

On Murder Reconsidered as One of the Fine Arts:

Dismantling the Binary of Gendered Gazes in Filmic and Literary Representations of Violence

Thesis Submitted for the award of

Doctor of Philosophy

By

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January 2020

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Declaration

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Acknowledgements

Many thanks are due to my supervisor Mr Jean-Philippe Imbert for his encouragement, help and friendship over the years of writing this thesis. Thanks also to Brigitte Le Juez for helping me to the halfway stage before (I hope, a happy) retirement.

Thank you to my fellow PhD candidates Caroline, Marian and Sarah for an excellent team effort at the end (and for all those lifts to DCU in the beginning, Marian).

Special thanks, too, to Kathryn A. Daniel for a crucial read-through at the end.

Thanks to my family for being an unwavering support, especially my mother, Kathleen.

And thank you Josefin, for making this whole time very fun indeed.

This is dedicated to my parents.

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Abstract

Michael Monaghan

On Murder Reconsidered as One of the Fine Arts: Dismantling the Binary of Gendered Gazes in Filmic and Literary Representations of Violence

In his late-Romantic essay "On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts", Thomas De Quincey identifies a cultural preoccupation with the aestheticisation of violence and the lionisation of the sovereign subject's power over the passive victim. In this approximation, the artist-murderer is a subject who triumphs by annihilating a figure that is perceived as feminine or Other. There thus lies a misogyny at the heart of De Quincey's murderer-as-artist, and the masculine exceptionalism which thrives on this has helped perpetuate the myth of the criminal hero/anti-hero. Figures such as Dostoevsky's Underground Man, Wilde's Dorian Gray, Highsmith's Ripley and Harris's Hannibal Lecter permeate Western culture to this day.

The ubiquity of this artist-murderer is emblematic of a problem which pervades wider society, from online misogyny, explored by Angela Nagle, to the phenomenon of mass shooting, as explored by Lisa Downing. The main tropes explored in this thesis—of the artist murderer, the queer murderer and the *femme fatale*—have all been established in this spirit, in which a masculinised perspective, written in a code of phallic symbolism, prevails.

The misogyny which underpins this is rooted in a long-standing sexualisation of the image of the feminine that is predicated on masculine domination and ownership, as John Berger explores. This thesis analyses the violent relationship between the subject and the image in literature, as well as aestheticised murder in literature as a form of ekphrasis. Artist and psychoanalyst Bracha L. Ettinger's theories of the matrixial offer a means of decoding representations of the subject-image relationship; works in which these traditional paradigms of gender are undermined are highlighted here using an analysis which draws from Ettinger's work. Therefore, a discourse of ekphrasis guided by matrixial theory will be stimulated—a discourse which exists to wrest the image of the feminine and the Other out of the violent hands of tradition.

Chapter I

Introduction

I.1. Our Killers, Ourselves

The act of murder does not require the murderer to be an exceptional subject. As Lisa Downing (2013) writes, those who kill are not the one-dimensional personalities we have come to recognise as archetypes of cultural discourse: artist-killers, sex-beasts, unnatural child-hating women and incomprehensible monsters. These stereotypes are a way of deflecting from what is actually exceptional about those who seem to kill “in cold blood”—‘that they are aberrant reactions to, *and symptoms of*, normative and normalizing culture.’¹ Instead, Downing continues, they represent ‘the kernel of otherness that is interior to—at the heart of—our own culture, intimate but necessarily disavowed in order to maintain a semblance of decency.’² The fictions we construct around murderers provide a monstrous aberration to our beliefs about gender, sexuality, class and economy. Murder serves both as an extreme metaphor for social relations, and as collateral damage in the maintenance of an inherently misogynist neoliberal economic order. We are conditioned to lionise the masculine subject, to objectify and sexualise women and make Other those who deviate from this heteronormative dynamic. This dynamic is, in itself, an expression of violence, of masculine dominance over the feminine, of society’s rejection of those who are different. The way we depict and perceive violence has always depended on one’s play upon the gender binary, both in its rejection and its perpetuation. The present work seeks a path towards the undoing of the misogyny, by gaining a deeper understanding of those who are othered in the aestheticisation of murder.

This study began life as a master's programme paper on the influence of Thomas de Quincey's essays on murder as fine art over the work of Oscar Wilde and John Banville, both of whom depicted murder scenes in the presence of paintings. It had been assumed they were in the thrall of the immanence of the Romantic hero-artist. The paper sought to explore a connection between this would-be artist and the decadence movement, particularly within the parameters of Wilde's "Preface" to *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) in which he states: 'Vice and virtue are to the artist materials for an art.'³ Central to this was the role of ekphrasis in locating Dorian Gray's place in Freddie Montgomery's murderous lineage. The fundamental idea for a doctoral thesis was to conduct an analysis of the concept of murder as art since De Quincey's time, with a particular focus on the representation of murder as an actual artform (i.e. ekphrasis—see section II.4.1). From reading Joel Black's *The Aesthetics of Murder* (1991) and Lisa Downing's *The Subject of Murder* (2013), it quickly became apparent that De Quincey's artist-murderer was a misogynist at heart and that subsequent cases of aestheticised murder are generally structured around the subjectivity and masculinity of the killer and the objectivity, passivity and femininity of the victim. Any ekphrastic reading of the concept would have to centre upon this problem.

Reading Downing's work, it is clear that murder as art is just one avenue of thought down which to take the Kantian and Sadeian principles which De Quincey satirises—the Sadeian libertine features prominently in the artist-murderer's family tree. The Marquis de Sade's protagonists yield to sexual instincts for pleasure and for whom 'rarefied erotic pleasure is found in murder.'⁴ Sade himself notes that 'there is not a libertine some little way gone in vice, who does not know what a hold murder has on

the senses.’⁵ Sade’s libertine is, according to Downing, ‘a sovereign self, obeying only the destructive force of nature,’⁶ who works similarly to De Quincey’s murderer, with this sense of righteous freedom, safe in the knowledge that they are guided by aesthetics rather than morality. The essence of Sade’s libertinage is the ‘the experience of radical freedom’ that amoral agency affords them, which they ought to follow up on to ‘its logical limit.’⁷ Eroticism, too, is thus crucial to the figure of the murderer as we know it today.

Reading Georges Bataille’s *Eroticism: Death and Sensuality* (1957) together with Susan Sontag’s essay “The Pornographic Imagination” (1967) provided an early critical framework to approaching a modern conception of the Romantic murderer as artist. *Eroticism* ties Sade’s libertine to a theory of eroticism which still rings true, and Susan Sontag expands upon this in “The Pornographic Imagination”, focusing on ‘the pleasures of transgression rather than the mere pleasure itself.’⁸ Death and its repetition are endemic of a stifled pornography which lacks any form of resolution – *i.e.* an ending. Applying Sontag’s summation of the death-bound nature of pornography to J.G. Ballard’s (1973) dystopian work of erotic fiction *Crash* and Will Self’s (2002) adaptation of *Dorian Gray* suggested the underlying framework of contemporary visual and narrative culture is based upon gender dynamics in which masculinity is defined by the will for freedom and power over others (see Chapters IV and VI). This would form a crucial aspect of the analysis of the aesthetics of violence and murder and the basis of an aesthetic and ethical resolution to the subject’s struggle with the Other.

Beyond the archetype of the male artist-murderer, lie other fixed killer personas.

Downing lists the sex-beast, the child-hating woman and children who kill children as fixed gender-determined identities who are exceptions to normative culture and ‘proof of an incomprehensible “other” type of subjectivity.’⁹ As much of the analysis which will follow explores, such figures ought to neither be reified nor othered because, rather than exceptions to normative culture, they form ‘aberrant reactions to’¹⁰ that culture. In many cases, the violence committed by these characters forms a logical conclusion to acting out the personas they are expected to inhabit. This is especially apparent in those having to live up to gender roles, from the ideal woman turning upon the husband who has stopped living up to his own gender expectations (see *Gone Girl*’s Amy Dunne—Chapter V) to the emasculated man seeking to assert his traditionally gender-assigned dominance within a society in which the value of masculinity has depreciated (see *Fight Club*’s Tyler Durden—Chapter VI).

Given that analysing the ekphrasis in the chosen texts would provide the thrust for this work, it was clear that misogyny in the description and the production of art was the central problem which needed addressing. The task was thus to form an understanding of the tradition of male gazing in art, ekphrasis and culture and then find an instructive method of breaking down the strict limitations of gender which bound it. I had recently become aware that Bracha L. Ettinger theorised a gaze outside of the traditional binary and held to the idea that the thesis could work towards suggesting resolutions to problematic aspects of aestheticised murder and violence. I could see in her work a rigorous approach to theorising a feminine form of subjectivity which was outside of the binary dynamics that had seemed unavoidable in my early readings. It was clear that Ettinger’s work had the potential to achieve some

theoretical fluidity in a long-fixed gender-steeped aesthetic tradition. Revealing the source of discord between subjects in our understanding of violent images and narratives seemed possible. In this way, a comparative approach was decided upon that incorporated matrixial and psychoanalytic theory, ekphrasis, gender studies, literature and film.

I.2. Introducing the Subject

As a preliminary to any discussions on gendered cultural understandings of the murdering subject, it is important to be clear on the definition of the subject and how it relates to gender. The subject and subjectivity figure throughout the present work as a means of activating identities and engendering self-determination. Manfred Frank (2012) offers a general interpretation of the concept of the subject as ‘a general structural characteristic of all beings capable of mental states and acts’¹¹ and subjectivity as ‘the class of mental activities and experiences, which are essentially familiar either with *themselves* or with the *owner* of these states.’¹² In a commentary on Sigmund Freud’s interpretation of consciousness and the sub-conscious, Kim Atkins (2005) notes that a healthy ego/superego/id dynamic results in ‘an (optimally) coherent and socially integrated personality, a human subject.’¹³ Furthermore, Lorenzo Chiesa describes a Jacques Lacan’s post-Freudian picture of the subject as one who has attained ‘a “normal” symbolic identification by successfully resolving his Oedipus complex.’¹⁴ ¹⁵ This hits upon a key problem underpinning representation: thinking of subjectivity in terms of castration and the phallus. Griselda Pollock writes ‘[w]hat has been taken as the neutral and universal concept of the subject is in fact a phallic model premised on an on/off logic that positions the feminine negatively, below the threshold of any kind of symbolization.’¹⁶ Though critics such as Michael Foucault

(1975 & 1976) reject the concept of the subject as a mirage of the intersection of politics, language and culture, this does not contradict an illusion of self-possession and a relation in contrast to “the object,” an entity which exists to be acted upon according to the subject’s interpretation.

In this post-Freud and post-Lacan context, the object in relation to the subject is associated with a *lack* of agency, with passivity and femininity—an indication of the relationship of women to subjectivity within a phallic interpretation. Femininity—in its relation to masculinity—comprises of (feminine) traits amounting to deference to the male, presenting as an object for sexual desire as well as demonstrating capacity for motherhood.¹⁷ It is important to note that even within much of feminist theory, the idea of the feminine is interpreted from its place within a Freudian/Lacanian phallic perspective. Those preceding Ettinger within the *Écriture féminine* movement (*e.g.* Cixous, 1976 and Irigaray, 1985) have written about affirming otherness in relation to phallic systems of meaning. Ettinger enters this movement with a separate conception of subjectivity and femininity.¹⁸

On the other hand, masculinity, distinct from male biological sex, relates to the set of identifiers of the masculine subject or individual. These ideals—which have varied according to time and place (see Kimmel and Aronson, 2004)—include strength, courage, aggression, heterosexuality and the prioritisation of work. A definition of masculinity, like those working with notions of femininity, according to Michael Kimmel, concerns gendered power relations which are hidden behind an academic discourse surrounding fixed “sex roles”. To Kimmel, notions of masculinity have been constructed within fields of power relations—‘1) the power of men over women; 2)

the power of some men over other men.’¹⁹ The dominance emerging from such competition reaps privileges within contexts of sex, race, class and sexual orientation, thus empowering a sense of cultural hegemony for the male subject (see section III.2.6. for a discussion on the precarity of masculinity as a fundamental identifier of subjectivity). In contrast to this exists those who have been “othered” by this power dynamic. Otherness, as Emmanuel Levinas (1961) interprets it, concerns that which is made exterior to the self, both in the sense that it does not conform with conventions of subjectivity sanctioned by phallic systems of social relation and that it is not simply an object of the subject’s consciousness—it transcends consciousness into a state of absolute alterity. The Other comprises that which transcends phallic interpretation through a deviation of norms, particularly as it relates to the transgression of race, gender, class and sexual power dynamics (heteronormativity is used throughout this thesis as the gender and sexual aspects of these). Within this complex, the masculine male embodies the *subject* with which to identify and who is at odds with the *object* and the *Other* who embody the feminine or identity which transgresses societal norms, for which there is a symbolic lack within a phallic system of interpretation that reifies the masculine subject.

These terms are used throughout the thesis, though, depending on the critic cited, they can vary in meaning. This is particularly so when referring to the theorists of the *Écriture féminine* movement (Cixous, Irigaray, Kristeva, Bronfen, Ettinger), who are seeking to re-evaluate the place of femininity and women within a Lacanian context, and even more so when referring to Ettinger, who is, according to Pollock, working out of the possibility of ‘a sphere from which *a sex-difference can originate that is not*

*relative to masculinity.*²⁰

I.3. Introduction to the Corpus

After the critical review (Chapter II) the thesis is split into four primary chapters, focusing on Chapter III: the hero-artist-murderer; Chapter IV: representations of the queer murderer; Chapter V: the *femme fatale*; and Chapter VI: the role of masculinity in aestheticised murder. The chosen texts—with the exception of John Banville's novels in Chapter III—focus on marginalised subjects: homosexual men, women who seek to break with their traditional roles and men who feel their traditional dominant gender roles are of little consequence in the post-war period and beyond. Oscar Wilde figures centrally in Chapters IV and V because—as shall be explored—his depictions of his character Dorian Gray (1890) and the biblical figure of Salome (1891) have had a great influence over modern cultural perceptions of homosexuality and the figure of the *femme fatale*. The development of these frequently monstrous figures is then explored in updates of Wilde's characters: Carol Ann Duffy's poem "Salome" (1999) and Will Self's novel *Dorian: An Imitation* (2002).

As well as different subjective viewpoints, different media of representation are also explored to track the development of how these viewpoints are represented. Chapter IV uses the context of queer representations in Hollywood cinema to help understand the importance of homosexual subtexts in the story of Dorian Gray, while, in Chapter V, her mythical roots helps to understand how the feminine perspective stands in relation to depictions of the *femme fatale*. Both chapters build on the literary focus of Chapter III, particularly in regard to the literary representation of art.

J.G. Ballard's *Crash* was chosen as a perfect example of the literary transposition of a

pornographic imagination onto the visual landscape of modernity. Ballard's dystopia is one of the mind, situated within an ordinary twentieth century metropolis. The blend of the aesthetics of eroticism and advertising in Ballard's book is uncannily prophetic of the rise of reality television and the internet in the twenty-first century, in which people's lives become more and more incorporated into the media landscape. Angela Nagle's *Kill All Normies* (2017) is used in this chapter as an interpretive key to revealing the influences of these phenomena on the contemporary incarnation of the Sadeian libertine.

I.4. Thesis Structure: Aestheticised Murder as an Event in which to Explore the Space between the Discourses

The chapters which follow all look at the ways in which characters are trapped by their roles and the various ways in which they seek to break free from the misogyny which underpins their fate. Each in their own way is seeking to escape the territories of their gender-bound status quo, and it is the aim of this work to chart the courses they have set.

In order to achieve such an analysis, **Chapter II** builds a critical context surrounding the central methods of analysis throughout the thesis. These methods revolve around the use of ekphrasis—the literary representation of an artwork (see section II.4.1)—to interpret violence and murder in their representations as artforms in the chosen texts. Ekphrasis is particularly amenable because, in its long history, it has incorporated all of the critical discussions which preoccupy scholars today, such as the male gaze and the silencing of women through the gendering of the narrative voice. Bracha L. Ettinger's own writing is a complement to her artworks depicting female figures such as Eurydice. Thus, the relationship between the visual and the textual forms the core of

this work and the initial development of an understanding of this relationship turns it into an interpretive key to the chosen texts.

The first aim of the critical review is to provide a critical context against which the analyses of texts, which comprise the main body of this work, will be held. Its second aim is to highlight how the secondary material comprising this context allows for a unique feminist critical line of enquiry. The outcome of the latter is to form a rounded methodology which enables the reinterpretation of the ekphrases within the chosen texts based on Ettinger's theories and artworks. With regard to the first aim, the aestheticisation of murder is examined in a way that focuses on the relationship between the act itself and the narrative thereof, and the art which constitutes their endpoint within a text. Throughout this introduction and the critical review which follows, terms such as "other", "Other", "othered"/ "othering", will come into use, and set a precedent which will be upheld throughout. Though there is no fixed style for its use among theorists, the use here of capitalisation for "Other" in its use as a noun is taken from *The Matrixial Borderspace* in deference to its relationship as a companion piece to much of the analysis.

In **Chapter III**, John Banville's would-be artist-murderer Freddie Montgomery seeks, Ettinger-like, to reformulate his interpretation of art in order to redeem himself for the murder of a woman. In *The Book of Evidence* (1989) and *Ghosts* (1993), he investigates his relation to the Other, seeming to resonate with it as it strikes in him powerful emotions he does not understand. Invariably, the Other manifests itself in the image of a woman, which inspires in him the instincts of a predator, the subject who seeks to possess and control the fetishised feminine object. Freddie, having killed in response

to being overwhelmed by emotion in the presence of the Other, insists on revisiting the experience in order to correct his mistakes. Chapter III seeks to plot his apparent findings onto the map of the matrixial and establish a basis for Ettinger's theories to understand the role of the failure to recognise otherness in the aesthetics of murder.

The following chapter (IV) develops the idea that fetishisation and othering is a way of stripping away the agency of the object of one's gaze—a way of projecting one's own ideals upon the object. Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) offers a unique scenario in which the ideals of the artist are captured in a painting and, through enchantment, are embodied by the sitter. Dorian Gray is both subject and object, a feminised Other and reified killer. As a subject, Dorian is thus in close quarters with his own otherness: reflected back on him in a portrait of himself which bears the marks of his age and the tolls of a secret life in which he breaks the taboos of the age. Secrecy is key to Dorian's monstrosity, and Chapter IV tracks the changing perception of Dorian's sexual orientation in the century since the publication of Wilde's novel, particularly in adaptations of the work. In Robert Lewin's 1945 screen adaptation, Dorian's secrets remain unspoken due largely to the social mores of the time and the restrictive censorship which presided over American cinema. A literary adaptation, Will Self's *Dorian: An Imitation* (2002) indicates a softening in attitudes to queer communities in the latter half of the twentieth century. However, this does not necessarily mean Dorian's perceived monstrosity has subsided. Self's examination of the connection between the AIDS epidemic and queer monstrosity suggests the othering of non-normative behaviour finds new forms when brought into the light.

