romantic wishes, Angelique grabs his wrist and pledges, "If I can't have you, my love, I'll destroy you." By this remark I consider that Burton alters the stock phrase, "If I can't have you, then no one will," a rather clichéd line typical of the jealous male villain demanding love from the helpless heroine. As a result, I would suggest that the vampire is rendered somewhat effeminate, while Angelique is again seen as a *femme fatale* capable of undermining the male hierarchy. Like Catwoman, she does not merely use her appearance in the gender wars. Rather, her supernatural powers permit her real agency and so she comes to be a figure both desired and feared. For Halberstam, this is precisely the concern raised in the Gothic, where the Other "inspires fear and desire at the same time" (1995: 13). Such a motif is again communicated by Burton in the scene where Angelique attends the Collins family ball. In true *femme fatale* fashion, she arrives, rather recklessly, at Collinwood in a red convertible with its black top up, the wheels squealing in her haste to attend the ball. Independent and powerful as a businesswoman who financially controls the quiet town of Collinsport, Angelique can afford such luxuries. As if to match her car, she wears a long, red, tight-fitting sequined dress, with a low-cut neckline exposing her breasts, and her customary red lipstick. Redolent of the biblical allusion to the scarlet woman, the colour reinforces her location as the sexually promiscuous 'bad' woman, quite opposed to the construct of the 'good' girl heroine. More than this, the use of red by Burton across her lips, I consider, reiterates her embodiment as the castrating woman who inflicts

bloody wounds. Rejected by Barnabas again, she has come to be more dangerous than ever, where her aggression will no longer take the form of mere forceful and animalistic sexuality, but rather frightening violence. However, her choice of clothing seems to suggest that she has not quite given up on seducing Barnabas once more. For Luce Irigaray, Woman can be said to “assume the feminine role deliberately” by way of “playful repetition” (1985: 76). In the case of the *femme fatale*, this role is wholeheartedly taken up, as she purposely places her body on display so as to attract male attention. In *Batman Returns*, Catwoman sunders herself from her ‘good’ girl positioning, constructing her body as a visual index of eroticism. Likewise, I posit that in *Dark Shadows*, Angelique mimics the stereotype of the *femme fatale* deliberately, where her choice of racy red attire can be seen as connoting sexiness and power. So, she makes her intentions clear, all the while solidifying her status as the castrating monstrous-feminine who will take what she craves or exact a bloody vengeance.

Discussing sexuality within the Gothic, Susanne Becker remarks that such texts represent “a dangerous beauty” (1999: 59). Within Burton’s films, this visualisation is made apparent in the figure of Catwoman, who is constructed not only as strange and sensual, but as a threat to hegemonic society. Similarly, Angelique can be seen to embody a dangerous beauty, taking on the role of the scarlet woman, who is not ‘fully’ human and is bent on obtaining what she desires by force. Her need for retribution comes to a climax at the ball, when Angelique witnesses Barnabas and Victoria kissing on the mansion’s balcony, emulating Barnabas and Josette’s fateful kiss almost two hundred years earlier. In contrast to Angelique, Victoria’s body, initially seen from behind, is adorned in a lacy white, full-length, full-sleeved dress. Bathed in light from the unseen moon, the heroine almost glows, as if to reinforce her ethereal goodness when compared to Angelique. Modestly dressed and with very little make-up, Victoria is set apart from the *femme fatale*, but also from everyone else at the party. Devoid of overt sexuality, her body becomes a space signifying virginity and innocence, especially as it is overlaid in white. While she might be the virtuous heroine, the scene also exposes her kissing a vampire, thus destabilising this role to a certain extent. It is certainly a far cry from the sexual liaison between Angelique and Barnabas, but this monstrous kiss suggests the heroine as not quite so ‘good,’ even while she is unaware of his dead/undead embodiment. Angelique sees the kiss and, with her back to the camera, she scrapes her long, red nails down a snake-like, scaly column positioned next to her.

Although suggestive of her forthcoming wrath, I argue that Burton again references the temptress Eve through this action, while also echoing the witch's status as the woman who castrates as she claws at the serpentine surface.

Angelique's rage is taken further in this scene as she turns toward the camera and the audience views her face, which is quite literally seen to be cracking. This physical rupturing of her body is accompanied by the sound of the fracturing of a solid, glass-like surface. The image, I suggest, is used by Burton to symbolise that the *femme fatale* is not immune to emotional fragility. Just as Catwoman unravels in the final scene of *Batman Returns* and Mrs. Lovett seems distressed when she determines to see the orphan Toby killed by Todd, so this scene reveals Angelique's vulnerability. While the image might be indicative of her emotionality and her twisted love for Barnabas, the fact that her face can physically crack takes her form into non-human territory. By this image, Burton suggests that the witch is somehow hollow and devoid of the inner components of the human subject. For Hogle, "every major Gothic figure is the signifier of a signifier," where the neo-Gothic, especially, replicates "[s]heer and fragmentary simulacra, seemingly struck off from a mold that is already an imitation" (2008: 284-285).²⁰ As part of the neo-Gothic tradition, I argue that Burton fashions Angelique in *Dark Shadows* as a signifier of a signifier. She comes to take up the position of a Gothic counterfeit doll, so standing in for the lifeless doll, which in turn signifies the human subject. Resembling Ernst Theodor Amadeus Hoffmann's doll Olympia from *The Sandman* (1816), Angelique is likewise eerily located as both like and unlike 'normative' humanity. Hoffmann describes Olympia as dancing with "a peculiar rhythmical steadiness," illustrative of her inanimate animacy as a doll (2008: 32). Alive, but radically removed from the 'real' woman in her embodiment as doll-like and hollow, Angelique similarly comes to signify a lifeless form of animacy. In revealing her body as cavernous and liable to crack, Burton dramatically establishes the *femme fatale* as a Thing far removed from humanity, an abject monster resembling the living dead. More so than Catwoman, I consider that this character utterly destabilises what it means to be human, a subversive concern which Burton will advance in Angelique's final scene in the film.