Sexuality, according to Judith Halberstam²¹ (1995), can manifest itself as one of the

long-standing marks upon the body of the Other, alongside race, class, and gender. Halberstam writes that the monster of the Other demonises everything that is not 'male bourgeois humanity.'²² It remains a threat to the status quo through the perpetuation of tropes such as the homosexual who inspires panic in those who hold to a gender binary. Dorian represents an internal dialogue with the Other which has been externalised and is taking place between Dorian on canvas and Dorian in flesh. The first step of a matrixial analysis of this dialogue between the subject and the Other is to identify what is being exchanged—what the Other can convey onto a phallic symbolic paradigm and whether adaptors of Wilde's novel can identify in Dorian's otherness something more than a rupture and a void in the phallic system of signs.

Chapter V continues to focus on the figure of the Other as monster. In this case, the mythological and biblical roots of the modern *femme fatale* are examined. Here, the analysis draws from the use of ancient *femmes fatales* in feminist and psychoanalytic discourses and allows this to form the context of a matrixial reading of texts including Oscar Wilde's *Salome*, Carol Ann Duffy's poem of the same name and Gillian Flynn's *Gone Girl* (2012). The *femme fatale* is a traditionally doomed figure who resists her confinement as a female subject within patriarchal society. The focus on the recent development of the trope in the context of second and third wave feminist movements provides a deeper understanding of both the inadequacies of the feminist contexts and the *femme fatale*'s potential for the development of her resistance in spite of feminism's discursive shortfalls.

The last major section, **Chapter VI**, follows the masculine subject—romanticised in the earliest conceptions of murder as fine art by Thomas De Quincey—as he negotiates

the existential threat presented by the inroads made by the feminist movement throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first. As women's rights movements have progressed globally, hegemonic masculinist and heteronormative traditions have increasingly faced rejection through the rise of women's rights and feminist discourse. This has resulted in those who continue to hold to those traditions so as to adopt the discourse of the oppressed. The development of a sense of the hero's persecution is traced from Hollywood action films of the 1980s and 1990s to the online discourse of "culture wars" today, which hold a major influence over emergent reactionary and neoliberal political movements. The messianic figures of Dr Robert Vaughan in J.G. Ballard's *Crash* (1973) and Tyler Durden in Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club* (1996) seek to redefine themselves within the century's changing heteronormative conditions. Tyler, in an attempt to redress the failure of his generation to live up to the ideals of masculinity in the generations before, seeks to engage in violence with other men in order to recapture the sense of sovereignty over the Other by role-playing its destruction. Vaughan, fascinated by the aesthetics of the automobile and eroticism which dominate the cultural landscape, chooses to embrace a technological eroticism and live wholeheartedly according to its code. He becomes a societal outsider, but it is apparent that he is merely paying attention to the interactions between violence, technology and sex within a media landscape of news, consumerism and advertising. His artist-hero status is sealed within his cohort through his attempts to achieve the perfectly staged car-crash in which he aims to kill one of the most famous feminine sex-symbols of the age, Elizabeth Taylor. As shall be explored, both Tyler and Vaughan fail in their endeavours. However, their violence makes it clear that they are seeking to consolidate their own gendered subjectivity over a feminised Other by having a sense

of mastery over a society which they also seek to alter in some way. What they don't realise is that, even in delusion, their dreams are impossible as long as they have no conception of the otherness they seek to destroy and, through transgression, the Others they seek to become.

Using Ettinger's theoretical framework, we can begin to shed light on the connections Tyler and Vaughan open up to otherness—to the matrixial—and recognise their blindness to the subjectivity of the Other, to their sympathy for it and envy of it. Over the following chapters, the misogyny of the aesthetics of murder is decoded, re-assessed and, in Ettinger's psychoanalytic spirit, directed towards resolving the misunderstandings between subject and object that are facilitated by a phallogentric worldview that is blind to a "ladies' side"²³.

I.5. The Beginnings of a Feminist Methodology

The methodology going forward takes the fundamental assumption outlined by Annette Kolodny in 1980 that the gendering of literary discourse and intertextuality needs a feminist challenge. Kolodny herself is responding to Harold Bloom's assessment of critical discourse in *A Map of Misreading* (1975), particularly Bloom's assertion that the work of a given critic or writer is based absolutely on the *misreading* of the writers under whose influence they are reading or writing. In this way the reading of a single text is to read one writer's interpretation of a pre-existing system of texts. The texts chosen by Bloom with which to examine this assertion (starting with the first appearance of Homer's poetry in Greek schoolrooms of the sixth century B.C.) both highlight and perpetuate the male-dominated literary canon. Kolodny suggests Bloom is silent over those readers and writers who have been in some way cut off

from the dominant literary tradition. Access to systems of texts varies depending on the time and culture. Difference in access is especially clear between the men and women within the same culture, necessitating alternative lines of influence depending on gender. Kolodny cites Virginia Woolf as an example of one who, as a writer and a reader, is refused access to a 'famous library' and must return to her hotel room in "A Room of One's Own" (1929). In his analysis, Bloom thus masks a separate tradition within the same culture 'in which women taught one another how to read and write about and out of their own unique (and sometimes isolated) contexts.'²⁴ In refusing to allow women's influence any higher capacity within the literary canon than the muse of the writer, Kolodny argues our perception and rewriting of literary tradition will always be gendered in favour of male dominance. The traditions to which texts contribute consist of the circulation of meaning back and forth between texts through the interpretations of readers and writers, according to Bloom. This fixed system of texts confronts a writer when the time comes to attempt entry into this system, and many marginalised groups of writers such as women are met with an interpretive strategy that is gendered by the canon. Kolodny suggests that this causes texts which are not included in the literary canon to become isolated islands of symbolic significance, which can at best hope to engage in a subcultural system, but do not contribute to the wider discourse or thrive economically. Kolodny's analysis leads both her and the reader to a hopeful conclusion: revising and renewing our approach to the literary canon offers a path not simply to validate historically othered contributions to literature, but to give these texts access to the literary discourse and inhibit the exclusionary nature of the canon.

I.6. “A Jury of her Peers”: Missed Encounters between Dominant and Passive Gendered Discourses

One such text, according to Kolodny, is “A Jury of her Peers” by Susan Glaspell (1916). In the short story, Mrs Hale, a farmer’s wife and Mrs Peters, the sheriff’s wife, attend the scene of a murder with their husbands and the county attorney in the home of Mr and Mrs Wright. The women are there to collect some necessary items for the murdered man’s wife, who has been arrested under suspicion of the crime. The men search unsuccessfully for clues as to the suspect’s motive, amused by the women’s preoccupation with the minutiae of the fallen couple’s domesticity. They scoff at their interest in an evenly sewn quilt, which reveals to them through an exceptional unevenly sewn block, a sudden and severe stress inflicting Mrs Wright: ““They Wonder whether she was going to quilt it or just knot it!”” exclaims the Sheriff, followed by ‘a laugh for the ways of women.’²⁵ However, the women have the ‘proper interpretive strategies’²⁶ within this domestic scene to observe unfinished kitchen chores and the drabness of a kitchen with a broken stove which suggests to them a miserly husband. They apparently take the initiative of destroying the evidence as they find it, until finally hiding Minnie Wright’s strangled canary, whose death seems to have been the wringing out of the last piece of beauty in Minnie’s life. In their destruction of the signs of the effects of the hard, masculine life upon the feminine, the women offer aid and solidarity to Minnie’s resistance. The fact that the men recognise neither the signs of a motive nor the actions of their wives is analogous of the systematic cruelty perpetrated against Minnie. The truth of these women’s lives is foreclosed behind the image of their femininity and domesticity, as the men see it. Not only this, but the truth of the murder as an expression of Minnie Wright’s intolerance of misogynist

oppression is foreclosed behind the male conception of a motive to kill.

This conception of a motive to kill worthy of masculine action dominates the process of the aestheticisation of murder and violence in the first place. The men in the Glaspell story are able only to conceive of the act in their terms and turn away a non-masculine interpretation without understanding its implications. Two sets of signs co-exist in the Wrights' kitchen, and the set which belongs to the women is not comprehended by the men, who society has appointed to make sense of what has happened and to clean up the mess of murder. Here, the men are the authorities of meaning. Foreclosed within this prevailing symbolic order is another set of meanings, that of the women, who read the situation astutely and display capabilities for the job of investigating to which men are blind. The women are conditioned not to translate their interpretation to the men and the men not to recognise its value in the first place, guilty of what John Banville describes as a 'failure of imagination'²⁷ (see Chapter III).

It is this disconnection between paradigms of gendered discourse which this thesis contends is a foundation of a misogynistic aesthetics of murder that dominates contemporary visual culture. The act of murder offers a focal point for both the study of aestheticised misogynistic violence and misogynistic discourses which foreclose the experience of the Other and make a monster of it. The key interpretive text which runs through the present work is Bracha Ettinger's *The Matrixial Borderspace* (2006). Ettinger is a visual artist, philosopher and psychoanalyst who—having persisted with painting and art-working despite the challenge of bringing a major transformation to a realm 'oversaturated with maleness'²⁸—has made the concept of the feminine a

central focus of her research, writing and artworks. Her focus on the traditional inscrutability of femininity in Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis has produced a new symbolic framework for the feminine and the Other, as well as a means of understanding the interactions between phallogentric meaning and otherness. The misunderstanding between the two is central to the aesthetics of murder, and this thesis proposes that Ettinger's theory and discourse is capable of resolving the misunderstandings and missed encounters between the subject and the Other that result in violence and death.

The presence of misunderstanding between subject and Other in literature, both within and between texts, is emblematic of a problem which pervades contemporary society, from online misogyny, explored by Emma A. Jane (2016) and Angela Nagle (2017), to the phenomenon of mass shooting as explored by Lisa Downing (2013). Other tropes, explored in the present work, of the artist murderer (Chapter III), the queer murderer (Chapter IV), the *femme fatale* (Chapter V) and the masculine subject (Chapter VI), have been established in this comparative spirit, in which a masculinised perspective, written in a code of phallic symbolism, prevails.

A research question can thus be asked: can a new analytical way forward be found in order to subvert and counteract the misogyny inherent in murder considered as one of the fine arts?

¹ Lisa Downing, *The Subject of Murder: Gender, Exceptionality and the Modern Killer* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2013), p. 197.

² *Ibid*, p. 197.

³ Oscar Wilde, "Preface" to *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (London: Penguin, 1890), p. 3.

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 4.

⁵ Marquis de Sade, *120 Days of Sodom*, cited in *Eroticism: Death and Sensuality* by Georges Bataille, Mary Dalwood Tr. [1986] (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1957), p. 11.

⁶ *The Subject of Murder*, p. 3.

⁷ *Ibid*, p. 4.

⁸ Susan Sontag, "The Pornographic Imagination," (1967) reprinted in *Story of the Eye* by Georges Bataille, tr. Joachim Neugroschel [2001] (London: Penguin, 1928), p. 108.

⁹ *The Subject of Murder*, p. 197.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 197.

¹¹ Manfred Frank, "Varieties of Subjectivity" in *Consciousness and Subjectivity*, edited by Sofia Miguens, and Gerhard Preyer (Lancaster: De Gruyter, Inc., 2012) p. 171.

¹² *Ibid*, p. 171.

¹³ Kim Atkins ed., *Self and Subjectivity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), p. 197.

¹⁴ Lorenzo Chiesa, *Subjectivity and Otherness: A Philosophical Reading of Lacan* (London & Cambridge Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2007) p. 6.

¹⁵ Oedipus complex refers to Sophocles' 429 BC play in which the title character inadvertently murders his father the king and marries his mother. Freud uses it as a metaphor for subject formation within a generalised system of family relations in which, according Allan Bullock and Stephen Trombley (1999) the mother is an object of love for the father as well as for the son. If she reciprocates the father's love, she may not return the son's. Conversely, if she reciprocates the son's love, she may not return the father's. The competition with the father may lead the son to fantasise about killing the father and having sex with the mother. The rivalry leads to a fear of castration by the physically superior father. The boy must eventually identify with the father in order to diminish the threat, leading to a resolution of the complex. Girls enter into this developmental stage, too, by attributing their lack of a penis to castration, developing an "envy" for the penis of the father, needing to identify with the mother's castration in order to resolve this. She may also retain the belief that a penis will someday grow or that she can acquire one by other means.

¹⁶ Griselda Pollock in Bracha L. Ettinger, *The Matrixial Borderspace*, Brian Massumi ed., (Minneapolis/London: Minnesota University Press, 2006), p. 2.

¹⁷ See Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* (Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1970).

¹⁸ Pollock notes that 'Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger resumes [a Kristevan engagement with Lacan's theories of relations], with a difference: that the feminine is not synonymous with women. What it is, is as still unknown to women as it is to the core mystery for patriarchy' ("To Inscribe in the Feminine: A Kristevan Impossibility? or Femininity, Melancholy and Sublimation", *Parallax*, 4, No. 3, 1998, p. 111). As noted below, Pollock describes Ettinger's allowance for the possibility of 'a sphere from which a sex-difference can originate that is not relative to masculinity. This *feminine m* (Feminine via the Matrix) is a sex difference from the outset, and not just due to the phallic signification of the cut of castration. Matrixial femininity is not relative to the masculine or based in any way on the division of the sexes we know through gender' (in *The Matrixial Borderspace*, p. 28).

¹⁹ Michael S. Kimmel, *History of Men: Essays on the History of American and British Masculinities* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), p. 6.

²⁰ Griselda Pollock in *The Matrixial Borderspace*, p. 28. Accounting for the emergence of Ettinger's conception of a matrixial feminine, Pollock states that 'the matrixial feminine refers to the co-affecting, co-emerging difference-in-proximity of the pre-maternal/pre-natal conditions of human genesis which bequeaths a matrixial legacy to subjects whatever sex, gender or sexuality they later assume under the impact of phallic subjectivisation (i.e., Oedipalisation and the castration complex)' ("Mother Trouble: The Maternal-Feminine in Phallic and Feminist Theory in Relation to Bracha Ettinger's Elaboration of Matrixial Ethics/Aesthetics", *Studies in the Maternal*, 1, No. 1, 2009, p. 10).

²¹ Jack Halberstam published under the name "Judith" in the texts cited in this thesis, so—for this reason only—will be referred to by their name at the time of publication.

²² Judith Halberstam, *Skin shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), p. 110.

²³ Bracha L. Ettinger, *The Matrixial Borderspace*, p. 50.

²⁴ Annette Kolodny, "A Map for Rereading: Or, Gender and the Interpretation of Literary Texts", *New Literary History*, 11, No. 3, On Narrative and Narratives (Spring 1980), p. 465.

²⁵ Susan Glaspell, *Her America: "A Jury of Her Peers" and Other Stories*, ed. by Patricia L. Ryan and Martha C. Carpentier (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2010), p. 93.

²⁶ Kolodny (1980), p. 461.

²⁷ John Banville, *The Book of Evidence* (London: Picador, 1989), p. 220.

²⁸ Anna Godfrey Larmon, "Interviews: Bracha L. Ettinger", *Artforum* (July 2018), <https://www.artforum.com/interviews/bracha-l-ettinger-discusses-her-life-and-work-75919>, retrieved: 22/5/2019.

CHAPTER II

Critical Review: Towards a Theory of Matrixial Ekphrasis

There are no moral phenomena at all, only a moral interpretation of phenomena.

—Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 1886

Throughout history people have knocked their heads against the riddle of the nature of femininity— [...] Nor will you have escaped worrying over this problem—those of you who are men; to those of you who are women this will not apply—you are yourselves the problem.

—Freud, *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis, Lecture III*, 1933

I believe in the passage from art to science, from art to politics, from painting to the cultural, even if this can't be immediate.

—Bracha L. Ettinger, Interview for *Artforum*, 2018

She comes forth...

—Judith Butler on Ettinger's *Eurydice*, 2006

II.1.1. The Aesthetics of Murder

After the success of “On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts” (1827), Thomas De Quincey was encouraged to write a further two papers on the subject (1839 and 1854). De Quincey fashioned an aesthetics of murder as a commentary on the figure of the Romantic anti-hero; a Sadeian libertine, engaging with the most destructive elements of nature (in this case, human nature) which Immanuel Kant (1790) posits are beautiful and are representative of the concept of the transcendental. In his murder essays, De Quincey appropriates the experience of the transcendental and the

figure of the refined personage, eschewing morality in favour of aesthetics. An earlier essay “On the Knocking at the Gate in *Macbeth*” (1823) identifies this transcendental moment as a long-standing trope in literature and entering a contemporary reality in the event of the Ratcliff Highway murders (1811). John Williams—De Quincey’s presumed-guilty murderer—is to Ratcliff highway what Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are to the stage, and De Quincey outlines how Shakespeare’s staging of Duncan’s murder typifies the Romantic aesthetic elements of a real-life murder. The scenes of the crime become rarefied environments, into which the most feared elements of nature (including human nature) may enter. The silent, chaotic world behind the front gate of Macbeth’s castle is, according to De Quincey, unknowingly confronted by the knock, both by Macduff and Lennox at the gate of Macbeth’s castle and Margaret Jewell at the door of the murdered Marr family. Their knocking represents humanity reintroducing form and order to the event, marking a closing ‘parenthesis’¹ between the fiendish chaos and the formality of human life.

The starkness of such a punctuation highlights the dichotomy of the sublime and the beautiful outlined by Edmund Burke (1756) and roots De Quincy’s notion of murder-as-art within this Romantic framework of aesthetics. According to Burke, to face an immense and incomprehensible horror within one’s own perception of events is to face the sublime, which produces a potentially pleasurable sense of awe. In its experience of the sublime in nature, Kant and Burke emphasise humanity’s sense of its own rationality in the face of a mighty unknown. This leaves open the paradoxical possibility of the rational individual’s potential for irrational violence upon their fellow humans. This, according to Joel Black (1991), leads to De Quincy’s mischievous

suggestion that murder as art is the logical conclusion of the Romantic artist seeking a perfect rendition of Burke and Kant's ideals.

II.1.2. The Misogynistic Construction of the Artist-Genius

De Quincey further refines the parameters of murder as art as necessitating that the murdered victim be weaker and passive, submitting to the artist whose agency and creativity are ultimate. Josephine McDonagh (1992) suggests that this is intrinsically misogynistic. She argues that a supreme subject's use of a passive and docile victim as the object on which to express themselves is a process of feminisation. McDonagh notes, too, that the killing of whole families as a celebration of the art indicates De Quincey's agent seeks the symbolic destruction of the female capacity to reproduce. Lisa Downing (2004) suggests De Quincey's light-hearted use of the assertion of individual agency as the enactment of violence which transcends ethical considerations is done to outline how this individual might maintain the coherent fiction of a sovereign self. According to Downing, aesthetic murder produces an antagonistic subject who triumphs by the same means as the protagonist: 'the annihilation of the Other.'² Here, Downing pinpoints the misogyny at the heart of De Quincey's murderer-as-artist and the masculine exceptionalism upon which so many hero/anti-hero myths are founded.

Downing's antagonistic subject tallies well with Bracha Ettinger's (2006) analysis of the phallic Artist-Genius, a figure who represents a self-creating god in man with powers of creation. His identity depends upon the elimination of the "mother-object" responsible for creating him. Ettinger suggests that, according to the patriarchal Freudian and Lacanian symbolic models, femininity and maternity entail lack and 'the

archaic maternal is not considered to be subjectivizing'³ within these models. Thus, the heroic male figure is allowed to take advantage of and appropriate the procreative powers of the mother-object, building a myth of self-perpetuation. This underpins the construction of masculine identities: 'anyone male or female who takes upon him- or herself this hero configuration becomes by definition a man who eliminates the archaic Woman-m/Other.'⁴ The productivity that justifies heroic male sexuality relies upon this erasure; it commences when female subjectivity is reduced to invisibility and insignificance.