²⁰ For a detailed account of the simulacrum, see Jean Baudrillard's *Symbolic Exchange and Death (Theory, Culture & Society)* (1993).

Following their show of mutual romantic interest at the ball, Victoria discovers Barnabas's secret during an incident where the vampire catches fire, as a result of standing in direct sunlight. Seemingly terrified, the heroine flees his touch. Consequently, Barnabas approaches Angelique to demand liberation from the curse of vampirism which she has inflicted upon him. The scene commences with Angelique, dressed in black, seated at her boardroom table, her bare legs raised on the wooden surface. Within this space, Angelique is in control and all-powerful in an inversion of the social hierarchy of the time period in which the film is situated. Her exposed legs, rather inappropriate in an office setting, again reinforce her as an erotic being, so melding her supernatural abilities with her assertive sexuality. For Creed, cinematic portrayals of the witch as monstrous-feminine tend to "foreground her essentially sexual nature," where she is seen as evil and no longer occupies the social role of "healer and seer" (1993: 76). In Burton's portrayal of Angelique, just such a contemporary approach is adopted, where the sensualised sorceress's magic is lacking in any healing properties. All such properties have been lost through her perilous and ultimately debilitating obsession with the vampire. As the 'wicked witch,' she offers Barnabas a drink of blood from a wine glass, inciting disgust in the viewer. For Kristeva, blood is indicative of "the impure," but "also refers to women" on account of the menstrual cycle (1982: 96). The image consequently evokes her location as the horrifying and fluid female Other, even while alluding to the violence which the witch has every intention of exacting in her thirst for vengeance. In his rage, Barnabas refers to Angelique as a "snake," a comment on her poisonous nature, made visual by Burton as the *femme fatale* wears a revealing, black outfit consisting of shiny, almost scale-like fabric. For Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, what is on the surface is "contagious metonymically" (1981: 256). Clothing, as a surface covering of the body, can be seen as not only indicative of that which is within, but also as a signifier which can be carried through the narrative. In the case of Angelique, her snake-like nature is conveyed by Burton through her attire, where she attempts to 'poison' Barnabas and anyone he loves within the storyworld. However, historically, the snake has also functioned in society "as a medical emblem" (Antoniou 2001: 217). Ironically, Barnabas's remark also alludes to Angelique's provision of the substance that nourishes and sustains him, human blood. Rather than a healer, the witch is depraved and destructive, a location which Burton communicates once more as she threatens to kill Victoria in the same fashion she did Josette. In response to her threats, Barnabas attempts to storm out of the

room, but discovers an erect coffin waiting for him once he opens the office door. In a demonstration of her ruthless powers, Angelique holds out her hand in a rather clichéd display of supernatural ability and chains encircle Barnabas's body in an action seemingly reminiscent of a serpent's coils. Ineffectual when faced with her powers, Barnabas is rendered effeminate, a position furthered in that he requires blood to survive.

Once she has captured the vampire, Angelique proceeds to ignite the Collins family business, conjuring a spell which opens with the words, "Sleeping flame, I summon thee." This use of "thee," I consider, is deployed by Burton to suggest her witchcraft as an ancient practice, something almost primitive. The resultant fire, on the other hand, serves to raise the typically Gothic concern of "chaos, confusion, and terror" (Schmitt 1997: 9). It is Angelique who institutes this terror, in her role as the witch who can govern the elements for her malicious purposes. For Creed, this ability to control nature on the part of the evil sorceress constitutes "part of her 'feminine' nature" (1993: 76). Unlike the man, who is ideologically conceived as distinct from the 'natural' world, Woman is discursively conflated with this disturbing and potentially dangerous realm. As she takes up this frightening monstrous-feminine role, Angelique can be seen as "an implacable enemy" of the established male order, terrorising everyone and everything in her path (Creed 1993: 76). This intention is again communicated when she bids farewell to Barnabas following his capture, although this separation will be short-lived. Leaving Barnabas ensnared within a coffin once more, this time in the Collins family crypt, Angelique bends down to taunt the vampire. Mockingly, the *femme fatale* says, "I'm going to destroy everything you love," all the while removing a pair of lacy, red underwear from beneath her clothing. As a sort of keepsake, she places the garment across Barnabas's nose and mouth, vividly recalling the scarlet woman as she does so. While the action is erotic, the red item was also used to veil Angelique's sexual wound, thus, I consider, coming to symbolise her own blood and the male fear of castration. There is something rather unsettling in the act, where she positions the garment on another wound of the male body, Barnabas's mouth. Within the crypt, this gesture takes on ominous connotations, becoming overlaid with images of male debilitation and even death in the face of a terrifying feminine power. The act itself reveals Angelique's 'unnatural' usurpation of male power as she forces the vampire into passivity, a location traditionally reserved for women. For Ridge, the *femme fatale* "is no longer woman as

nature meant her to be,” as she “has lost the capacity for love, and with it her function as wife and mother” (1961: 353). Interestingly, Ridge mentions ‘nature,’ indicative of the essentialism intrinsic to the concept of Woman. In the case of Angelique, I contend that she is stereotypically figured by Burton as ‘unnatural’ because though claiming to love the vampire, her treatment of him counters this assertion. She is illustrative of the fatal woman who can no longer love, and who has negated her sanctioned ‘womanly’ roles of wife and mother. Yet, ironically, as a witch, she is also an ambassador of the natural world with its potent forces, such as tempests and hurricanes (Creed 1993: 76). Consequently, she is representative of an ambivalent and dangerous threat, one feared by men.