Ettinger uses Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis as a framework for her own theories, but also recognises it as a self-analysis of patriarchal discourse and the prevailing phallic symbolic order. Citing Otto Rank (1931), she demonstrates that the misogyny inherent in the production of Artist-Genius identities emerged from early ancient Rome, where the "Genius", through the entitlement entailed by fatherhood acquired the literal meaning "begetter", 'responsible for the continuity of all life.'⁵ The price of masculinity's self-glorification and the indulgence of its fantasy of self-perpetuation has been the continued objectification of the feminine and the sacrifice of the mother-object (the narrative response to which is explored through the concept of the *femme fatale* in Chapter V).

Rank, in *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero* (1909), charts the commonalities of the lives of mythical heroes, noting their propensity to be separated from their parents—who are usually "distinguished" personages—at an early age, to eventually find their way back to them in adulthood, to take revenge upon the father and achieve a greatness and fame of their own. Rank refers to an earlier observation of Freud's that the

endeavour to get rid of the parents is...

...the expression of the child's longing for the vanished happy time when to him the father seemed the strongest and noblest man, and the mother the dearest and loveliest woman. The child turns away from the father, as he now knows him, to the father in whom he believed in his earlier years, and his fantasies are only the expression of regret that this happy time is over.⁶

Here, Freud fleshes out the Oedipal quest that Rank applies to a wide spectrum of heroes, including Hamlet, and Rank connects it to the typical ego of the child, suggesting that...

...the hero should always be interpreted as a collective ego [...] just as the hero in works by a specific author usually represents the author himself or, better, one side of his character.⁷

Rank associates the murder of the father with the will of the child/hero for independence, particularly if the father of reality poses a threat to the hero's progress towards achieving alignment with the idealised father of fantasy. Lacan uses his theory of the mirror stage to explain the fantasy of the father (and sometimes the mother) that the hero is attempting to restore through their murder. The child's reflection of itself in the mirror helps form its conception of the imaginary and, in the reflection of its body, the child's sense of its own identity is formed. The presence of protectors (in the form of parents) in the reflection offers the child subject a sense of wholeness—an Other with which to engage and protect the subject. Thus, subject formation takes place around the construction of the imaginary dimension of the self and its relation to the Other. Ettinger notes the mother's role in Rank's assessment of the dynamic is usually that of...

...an attractive object of father-son rivalry or a nursing object: either a copulating animal or a nourishing animal. In either of these roles a woman can

also appear as a muse, the source of inspiration. But between copulating and nursing it seems that there is a void. I argue that this void, the negated third possibility—an unspeakable, or should we say evacuated possibility—holds the Genius-Hero complex together and allows its appearance. The lacking possibility is the gestating and birth-giving mother, the begetting mother, or what I have called the archaic m/Other⁸ and analysed as poietic Event and Encounter. It is only with the disappearance of this third possibility, the woman-becoming-mother figure, that the hero-son-god—can give birth to itself and establish a male filiation in the same stroke.⁹

While the child, through the murder of the father, resurrects the hero of the imagination, Ettinger notes: ‘the archaic becoming-mother must melt into obscurity and senselessness as a Thing of no human significance.’¹⁰ Neither Freud nor Rank dismiss the theoretical potential of a sex-difference in terms of the mother’s role and that of fantasies of the womb in the formation of subjectivity, though Ettinger claims they deny it a role on the basis that it risks destabilising their most basic psychoanalytic assumptions.

The foreclosure of the female’s active role in the reproduction of hero mythologies underpins the subjectivisation of male killers in media-mediated public discourse on sensationalised murder. In a 2013 study, Downing claims the gendering of murder which De Quincey incorporates into the artistic murder remains central to cultural understandings of the phenomenon. She elaborates that such “beautiful” crimes leave no place for women, except as victims. Perceived as unreasonable by nature in the nineteenth century, they would be seen as incapable of producing an *acte gratuit* which could only be expected of the super-reasoned male subject. Such discourse amounts to a macho-masculinist fantasy, according to Downing. As shall be explored in Chapters III and IV, versions of this fantasist re-emerge in decadence, neo-Victorianism and beyond—evidence that culture continues to perpetuate ideals of the male agent

enacting his creativity for the sake of his sovereignty, whatever the cost. Downing further contends that the grandiosity which surrounds the exceptional figure of the killer is a mask for culturally endemic acceptance of the masculine murderer. She notes the cases of Peter Sutcliffe and Ian Brady, both convicted twentieth century murderers. Sutcliffe—convicted as sane for the murder of thirteen women—was transformed by the press into the Yorkshire Ripper during his crime spree, thus disguising misogynistic motivations as monstrous and exceptional instead. Downing's analysis tracks the induction of Artist-Hero murderers, while othering non-masculine killers in accordance with the patriarchal framework outlined above. And as is discussed below, Julia Kristeva (1982) goes some way to contextualising the status of premeditated and "amoral" crime, suggesting that flaunting the law requires an agency to reject identities tied to the threat of "abjection". The amoral criminal operates outside the laws of the patriarchal system and is lionised rather than rejected by that system.

II.1.3. Wound Culture: from Murder by the Fireside to Murder at the Water Cooler

Joel Black (1991) notes that doctors, teachers and civil servants—middle class ripper-murderers—preying upon prostitutes and housemaids was commonplace by the twentieth century. Black also notes emergence of working-class murderers in the twentieth century led to the designation of the labels "psycho-" and "sociopaths". However, in their continued victimisation of perceived social inferiors, they are pardoned as connoisseurs and eccentrics. Such a tolerance of the act is suggestive of the *ennui* which hangs over the topic in George Orwell's 1946 essay "Decline of English Murder", for which the perfect murder should excite the *News of the World* reader and be committed by a middle-class professional as an act of sexual or professional

jealousy. For Orwell, the maleness of the killer is vital for a murder of interest. He suggests that one reason for killing is that it would be 'less damaging to his career, than being detected in adultery.'¹¹ Thus, maleness, misogyny and economic output are key ingredients in the perceived sovereignty of the male killer. As will be explored in Chapter VI, maintaining enough of a masculine identity is key to the perpetuation of misogynistic representations of murder.

Orwell's *News of the World* audience are suggestive of the wide appeal of the aestheticisation of murder, regardless of class, and represent the persistent popularity of the morbid entertainment true crime provides. So much has it persisted that Mark Seltzer has since noted (in 1998) that representations of serial killing have 'replaced the Western as the most popular genre-fiction of the body and bodily violence'¹² and the popularity of Sarah Koenig's 2014 podcast series *Serial* is still further evidence. *Serial* is Koenig's journalistic account of Adnan Syed, a young man imprisoned for the murder of his high school classmate and former girlfriend Hay Min Lee in 1999. The series covers the flawed nature of the legal case upon which his conviction was based and grapples with the fact that Syed's ordinariness is a potential signifier of his innocence, while his status as a non-white former lover of the murdered girl offers the sensationalism of crime fiction. By inserting other elements of crime fiction, such as its serialisation in regular weekly instalments, generating the watercooler talk inspired by classics of the crime show genre, such as *Twin Peaks* (1990-1991), Yardley, Wilson & Kennedy (2017) suggest that *Serial* entered popular culture not just as a documentary, but as crime fiction. They note the frustration listeners felt at the podcast's lack of a conclusive ending and relate this need for a reinforcement and renegotiation of

audiences' moral values to what is known as *wound culture*. Wound culture is the use of a damaged private body as a public gathering place in which people may use the body to communally engage in sexual/murder-oriented private fantasies (Seltzer, 1997). It is thus an engagement with a socially sanctioned pornography in which a body is exploited for entertainment and links modern changes in the true-crime/crime documentary genre with its ripper murderer-inspired forebears through their interactions with a 'pathological public sphere.'¹³

The figure of the serial killer is integral to serialised and mass marketed murder. The serial killer emerged as a cultural phenomenon in the aftermath in nineteenth literary and cultural murderers such as Jack the Ripper, when the lines between crime, reality and entertainment blurred. This allowed serial killing as a cultural phenomenon to form into the most appealing discursive construction of the 'murdering subject'¹⁴ offered to us by the criminological and psychological disciplines. According to Anthony King (2006), serial killers do not represent all multiple murderers. They prioritise murders which centre on mutilation and sexual defilement, through which they engage in acts of bodily intercourse with their victims and by which 'the institutionalized rules of modernity are breached as the murderer penetrates the body of the other.'¹⁵ In other words, transgression is central to the acts of the serial killer. Therefore, according to King, the serial killer represents a 'commodified transgression'¹⁶ which allows the privileged self (or subject) to engage in a kind of profane ecstasy. King's focus on the commodification of the serial killer addresses capitalism's deep connection with patriarchy and is further explored in Chapters V and VI. However, transgression itself has an aestheticising effect which predates the

postmodern concept of the serial killer.

II.1.4. Transgression

According to Georges Bataille, transgression 'suspends a taboo without suppressing it.'¹⁷ For Bataille, the construction of taboos has allowed societies to function without the imminent threat of atavistic violence invading everyday life. This occurred through the creation of a code based on the concept of work, where taboos are built in order to coexist and work for the common good. Transgression of the code was only permissible in a ritualistic sense: an allotted time and place in which the common code could be transgressed. One way of doing so is through war, which sanctions the act of murder. The taboo on murder allows war to become a ritual transgression, yet functional and necessary in an economic sense. Outside of war, murder is unacceptable. On our relation to the power of transgression and the mastery it can hold over us, Bataille writes that the existence of the contradictory urges of taboo and transgression reflect the fact that humans are driven away by the terror and drawn by the awed fascination it inspires: 'The taboo would forbid the transgression but the fascination compels it.'¹⁸

The intertwining relationships between sex, violence and death are pivotal to Bataille and this is demonstrated by the dynamics of the brothel, which he considered a place of worship, doling out the sacrament of sex. Sex takes on the signifiers of sacrifice in this setting: the woman assumes the position of the sacrificed and is stripped of her human identity. At the hands of a male consumer, the woman is despoiled of her being, she is laid open to the impersonal violence that overwhelms her from the outside.¹⁹ For Bataille, religious sacrifice, violence and eroticism flow from the one

spring. The adherence of much of our species to this equation of the transgressive is our one true sacrament, maintaining our humanity by limiting our inhumanity to the alluring world of taboo.

Susan Sontag (1967) hits upon Bataille's formulation of a quasi-religious erotic in her appraisal of art as 'the nearest thing to a sacramental human activity acknowledged by secular society.'²⁰ The artist is its creator and is given licence to operate outside the bounds of normal behaviour to achieve their art. Art, for Sontag, is the result of a secular equivalent of religious sacrifice. The artist must commit to their own unusual conditions and report back for the entertainment and edification of others. Works which emerge from such a process hold no responsibility to reflect reality and the boundaries of human abilities.

Pornography thus becomes the verisimilitude of a fantasy rather than a reflection of the real world. The exaggeration of sexual behaviours is simply a narrative situated in an 'ideal *topos*.'²¹ Like any literary fiction, pornography must have a narrative structure concurrent with its *topos*.

If the pornographic imagination becomes systematic within the narrative, according to Sontag, then the only resolution to be had is death when the narrative becomes focused on the pleasures of transgression rather than the pleasure that is achieved within the narrative.²² According to Sontag, Sade 'multiplied and thickened his narrative,'²³ with interchangeable characters capable of almost instant regeneration from the excesses of the night before, rather than arrive at an ending through coherent narrative progression. Everything in the narrative must therefore bear upon the erotic situations,²⁴ irreducible elements which render the narrative of pornography

so amenable to economy. For Bataille, death, too, is economised to achieve its maximum effect. It is an event slowly worked upon, and variables of the event are extrapolated with care and efficiency as an economic fuel for the narrative.

Pornography as a psychological phenomenon—an element of consciousness—is, Sontag suggests, one all are capable of engaging with. But just as all are capable of needing the pleasure of transgression over the pleasure itself in the pornographic imagination, all are capable similarly of madness, violence and murder. The quality of pornography, erotic literature, of any genre of the arts, in fact, relies on the restraint which Foucault (1976) best demonstrates we are capable of in the sense of sexual discourse prior to the explosion of discussion on the subject in the seventeenth century; a rise in discussion which has allowed for a less fettered obsession with the subject.

Sexuality, eroticism, pornography; they stand or fall on how they are used. If a ritualistic (Bataille), disciplined (Foucault), economic (Sontag) way is found, a balance between work and transgression may be found too. Human nature survives in this balance; better use can be made of it and greater pleasure may be taken from transgressions the more rigorously the balance is upheld. Bataille describes transgressions as “limit experiences”, in which the artist-genius indulges in the signifiers of his identity and, as Bataille’s assignment of roles in the brothel suggests, these are gendered experiences. Modern-day pornography relies on the same gendering; the way women are depicted in this context suggests a measure of control is still exercised over them by their male onscreen counterparts and the viewer.

Rochelle Gurstein (2006) notes that the postfeminist (discussed further in section

II.3.5) choice women make to sexualise their image conforms to the male demand for sex and eroticism. These feminist-minded women—having recognised their monetary value in this marketplace—recast 'the humiliation and degradation of women, even if it is self-inflicted, as forms of self-expression.'²⁵ However, Lisa Downing (2013) argues that the gendered construction of self-styled sovereign transgressive subjects is overdetermined discursively. She highlights the fact that real-life murderers who attempt to represent themselves as exceptional figures cannot escape the normality of their conditions. Downing cites the artist Dieter Rossi's 1993 portrait of self-styled artist-murderer Dennis Nilsen in which he is depicted with a 'bespectacled, grimacing, civil servant's face,' which confounds (Nilsen's own) preconceptions of the murderer as the sovereign hero-figure, and insists that he 'is not ontologically definable by the nature of his acts.'²⁶ This separation of the culturally constructed fantasy from the tedious misogynistic reality is revealed in the exploration of aestheticised violence, and the roles which occupy this ideal *topos* also reveal a distortion of reality.

II.2. Gender

II.2.1. Beauvoir and Feminist Theory: Distinguishing between Sex and Gender

The gendering of representations of violence is the basis of this enquiry and a central assumption here is that gender provides a framework on which to analyse the culturally systemic enactment of violence by male perpetrators on all other groups which do not exist within a strict set of acceptable yet subordinate gender, sexual and cultural groups. This has already been in evidence in our analysis of De Quincey's hero-murderer, but, as shall later be discussed in relation to Laura Mulvey's concept of the "male gaze" (see section II.3.2), it remains so in popular culture and social systems.

Simone de Beauvoir approaches the concept of the female sex as a more complex arrangement than the body one is born with deciding one's sexual identity. Instead, she argues that the childbearing characteristics of the female body have been appropriated by male-dominated societies as the essential determiner of a female identity to which their bodies have "riveted" them. It is under these conditions in which Beauvoir famously opens the second volume of *The Second Sex*: 'One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman.'²⁷ Here, she is distinguishing between the female body and the female gender—the body represents a site onto which signifiers of gender identity are placed, and this identity is predetermined by the system of signs into which the body is born. Beauvoir outlines femaleness as a systematically constructed identity in which biology is a primary determiner.

Toril Moi (1989) makes a similar distinction, usefully delineating the concepts of the female and the feminine. She constitutes the female a matter of biology and femininity a cultural construct, which primarily exist within a patriarchal symbolic order. Moi also explains the difference between femaleness—particularly female writing—and feminism, noting that raising consciousness of the female experience is not necessarily feminist, which is to act politically in opposition to all forms of patriarchy and sexism. In their opposition to patriarchy, feminists, according to Moi, are acting against the imposition of femininity upon those born with female bodies, which is deemed their natural predominant trait. It therefore follows that femaleness is not a prerequisite for femininity and *vice versa*. According to Moi, systems of patriarchy display a 'desire to bestow feminine virtues on all female bodies necessarily plays into the hands of patriarchs.'²⁸ This suggests an order of oppression in which the concept of femininity

represents a form of societal stigma. Given the challenges feminist theorists face in further clarifying a subjective nature of femininity, it is clear that, as a central feature of identity, femininity offers women little and even inhibits the female body's purposeful engagement with a male-dominated society. Beauvoir writes that in her confrontation of this fact and herself, the woman is met with a sense of ambiguity 'and her ambiguity is that of the very idea of Other: it is that of the human condition as defined in its relation with the Other.'²⁹ Men embody the subjectivity with which culture has privileged them, whereas women represent the Other, that which is inessential to the purpose of the male. This also holds true within the discourse and critical capacity of this symbolic system. According to Susan Hekman (2015), Beauvoir suggests that Western philosophy is bereft of a concept of the feminine that might offer a solution to the subjective lack embodied by women.

II.2.2. Freudian and Lacanian Femininity

Moi explores this lack through the work of Julia Kristeva. Kristeva also views femininity as a cultural construct, one which is characterised by its ineffability within the patriarchal framework. Moi posits a Kristevan relational definition of femininity as 'that which is marginalised by the patriarchal symbolic order.'³⁰ Thus, as a patriarchal construct, femininity and the women to whose bodies femininity is tied occupy a marginal position within the symbolic order. They can be said, according to Moi, to embody a frontier between the ordered world of man and the "chaos" beyond. This idea is in accord with an Ettingerian conception of a form of subjectivity which has been banished from a phallic order (though her interpretation diverges radically when accounting for the place of the feminine in subject relations: see endnotes 18 [Chapter I] and 8 [Chapter II]). From a phallic perspective, women represent the potential of a

void of meaning which manifest in elements of the abject and otherness. Moi suggests this as a fundamental aspect of feminine evil, citing Lilith and the Whore of Babylon, as well as divine figures such as the mothers of gods.

The influence Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic conceptions of human behaviour and culture over feminist discourse are irrefutable through theorists' propensity to both expand and refute his assessment of women in what is a broadly insightful analysis of human (*i.e.* male) development within a male-dominated culture. Freud characterises female sexual development as being the same as that of boys until they are confronted by their lack of a penis (Cohler & Galatzer-Levy, 2008). This can result in a fixation on a substitute phallus, before an ideal resolution in the acceptance of the vagina, as opposed to the clitoris, as the site of sexual satisfaction. In an inversion of the Oedipus complex in men, Freud posits that girls become infatuated with their fathers, who might impregnate them, allowing the resulting child to compensate her "penis envy" (Storr, 2001). Freud's approach to female sexuality, concentrating on their sense of failure over the lack of a penis is by definition phallogentric. In terms of sexual difference, his interpretation of femaleness and femininity is accounted for by the psychological reaction to the biological reality and that all little girls are, in fact, little boys.

In his 1996 study, Robin Farrell notes that Freud articulates the patriarchal social order's distinction between the sexes, and Luce Irigaray (1985) writes that this reveals the negation of the female sex, in that it can relate only to the male pleasure of the phallus. Furthermore, feminine desires and the pleasure of the clitoris are, in this context, 'not-man-enough'. Freud's analysis is thus enmeshed in this patriarchal social

order and Irigaray emphasises the fact that he affords women no place in a discourse of which they are 'the target, the object [and] the stake.'³¹ Irigaray's criticism of Freudian theory centres on its implied commodification of the female body. By passing from childhood into womanhood by way of her castration crisis, Irigaray contends that femaleness can only come into being once the biological tools of motherhood and maternity become functional. Until then the 'true female vagina'³² remains undiscovered and the child is of little value. Irigaray and many of her contemporary feminist theorists, such as Julia Kristeva (discussed below) and Hélène Cixous (see Chapter V), use the theoretical framework provided by Jacques Lacan, who built on Freud's theories of castration to more thoroughly explain the concept of femininity within the patriarchal symbolic order.

In Lacan's reformulation of Freud's theories of castration, femininity and masculinity are not determined by biology. Gender is instead determined by the subject's relation to the symbol of the phallus. The phallus as symbol and the penis are separate entities here; the phallus 'is the eternally erect and massive symbol of power and potency.'³³ In Lacan's interpretation of Freud's Oedipus theory, the phallus is central to a male child's desire, the father its possessor, the mother its embodiment. He masquerades his own possession of the phallus in order to become an object of desire for the female, though, to him, the phallus is always elsewhere. Girls ultimately identify with their mothers in order to become the phallus and therefore the object of men's desires. She rejects her real self in order to put on this masquerade in which she becomes the phallus and thus the desired signifier of the Other. This is central to the analysis of the construction of feminine evil in Chapter V and, as will be explored, is also phallogocentric

in terms of the fetishisation of the object of desire. However, for Lacan this object—*objet petit a*³⁴—is phallic in its symbolic construction and the women for whom it is the subject of masquerade have no symbolic apparatus to represent themselves as women. There is no symbolic representation of femininity within this system save that which is dictated by the male point of view within which the woman must present herself, as well as his own projection of femininity onto her. The projection and ideation of femininity is fundamental to the voyeuristic/scopic drive and central to the creation of the *objet petit a*, which constitutes, according to Lacan, the ‘presence of a hollow, a void’³⁵ onto which the voyeur can ‘phantasize the magic of any presence’³⁶ they should want. Thus, the *objet petit a* provides the basis for theories of gazing, particularly Laura Mulvey’s analysis of cinematic gazing (see below), which suggests that the gaze is propelled by a sexual drive that seeks satisfaction from the unknowable object of desire partially embodied by the Other. The *objet petit a* cannot be gained from the object that is the Other. The drive is indifferent to this. The object ‘only reveals other want’³⁷ and another yearning for satisfaction. Every embodiment of the desired Other constitutes the potential of attaining the *objet petit a*, whereas the *objet petit a* itself constitutes the *cause* of desire.

For Lacan, the sexual drive for the *objet petit a* is motivated by the sense of lack brought about by the sense of castration or fear of it in childhood. Therefore, it is not biological, though it mimics biological instinct, differentiating the genders largely on the basis of biological sex, though the relation is not inextricable. Falling into more socially pervasive gender roles also follows from early notions of biological and symbolic castration. Recognising her lack of a penis and the phallic properties it

endows, a young girl accepts a subordinate role to the possessors of a penis, taking up a role of passive dependency within the patriarchal structure. The gendered differentiation between the sexes is clear here: males, possessing the phallus, take on the active role associated with masculinity, while the female embodies the passive traits of femininity.

Lacan places the values of subjectivity and gender within a system of signs that is not necessarily determined by biology, offering feminist theorists a framework with which to work in which women are not marked out in psychoanalytic theory as inherently suffering from lack. However, there is much scope in his work for criticism and the advancement of theories which, despite an acceptance of female sexuality, remain phallogentric. The most obvious criticism here is that, by relying only on symbolism, female difference is denied particularly in its biological relation to systems of male dominance.

II.2.3 Kristeva, Butler and the Other

Julia Kristeva ties the discussion of the symbolic Other to the analysis of biological otherness. In *The Powers of Horror* (1982), she draws a correlation between the woman's symbolic otherness to the "abject" aspects of the female body. For Kristeva, the abject is that which 'disturbs identity' and 'system order,' it 'does not respect borders, positions, rules,' it 'is the in-between, the ambiguous, the composite'³⁸ and thus has one foot in the non-symbolic or, as Ettinger terms it, the "pre-symbolic". It manifests in the subject's bodily response of revulsion and horror to these non-symbolic signifiers. The human body itself represents the fragile border between the inside and outside, between the subject and the Other. Urine, blood, semen and

excrement represent lack within the subject's own body, and it happens that the female body is more prone to the abjection of 'flows from within'³⁹ due to its reproductive system. Kristeva is thus demonstrating the ease with which biological and symbolic othering take place, how the female body becomes the object of revulsion through its reproductive function. She further suggests that the coherent and 'whole' body is intrinsically masculine, while the female body, in its heightened state of abjection, lacks 'existential health'⁴⁰ and is thus devalued by men. Kristeva's assessment of the female body expands upon Beauvoir's description of feminine ambiguity and offers a counterpoint to Lacan's *objet petit a* by attributing biological substance to the symbolic void in which feminine difference resides and suggesting that the symbolic make-up of feminine difference is founded upon abjection. The present work posits that engagement with the abject offers an alternative to the patriarchal order of gender, particularly in relation to representations of Salome (Chapter V) and crises of masculinity (Chapter VI).

In *Gender Trouble* (1990), Judith Butler takes issue with Kristeva's notion of a pre-cultural maternal body, neglecting to analyse its own cultural construction, noting that, in her formulation of the otherness of females as gender, she marginalises homosexuality also. She does this, according to Butler, by reducing lesbianism to an unintelligible "whirl of words" within a patriarchal heterosexual culture. From this critique, Butler's own position on the connection between sex and gender becomes apparent. Pointing out that sex, though biological, is as unfixed as gender and it, too, is an 'ideal construct which is forcibly materialized through time.'⁴¹ It is performed like gender and the repeated reproduction of this performance constitutes a social norm

which falls into 'the service of the consolidation of the heterosexual imperative.'⁴² This assertion bears a close resemblance to Michel Foucault's (1961) idea that societal power is exercised by the imposition of norms rather than laws as the primary form of social control. Foucault connects the development of these norms to the development of scientific discourse since the enlightenment. Butler highlights the erasure of sex in the prevailing feminist discourse once gender has been assigned and questions the place of non-normative sexual practices in prevailing concepts of gender. She suggests that non-normative sexuality subverts the hierarchy of gender, that the concept of a gender dichotomy itself is a system of social oppression, through which 'the production and normalization of masculine and feminine take place'⁴³ and that the site and method of the oppression is within and through the use of a restrictive discourse. This discourse insists upon a gender binary and 'forecloses the thinkability of its disruption.'⁴⁴ The idea of foreclosure of non-normative sexual and gender identity markers emerges again in Chapter IV's discussion of the othering of Oscar Wilde's Dorian Gray. By proposing that gender, in concert with sexual difference and desire, is a fluid social construct based on performance, Butler offers a legitimacy to the Other as a performance of identity which transgresses the institutional boundaries outlined by Foucault.

Foucault's analysis of the nature of power provides the raw materials with which feminist theorists such as Butler can construct their theoretical frameworks, particularly when defining the development and use of potentially ineffable power structures such as patriarchy. Power, instead of being controlled and implemented by those at the top of society is disseminated throughout society. It is used as a tool to

enable those who exercise it rather than to inflict upon those without it. However, feminists such as Nancy Fraser (1989) and Nancy Hartsock (1990) argue that by reducing the individual within a power structure to a cipher upon which the distribution of power acts, the disenfranchised individual is robbed of the agency to seize any of the power of which they are being deprived. Foucault counters this by locating the site of resistance at the point of power's implementation. By rejecting the imposition of fixed identities, the individual can erode society's hold on the body through a more fluid expression of itself. By tracking the regulation of the body throughout history in his *History of Sexuality* (1976, 1984 & 1984), Foucault outlines the societal construction of a means of dominating women. Unsurprisingly, medical institutions play an integral role.

II.2.4. Feminine Deviancy and Femicide as the Enactment of Sexual Power that is Enabled by Economy

The anxieties surrounding active and insufficiently passive women in nineteenth century France are noted by Lisa Downing (2013). The rise in treatment of female pathologies at this time are reflective of these anxieties and offered a way of regulating gendered behaviour, while constructing an image of deviance and otherness around behaviours such as nymphomania, lesbianism and hysteria. Hysteria, in particular, developed into a pathology in the 1880s to which a multitude of female behaviours could be attributed. Originating from the Greek word for "uterus" (*hystera*) hysteria has long been associated with abnormalities of the womb and what Downing describes as 'femininity out of control, teeming beyond the confines of its embodiment [...] becoming threatening, aggressive, *unfeminine*.'⁴⁵ Hysteria, according to Foucault, was employed as a means of gaining power over the female body and

regulating what was sexually appropriate: 'the woman's body was analysed, qualified and disqualified—as a body integrally saturated with sexuality'⁴⁶ thus locating the female body as a permanent site on which the discourse of normative behaviour is enacted and its effects implemented. It has provided a framework that has easily come to feel the strain of the divestment of female energy into civic life and the labour market.

Deviations from sexual norms also put strain on the normative framework, and attack what Foucault and Catherine MacKinnon (1983) see as a primary centre of the male's power:

Women and men are divided by gender, made into the sexes as we know them, by the social requirements of heterosexuality, which institutionalizes male sexual dominance and female sexual submission. If this is true, sexuality is the linchpin of gender inequality.⁴⁷

We can see this to be borne out globally. According to a study conducted by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (Gibbons, 2013), 96% of all homicide perpetrators worldwide were male. Males made up the majority of victims, too, but only 79%, suggesting a high rate of male perpetrated murders of women. Indeed, the study reports that a high proportion (47% globally) of homicides perpetrated on women occurred within an intimate partner or family relationship compared to a vastly lower proportion of male victims within this context globally (6%).

Messerschmidt (2017) notes that much intimate partner femicide involves the violent assertion of their 'right to dominate'⁴⁸ their partner over issues involving household labour and sexual jealousy. Murder is the result of the failure of a programme of constructing a dominating masculinity and a subservient partner. Therefore, femicide, according to Messerschmidt, 'reproduces the gender inequality that the female

partner has challenged'⁴⁹ by defying and acting independently of the male's assertion of the right to control. Messerschmidt also points to the honour killing as an act of femicide within the context of the family, in which the gendered behaviour of the woman threatens her and her family's social status. Messerschmidt notes that both forms of femicide employed here are a reaction employed to restore either an individually focused masculine domination or a more societally sanctioned masculine hegemony, upon which the former is a variation.

Systemic femicide takes place in economic as well as sexual and familial contexts. More than three hundred and seventy women have been murdered in the city of Juarez on the Mexican side of the US/Mexico border since the early 1990s. The factories built at the border in the early '90s became a centre of low-wage female labour while violent drug gangs prospered. Poor labour regulation made for a disposable workforce of willing migrants from poorer areas of Mexico to replace them. When the women began to disappear, the US run factories refused to engage and the Mexican state and police focused on the victims' sexual propriety in an effort to shift the blame onto them and protect their own interests, in spite and, perhaps, because of the systemic nature of the violence taking place in Juarez. The term "femicide" is used by human rights activists and victims' families as a means of identifying the systemic nature of the gender-motivated killings, killings which have been facilitated by the economic order which have drawn the victims to Juarez and turned a blind eye to their deaths, which are, according to Louise Wattis (2016), 'an expression of gender domination, enabled by neoliberalism, but sanctioned and legitimized by patriarchal forces.'⁵⁰ Male aggression and potency is not simply tolerated in Juarez, but protected

by individuals and the social and economic system at large, in concert with this the female is represented as passive, her sexual identity 'constructed as the provocation for such violence'⁵¹ and vilified for transgressing the boundaries of domesticity.

The cultural drive behind the systemic propagation of the female victim exists to maintain the economic status quo while supporting itself within this economy. Judith R. Walkowitz (1982) tracks the 'deleterious effects of the Ripper legacy'⁵² on women's lives, singling out mass media's recycling of Ripper iconography to reproduce hero murderers such as Peter Sutcliffe ("Yorkshire Ripper") and Steve Wright ("Suffolk Strangler"), both of whom preyed upon women working as prostitutes. Such cases allowed for a narrative in which the women were paying the price for violating their womanhood, validating the vulnerability of young women who walk alone at night to sexualised male violence. Such narratives often arise in spite of women's movements such as take-back-the-night marches, slutwalks, women's shelters and sex workers' rights organisations, which 'transcend that mythic fatality [and] offer diverse strategies against the false notion of universal female passivity.'⁵³

II.3. The Gaze

II.3.1. The Male Gaze in Visual Art

In *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir identifies the female body as a site of ambiguity, which she must use to assert her subjectivity while being objectified by society, which applies its own meaning upon her, driven in part by an expectation of her to act out her "womanhood". There is no greater variety of examples of the process of the objectification of women than in the Western canon of nude portrait painting. In Kenneth Clark's *The Nude* (1956), the author expounds upon the importance of the

idealised human form and getting the representations of bodies right in order to create art worthy of the form itself. The nude, according to Clark, is the representation of 'a balanced, prosperous, and confident body: the body reformed.'⁵⁴ Such a reformation is enacted upon an otherwise "naked" body—a term which implies 'embarrassment.' To Clark, 'no nude, however abstract, should fail to arouse in the spectator some vestige of erotic feeling.'⁵⁵ Clark's traditionalist history outlines a difference between the representations of male and female nudes. The ideal male nude of Ancient Greece embodies the energy and purpose of the public figure and the ideal figure for worship in the temple. Clark writes that the female body—a more passive figure—was not idealised by the Greeks to such an extent. However, from the Renaissance onwards, the female nude has been the most vital in the Western form, a provocative image, fulfilling 'every fantasy for her bourgeois male consumer' and a muse for the male artist. Bostrom and Malik (1999) observe that Clark, embodying the traditionalist viewpoint, ignores and dismisses the cruder northern European depictions of women's bodies, exalting nudity (as opposed to nakedness) to the most vital component of high art. Here, Clark betrays a distaste for the real body, favouring the erotically charged objectification of the female form, endorsing the projection of masculinist fantasies as "art". The obscenity of this kind of eroticism is vital to the appeal of the form, according to Lynda Nead (1992)—the risk of female transgression posed by the nude threatens to destabilise the order in which her passivity is essential to the nude's aesthetic principles. Nead suggests that Clarke is here creating an arbitrary logic to justify this system.

Carol Duncan provides a (1989) critique of New York's Museum of Modern Art which

suggests that the system of misogyny Clark attempts to justify in his analysis of the nude has survived the twentieth century within the art world's highest institutions. Artworks which directly confront the dominance of the male artist and the female nude, such as Guerrilla Girls' *Do Women Have to be Naked to get into the Met. Museum?*⁵⁶ (1989), are indicative of the museum constituting 'a site of male transcendence.'⁵⁷ From this perspective, the museum, as a place in which to participate in Clark's exultation of the nude, becomes a more pernicious space in which the works become 'recurrent images of sexualized female bodies [which] actively masculinize the museum as a social environment.'⁵⁸ In its othering of the woman within its walls the project of modern art seems to further encourage male action, and the project of modern art and the progress it implies is thus specified as a 'male quest.'⁵⁹ Duncan's assessment of the vanguard of establishment progress suggests that Clark's system of looking continued to function as a justification of the status quo long after its inherent misogyny was exposed.

John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* (1972) television series and accompanying book offer a comprehensive and direct riposte to Clark's traditionalist values, which themselves found a wide TV audience in his *Civilisation* (1969) series for BBC. Berger is clear that the depiction of the nude in art is an extension of how we choose to perceive women in the real world, a symptom of the societal subjugation of women. In visual culture '*men act and women appear*. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at.'⁶⁰ Berger emphasises the correspondence between the woman's role in the nude and her awareness of being looked at—nudity is her awareness that 'she is naked as the spectator sees her.'⁶¹ According to Berger, this role transcends painting and

permeates Western visual culture. The woman is thus aware that her value, if she requires it to succeed, depends upon how she is seen by men. Berger thus revises Clark's definition of the nude by contrasting it with nakedness:

To be naked is to be oneself.

To be nude is to be seen naked by others and yet not recognized for oneself.⁶²

This implies that the image of the woman is not of her own making and—considering the majority of the time she is unable to observe her own body completely—she entrusts it to a performance to be interpreted visually by others only and modified by their response in real-time. This idea of having given over one's subjectivity plays into Judith Posner's (1984) definition of objectification in which the 'object-like character of an image [...] connotes passivity, vulnerability, property, and, in its most extreme form, victimization.'⁶³ The element of this definition pertaining to property is notable for its having been extensively borne out through the media, particularly advertising, music videos, cinema and television. However empowered the model Eva Herzigova may be made to feel by participating in the sale of Wonderbra, her 'Hello boys'⁶⁴ suggests that Berger is right when he claims that the essential use to which images of women in the European nude are put, has not changed: 'the "ideal" spectator is always assumed to be male and the image of the woman is designed to flatter him.'⁶⁵ Berger emphasises the power of the sexualised female image as a means of both commodification within gendered economic paradigms as well as an ego boost for the would-be *voyeur*. Berger's line of thinking has been taken up by theorists of the modern media which inherited the artistic prestige of the Western nude—most notably by critics of cinema.

II.3.2. Mulvey and Cinema

Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975) is the founding text of

feminist film studies as we know them today. According to Mulvey, cinema has created a system of looking in which a gaze is instigated by the male protagonist under which women characters are objectified and sexualised for the spectator's pleasure. This is underpinned by Lacan's position that 'at the scopic level, we are no longer at the level of demand, but of desire, the desire of the Other.'⁶⁶ The gaze is dependent on desire, which props up the fantasy of the spectator. The moment the fantasy is disrupted by reality, desire is diverted or disappears and the gaze—an imaginary dynamic created by the spectator—collapses. The audience of the film, who are persuaded by the film's narrative to sympathise with the lead male character, consequently participate in that character's gaze. Mulvey emphasises the pleasure of looking—*scopophilia*—citing it as one of Freud's 'component instincts of sexuality'⁶⁷ and connecting it to the controlling nature of the gaze and the taking of other people as objects. Though the agency of the male character advances the narrative, the masculine engine which provides the thrust is delicate: he is unable to 'bear the burden of [his own] sexual objectification'⁶⁸ when the gaze turns to him, which is one result the disruption of the gaze—when the spectator is not employing the gaze, he becomes its object. On the other hand, female characters act as passive objects, disrupting the progress of the male agent, behind which is an otherness signified by lack. Non-masculine characters thus only function as a narrative support to the male lead. Mulvey contends that the whole audience must, therefore, identify with the male character, on whom every aspect of the narrative's progress depends, in order to follow the narrative to the end and participate in the film's point of view.

The male gaze in cinema operates as an element of the systematised violence or threat

of violence towards the Other. Marion Crane in Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960), for example, is both the object of the gaze in an erotic sense, separate from the narrative progression, yet her being looked at by Norman Bates is central to her death. As the narrative has followed Crane's point of view from the start, the audience is aware of her social and sexual transgressions and her theft of her employer's client's cash. The film directs the audience to empathise with her misdeeds. As soon as the audience's point of view shifts from Crane to Bates, the audience suddenly begins to stalk and objectify Crane. By Mulvey's logic, the erotic event of male spectatorship is made violent by male complicity in Bates's "assaultive"⁶⁹ gazing. The three looks (from the camera, the audience and the male character⁷⁰) converge upon Marion and are activated in order to bring about her death. Given Bates is himself othered by the narrative, *Psycho* is illustrative of the potency of the male gaze as a tool of misogynistic capabilities and action—in Mulvey's assessment, it is fundamentally patriarchal, ideological and phallogentric. The institution of a patriarchal film industry—particularly in the United States—has undoubtedly led to narrative traditions in which the desires of predominantly male film-makers are catered to and may also account for the inability of their male avatars to cope with self-analysis through the objectification of their own bodies.