Fortunately for the vampire, his imprisonment within the coffin does not last longer than twenty minutes, after which David liberates him, guided by his spectral mother. As with Burton’s other films, the result is a final confrontation, where the *femme fatale* is ultimately killed. During the vampire’s brief confinement, Angelique succeeds in rallying the townspeople against the Collins family, although her plot is thwarted when she publically uncovers her liminal embodiment. In an effort to expose her, Barnabas strangles and bites the witch before the crowd, prompting her face and neck to crack. As she loses her temper, she tosses Barnabas effortlessly through Collinwood mansion’s door, following which her head pivots unnaturally, revealing the extent of her machine-like body. It is at this point in the film where Burton takes Angelique’s form into grotesque Gothic excess, as she incites disgust in the viewer. Within the mansion, the frazzled *femme fatale* tells Barnabas that he makes her sick, demonstrated all too literally as she spews jets of green vomit from her mouth, striking him in the face, reminiscent of a snake and its venomous discharge. While the act is intended to ‘gross out’ the audience, the scene suggests Burton’s signature use of the comic Gothic. It is excessive and playful, where the director probes the conventions of the genre, inducing laughter rather than fear.

Nevertheless, Angelique’s explicit and shameless expulsion of bodily fluids distances her from the cool and composed *femme fatale*. Rather, I argue that Burton connects her with what Kristeva calls “a piece of filth, waste,” so epitomising what it means to be abject (1982: 2). Her mimicry of the seductive woman falls away, replaced instead by a reversion to a state reminiscent of traditional representations of the witch as an “ugly crone who is capable of monstrous acts” (Creed 1993: 2). As she wipes the sickening, green substance

from her lips, Barnabas labels her a “[v]ulgar, hideous serpent” and insists that she be delivered to “hell’s doorstep”. Not one to give up without a fight, the scene depicts Angelique as intent on obliterating the Gothic mansion, representative of the Collins family line. In an attempt to destroy both Barnabas’s and her own past, the witch incites the walls and floor to crack and ignites portions of the hall. In listening to her wishes, the house is further marked as in some way gothically uncanny and haunted. Her reasoning is her love for the vampire, apparent when she tells him, “I worshipped you” and “[a]dored you”. In response, Barnabas strikes her, a rather crude act which disrupts the male code of chivalry towards the ‘weaker’ sex. Yet, Angelique, I argue, is no longer seen as a ‘woman,’ or at least a ‘proper’ woman in the manner of the heroine, as she occupies the position of monstrous-feminine Thing. Even in *Sweeney Todd*, when the barber murders the *femme fatale*, the attack is underhanded, as he almost tricks Mrs. Lovett into being shoved into the underground bakehouse oven. In *Dark Shadows*, however, Barnabas makes no effort to hide his resolve to destroy the sorceress. As a result of his violence, Angelique’s head spins freakishly, accompanied by a sound not unlike a winding clock. Her body is shown to be gradually unravelling in the scene, where Burton presents her movements as disturbingly unnatural and quite removed from the normative human subject. Like Hoffmann’s Olympia, Angelique is “measured and stiff,” becoming “unpleasant” and doll-like as she struts the hall of Collinwood before the family (2008: 30). Replacing the stunning temptress who managed to seduce Barnabas is a Gothic automaton, a Thing blurring the boundaries between the animate and inanimate, the human and non-human.

Prior to her death, Angelique goes so far as to rouse the grotesque wooden statues of the Collinwood hall, bringing them to life as she commands poisonous blood to seep from the paintings and walls. Burton again uses images of blood in connection with the *femme fatale* to firmly locate her as the ‘evil’ and abject woman, where her otherness is accentuated in the process. Imprisoned by one of these statues, Barnabas is rendered helpless and the witch’s defeat and death only comes through the intervention of David’s deceased mother. Evidently, the ghost has a score to settle, as it was Angelique who killed her, a feat the *femme fatale* boasts of in this scene. As this spectral form enters the hall, Burton alters the lighting, where the scene takes on the tones and textures of an underwater blue. From within this space, the translucent ghost shrieks as she seeks to

defend her family from Angelique's malice. Indistinct and hazy, as the borders of her body almost shimmer, the ghost is positioned as a force that even the sorceress fears. Her hair floats eerily above her form, redolent of her death at sea, the result of Angelique's witchcraft. In an image of terrifying feminine strength, David's mother screams and her eyes widen, while her arms are dangerously raised. Like the banshee, she evokes this myth of the female spirit whose wail presages death, although, in this case, it is a death welcomed by the family. The mighty and otherworldly sound emitted compels ornaments to shatter and drives Angelique's body onto the central chandelier of the hall, which falls to the ground. Impaled on the glass chandelier, her captivity permits Barnabas to escape the clutches of the statue. As a result of the damage which she has sustained, Angelique's body is shattered and fragments of what appears to be her skin have been torn away. The image is again a suggestion by Burton that her form is somehow hollow, although the director takes this intimation further in this scene. Although the final conflict is not overly frightening, the *femme fatale* certainly spurs unease as her body refuses to bleed. Like a porcelain doll, she merely cracks and splinters, so navigating the rigid boundaries of the body, a consistent concern in the Gothic. For Marcia England, horror films incite horror "when boundaries are transgressed, when what is seen as normal suddenly becomes inverted" (2006: 354). Angelique's hybrid embodiment seems both empty and capable of enduring rather rigorous abuse. Nevertheless, Burton does kill her off, recalling Davy's comment that the *femme fatale* must either be "utterly recuperated, or destroyed" (1993: 65). Beyond redemption, as is the case with Mrs. Lovett, Burton chooses to destroy this powerful character.