II.3.3. Female Spectatorship and Male Masochism in Horror Films

Theories of female spectatorship are rare, but there are forms of female gazing which are well-established in mainstream cinema. The horror genre in which a female victim/heroine survives is now a contemporary trope which has, according to Halberstam (1995), replaced nineteenth-century Gothic fiction's indistinguishable victim and potential heroine figures. Carol J. Clover (1992) uses the term "final girl" to

describe the last surviving woman to face the killer in films such as *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Tobe Hooper dir., 1974) *Halloween* (John Carpenter dir., 1978), *Friday the 13th* (Sean S. Cunningham dir., 1980). Halberstam contends that this emergent female figure is being watched by her persecutors within the film and is aware that this is the case. She, unlike the passive watched subject, is a paranoid 'subject who watches as well as a subject who is watched.'⁷¹ This figure's fear is a key to their survival, according to Halberstam, in contrast to women who don't worry about being watched and often die. In such a figure, a feminine gaze exists with which the film spectator is forced to partake as they would with a male protagonist by Mulvey's reckoning. The watching male thus enters into a new formula of watching in which what Clover describes as a "masochistic aesthetic" is achieved quite apart from the sadistic and voyeuristic elements of cinema both within horror and beyond. This happens through his participation in a feminine gaze, fearful of assault from a monstrous masculinity. By engaging with the female lead, much of the time watching the film is thus 'registered as a "feminine" experience.'⁷² However, masochism in and of itself implies a desire to be subjected to the pain and thus the reformulation of the gaze remains true to the purposes of sexual stimulation and desire.

Kaja Silverman (1980) suggests the audience enters into the victim's experience in order to act upon a fundamental compulsion of masochistic behaviour: 'a pleasurable repetition of his/her own history.'⁷³ This is done, according to Silverman, from a more powerful position than the passive point of view can facilitate: the sadistic position of the camera's gaze. Therefore, one of the unique visual elements of female-led horror cinema is to go beyond the typically sadistic pleasure of looking by engaging with the

protagonist's pain. A proxy for masochistic pleasure, she does not willingly enter into this paranoia, and is identifiable and complicit in her will to survive. Citing Mulvey, Silverman also suggests that any willing engagement with masochistic pleasure on the female subject's behalf only serves to threaten male subjectivity and results in the film's insistence upon her guilt and sickness, that she is responsible for the castration of her male counterparts. Silverman notes that filmmakers can break with these traditions by 'dramatising the lure both for the male and female subjects of negation, passivity and loss.'⁷⁴ This is done on the part of the male through an acceptance that the reality of the penis is not equal to the symbolic significance of the phallus. The reality of the male's inadequacy under the symbolic weight of the phallus contributes to the brittleness of the masculine identity. This is especially apparent when the male figure is confronted feminine agency and when under the scrutiny of Mulvey's conception of the phallogentric gaze. It is thus the lot of the female subject—by way of the integration of her castration and guilt into her narrative identity—to bear this inadequacy on behalf of both.

Even through horror cinema's masochistic variation on the gaze, Mulvey's assessment holds its ground. Judith Halberstam (1995) doubts aggressive or paranoid femininity offers any reward to a feminine spectator, suggesting the relationship in horror between the monstrous and the female as an affirmation of psychoanalytic narratives of human fear and desire. Halberstam suggests paranoia has the tendency of producing the very reality it fears. No matter how well spectators identify with her, the heroine 'demands' a male or masculine predator and 'will inevitably run screaming into the void.'⁷⁵ This, according to Linda Williams (1996), is an excellent reason for the

woman not to look in the first place—there is no place for her pleasure in such looking, only punishment. Williams contests that looking and seeing a monster on the part of a woman is to look at a mirror image and to see the power of the castrated subject, of a non-phallic sexuality. For seeing this she—as the avatar of a male-constructed gaze—is punished by male power by fleeing from it or destroying it on his behalf.⁷⁶ In her encounter with a monster who reflects back onto her the power of the Other, Williams also suggests a subversive recognition exists between them that can amount to sympathy, followed regardless by the callous destruction of the monster and the return of the woman to the phallic signification of the action.

From Clover, Silverman and Williams's analysis of the female subject, it is evident that the representation of women who confront various kinds of danger within cinema are not simply burdened as objects for pleasurable looking, but with their own bodily reality. This is to say that as ciphers in which men may play out their fears of what is lacking in their (over)estimated symbolic worth, they are, through their trials, given a chance to recognise their non-symbolic power and the threat it poses to the phallic narrative which is operational through the male gaze.

II.3.4. The Emergence of the Lesbian Gaze

Karen Hollinger's conception of the lesbian gaze offers mainstream cinema spectators an alternative to the paranoid female gaze of contemporary screen horror (1998). According to Hollinger, the desire for the lesbian object is mediated by the female desire of the lesbian subject. They are coupled by their sex and more closely aligning genders. Most vitally, the lesbian looker seeks a returning look, contrary to Mulvey's model of male-female opposition in the formation of subject and object.⁷⁷ Just as the

female paranoid gaze is an erotic one in its masochism, the lesbian gaze at least equates to one of lesbian desire, which, in part, excludes the male from full complicity. The lesbian gaze is more a two-way dialogue between subject and object and empowers both women to engage actively in the erotic act of looking. Hollinger suggests that the representation of lesbianism in mainstream cinema in and of itself disrupts the hegemony of heterosexuality. She also notes that truly subversive representations of subjectivity within woman/woman onscreen relations are rare in mainstream Western cinema, which use the conventions of heterosexual love stories with active (masculine) and passive (feminine) participants. According to Hollinger, these cases allow the perpetuation of homophobia in a framework which allows lesbians to present as villains, mentally ill or sexual turn-ons for heterosexual male spectators. She further suggests that one strategy to resisting heterosexual appropriation is for films to deal with their central characters' sexuality implicitly only. As shall be explored in Chapter IV, this both serves to undermine prevailing homophobia as well as compound the foreclosure of non-normative discourses. It is clear, however, that the more successful and widely known attempts at representing a lesbian gaze, occur within a recognisable paradigm of scopophilic looking.

Richard Dyer (2003) outlines the subversive qualities of a film like Janet Meyers' *Getting Ready* (1977), which begins by knowingly presenting images of the female body to the approving sounds of male voices. Dyer concludes—with its main characters Diana and Val choosing to shirk the influence of men over their behaviour, committing to a relationship with each other—*Getting Ready* embodies the expression of cultural feminism. By explicitly rejecting the voice of male control, choosing to

invest in a “friendship” between women and the use of vaginal imagery, films such as *Getting Ready* disrupt male-identified ways of thinking/seeing and ‘places delight in female genitalia within an all-female circuit of pleasure.’⁷⁸ However, Dyer suggests there are limitations to such an approach, given that much of subversive lesbian cinema utilises mainstream approaches. Here, he highlights the tendency of lesbian pornography—in order to reclaim the practices of butch/femme roles, the use of dildos and sadomasochism—to use mainstream forms of visual representation reminiscent of the *Playboy* and *Penthouse* magazines; a ‘rather white, rather vanilla version of lesbianism.’⁷⁹ The site of female looking is thus always moving back towards conventional tropes and positions. In accordance with Dyer, Linda Williams (2017) points out that the much-reproduced heterosexual pornography positions of “scissoring” and “reverse cowgirl” practices have been popular since the 1980s and that the negative response to their portrayal in Abdellatif Kechiche’s *Blue is the Warmest Colour* (2013) gets to the root of why an unambiguously subversive lesbian film to counter the male gaze is impossible. Williams asks: ‘why can’t audiences, male and female alike, appreciate derrières, especially in a film that foregrounds its women characters’ own appreciation of them?’⁸⁰ Male gaze aesthetics may dominate, but depictions of lesbianism and of female pleasure in female forms show that it is more than just men who engage in scopophilic looking.

Elsewhere (1989), Williams emphasises that despite the array of lookers taking pleasure in the image, cinema remains a kind of testing ground within patriarchal paradigms in which taboos of gender and sexuality may be explored. In slasher films, the triumphant final girl emerges from the bloodbath wielding a phallus in the form of

a chainsaw or knife in a moment of “high drag”. This is the resolution of the male’s perverse pleasure in playing with roles of femininity in abject terror. Having engaged in the ‘extreme theatricalization (“play”) of gender roles,’⁸¹ male viewers resolve the castration anxiety they have courted with the restoration of the phallus to a position of dominance within the narrative. The feminine position from a site of looking is, then, taking both the final girl and the lesbian looker into account, what Mary Ann Doane (1982) describes as one of ‘oscillation between a feminine and a masculine position, invoking the metaphor of the transvestite.’⁸² As Laura Mulvey reflects in one of her “Afterthoughts” (1981) on “Visual Pleasure”, the liminality of this kind of horror film as a place of gender play offers a hint of its role as site of engagement with the Other on the part of the male-coded subject. Furthermore, the genre gives us a glimpse of the shapeshifting nature of femininity itself within a phallic paradigm, as well as the ‘trans-sex identification’ needed for women to engage with it as viewers. Mulvey suggests that this is habitual from childhood for women ‘that very easily becomes *second Nature*. However, this Nature does not sit easily and shifts restlessly in its borrowed transvestite clothes.’⁸³ The woman spectator, though she may identify in some form with the feminine image, infiltrates it by phallocentric disguise and thus simultaneously engages and abandons it.

II.3.5. Postfeminist Gazing

In the wake of the second and third waves of feminism, media and culture continue to adjust their articulations of gender. These adjustments manifest themselves in the advancement of women’s rights, a recognition of and a move against the problematic nature of media sexualisation of women, the rise of representations of empowered woman as well as the backlash against all forms of feminism beyond first-wave ideals.

Rosalind Gill (2006) describes the concept as a “sensibility” concerning a historical movement of these developments which is enmeshed in neoliberalism. In other words, it concerns the reconstitution of feminism within the pre-existing male-dominated economic structure. One of the primary postfeminist shifts has been the definition of femininity as ‘a bodily property rather than (say) a social structural or psychological one.’⁸⁴ The source of a successful feminine identity within media, according to Gill, is thus a well-regulated “sexy” body which works in tandem with the beauty industry in order to conform with narrow beauty standards. When it comes to women who do not conform to these standards, this situation encourages a kind of judgmental outsourcing. Judgement and aggression towards normative outliers are delegated to relations between the women themselves in the name of female empowerment. As Anneke Smelik (2009) puts it ‘...the voyeuristic gaze has been internalized in impossible norms for a thin and yet strong and well-formed body’⁸⁵ instituting a Foucauldian regime of visual self-policing.

Gill points to celebrity magazines’ critical analysis of women’s bodies and “makeover” programmes on TV as evidence of the media’s part in reinforcing gendered standards of visual appearance. Visible body hair and the effects of fat—whether too much or too little—on women’s bodies comes in for greatest scrutiny. Further, Riley, Evans and Mackiewicz (2016) suggest that humiliating women on makeover shows amounts to the policing of consumer choices and imposing a standard of appearance in keeping with the white middle-class. This is intended to be a process of empowering women to take control of their bodies, accessing the power of acceptable femininity by buying into the economy which regulates it. In seeing the “perfect” woman as an exemplar of

empowerment, of feminist identity and as sexually attractive, McRobbie (2009) outlines a female gaze of 'fascinated looking'⁸⁶ in which illegible desires manifest. Women thus enter into the "postfeminist gaze" which is subjective, regulating and objectifying, while male gazes are side-lined. The male gaze is not redundant in this context, but has less of a direct effect than the postfeminist gaze—it takes on a more passive yet all-seeing role, while apparently more forgiving than a female gaze (Riley, Evans & Mackiewicz, 2016). Under the strain of such scrutiny, women face inevitable failure to reach the prescribed feminine ideal. This is obviously not a new experience for women long hindered by the prevalence of male gazing, and—as explored in Chapter VI—men are subject to a similar form of gender role strain. However, the upshot of postfeminist theory is that co-option of women into carrying out the sexualising and regulating work of the male gaze indicts the neoliberal subject as a more indirect variation on the dominant phallocentric agent.

This subtle promotion of female empowerment has bled into successful re-renderings of the female action hero in cinema. In a context where onscreen images are easily manipulated, Debbie Ging (2007) looks at representations of empowered and equal women as heroines of early twenty-first century cinema. Though the heroes of films such as *Lara Croft: Tomb Rider* (2001) and *Charlie's Angels* (2000) do not cater completely to the straight male gaze, they are—through use of computer-generated image (CGI) enhancement and the influence of video game aesthetics—exaggerated in both femininity and physical ability. They retain a more feminine physique that their forebears (Ripley of the *Alien* franchise, Sarah Connor of the *Terminator* films) were not required to master: 'waif-like legs, page-3 size breasts and lightly muscled arms.'⁸⁷

Wielding the phallus-associated weapons of their male counterparts, they thus form 'the products of male/masculinist fantasy,'⁸⁸ enacting potentially subjectivising violence on the precarious platform of what Ariel Levy (2005) describes as "raunch culture". Women's empowerment, in this context facilitated by developments in weaponry and reproductive technologies, is, according to Ging, epitomised by the 'hyper-sexualised and hyper-violent, but non-fertile'⁸⁹ Lara Croft. The empowerment is transmuted through media and thus offers illusory gain in the fight for gender balance. This manifests in an objectifying female gaze, which elicits the spectacle of idealised male bodies. This suggests that a corresponding regulation of masculine ideals—as exemplified by a wet and nude Daniel Craig in *Casino Royale* (2006) and the sweaty chiselled torso of Brad Pitt in *Fight Club* (1999)—is also being enforced. The female gaze is here employed as mirror version of the male gaze, reinforcing the male fantasy of gender roles. An embodied femininity remains essential to the female action hero's success as a subject, from which looked-at-ness emerges as a healthy by-product; she may add to her list of lookers the window-shopping postfeminist. Her trappings in contemporary cinema offer a simulated response to masculine domination, but in reality, the male gaze remains a potent—if less direct—threat.

Postfeminism has developed since the early 2000s, having incorporated discussions about online misogyny and rape culture in order to address the pervasiveness of misogyny through highly publicised causes such as the Me Too movement. Me Too was founded by Tarana Burke in 2006 as a discursive network between women of colour experiencing sexual abuse within underprivileged communities (Zacharias, 2018). The concept burst into a wider public consciousness in 2017, when celebrities

such as Alyssa Milano began promoting “#MeToo” as a means for victims of sexual harassment to share their experiences and move them into the wider public consciousness. As well as this, Whelehan (2010) has argued that—through the never-ending need to refresh their identities and lifestyles by means of the makeover—the narrative tropes and character ideals of postfeminism are starting to dry up (as exemplified by the thematic dead end of *Sex and the City 2* [2010]). However, Gill (2016) is keen to point out that, despite the rise of newly visible forms of feminism, there exists a proliferation of new (online) and old (institutional) misogynies; at a point of Western/global economic and social inflection, the context of these feminisms remains tied to the progress of neoliberalism and to how they are commodified. In a recent reflection on the postfeminist sensibility, Gurevich *et al.* (2017) cite the resurgence in transnational feminist activism as a response to the continued regulation of standards of femininity, which has widened further into the technological sphere. According to Thorpe, Toffoletti and Bruce (2017), independent use of social media as a path to personal empowerment oftentimes falls into line with the traditional depictions of feminine success, emphasising youth, whiteness, heterosexuality and femininity. This hyperfemininity is not available to all—sportswomen and the rich have easier access to the tools required—and for those who feel the pressure that to conform is to succeed, the spectres of “postfeminist disorders” (bulimia, anorexia, anxiety etc.) threaten to block the path. Gill (2017) sees no sign of postfeminism’s demise in spite of its coexistence with heightened feminist and gender activism through which it sometimes operates, recognising new opportunities in filtering, monetising and sexualising the “resistance”.

II.4.1. Ekphrasis

The present work proposes a novel approach to undoing the problems of gendered aestheticised violence. Central to this approach is Bracha Ettinger's *The Matrixial Borderspace* (2006), a compendium of essays and visual portraits which concentrates on the figure of Eurydice. The nymph Eurydice, soon after her marriage to Orpheus (the greatest musician and singer in Greek myth) is bitten by a snake and killed.

Orpheus takes it upon himself to retrieve her from the underworld. He enchants all who dwell below and is allowed to take Eurydice back to the upper world on the condition that he leads her out without looking back. He looks back to gaze upon his wife and she is lost to him as he emerges from the world of the dead without her.⁹⁰

Ettinger paints Eurydice as a female figure who—in the moment Orpheus looks back—is in a liminal state, both in our visual possession and beyond it. Ettinger—more thoroughly introduced in the next section—writes about the paintings and what they mean. This occurs during the process of outlining matrixial theory, which uses a Lacanian psychoanalytic approach to create representations of gender which do away with the phallogentrism underlying our narrative understanding of culture (*i.e.* the roles enforced by our archaic understandings of gender. These include: agent, subject, object, passive, active, victim, etc.). However, Ettinger's text highlights the potential of ekphrasis as a tool for the re-representation of the figures depicted by art within the matrixial borderspace. Therefore, it is necessary to devote time to understanding the capabilities of ekphrasis as the linguistic medium by which we undo phallogentrism in art and writing.

Modern interpretations of ekphrasis vary. Usually, it is taken as simply writing about visual art. However, several interpretations imply that its subject matter stretches to

include music, film, dance as well as non-artistic pursuits. To put our use and interpretation of the concept simply, it is representing art through writing. James Heffernan's 1993 provides this fundamental interpretation from a literary perspective: 'a verbal representation of a visual representation.'⁹¹ However, this is simply the first step in understanding a concept that stretches to denote the representation of a representation. Laura M. Sager Eidt (2008) outlines "filmic ekphrasis" as the representation of the image through the moving image. Emma Kafalenos (2003) refers to the *Truman Show* (1999) as an example of the representation of an imaginary genre of television transposed onto cinema—what she describes as "double coding". *The Picture of Dorian Gray* consists of a similar form of the transposition of the imaginary. Dorian's portrait consists of a moving image for which there is practically no real-life referent (until the development of cinema in the years to immediately follow).

The wide array of definitions and interpretations of ekphrasis emphasise how fraught its meaning has been in the context of gender. The challenge of representing art in this context, too, becomes apparent. The concept has existed since its ancient Greek usage as a rhetorical exercise not associated with representing art specifically. Ruth Webb (2009) outlines the distinction between its rhetorical origins and its changeable modern meaning. Heffernan's simple definition is but one strand of the many, according to Webb, representing one of multiple aspects of its ancient Greek usage, which included subject matter such as persons, places, times, events, animals and festivals.⁹² Works of art were not essential to an ekphrasis known to the Romans as 'a speech that brings the subject matter vividly before the eyes.'⁹³ However, the visual remains central to the modern understanding of the concept, its essential element

being its ability to convey the image of the subject-matter to the mind's eye of the listener.