Discussing the death of the Gothic monster, Dryden comments that this demise, particularly in the instance of the female monster, "is never anything but ugly and prolonged, usually involving reversion to a repulsive, more viscous incarnation or an acceleration into an atrophied or degraded state" (2007: 167). For Dryden, where this monster is a *femme fatale* "all trace of her compelling sexual allure is wiped out, leaving a repellent "thing" in its place" (2007: 167). In the final moments of her life, I argue that Burton wholly collapses Angelique's stable form, leaving a Thing in its place, a being largely devoid of any sexual appeal. Her body, disunited and dented, is pinned against the chandelier, where both arms are helplessly outstretched. The branches of the chandelier, I consider, can be regarded as representative of a deadly, corrective form of phallic

penetration, ironic given that her death is effectuated by another woman. Almost touchingly, Barnabas confesses to Angelique, "You know, there was a time when I might have loved you." As a tear runs down her cracked face, the witch offers herself to him once more, hoping to spend eternity together. As can be expected, Barnabas rejects her offer, censuring her need to "possess" him, rather than love him. Tenderly, Angelique disagrees, uttering softly, "I love you, Barnabas." The vampire, again, condemns her, saying that she "cannot love". As if to counter his denunciation, Angelique breaks open her own chest with an audible crack and produces her luminous pink and beating heart. The organ pulsing distinctly in her outstretched hand, she urges Barnabas to "[t]ake it". However, the vampire does not respond, merely staring at her solemnly and her heart splinters and crumbles, falling from her hand as she dies. Far from the violence of Mrs. Lovett's death where Todd flings her into a fire, Barnabas even strokes Angelique's face once she has died, unintentionally causing further damage to her fractured, doll-like body. Unlike Mrs. Lovett, who dies in disgrace, or Catwoman, who eschews societal approval, Angelique appears partially to redeem herself through her death, seeming to die of her own accord. The offering of her beating heart to Barnabas is a final attempt to prove her love for the vampire, albeit a love that is warped and destructive. As she detaches her own heart, Angelique becomes something utterly alarming, a creature radically removed from humanity and even animality. While Mrs. Lovett can still be seen as human and Catwoman is a hybrid creature midway between the human and the animal, Angelique surpasses these positions entirely. Expressive of a physical deviance unrivalled in Burton's other films under study, I assert that of all the director's *femmes fatales*, it is Angelique who most visibly represents the monstrous-feminine, where she is made to assume an abject and horrific corporeality.

Following Angelique's lurid demise, David, enlightened by his spectral mother, informs Barnabas that Victoria is on Widow's Hill, the site of Josette's death. The scene closely resembles that in which Josette died almost two hundred years before, where Burton recreates the stormy night and raging sea. Employing the same ominous music, the director similarly sends his heroine Victoria through the woods in a trance-like state. Unlike Josette, however, Victoria is presented as far more canny, as the audience becomes aware of her plan to be transformed into a vampire. In a deranged form of suicide, the heroine will

fling herself from the cliff, forcing Barnabas to bite her as she falls, so compelling her body to take on the curse of vampirism. Prior to this, however, resembling the scene set centuries before, Barnabas chases Victoria to the edge of the cliff. Even on the brink of suicide, Burton portrays his heroine as innocent. While the moon illuminates her youthful face in almost blue light, her pale blue, long-sleeved dress and hair blow forlornly in the wind. The image, I suggest, serves to further Burton's use of the Gothic motif of doubling, a concern which will be radically established as the heroines merge upon Victoria's 'death'. The viewer cannot help but recall the ghost Josette, whose pale blue dress and blonde hair move in a comparable manner even while within the manor, where her form also seems basked in blue light. In this case, the light which bathes the heroine is provided by the veiled moon, a subtle hint regarding Victoria's forthcoming transformation into a creature of darkness. The moon, of course, is also ideologically connected with Woman and her menstrual cycle, where she can be seen as a being in flux and one inextricably linked to the cycles of the natural world. Victoria confesses her rationale to Barnabas, saying, "I live in the light, Barnabas. You live in the shadows." Although an acknowledgement of their roles as the pure heroine and monstrous villain, the comment also presages her imminent mutation into a creature of the shadows. Given his immortality, Victoria evidently resolves that their love can only survive if she is made into a vampire. Demonstrative of her conviction, she tells him, "There's only one way."

Once Victoria falls to her 'death' and Barnabas holds her limp body on the wet rocks below, the audience gradually observes her appearance altering slightly. Apparently wondering if she is indeed still alive, Barnabas says "Victoria," to which she responds, "Josette." By this, I posit that Burton suggests that Josette's ghost has finally occupied Victoria's body, so permitting the reunion of the lovers. Yet, I do not consider that Victoria has wholly died. Rather, it is a physical and spiritual union of the heroines, who have somehow always been one entity, separated across time and the life/death divide. Fused at last, Josette-Victoria awakens as a vampire, a creature who Creed argues "crosses the boundary between the living and the dead, the human and the animal" (1993: 61). While the vampire is horrifying indeed, the female vampire is arguably more so, as "driven by her lust for blood, she does not respect the dictates of the law which set down the rules of proper sexual conduct" (Creed 1993: 61). Opposed to the asexual and prudish 'proper'

woman, she is a ravaging sexualised monster, intent on feasting upon human bodies, both male and female. Halberstam indicates that vampiric sexuality is “pathological” and “non-reproductive” (1995: 16). In contrast to the ‘good’ woman whose sexuality is conflated with reproductive potential, the vampire is erotic and infertile. In her altered form, Burton reveals the heroine’s ‘new’ subversive sexuality. Rather than expressive of the purity and innocence of ‘the Angel in the House,’ Josette-Victoria assumes frightening sensual appeal as the director quite literally darkens her appearance. Prominent black rings surround her eyes, while her face seems almost mauve in its pallor. Purple tones stain her lips and her hair is markedly darker. It can be assumed that she takes on a dark Gothic sexuality, a carnality which she will henceforth share with Barnabas, likely revelling in the same sexual excess which the vampire previously enjoyed with the witch.

While darkly seductive, Josette-Victoria is also evidently dangerous, so attesting to her powerful agency. Blood streams down her neck from the wound Barnabas inflicted, mingling with the ocean’s spray. Certainly she is injured, yet the image evokes her impending thirst for human blood as a creature of darkness. As she speaks, her sharp teeth are exposed, redolent of the terror which she will inspire. For Hurley, the Gothic has a tendency to explore a “subject whose undoing it accomplishes so resolutely” (1996: 4). It is this ‘undoing’ which I see Burton achieving with Josette-Victoria. Utterly estranged from her portrayal in the opening scenes of the film, she is no longer the idealised heroine. Instead, she is the ‘dark lady’ of the Gothic, one who is both forceful and fearsome. As the lovers kiss, Barnabas’s voice-over narrates the scene, circling back to his words spoken at the film’s outset, “It is said that blood is thicker than water. It is what defines us, binds us, curses us.” Although perhaps romantic, in that the comment alludes to the lovers as intricately connected, the concern with blood, like in the case of *Sweeney Todd*, also threads through the film, in its use of images of violence and death. More than this, Burton employs the comment to remind the viewer of the couple’s vampiric forms, where their sustenance will come from the drinking of human blood. Like *Batman Returns*, where Catwoman is retained in the narrative and just might wreak havoc on Gotham City, so the viewer is unsure what Josette-Victoria might do in her new monstrous incarnation. For England, horror films probe abject spaces through the destabilisation of established binaries, but “in the end the binaries are usually restored” (2006: 355). In characteristic Burton style, as in *Batman*

Returns, *Dark Shadows* does not conclude with the restoration of boundaries. Instead, the audience is left with the knowledge that the revenant lovers will live out their immortality together, disturbing social norms and unsettling corporeal limits. Rather than the stereotypical 'happily ever after' ending with the hero and heroine, both Josette-Victoria and Barnabas are hybrid creatures, where the heroine, ironically, takes on traits of the *femme fatale* Angelique in her final deathly metamorphosis.

According to Gothic scholar Fred Botting, the "Gothic signifies ... excess" (1996: 1). Likewise, Becker notes the genre's "excess in moral terms, excess of realism into the supernatural" (1999: 1). In *Dark Shadows*, Burton appears to play out such Gothic concerns, crafting his women as excessive and contrary to what is considered 'normal' and 'natural'. Writing on the genre, Misha Kavka observes that the Gothic "deals in those liminal regions of being" (2002: 212). In this chapter, I have argued that the heroine Josette-Victoria and *femme fatale* Angelique are established as such gothicised beings, revealing themselves as bodies that mutate and transgress sanctioned gender norms. Like *Batman Returns* and *Sweeney Todd*, I consider that the female characters of *Dark Shadows* can be seen as abject creatures, who take on the unsettling corporeality associated with the monstrous-feminine. While the director styles his female characters as strange and potentially frightening, he also draws on the good/evil binary associated with women, as his characters assume angelic or corrupt traits. Josette-Victoria, I have argued, comes to resemble Patmore's (1863) exemplary 'Angel in the House' as she is fashioned in a similar manner to Burton's other fair heroines. However, this is a role which she undermines, as she acquires certain characteristics of the Gothic *femme fatale*. As a hybrid creature, one who is doubled and dead/undead, her body becomes a thoroughly transgressive and disorderly space. Yet, in this transgression, I have maintained there is also a degree of agency for the heroine. Alternatively, acting as a foil to the heroine, it is the witch Angelique who terrorises the Collins family, most obviously embodying what it is about Woman that is chillingly Other. Deadly and erotic, she is a force to be reckoned with, especially given her penchant for performing black magic. For Hurley, the Gothic tradition erases "the demarcations between "the human" and any number of not-human configurations" (1996: 31). While Burton's narrative explores the unravelling of the human subject by way of numerous deviant bodies, both male and female, this disruption between the human and non-human, I argue, is best

portrayed through the character of Angelique. As a witch, a figure of supernatural potency, this *femme fatale* precisely signifies Woman as both appealing and horrifying. Yet, even the heroine Josette-Victoria subverts corporeal and metaphysical limits, coming to occupy a space of alterity between species. While predominantly light-hearted, Burton's Gothic comedy horror, I suggest, once again indicates the director's fascination with feminine physicality and what it is about Woman that is deemed disturbing. Though female otherness is raised, so too, I contend, is a territory for the monstrous-feminine to relish subverting the restrictions set in place by the otherwise dominant male hegemony.