II.4.2. Gendering Ekphrasis

Heffernan's 1993 study of ekphrasis centres on the power of language over image, and their embodiment of the duel between the male and female gazes respectively.

Heffernan posits that language is equated with the agency of male speech seeking to gain control over a passive, still and beautiful female image. Grant F. Scott (1994) agrees with this assessment, describing ekphrasis as an attempt to master the image by inscribing it, while promising to give voice to it. On the basis of this promise, other studies have sought to highlight the opportunity ekphrasis provides to form representations of female agency in the literary image and, from there, track the emergence of a female voice. For instance, W.J.T. Mitchell (1994) suggests that the production of ekphrasis is not simply to wrestle passive objects and images into a verbal poetic structure. However, he also notes that there is a tradition in poetry that treats the image as a female Other and that to engage in ekphrasis is to adopt a masculine perspective with the assumption of a masculine audience.⁹⁴ This presents a problem to writers seeking to produce a form of ekphrasis which disengages from the male power-seeking perspective. Elsewhere (2005), Mitchell recognises the slippage of meaning that takes place in the interpretation of the image, associating the image with the projection of the desire of the looker, which is 'inseparable from the problem of the image, as if the two concepts were caught in a mutually generative circuit, desire generating images and images generating desire.'⁹⁵ Here, he captures the inherent failure of the process which is an outcome of the clash between visual and verbal modes of representation. Ekphrasis induces three states between which those who

approach it fluctuate: hope (that the difference between word and image can be overcome), fear (resistance to the image and a need to maintain the difference) and indifference (the realisation that ekphrasis is impossible). Ekphrasis is thus the opening of a pathway to the otherness of the image under an imperative not to follow it to the end.

In her analysis of Elizabeth Bishop's ekphrastic writing, Cynthia Messenger (1994) highlights the inability of female writers to imbue the male-produced artwork (often depicting a passive female) with female agency. In response to this, Sara Lundquist (1997) points out that some artworks are produced that specifically imbue their often-female subjects with agency. She suggests poets seek to write about art which empowers its subjects through reinforcing female agency, a female voice and a female gaze. Furthermore, Sager Eidt (2008) outlines the way a novel such as *The Girl with the Pearl Earring* by Tracy Chevalier (1999) provides a previously passive and silent image, like that of the figure of the eponymous Johannes Vermeer portrait (1665), a space in which to retreat from her social context, and a voice through which the reader experiences her perspective.⁹⁶ It is clear from the vibrant discourse surrounding the gendering of ekphrasis that theorists are concerned about the subject, and that a means of moving on from recent traditions of masculine rhetorical power is being sought and highlighted. As ekphrasis lends itself to broad definitions in its modern contexts, this is by no means impossible.

In the following analysis of texts, in which the narrative conveys and emphasises the visual and aesthetic significance of events, it will be presumed that they are engaging in ekphrastic writing. Conflating and confusing events with artifice and transgression

for the sake of aesthetic beauty and pleasure is at the heart of the process of aestheticising subject-matter such as violence and murder. Putting murder into the order of fine arts, as De Quincey does, requires it to be placed within the discourse surrounding fine art. De Quincey, for his part, appropriates and satirises the discourses surrounding the Romantic movement. Adopting the language of erotica or attributing the elements of visual art to an event, justify it in an aesthetic sense rather than a moral one. This is a way of imbuing an event, object or experience with meaning, which makes them work toward the narrative ends of the author and underlines the solipsistic nature of ekphrastic writing which will be explored in Chapter III. Katie Aisenberg (1995) goes as far as to equate such dominance to the rape of silent, feminised and othered objects/images perpetrated by the male poet of ekphrastic tradition.

II.4.3. Forms of Ekphrasis

Ekphrastic writing can thus be a form of narrative gymnastics, by which the author invents and contorts works of art in order to imbue meaning onto a story, allowing the teller to justify their actions according to aesthetic standards, as an alternative ethics. As will be explored in Chapter IV, Oscar Wilde's (1890) portrayal of Dorian Gray's enchanted portrait is the perfect example of this: a changeable work of art (transformative ekphrasis⁹⁷) upon which the moral outlook of the novel depends. The flexibility of ekphrasis makes it more than simply the description of a picture. Instead, an imagined picture, a changing picture and reality imbued with the aesthetics of an artwork all come under the ekphrastic umbrella. John Hollander (1995) has coined the term "notional ekphrasis" in relation to works of art which exist within texts alone and bear no direct real-world referent. Given that the present work focuses on

the ekphrastic writing of John Banville, Oscar Wilde and J.G. Ballard, the majority of the ekphrasis is notional to one extent or another. Furthermore, much of the artwork in Banville's "Frames Trilogy" (1989-1995) consists of reworked textual reproductions of existing artworks. Banville combines actual paintings to create those that exist within the texts. Frederick De Armas (2005) describes this process as combinatory ekphrasis—the combination of two or more real-life artworks in one textual image. De Armas provides useful labels for different textual representations of pictorial models, including actual (based on a real-life works of art), fragmented (using parts of an artwork), collectionist (the textual depiction of a gallery or museum) and narrative (expanding upon a story depicted in a work) ekphrasis. Such a range of tools suggest increased capacity to manipulate the representation of an object, again underlining the power the writer wields through ekphrastic writing.

Ekphrasis operates as a response to the form in which it is produced as well as in terms of its subject matter. Mack Smith (1995) writes that the relationship of ekphrasis to each form—for example, by a novel rather than a poem—allows the ekphrasis to inhabit that form in a way to which it is unique. Sager Eidt (2008) suggests that this can depend on the context of the system of production. For example, the film adaptation of *Girl with a Pearl Earring* (2003) is not equipped to reproduce the feminist tone of the original novel (1999). This is mainly due to the institutional bias which switches the perspective of characters' ekphrastic interpretations from the women in the novel to the men in the film. It is thus important to note that ekphrasis is a linguistic vehicle of representation which permeates a given narrative or discursive form, relates to other forms and texts, which in turn offer their own unique nuances to that ekphrastic

representation.

Central, then, is the triangular relationship between the ekphrasis, the form through which it is produced and its subject matter. This analysis uses novels, films, poetry and philosophical writing which represent real and imagined paintings, as well as photography incorporated into painting in Bracha Ettinger's case. And though each ekphrasis will vary from one example to the next, here they are at least tied to the understanding that ekphrasis is the representation or transposition of a real or imagined artwork in or onto another artwork.

II.4.4. Orpheus as the Embodiment of "Normative" Ekphrasis

Jodi Cranston (2011) notes that the Renaissance fascination with ancient textual descriptions of artworks suggests that hope was held for the recovery of these lost objects, and that ekphrastic writing about lost classical masterpieces was seen as a type of Orphic gaze. She quotes Rubens, who believed painting offered students a more fruitful scope for their improvement than the...

...study of a subject which reveals itself to us only through our imagination, in a dream, as it were, and to such an extent overlaid with words that, grasped three times in vain, they often elude us (as the image of Eurydice eluded Orpheus), and frustrate a student in his hope.⁹⁸

Rubens is here referring to attempts by artists to learn from and reproduce the work of the ancients through surviving text rather than image. He equates the process to Orpheus's reaching back for Eurydice. Orpheus, according to Cranston, embodies ekphrasis and ekphrastic longing. Rubens' observation also highlights the disconnection between the ekphrastic approximation of the image and the image itself and the fact that the ekphrasis of actual objects is a doomed project, an elegy for the

unreproducible. Loss is thus central to ekphrastic representation, and works to unify theme, content and form in Bracha L. Ettinger's writing. Ettinger dwells on a forbidden act both in form and content, where two entities are held suspended in an encounter in which their separation and loss to each other is sealed. It is apt that Ettinger takes the scene of the Orphic gaze—an apotheosis of the Lacan male gaze which freezes forever the feminine image he seeks to possess—as the theoretical laboratory in which a non-phallic mode of representation is worked out. In its failure to depict masculine mastery, it exposes the peril of the fetishisation of the feminine image. The tragedy of the scenario reveals the precarious turn things take for the narrative when enforcing a gender binary into a mode of representation.

The myth of Orpheus and Eurydice can be read as the dramatisation of the attempted encounter between the “sister arts” of poetry and painting, according to Stephen Cheeke (2009). Cheeke highlights the story as representative of the transgressive space into which writing follows visual art, and in which, as separate entities, they may encounter each other, Orpheus as the word, and Eurydice the image. Cheeke sees the encounter of text and image occurring in a ‘border terrain or no-man’s-land.’⁹⁹ He also notes the urgency of the image of Eurydice which seems to demand Orpheus’s look. He is referring here to Frederick Leighton’s 1864 painting of the encounter (see Appendix B), in which Eurydice seems to demand a reluctant Orpheus to look at her. He suggests that this deviation from the traditional telling is representative of the way the image plays upon the poet’s imagination.



Figure 2.1. Frederick Leighton, *Orpheus and Eurydice* (1864)¹⁰⁰

Cheeke is here referring to Mitchell's (2005) idea of the agency and vitality of images, the attribution of which provides them with the symbolism of living things (which will be looked at more closely in Chapter IV's analysis of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*). In an ekphrastic sense, the poet shares the doom which befalls Orpheus upon looking. By following the image into the border terrain, the poet is doomed, up in the smoke of this ancient rhetorical form. In this sense, the poet is taking part in the fetishisation of the image and negotiating the urge to control it, while the image remains apart. Vying for dominance, the interpretation of one informs and breathes life into the interpretation of the other. Mitchell (1986) associates this with the Renaissance concept of the *paragone*, a notion of conflict or competition between the two forms which challenges their link as "sister arts".¹⁰¹ De Armas's 2005 analysis of sisterly reciprocation between the forms in classical and Renaissance contexts—in which

painters and writers engaged in an inter-form dialogue, literature deeply influencing painting and *vice-versa*—is at odds with Mitchell’s concept. The interpretation of a feminine-coded relationship between the arts suggests interpretations of ekphrasis can be reworked in the spirit of exchange between gendered forms.

II.4.5. Queer Ekphrasis

Elizabeth Bergmann Loizeaux (2008) disputes the suggestion that the sisterly component of ekphrastic writing completely reorients the relationship between word and image. However, she does suggest that Mitchell’s “paragonal model” does not account for a multitude of approaches a writer may take to an artwork, such as ‘modest, and profound feelings of companionship or friendship,’¹⁰² and fails to see beyond the hope of victory promised by the paragonal conflict, through which...

...every ekphrastic relationship looks like linguistic appropriation, every gesture of friendship like co-option, every expression of admiration a declaration of envy by the work for the unobtainable power of the image.¹⁰³

Such an assessment implies that, at its heart, ekphrasis, as a process of acquisition of meaning between forms, exists as meaning-making and meaning-taking that seeks dominance over other forms within a fixed system of signs. Brian Glavey (2016) concurs with Bergmann Loizeaux’s assessment, stressing that crediting all the energy of an ekphrastic relationship to the appropriation, co-option and envy of the *paragone* is to ‘foreclose the recognition of other dynamics that exist alongside the forms of agonism they highlight.’¹⁰⁴ Glavey suggests an approach to ekphrasis that embraces its association with “sister arts”, emphasising the feminine gendering of the concept and that the siblings can number far higher than two and be at multiple cross purposes. Ekphrasis exists here as an intersection of forms. Glavey argues that a form of

ekphrasis exists that embraces the flux of a representation which can be perceived as 'itself and something else at the same time.'¹⁰⁵ "Normative ekphrasis"—in line with everything we now know of the normative gaze—is about seeing. It demands an active and masculine writer to 'master and reify images of femininity' in the name of naturalising the 'heterosexist vision'¹⁰⁶ which underlies it. This is to deny not just the non-normative nature of ekphrasis as an intersection of forms, but to invalidate the non-normative intersections of those who produce it. Ekphrasis, of course, is not simply about seeing; it is about showing and sharing, inviting others into an imaginative space. Failure is inherent to this practice of imitation and anathema to the desires of normative ekphrasis. By embracing its failure, ekphrasis can take on queer functions, as Halberstam (2011) puts it, by quietly losing, 'and in losing it imagines other goals for life, for love, for art, and for being.'¹⁰⁷ Glavey argues that, in this spirit of failure, ekphrasis is a queer art, that engaging in mimesis and imitation between forms is akin to Butler's interpretation of the performativity of gender as 'a kind of imitation for which there is no original.'¹⁰⁸ Normative heterosexuality to Butler is in itself 'an incessant and *panicked* imitation of its own naturalized idealization,' subsequently identifying gay cultures and identities as 'a copy of a copy, for which there is no original.'¹⁰⁹

Ekphrasis thus offers queer artists an ideal medium through which to alter one's own failure to imitate the imitation into a generative aesthetic experience. Embracing the absurdity of the imitation of masculinity by representing the male nude, for example, confounds and discomfits heteronormative conceptions of form, but opens a dialogue about the work beyond the normative in spite of its apparent failure. Ekphrastic

longing can be more than simply normative in this environment. The desire to achieve a passing imitation is, in terms of the performativity of gender in the oppressive environment of heteronormativity, a kind of shared experience between those who are and are not queer. Seeking to conform to an ideal through performance is analogous to the imitative nature of ekphrasis, whose failure is inherent (as will be explored in Chapter VI's masculine performers), as are queer imitations of these performances. Both occur within the repressive space of social convention—the latter knowingly, the former not—each seeking to recreate a fantasy, each failing. A queer approach, according to Glavey, offers to fill this space with 'creativity, cooperation, and surprise' and queer ekphrasis offers 'a model for thinking about how this creativity happens.'¹¹⁰

The generative power of failure is evident in explicitly queer ekphrastic writers such as Gertrude Stein, Richard Bruce Nugent and Frank O'Hara's unorthodox approaches to producing ekphrasis. Examples of this include Stein's falling asleep in front of a painting, Bruce Nugent's confusion over which form is which and O'Hara's attempts at becoming art himself. They create a proliferation of perceptions and interpretations by 'loving, imitating, envying, and sometimes ignoring works of art.'¹¹¹ Ekphrasis, in its flux, is the site to which transgression and disruption are drawn because it is the place where the inherent failure of the attempt to possess and reify the feminine image exposes the lie of the normative project. It is a site which offers passage to the representation of otherness, as long as the otherness, the lack and the failure is embraced, and energy is allowed to circumvent the central field of the normative. As a field for pitching a theory which contravenes old modes of representation, ekphrasis

provides the application of Bracha Ettinger's theories with ideal pasture.

II.5.1. Introducing Ettinger

Ettinger proposes 'the existence in art of a site of yet unformulated knowledge about sexuality and subjectivity.'¹¹² Psychoanalytic theory has a function in art, Ettinger suggests, to expose and navigate this site and clarify it 'as a source for ideas that are awaiting signification in language, and to articulate them.'¹¹³ In the following chapters, Bracha Ettinger's concept of the matrixial borderspace helps to contextualise the confinement of characters and narratives to a phallic system of signs. Ettinger grounds the concept in the work of Freud and Lacan and mounts it as a challenge to their phallocentrism—their focus on lack, castration and otherness as inherent markers of femininity. The matrix—a term which refers to the womb—offers an alternative to the phallic system of seeing the world, one of the best approximations of which is offered by Mulvey's identification of the Lacanian "male gaze" in cinema. Mulvey sums up the Lacanian phallic paradigm, in which the woman exists in the film as Other, an object, feminine and beautiful, but beyond the lived experience. Sex is thought of here as 'One and its Other, and thus in fact always and only as the One.'¹¹⁴ Ettinger, according to Griselda Pollock, suggests that there is more than just this one symbol and asks: 'What is involved in a non-phallic, matrixial reading of an artistic text?'¹¹⁵ The present work uses Ettinger's perspective from her conception of what lies beyond the phallocentric field as a means of analysing the role of masculinity and the sovereign male subject in the aestheticisation of violence and the misogyny inherent in transgression.

Ettinger's theory works in concert with her art-making to produce a dense reworking

of psychoanalytic discourse. In order to produce a working theory which circumvents everything that constitutes the symbolism of the phallic and the normative, she needs to rework the language which conveys it. Approaching her writing, which is dominated by neologisms, is thus a jarring experience. Its unfamiliar language speaks in concordance with her art—layers of paint and photocopies reproducing images of trauma—constructing a symbolic means of communicating what lies in the shadows at the borderspaces of the phallic.

II.5.2. *Eurydice* and the Matrixial Feminine

Ettinger breaks from the traditional psychoanalytic ideas of Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan, and, to some extent, Emmanuel Levinas that the “woman” is a ‘radical Other.’¹¹⁶ She proposes that the feminine cannot be a total otherness, but an

*‘Otherity: a partial alterity that infiltrates the I’*¹¹⁷ On the back of Levinas’s theory of subjectivity, Ettinger concludes that the feminine is an ‘irreducible difference *inside* subjectivity’¹¹⁸ (Ettinger’s emphasis). Therefore, to Ettinger, the feminine transforms and determines what it means to be a subject. Language may fail to express it in the post-Freudian interpretation, but femininity in this context is invisibly and inexpressibly making signs and meanings in a state of disappearance and action, weaving threads of subjectivity. This kind of subjectivity is feminine, ‘inasmuch as all human beings must differentiate themselves first from the m/Other, and establish their particular modes of differentiating within this archaic first relationship’¹¹⁹—a relationship which is repressed and consumed by Freudian paradigms of castration.

In addressing Sigmund Freud’s inability to comprehend ‘what does a woman want?’¹²⁰ Ettinger rejects and accepts Freudian and Lacanian phallic paradigms simultaneously.

This liminality is thus inherent to multiple aspects of Ettinger's representation of Eurydice. According to Pollock, she moves the feminine to a 'different site of sexual difference that is not about binary logic.'¹²¹

The matrixial feminine is not associated with absence or lack. It is simply a sexual specificity that is *pre-Symbolic*, a 'beyond-the-phallus feminine field (both in men and women) related to the feminine real.'¹²² Observing femininity, as Ettinger puts it, constitutes openness to feminine possibilities. Femininity here corresponds to the prenatal sense of otherness that first forms between a mother and the unborn child. The relationship of the subject with the Other becomes the recognition of coexistence with the Other in which differences in personhood are recognised and traits are not fetishised or objectified at the cost of the subjectivity of the Other.



Figure 2.2. Bracha L. Ettinger, *Eurydice No 10*, (1994-1996)¹²³

A major thread of *The Matrixial Borderspace* is Ettinger's visual artwork, which she interweaves with her writing throughout the text. She uses a continuing series of portraits of Eurydice (1992 – present) caught in the moment when Orpheus looks to her as he leads her out of the underworld, thus causing her disappearance back into the underworld. This is a moment in which the gaze is stripped of its possessive power; Eurydice both suffers for it and is freed from it. Ettinger uses abstract images of figures which seem to be fading from view, though caught in the stillness of presence, rendering the looker powerless to objectify a figure in an encounter that is implicated with the permanent separation of subject from object. The gaze is thus incomplete and not dominant, and Eurydice is beyond it, acting out of its accord. Judith Butler in the foreword to Ettinger's text describes it as wanting to have her by knowing her, and that through knowing her we have lost her, as she cannot be had that way.¹²⁴ Subject and object are caught in a state of flux that defies a purely phallic interpretation.

A matrixial interpretation of artworks allows for the potential of a gendered (Oedipal) gaze which picks up on affects encountered prior to Oedipal subjectivising. Concurrent to this arises a matrixial gaze which picks up on aspects of the work evoking affect (related to the trauma of/and past relations to the Other) which cannot be explained in phallic terms of desire:

The painting touches us in a dimension which is *beyond appearance*. If beyond appearance we can conceive of *traces* of the archaic mental object *in its alliance with unconscious desire* both as a phallic object *a* and as a *matrixial objet a*, if we can describe a *beyond-the-phallus objet a* and, in the scopic field, a *matrixial gaze*, then the possibility of a non-Oedipal beyond-the-phallus *matrixial sublimation*¹²⁵ arises, revealing the relevance of the process of painting in contemporary art and the necessity of its study from a "ladies' side".¹²⁶

Eurydice, in a look that seeks to possess her, is beyond Orpheus's reach, as well as ours on his behalf. Eurydice, as an artwork, has been invested with matrixial affects which evade repression. Christina Kinsella (2013) further develops Ettinger's approach to the artwork:

[...] the matrixial *objet/link a* can trace a borderlink to the beyond-the-phallus matrixial corpo-Real dimension [...] The matrixial link *a* resists the Phallus and weaves a becoming threshold into culture so that new concepts of the primal scene — which Freud and Lacan considered as repressed and included within the castration paradigm — can be laced into and enlarge the Symbolic.¹²⁷

The affects and effects of sublimation on the phallic male subject's encounter with the artwork as Other thus reveal the fragility of a gendered identity primarily motivated by the possession of the feminine-coded image as *objet petit a* (the fundamental concern of Banville's murdering subject in Chapter III).

Of Ettinger's work Butler writes that Eurydice does not belong to us, 'she comes forth' on the condition she is not banished and that she cannot belong to us, the onlookers. She is the object of the gaze, yet her femininity balances with a condition of being beyond us on a threshold of our perception, threatening our sense of loss.¹²⁸

Finally, Eurydice is something else: murdered. The look which cannot possess her condemns her to the world of the dead. By looking, we and Orpheus are attempting murder. However, the attempt, as we would have it, is sullied and incomplete. Our subjectivity has changed and so has Eurydice's. The matrixial offers a way of approaching representations of murder which circumvents the opposition of subject and object which has defined gendered visual representations.

II.5.3. The Matrixial Gaze

Matrixial theory builds on Lacan's *objet petit a*—the desire for the magical fantasy of the Other projected onto the object of the gaze (see section II.3.2 and II.4.2). The *objet petit a* and the gaze as we understand it are the same because the *objet petit a* is 'the cause of desire in the scopic field.'¹²⁹ However, Ettinger suggests that the phallic lack embodied by the object has a "*beyond-the-phallus*" dimension which is reduced to the phallus by the prevailing castration paradigm of traditional psychoanalysis. She takes issue with the othered subject having to pass the signposts of phallic lack and symbolic castration 'on the road to meaning.'¹³⁰

The gaze, according to Lacan, is disconnected from the eye of the subject, 'imagined [...] in the field of the Other.'¹³¹ This is exposed when it fails as the subject implements his imagined dominance over the Other and the dynamic between the subject and the object are revealed to be founded upon an illusion. This is due to the visual nature of the phallic gaze. The fantasy which provides meaning to the phallic gaze offers the traits of passivity and lack to the object in order to explain the non-visual effects of what lies *beyond appearance*. When the spectator is confronted with the consciousness of the Other—the moment the *objet petit a* of fantasy abandons the object—

...it takes the form of a strange contingency revealed by an "uncanny" feeling, an *Unheimlich* signalling to us that we are on the *horizon of experience*, in other words approaching "the lack that constitutes castration anxiety".¹³²

Ettinger here highlights Freud's theory of the Uncanny as the phallic account of what occurs within the aesthetic experience. The Uncanny (*unheimlich*, German for unhomely; *Heimlich* can mean "homely" or "familiar" as well as "secret" or

“concealed”), as Freud (1919) describes it, refers to something which is simultaneously familiar and unfamiliar: ‘that class of frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar.’¹³³ It can refer to the sense of familiarity with that which the self has kept hidden or repressed or a hidden desire which has revealed itself.

In “The Uncanny”, Freud suggests that the repression of the fear/desire is motivated by castration anxiety. Ettinger suggests that Freud’s claim that the Uncanny is the manifestation of the repressed familiarity with a mother’s body or genitals accommodates her theory of a ‘supplementary possibility.’¹³⁴ She claims that Freud leads the reader to the conclusion that this fantasy of the womb serves no other purpose but that of the construction of castration fantasy into which it is foreclosed. The phallus is the determining symbol of the split from the familiarity which is repressed and returns as the Uncanny. Castration represents, according to Ettinger, the separation from the ‘bodily and archaic partial dimension.’¹³⁵ Our failure to recognise that dimension is because the phallic aspect is only one side of the story; feminine difference is not recognised on its own terms.

Ettinger is keen to point out that Freud does not subjugate the intra-uterine fantasy into that of castration. The former is repressed, yet it co-exists with the latter. Ettinger thus recognises two subjectivising strata: the phallic and the matrixial. Matrixial subjectivity is comprised of the elements which make up phallic subjectivity, such as ‘*mastery* (sadism), *gazing* (scopophilia), *curiosity* (knowledge-seeking),’¹³⁶ but in a way which does not rely on phallic symbols, erogenous areas or bodily orifices. Touch, hearing, voice and movement inform the matrixial subject.

According to Lacan, the woman constitutes the man’s *objet petit a*—femininity

represents the lack implied by castration that emerges during the primal split. Through the gaze, the subject longs for this 'lost trace, [the] "nothing" related to *originary repression*.'¹³⁷ Ettinger is essentially seeking to explore the overlooked possibilities of the matrixial. Her art and writing complement each other in this. Painting 'touches us in a dimension which is *beyond appearance*,'¹³⁸ according to Ettinger, and, as we have explored in Berger (section II.3.1), is dominated by eroticised visual fetishization of the feminine. However, Ettinger proposes the visual field is only part of the story, even in misogynistic works—the traces of archaic mental objects must be working in concert with phallic visual desires when instances of the Uncanny arise. The phallic *objet petit a* and a *matrixial object a* must therefore be working in tandem, opening up a matrixial gaze, 'revealing the relevance of the process of painting in contemporary art and the necessity for its study from a "ladies' side.'"¹³⁹

Matrixial theory uses the mother/infant relationship as a reorientating guideline encounter, one in which the "I" (as a partial subjectivity) does not attempt to suppress or dominate the Other, but relates to other partial subjects through transsubjectivity.¹⁴⁰ In this encounter 'the boundaries of the subject (are opened) to trans-subjective inspirations,'¹⁴¹ in what Ettinger describes as a "fragilizing" process for the subject. By allowing for a matrixial *objet petit a*, the gaze is altered; the subject co-emerges with the Other in the encounter as they are struck by the symbolic impact of a 'shared unconscious, trauma, phantasy, and desire.'¹⁴² There is thus an adjacency between a subject and its (phallic) Other, an empathy and a surrender of dominance where the matrixial subjectivity of both can emerge. This form of '*subjectivity-as-encounter*' occurs in what Ettinger describes as the '*matrixial stratum of*

*subjectivisation.*¹⁴³ The pathways of the matrixial encounter are needed to access this space.

The matrixial co-emerging partial subjects can simultaneously be seen from the phallic angle as “whole” subjects or as each other’s object. A matrixial encounter engenders shared traces, traumas, pictograms, and fantasies in *several* partners conjointly but differently, accompanied and partially created by diffuse matrixial affects; it engenders nonconscious readjustments of their connectivity and reattunements of transsubjectivity.

The matrix is the locus of a process of multidirectional change and exchange on the borderlines of perceptibility.¹⁴⁴

A level of co-existence is possible in the matrixial that allows us to make a fundamental reassessment of the relationship between the self and the Other, engendering notions of care and co-dependence within societal and aesthetic contexts.

The matrixial borderspace represents that which lies at the margin and beyond the phallic field. The act of painting perforates that border ‘which is not conscious.’¹⁴⁵ The present work will take this premise and apply it to the representation of art in works which grapple with the gendered objectification inherent to these works. This thesis does not seek to extrapolate Ettinger’s meaning in relation to psychoanalytic thought beyond how it relates to ekphrasis and theories of spectatorship. The foremost aim is to utilise matrixial theory in order to enhance ekphrastic and gaze theory methodologies.

The chapters which follow aim: 1) to assess the misogyny inherent to the aesthetics of various representations of murder in texts and films, and 2) to approach these same texts by way of matrixial analysis in an attempt to contextualise them in a non-phallic sense. This way, resolutions to misogyny can be explored by analysing the othering that occurs through art-making and how the Other is related to within the text. These

interactions take place at the edges of the phallic, and Ettinger offers a means of seeing them, shining a light on a new symbolic way forward for those who seek to counteract the misogyny.

¹ Thomas De Quincey, "On the Knocking at the Gate in *Macbeth*", *On Murder* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 7.

² Lisa Downing, "Beyond Reasonable Doubt: Aesthetic Violence and the Motiveless Murder in French Decadent Fiction", *French Studies*, LVIII, No. 2 (2004), p. 193.

³ *The Matrixial Borderspace*, p. 175.

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 175.

⁵ *Ibid*, p. 174.

⁶ Rank, Otto. *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero: A Psychological Exploration of Myth*, E. James Lieberman and Robert A. Segal trans. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004 [1909]), p. 51.

⁷ *Ibid*, p. 52.

⁸ Ettinger neologism based on Freud and Lacan's interpretations of the archaic mother as a disruptive if nourishing influence over "normal" subject formations dominated by identification with the father and the phallus. It is also a key point at which Ettinger departs from Kristeva, Irigaray and Elizabeth Bronfen's concepts of the pre-Oedipal mother-child relationship. Irigaray and Bronfen posit, respectively, the placenta and umbilicus as early means of mother-child relations, while Kristeva disagrees with the removal of libidinal subjectivities from the realm of sexuality, suggesting this is a utopian vision. However, Ettinger does not countenance phallic substitutes for the penis as they still incorporate models of presence, absence and loss by castration and argues that to reject the archaic mother (m/Other) is to consolidate phallic interpretation. On the other hand, Ettinger's concept of the Matrix, according to Pollock...

...concerns the subjectivizing process of several part-subjects who cannot be entirely thought apart from their encounter as subject-subject, rather than as only subject/object, and in a way that it is impossible *by definition*, and not as a result of any previous assumption, to reach absence *without* presence, presence *without* absence. Under the matrixial dimension of subjectivity, severality is originary' (Pollock, *The Matrixial Borderspace*, p. 37).

This shall be fundamental to understanding the radical position Ettinger takes towards subject-formation and the foreclosure of femininity and the Other. Ettinger further comments:

The archaic maternal is not considered to be subjectivizing.

This is the psychoanalytic basis for understanding the genius-male-hero complex: born from no womb, the Artist-Genius is in fact the idea of a god transferred to man, now self-creating and holding the power of creation. Thus, the denial that allows for secretive and buried

appropriation of maternal gestation, begetting, birth-giving, and love in the service of father-son relations creates the Genius-Hero myth on the sacrifice of the eliminated and evaporated archaic Woman-m/Other. However, the Woman-m/Other should not be understood, as Lacan would have it, only “in the field of the Thing”, as the “other-Thing that lies beyond. In my view, she should also be understood in the field of Event and Encounter and as an almost-other-Event-Encounter that is borderlinked to the I. I will moreover argue that traces of the Event-Encounter function as a transgressive link in a web of connections and not as a missing object. The move of making the m/Other disappear is absorbed in what I have named metramorphosis: in the weaving of transsubjective links (Ettinger, *Ibid*, p. 175).

⁹ *Ibid*, p. 173.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 174.

¹¹ George Orwell, “Decline of English Murder” [1946], in *The Penguin Essays of George Orwell* (London: Penguin Books, 1984), pp. 346-347.

¹² Mark Seltzer, *Serial Killers: Death and Life in America’s Wound Culture* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 1.

¹³ Mark, Seltzer, “Wound Culture: Trauma in the Pathological Public Sphere,” *October* (1997), pp. 3-26.

¹⁴ *The Subject of Murder*, p. 28.

¹⁵ Anthony King, “Serial Killing and the Postmodern Self”, *History of the Human Sciences*, 19, No. 3 (August, 2006), p. 113.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 109.

¹⁷ Georges Bataille, *Eroticism: Death and Sensuality*, Mary Dalwood Tr. [1986] (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1957), p. 36.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 68.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 90.

²⁰ Susan Sontag, “The Pornographic Imagination” (1967) in Bataille, Georges, *Story of the Eye*, Joachim Neugroschel Tr. [2001] (London: Penguin, 1928), p. 92.

²¹ *Ibid*, p. 93.

²² *Ibid*, p. 108.

²³ *Ibid*, p. 108.

²⁴ *Ibid*, p. 112.

²⁵ Rochelle Gurstein, “On the Triumph of the Pornographic Imagination”, *The New Republic* (6 May, 2006), <https://newrepublic.com/article/63141/the-triumph-the-pornographic-imagination>, retrieved: 24/6/2019.

²⁶ *The Subject of Murder*, p. 132.

²⁷ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, Trans. by Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier (New York: Knopf, [1949] 2010), p. 283.

²⁸ Toril Moi, “Feminist, female, feminine,” in *The Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism*, ed. by Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore (New York: Blackwell, 1989), p. 124.

²⁹ *The Second Sex*, p. 163.

³⁰ Toril Moi, "Feminist, Female, Feminine" (1989), p. 126.

³¹ Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 13.

³² *Ibid*, p. 25.

³³ Valerie Steele, *Fetish: Fashion, Sex & Power* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

³⁴ Can also be referred to as the *objet a*, "object a" or "o object" (as translated by Cormac Gallaher). Lacan's translator, Alan Sheridan (1994) explains that the "a" stands for "*autre*", the French for "other".

³⁵ Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. by Alan Sheridan, ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller (London: Norton, 1998 [1973]), p. 180.

³⁶ *Ibid*, p. 182.

³⁷ Elizabeth A. Grosz, *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 75.

³⁸ Julia Kristeva, *The Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, tr. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press), p.4.

³⁹ *Ibid*, p. 53.

⁴⁰ Julia Kristeva, introduction to Margrit Shildrick, *Leaky Bodies and Boundaries: Feminism, Postmodernism and (Bio)Ethics* (London: Routledge, 1997).p. 14.

⁴¹ Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (London: Routledge, 1993) p. 1.

⁴² *Ibid*, p. 2.

⁴³ Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York/London: Routledge, 2004), p. 42.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p. 42.

⁴⁵ *The Subject of Murder*, p. 57.

⁴⁶ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Vol I: The Will to Knowledge*, (London: Penguin, 1976), p. 104.

⁴⁷ Catharine A. MacKinnon, *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State* (Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 118.

⁴⁸ Messerschmidt, James W., "Masculinities and Femicide." *Qualitative Sociology Review*, 13, No. 3 (2017), p. 75.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p. 76.

⁵⁰ Louise Wattis, "The Social Nature of Serial Murder: The Intersection of Gender and Modernity", *European Journal of Women's Studies* (2017), 24. No. 4, p. 389.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, p. 387.

⁵² Judith R. Walkowitz, "Jack the Ripper and the Myth of Male Violence", *Feminist Studies*, 8, No. 3 (Autumn, 1982), p. 569.

⁵³ *Ibid*, p. 570.

⁵⁴ Kenneth Clark, *The Nude: A Study of Ideal Art* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1956 [1990 ed.]), p. 1.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p. 8.

⁵⁶ The work claims that fewer than 5% of the artists in the museum's modern art sections are women,

while 85% of the nudes featured are female.

⁵⁷ Carol Duncan, "The MoMA's Hot Mamas", *Art Journal*, 48, No. 2 (Summer, 1989), pp. 171-178, p. 172.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p. 172.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p. 172.

⁶⁰ John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin, 1972), p. 47.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, p. 50.

⁶² *Ibid*, p. 54.

⁶³ Judith Posner, "State Censorship, Pornography, Sexuality", *Atkinson Review of Canadian Studies*, 1, No. 2 (Spring, 1984).

⁶⁴ Trevor Beattie's 1994 "Hello Boys" poster for the Playtex "Wonderbra" (analysed below) depicts Eva Herzigova 'not only as object of the male gaze, but also as an active subject, who was knowingly playing with her sexual power' (Gill, 2007, p.97).

⁶⁵ *Ways of Seeing*, p. 64.

⁶⁶ *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis*, p. 104.

⁶⁷ Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", *Screen*, 16, No.3 (Autumn 1975), p. 8.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, p. 12.

⁶⁹ As described by Carol J. Clover in *Men, Women, and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (London: British Film Institute, 1992).

⁷⁰ Mulvey (1975), p. 17.

⁷¹ *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters*, p. 127.

⁷² *Men, Women, and Chain Saws*, p. 61.

⁷³ Kaja Silverman, "Masochism and Subjectivity", *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media*, No. 12 (1980), p. 5.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, p. 8.

⁷⁵ *Skin Shows*, pp. 136-137.

⁷⁶ Linda Williams, "When the Woman Looks", Reprinted in *The Dread of Difference: Gender and the Horror Film*. Grant, B.K. (ed.), (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996), p. 34.

⁷⁷ Karen Hollinger, "Theorising Mainstream Female Spectatorship: The Case of the Popular Lesbian Film", *Cinema Journal*, 37, No. 2 (winter 1998), p. 12.

⁷⁸ Richard Dyer, *Now You See It: Studies in Lesbian and Gay Film*, Second Edition (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 332.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, p. 373.

⁸⁰ Linda Williams, "Blue is the Warmest Color: or the After-Life of 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema'", *New Review of Film and Television Studies*, 15, No. 4 (2017), p. 467.

⁸¹ Linda Williams, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the "Frenzy of the Visible"* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), p. 208.

⁸² Mary Ann Doane, "Film and the Masquerade: Theorising the Female Spectator", *Screen* (London), 3, No. 4 (1982), p. 80.