Conclusion

After more than three decades in the film industry, director Tim Burton has established what has become known as the 'Burtonesque' feeling, a fusion of the "deliciously macabre," featuring "quirky characters and delightfully sinister settings" (McMahon 2014: 1). His quirky characters include the deviant bodies which he has constructed over the years, from the sympathetic figure of the simulacrum with scissors for hands in *Edward Scissorhands* (1990), to the Red Queen with her grotesquely oversized head in *Alice in Wonderland* (2010). Given Burton's consistent evocation of physically othered bodies within his films, critical attention has recurrently probed the corporeal aberrance, both male and female, portrayed across his oeuvre. Through an exploration of the fashioning of Gothic feminine embodiment, my study has sought to add to this discussion, addressing what I consider to be a scholastic gap in this area. My research has centred upon three of Burton's films, specifically *Batman Returns* (1992), *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* (2007), hereafter referred to as *Sweeney Todd*, and *Dark Shadows* (2012), where my focus has been examining the narrative and structure of female representation, rather than analysing filmic constructs, such as camera angles and framing. Within these films, I have argued that the director appears to draw on the stereotypes of Woman as either 'virgin' or 'whore'. My contention has been that Burton crafts his female characters by way of employing elements of the Gothic, in particular the Gothic heroine and *femme fatale*. Nevertheless, the director's fairly stock portrayal of women cannot be said to be wholly one-dimensional. The heroines of his films, I have posited, approach the deviance of the *femme fatale*, as they take on traits of Gothic excess. As a result, I have indicated that Burton destabilises the virgin/whore duality to an extent, permitting a certain freedom and agency to the typically passive Gothic heroine, as well as the strong and deeply sensual fatal woman. Subversive and strange, his leading female characters come to suggest the abject Others of the Kristevan (1982) framework, thus constituting embodiments of Barbara Creed's (1993) 'monstrous-feminine'. The image of the distorted and oftentimes unsettling female body which emerges in this depiction, I have maintained, reveals that Gothic embodiment within Burton's films is frequently founded on the fear of the very notion of 'womanliness' itself.

Liminal and mutable bodies abound in the Gothic, which habitually gives rise to an array of monstrous incarnations, set upon inspiring unease in the viewer. While Burton's

films fall under the Gothic tradition, they also call upon aspects from a range of genres, effortlessly melding filmic elements of fantasy, horror and comedy. Of course, the monster is the stuff of both the genres of fantasy and horror, where the director's portrayal of these creatures is tempered by his Burtonesque wit, empathy and charm. For Maria Beville, the unnameable monster intimates "something that can never be known" (2014: 2). Similarly, Richard Kearney sees these figures as "unrecognisable" and defying "accredited norms of identification" (2004: 84). It is these unknowable and unrecognisable Things which I have sought to investigate in Burton's three films, as his female characters come to occupy a thoroughly incomprehensible bodily space. So, I have maintained that they can be understood as monstrous-feminine embodiments of Julia Kristeva's (1982) abject, as creatures which evade definition and navigate limits. For Jerrold E. Hogle, the Gothic delights in such figurations of abjection, where what is seen as othered within the genre is all too often conflated with what is seen as 'female' (2002: 11). Corporeality, as I have indicated, is highly gendered, where, as Jennifer M. Lehmann argues, Woman is conceived as affiliated with "the body, instinct, and nature" (1994: 85). Alternatively, men are discursively positioned as "the triumph of mind over body, morality over instinct, society over nature" (Lehmann 1994: 85). In shaping his female characters, both the figures of the heroine and *femme fatale*, as Things not quite nameable, Burton draws the audience into an uncomfortable territory of Gothic excess. These monstrous-feminine creatures occupy a space within his films which cannot be neatly classified by logic and rationality. Often beyond adequate explanation, these women serve to disconcert and distress. Thus, I have suggested, the director creates the distinct impression that it is the very 'essence' of femininity, ideologically assigned to a realm of crude corporeality, which is somehow troublesome and Other.

Consequently, I have considered the manner in which feminine alterity is evoked in Burton's three films under study, where Woman is shown to be set apart from the 'normative' male. While otherness is communicated through the myriad irregular feminine bodies presented in the director's films, Woman is also located as marginal as Burton employs certain aspects of the age-old virgin/whore dichotomy in his gendered portrayal. Although I have argued that Burton undermines this polarised stereotyping to an extent, the use of the 'good' girl heroine and 'bad' *femme fatale* is still very much at work in his

narratives. The Gothic heroine has long been a staple within the literary genre, one who is always ethereally beautiful, certainly virginal and described by Fred Botting as “passive and persecuted” (1996: 85). This feminine ideal, I have argued, can be seen as intimately related to Coventry Patmore’s (1863) ‘Angel in the House,’ a figure of otherworldly virtue and confined to docility and domesticity. Within the films discussed, I see this paragon of femininity coming to life through the figures of Burton’s Gothic heroines Selena of *Batman Returns*, Lucy and Johanna of *Sweeney Todd* and Josette-Victoria of *Dark Shadows*. Innocent and largely ineffectual in their positions as foils to the forceful *femmes fatales*, Burton visually marks their forms as pure and almost angelic, unfailingly deploying the cliché of the blonde-haired, fair-eyed beauty as heroine.

While these characters are indeed beautiful, often quite literally glowing within the storyworld of the narrative, they also take on the typical passivity and vulnerability of the Gothic heroine. As a secretary, Selena is presented as the timid and subservient ‘Angel in the House’ within the office setting of Gotham City, where she is ultimately killed by her sadistic employer Max Shreck. More so than Selena, the Victorian heroines of *Sweeney Todd*, Lucy and Johanna, resemble the characteristic ‘good’ girls of the Gothic. Women of unparalleled beauty, their obvious physical charm engenders the typical male violence and domination of the genre, through the character of the villain Judge Turpin. Utterly meek and mild, these characters suffer considerably, where Lucy is raped by Turpin, while her daughter Johanna is entrapped within his home and then in an asylum. Similarly, in *Dark Shadows* Burton portrays the heroine Josette-Victoria as a figure of almost unattainable bodily appeal, yet also as a woman brutalised, as Josette is murdered by the *femme fatale* Angelique, while Victoria is committed to an asylum. Consequently, I maintain that a distinct pattern emerges in Burton’s three films, where his fair beauties not only raise the ideology of Woman as body, but also, to an extent, take on the stipulated role of feminine passivity. Indeed, it is the woman who is traditionally compelled to silence and acceptance, a location accentuating her alterity. More than this, it is the woman who has been abused by the male hegemony, a concern which arises within the Gothic and which Burton habitually probes in his films.

While Burton’s ‘good’ girls certainly acquire aspects of the conventional Gothic heroine, his films permit a certain wreckage of gendered expectations. Selena is revealed to

be a masochistic busybody, one who, I have contended, crosses a pleasure/pain boundary in her rather risky conduct within the male-dominated office. Yet, it is her transformation into Catwoman which, more than anything else, calls attention to her corporeal deviancy. Entirely taking to the role of the monstrous-feminine following her deathly fall, Selena/Catwoman becomes an embodiment of the living dead, a borderline creature of abjection. Burton, I have suggested, explores similar concerns in *Dark Shadows*, where Josette-Victoria experiences a corresponding deadly fall. Josette returns to the world of the living as a ghost, while Victoria mutates into another figure of the living dead, the lascivious female vampire. Indicative of a radical subversion of the 'correct' manifestation of bodily limits, these female characters possess an uncanny and somewhat disquieting resemblance. By this, I have argued that Burton intimates an illogical and perhaps even frightening intimacy between these doubled heroines, an uncomfortable sphere inexplicable within the male hegemony. Although *Sweeney Todd* is the only film under study which does not evoke supernatural embodiment, the heroines Lucy and Johanna are not exempt from slipping into obvious abject liminality. Following her rape, Lucy's body space alters dramatically, as her tatty clothing reflects her inner turmoil and madness. Sundered from reality, all that remains of the once-beautiful heroine is a Thing, a creature both repulsive and between species. To a lesser extent than her mother, Johanna, I have maintained, acquires traits of the hysterical woman, coming to be seen as unruly and even animalistic within the walls of the asylum. Consequently, Burton's heroines, while illustrative of Woman as virtuous and unadulterated, also come to signify what it is about women which inspires fear and disgust. As they become dissociated from accepted societal norms, these characters are portrayed by the director as exceedingly corporeal creatures, a typical gendered locality. Crafted by Burton into such atypical beings, I have argued that these women take on certain characteristics of the *femme fatale*, another figure suggesting the rigid mind/body dualism.

For Stevie Simkin, the *femme fatale* is a "beautiful but lethal woman" who has long found her way into Gothic fiction (2014: 5). While these women recurrently use their beauty as a weapon against men, I have argued that within the Gothic of Burton's films there is room for the *femme fatale* to occupy a far more powerful position. The director, I have posited, shapes this figure into a veritable monster, raising the concern of the frightening monstrous-feminine. For Susanne Becker, the monstrous-feminine of the Gothic poses "a

radical attack on the constraints of ‘Woman’: the feminine ideal in a specific cultural historical context” (1999: 41). Certainly, the *femme fatale* is renowned for destabilising ‘proper’ femininity, but I have contended that Burton takes this image further, fashioning this woman in dramatic opposition not only to so-called femininity, but the very notion of ‘full’ humanity. Clothed in a black, highly erotic, skin-tight catsuit, Catwoman of *Batman Returns* hovers between the worlds of the living and the dead, becoming Thing-like in her role as Creed’s (1993) *femme castratrice*. Between clawing and killing the men who threaten her, Catwoman entertains her love interest Batman, in a manner which I have asserted is distinctly sadomasochistic, exposing her self-fashioning as the antithesis of the ‘good’ girl. Likewise, in *Sweeney Todd*, Mrs. Lovett is the very opposite of a ‘good’ girl, crafted as a ‘loose’ and domineering working-class woman fit for Burton’s vision of grungy Victorian London. Obsessed with both Sweeney Todd and pecuniary gain, this *femme fatale* becomes a castrating woman in her own right, stuffing pies with the flesh of the barber’s murder victims. While not supernatural in the manner of Catwoman, Burton, I have suggested, constructs Mrs. Lovett as just as dangerous, as she takes on associations with animalism and cannibalism. Yet, it is Angelique, the witch of *Dark Shadows*, whom I see as most removed from human subjectivity. Able to summon the world of nature to do her bidding, inflict others with supernatural curses and even detach her own heart, the sorceress is a force to be reckoned with, in her fusion of dark magic and lurid eroticism. Nevertheless, as the powerful and subversive woman, she inevitably meets her demise, reverting to a hollow and broken Thing in her final dying moments. Burton, it seems, does not shy away from punishing his fatal women, driving Catwoman into the shadows of Gotham City and killing off both Mrs. Lovett and Angelique. Located as the ‘bad’ woman by Burton, these characters not only traverse physical limits, but, I have posited, represent a gothically excessive embodiment indicative of the horrifying monstrous-feminine, a creature defined by her sexual otherness and feared by men.

This use of strong and deviant women is a concern demonstrated across Burton’s oeuvre, such as the titular character of *Corpse Bride* (2005), Lady Van Tassel of *Sleepy Hollow* (1999), and even Alice of *Alice in Wonderland*. In these films, it could be argued that the director similarly draws on the stereotypes of the Gothic heroine and *femme fatale*, all the while raising the notion of these women as somehow liminal and hybrid Others.

Consequently, I would suggest that further critical undertakings look to some of Burton's other films to probe the director's fashioning of the Gothic female form. More than this, as I have indicated, Burton calls upon a variety of genres to fabricate his distinct storyworlds, including staples of the traditional fairy tale, such as his use of the supernatural and the good/evil dichotomy. Certainly, these tropes can be understood as intricately related to the construction of the body, especially as his women take on the role of either the 'good' heroine or 'wicked' *femme fatale*. Other studies exploring such concerns could examine the director's deployment of the fairy tale, noting how this tradition both shapes feminine embodiment and is simultaneously subverted, as Burton gives his tales a unique twist. Yet, a closer look at Burton's films explored in this research indicates that his male characters appear to occupy somewhat stereotypical roles. *Batman Returns* offers a depiction of the ugly, deformed villain, the power-hungry tyrant and the handsome, mysterious hero. *Sweeney Todd* presents an old lecher desirous of youthful innocents, a good-looking young hero intent on rescuing said innocents, and a former family man resolved to avenge the injustice which befell his loved ones. *Dark Shadows*, however, is somewhat ambiguous in its portrayal of masculinity, as Barnabas assumes the role of both weak hero and villain. Nevertheless, there seems to be a hero/villain pattern of Gothic masculinities at work in Burton's films, which is certainly an area that warrants further investigation.

While Burton's work might reveal a degree of masculine stereotyping, my focus has been his cinematic depiction of women. Fashioning, as the director seems to do, his heroines and *femmes fatales* into bizarre Gothic beings, I have argued that in spite of this apparent stereotyping, these characters frighten and enthrall the viewer. This reaction of the audience, as Kristeva writes, represents a state of abjection, in which lurks a thing both attractive and repellent (1982: 1). It is this territory which the director's central female characters inhabit, as they are moulded into Gothic figures of otherness within the narrative frame. Yet, while these women are othered, they are also representative of the dangers of essentialism. Not only is this construction of Woman based on gendered fear, but the director also draws on the good/evil binary of the conventional portrayals of femininity. His films abound with images of pure and innocent heroines and sensualised and corrupt *femmes fatales*. Regardless, my contention has been that his heroines assume some of the deviance of the *femme fatale*, however limited. Still, there is a marked rupture of the role of

the 'good' girl, recalling Burton's fascination with all things eccentric. Consequently, the monstrous-feminine can be seen in his representation of the heroine and *femme fatale* alike. I have intentionally stressed and scrutinised the ideological danger inherent to both the director's films and the Gothic tradition, where the 'nature' of the monster is conflated with the alleged 'nature' of Woman. The wild and supposedly all-too-feminine beings conjured in Burton's films dwell in a space sullied by impropriety, aberrancy and excess, quite opposed to 'proper' hegemonic order. In this thoroughly 'feminine' space, female difference is communicated, but so is the need for feminine release and subversion of the enforced gendered role. It is here that Burton permits his *femmes fatales* to run riot and his heroines quietly to challenge the social structure. Fantastic and fascinating, his female characters might unsettle and disturb, but they also destroy, destabilise and fight back against accepted social expectations. So, the monstrous-feminine within Burton's films, as befits the abject and indeed the Gothic, both appals and captivates, creating a space for the woman, as Catwoman so aptly puts it, to "[h]ear me roar".

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**APPLICATION FOR EXEMPTION FROM ETHICS REVIEW AND CLEARANCE
FOR A NON-REACTIVE RESEARCH PROJECT**

1. Will the research project at any stage directly involve human participants?

Yes	No
	X

If you answered 'yes' please stop completing this form and follow the ordinary research ethics review process of your department/unit.

2. Title of your proposed project

Fashioning the Gothic female body: the representation of women in three of Tim Burton's films

3. Brief outline of your project

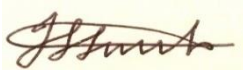
This research explores three of Tim Burton's films, with the intention of investigating the director's fashioning of the Gothic female body, both the heroine and *femme fatale*, as monstrous and Other.

4. Name and contact details of the principal researcher

Julie Lynne Smith

Email: 47320443@mylife.unisa.ac.za/ julielynnesmith1985@gmail.com

I, **Julie Lynne Smith**, declare that I have read the Policy on Research Ethics of UNISA (2014). The contents of this document are a true and accurate reflection of the methodological and ethical implications of my proposed study. I shall carry out the study in strict accordance with the conditions for which this project received exemption and the Policy on Research Ethics of Unisa.



SIGNED _____

Date: October 2016