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- ⁸³ Laura Mulvey, "Afterthoughts on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' Inspired by 'Duel in the Sun' (King Vidor, 1946)", *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media*, No. 15/17 (Summer, 1981), p. 13.
- ⁸⁴ Rosalind Gill, "Postfeminist Media Culture: Elements of a Sensibility", *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 10, No. 2 (2007), p. 149.
- ⁸⁵ Anneke Smelik, "Lara Croft, Kill Bill, and the Battle for Theory in Feminist Film Studies", in *Doing Gender in Media, Art and Culture*, edited by Rosemarie Buikema and Iris van der Tuin (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 183.
- ⁸⁶ Angela McRobbie, *The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Change* (London: Sage, 2009), p. 100.
- ⁸⁷ Debbie Ging, "All the Rage: Digital Games, Female Violence and the Postfeminisation of Cinema's New Action Heroines", *Film Ireland*, 4 (2007), p. 7.
- ⁸⁸ *Ibid*, p. 7.
- ⁸⁹ *Ibid*, p. 8.
- ⁹⁰ Jenny March, *The Penguin Book of Classical Myth* (London: Penguin, 2008).
- ⁹¹ James A. Heffernan, *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 3.
- ⁹² Ruth Webb, "Ekphrasis, Ancient and Modern: The Invention of a Genre", *Word & Image*, 15, No. 1 (1999), pp. 7-18.
- ⁹³ Ruth Webb, *Ekphrasis, Imagination and Persuasion in Ancient Rhetorical Theory and Practice* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2009), p. 1.
- ⁹⁴ William J.T Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representations* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).
- ⁹⁵ William J.T Mitchell, *What do Pictures Want?: The Lives and Loves of Images* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), p. 92.
- ⁹⁶ Laura M. Sager Eidt, *Writing and Filming the Painting: Ekphrasis in Literature and Film* (Rodopi, 2008).
- ⁹⁷ When aspects of the artwork are altered during the narrative. See Frederick De Armas, *Ekphrasis in the Age of Cervantes* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2005), p. 27.
- ⁹⁸ Jodi Cranston, "Longing for the Lost: Ekphrasis, Rivalry, and the Figuration of Notional Artworks in Italian Renaissance Painting", *Word & Image*, 27, No. 2 (2011), p. 214.
- ⁹⁹ Stephen Cheeke, *Writing for Art: The Aesthetics of Ekphrasis* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), p. 18.
- ¹⁰⁰ Retrieved from Wikiart <https://www.wikiart.org/en/frederic-leighton/orpheus-and-euridice-1864>, 2/10/2019.
- ¹⁰¹ De Armas (2005) that the fashion in renaissance painting to produce visual works based on notional ekphrases reinforced 'the concept of sister arts through a double link' (p.14).
- ¹⁰² Elizabeth Bergmann Loizeaux, *Twentieth Century Poetry and the Visual Arts* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 15.
- ¹⁰³ *Ibid*, p. 15.

¹⁰⁴ Brian Glavey, *The Wallflower Avant-Garde: Modernism, Sexuality and Queer Ekphrasis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 6.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*, p. 4.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*, p. 5.

¹⁰⁷ Judith Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham, NC & London: Duke University Press, 2011), p. 88.

¹⁰⁸ Judith Butler, "Imitation and Gender Insubordination" cited in Glavey (2016), p. 8.

¹⁰⁹ Judith Butler, "Imitation and Gender Insubordination", in *Literary Theory: A Reader*, 3rd ed., Julie Rivkin & Michael Ryan eds. (Chichester: Wiley/Blackwell, 2006), p. 957.

¹¹⁰ *The Wallflower Avant-Garde*, p. 8.

¹¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 6.

¹¹² Bracha L. Ettinger, "Trans-subjective Transferential Borderspace", *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature*, 24, No. 3 (1997), p. 645.

¹¹³ *Ibid*, p. 645.

¹¹⁴ Griselda Pollock, "Inscriptions in the Feminine", in *Inside the Visible: An Elliptical Traverse of Twentieth-Century Art*, ed. Catherine de Zegher (London: MIT Press, 1996), p. 81.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 81.

¹¹⁶ *The Matrixial Borderspace*, p. 189.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 190.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 190.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 176.

¹²⁰ *Ibid*, p. 22.

¹²¹ Griselda Pollock, *ibid*, p. 6.

¹²² Ettinger, *ibid*, p. 64.

¹²³ <https://s-media-cache-ak0.pinimg.com/736x/bf/fc/a2/bffca22e3bbcbd65583f3a1c62499d75.jpg>
Retrieved: 5/4/2016.

¹²⁴ *The Matrixial Borderspace*, p. viii.

¹²⁵ Ettinger outlines the effect of sublimation on the place of the matrixial gaze adjacent to the phallic gaze as follows:

Conceiving of a work of art as an incarnation of Woman as an absent *objet a* is clearly different to the idea of the incarnation of Woman as a present, passive commercial object given for the viewer, conceived within the prism of gender identification, since art is not a product of the imaginary or the symbolic, rather, it creates representations that filter into these domains and transform them. I would suggest that the incarnation of the Woman not only as a phallic *objet a* but also as a matrixial *objet a* is the effect of sublimation, if some aspects of sublimation can be understood as inscriptions of the non-Oedipal in the sub-symbolic sphere (Ettinger, "Woman as *Objet a* Between Phantasy and Art", in Benjamin, Andrew, ed. *Complexity: Architecture/ Art/ Philosophy*, London: Academy, 1995, p. 73).

¹²⁶ Ettinger, *The Matrixial Borderspace*, p. 50.

¹²⁷ See Christina Kinsella, "Bracha L. Ettinger's Matrixial Theory and Aesthetics: Matrixial Flesh and the Jouissance of Non-Life-in-Life" (doctoral thesis, the National College of Art and Design, 2013), pp. 91-92.

¹²⁸ Judith Butler, *The Matrixial Borderspace*, p. xii.

¹²⁹ Ettinger, *Ibid*, p. 42.

¹³⁰ *Ibid*, p. 45.

¹³¹ *Four Fundamental Concepts*, p. 84.

¹³² *The Matrixial Borderspace*, p. 46 (quoting Jacques Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts*).

¹³³ Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny", James Strachey tr. in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. 17 (1917-1919): An Infantile Neurosis and Other Works* (London: Random House, 1955), p. 220.

¹³⁴ *The Matrixial Borderspace*, p. 47.

¹³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 47.

¹³⁶ *Ibid*, p. 48.

¹³⁷ *Ibid*, p. 42.

¹³⁸ *Ibid*, p. 50.

¹³⁹ *Ibid*, p. 50.

¹⁴⁰ Coined from the idea of transcendence of subjectivity by Lorenzen (1969). Ettinger is at odds with Freudian and Lacanian thought in theorising that subjectivity exists in relation to other subjectivities in which the individual is constant negotiation with the "non-I":

From the moment we speak of the subject, we may also speak of an *enlarged subjectivity*. In the Matrix a meeting occurs between the co-emerging *I* and the unknown *non-I*. Neither assimilates or rejects the other, and their energy consists neither in fusion nor repulsion, but in a continual readjustment of distances, a continual negotiation of separateness and distance within togetherness and proximity (Ettinger, "Woman-Other-Thing: A Matrixial Touch" in Elliott, David and Ferris, Pamela eds., *Matrix-Borderlines* (catalogue), Oxford: MoMA, 1993, p. 12).

The *non-I* is the encountered part-subject. Ettinger takes...

...the feminine/prenatal meeting as a model for relations and processes of change in which the *non-I* is unknown to the *I* (or rather uncognized: known by a noncognitive process), but not an intruder. Rather, the *non-I* is a *partner-in-difference* of the *I* (*The Matrixial Borderspace*, p. 64-65).

¹⁴¹ Bracha L. Ettinger, "(M)Other Re-Spect: Maternal Subjectivity, the Ready-made Mother-Monster and the Ethics of Respecting", *Studies in the Maternal*, vol. 2, no. 1 (2010), p. 6.

¹⁴² *The Matrixial Borderspace*, p. 64.

¹⁴³ *Ibid*, p. 64.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p. 65.

¹⁴⁵ Bracha L. Ettinger (1997), p. 644.

Chapter III

Uncovering the Matrixial Borderspace in John Banville's *The Book of Evidence* (1989) and *Ghosts* (1993)

III.1.1. The "Frames" Trilogy

At the heart of a confessor's experience is the desire to atone, to find solace, to offer solace to those who have been wronged and to justify their actions. The memory of an act is worked upon until the confessor's current position finds a tonality which resonates with the source and audience of the confession. This at least is one of the possible objectives of the confession of John Banville's arch-solipsist Freddie Montgomery. Little can be known for sure about Freddie, except that we cannot rely on his version of events. We are introduced to him as he awaits trial, composing an account of his crimes to be offered up to the authorities.

Freddie recounts his murder of an innocent woman in cold blood, pointedly misleading the reader in his rendering of the truth in an effort at redemption. His "official" account forms *The Book of Evidence* (1989) and he returns twice more in *Ghosts* (1993) and *Athena* (1995). The novels are narrated by Freddie from the early stages of his incarceration, through to a fantasy of release from prison to a symbol-filled island in *Ghosts*. Finally, in *Athena*, he recounts a more likely period out of prison in which he settles in an unnamed Irish city.

Freddie decides that his guilt is not specifically a moral issue. His murder of the maid of a house in which he was attempting to steal a painting is eventually decided to be the result of a grievous and unforgiveable lack of imagination. He initially cites another manifestation of himself—the cartoonishly wicked childhood alter-ego Bunter—as the

instigator of his crimes. Here is an early indication of his studied compartmentalisation of his psyche in order to find an indication of reason behind his actions. His empathy for Josie Bell's family is non-existent and his sympathy with Josie herself amounts to a kind of confusion which is articulated as 'only [...] shame'¹ at its most basic. Freddie's lack of imagination, it can be argued, is his falling into step with the misogynistic fetishisation of the female image and the erotic violence this entails. Freddie, as the novels progress, realises this and is constantly developing methods to atone for and reverse his irreversible act. He does so by attempting to instil subjectivity into his verbal rendering of women and thus subvert the tendency towards objectification which caused his demise. The complexities of Banville's *Montgomery* are made visible thanks to a supreme self-awareness and to his transparent attempts to mislead the reader. This solipsistic stance undermines his attempts to instil subjectivity in the female characters. It reveals the fundamental problem of his approach: that subjectivity will always be wanting in their representation, particularly when it is rendered by the male imagination. His Pygmalion-like effort to bring a woman to life in his rendering and veneration means that he remains trapped in the paradigm of masculine power and, according to Anja Müller (2004), positioned as 'an almost grotesque instance of the convention of male looking.'² Though Freddie is indeed attempting to achieve the Pygmalion task, he is painfully aware that language is inadequate for that task. He is also aware, according to Müller, that it is the representational process itself—the way he frames things—by which he seeks to unlock some form of redemption.³

The supremacy of the creator is one of the great themes throughout Banville's fiction.

The Book of Evidence represents the conclusion of his turn away from focusing on great scientists of the past (*Doctor Copernicus*, 1976; *Kepler*, 1981; *The Newton Letter*, 1982) which began in 1986 with *Mefisto*. *Book of Evidence* represents the beginning of the narrator's obsession with art which has persisted throughout much of Banville's *oeuvre*. Freddie himself represents this turn as a gifted scientist who, in his effort to make 'the lack of certainty more manageable',⁴ encounters a rupture which results in an aesthetic uncertainty that eventually leads to murder.

III.1.2. Ekphrasis and the Male Gaze

One of Freddie's central obsessions in the Frames trilogy is the notion that the male gaze is a convention which is taken for granted enough to be considered a 'failure of imagination.'⁵ Banville uses visual art throughout the trilogy to question the gendering of the voice which represents the surfaces of things. Banville, in an interview with Helen Meany, decided on a career shift from writing about themes of science to the theme of visual art. This was due to his being 'fascinated by the surfaces of things [...] painting deals constantly with these. Painting is the triumph of looking, of obsessed scrutiny.'⁶ This point of view is echoed by Freddie in *The Book of Evidence*: '...on the surface, that's where there's depth.'⁷ Freddie suggests that this is the only way he can know other people—an understanding of reality that becomes his fatal flaw.

One of the defining features of the gaze is the agency with which it is deployed. The looker is the active party in the relationship with that which is looked upon. In Banville's work, that looked-upon is, more often than not, an idealised woman. McMinn (1991) points out that these women 'play a silent role in the novels'—they embody 'a myth of intuitive wisdom and grace always lamented by the male "great

cold technicians...” To McMinn, the tragedy of this opposition resides in the ‘masculine personality’⁸ common to Banville’s narrators in concert with their lack of emotional intelligence. Responding to McMinn, Ruth Frehner (2000) contends that equally important is their relation to the imagination as historians. In their knowledge of the history of the female image, they become overly familiar with the visual imaginations of women in art, affecting ‘their own perceptions of women, and therefore their own imaginings of women.’⁹ To Frehner, they wilfully repurpose their knowledge of the history and the ‘myth of woman as the essential “other”.’¹⁰ Seeing and accepting truth in the perceived surface of women is something Freddie Montgomery accepts of himself. He also accepts he is damned by it. He thus spends three novels attempting to perceive others beyond their surfaces and repurposing his own way of seeing.

In the Frames trilogy, Freddie Montgomery embarks on the reconstruction of his gender perception and his aesthetic perception of the world around him. He attempts to locate the fault in the way he sees the world and—given his way of seeing is most damaging to women in his life—he finds he needs to inhabit a world of reformed gender experience and perception comparable to Ettinger’s matrixial borderspace. That is, he is attempting to reform how he reacts to encounters with the feminine Other and, to do so, he must reform the encounter itself. This means he must challenge his own fundamental perceptions of the world around him. In his everyday observations, Freddie uses the language of ekphrasis. Paintings are infused into Freddie’s perception of the world and provide a framework for settings, motivations and characters within his narratives. His range of ekphrastic descriptions is varied; he

uses notional (representing an imaginary artwork), collectionist (looking at various pieces of art together interacting with each other as they would in an actual gallery), combinatory (imaginary combinations of existing artworks as one) and actual (the representation of a real-life artwork) ekphrasis in his oblique descriptions of the work of real painters. As readers, we explore these too in order to understand the underlying logic of Freddie's version of events.

Like Orpheus, Freddie must content himself with the attempt to recover the woman he has condemned to death because the paradigms of his masculine possessiveness (not to mention the impossibility of raising the dead) will doom the attempt to failure. Relinquishing his masculine subjectivity for the sake of the subjectivity of others by means of solipsism presents a contradiction which may be insurmountable. However, by working through these problems, he is at least keeping himself open to the possibility of change and in readiness for a moment in which a change might present itself. This chapter tracks this "working-through" process across *The Book of Evidence* and *Ghosts* as a search for redemption by means of animating and granting agency to the Other. It also explores whether Freddie has designed a narrative space in which women are allowed to exist as human beings, safe in their sexual difference from the conventions of the male gaze.

III.2. Failure of the Imagination: Objectification in *The Book of Evidence*

III.2.1. The Mad Swirl of Things: Freddie's Wilderness Years

In the telling of his story, Freddie creates a space in which to recognise female subjectivity through his engagement with art and the concept of the feminine. His murder of Josie Bell is set in motion by his response to his gaze upon a woman and the

painted image of another woman. His mistake is to confront the feminine subject in art only; the method of interpreting the world around him he has developed has led him to this point. His lapse, as he describes it, is not momentary, but caused by years of confusing reality with art.

Freddie returns to Ireland in a crisis and in search of substantial funds. His wife and child are apparently being held hostage by a small-time mobster to whom he owes money in Spain. He has been estranged from family and friends in Europe for ten years with his wife Phoebe and their son after a promising career as a scientist in the United States was cut short. He takes up science 'in order to make the lack of certainty more manageable,' but ends up bemused by the certainty of other people, who either deny or are blind to the chaos of existence, 'the mad swirl of things.'¹¹ This chaos seems also to extend to his inner self; he reveals an inner turmoil of having to deal with an "other self" whom he needed to convince of his own certainty:

...I had inside me too an exemplar of my own, a kind of invigilator, from whom I must hide my lack of conviction.¹²

Freddie's crisis seems to have begun, then, ten years before he returns to Ireland; it happens to have come about at the point at which he admits the inherent chaos of the universe to his "other self". By allowing this 'watcher from the inside' to step forth and take over, 'while the puzzled outsider cowers within,'¹³ he embraces an outward certainty. He also begins an affair at this time with two women: an old friend and the woman who would become his wife. This is the point at which he commences his engagement with the aesthetic value of the world (a shift towards a visual obsession which correlates with Banville's own change in thematic focus in his literary output at

the time, having finished the “science tetralogy” and begun the “frames/art trilogy”).

Freddie arrives in Ireland with neither a plan nor a moral compass. However, the way he fits his circumstances into a rigorous aesthetic interpretation does not falter. As he takes the ferry, he notes:

It was not just the drink [...] that was making me happy, but the tenderness of things, the simple goodness of the world. This sunset, for instance, how lavishly it was laid on...¹⁴

The sense is being created that, in spite of the turmoil of his own personal circumstance, he operates in a world which is ‘laid on, all of it, as if to console some lost, suffering wayfarer.’¹⁵ The artificiality of his world is already in place before he enters the scene of his crime and his place in it is already that of a ‘suffering wayfarer’ consoled and moved by its artistic beauty. His interpretation of the world is priming Freddie to confuse the gallery with life itself.

III.2.2. Daphne and Anna as Image: A Close Encounter with the Matrixial

Though Freddie is reticent as to why he leaves his life and burgeoning career in California, it is clear his marriage to Daphne and their relationship with Anna Behrens are central to the moment of rupture. He meets Daphne through Anna, an old Irish acquaintance. Anna invites him home and implicates him into (what is later discovered to be) her lesbian relationship with Daphne, constantly leaving the room to take telephone calls in order to leave them alone together. He is unknowingly a pawn in a game between the two. They quickly develop some form of a *ménage à trois*, sharing their expatriate lives and he is instantly enamoured by the vision of their beauty and lifestyle:

They embodied an ideal I had not known I harboured until now. I was still working at my science in those days [...]. Now suddenly another future had opened up...¹⁶

The two women are a spectacle to which he has only visual access. Their existence is not tied to their surroundings: they leave little impression on the house in which they have lived for six months, they have few possessions¹⁷ and, to Freddie, they seem to live off their love of each other, feeding each other's vitality. They offer a vision of unity which to him remains unattainable, while science offers no consolation to the chaos of existence; 'to speak of an individual with any show of certainty' seems, to Freddie, 'foolhardy'¹⁸ and contrasts with the coherence of their visual surface:

Will it seem strange, cold, perhaps even inhuman if I say that I was only interested really in what [Daphne] was on the surface? [...] This is the only way another creature can be known: on the surface, that's where there is depth.¹⁹

The two women divert him to such an extent that he can block out this worry over the formlessness inherent in the underlying workings of things. He finds in Anna and Daphne, according to Patricia Coughlan (2006) 'the perfectible realm' of art, to which, once he casts mathematics aside, he becomes devoted as a 'substitute for life.'²⁰ However, his exultation in the women as a visual phenomenon is only the beginning of the problem. He proceeds to engage with them on terms he presumes they share and are reflective of reality. This leads to a ten-year-long disaster the beginning of which is evident when he, Anna and Daphne have a threesome together. Here, he comes closest to the immediacy of a female/female relationship, recognising his separation from the event. Having already bound the spectacle of Anna and Daphne with an aesthetic experience, in this proximity to the event (as Ettinger puts it), he now finds himself sliding along its margins, 'threatened by this potential proximity, yet at the

same time compelled by a mysterious “promise of happiness” (Nietzsche’s description of beauty) offered by the encounter.’²¹ The happiness here is the opportunity to avoid the imposition of a heteronormative/phallic outcome to their pre-existing queer relationship. However, the threat which Ettinger suggests is posed by his proximity to Anna and Daphne as an event, artwork and Other, is not overcome. Freddie describes his role in the tryst as the outsider, noting that, despite being the man, it is he who is being ‘softly, irresistibly penetrated,’ that he is ‘only the link along which the two of them [negotiate] their way.’²² This suggests a process of engaging with them on feminine terms. However, there is no indication that he recognises a collapse of the barrier separating him from a connection to the feminine. In his outsider position, he has a chance to accept ‘the matrixial vulnerability to the *non-I*’²³ but he does not take it. He is unaware of the opportunity and transformation offered by recognising the potential for his own otherness to join up with the feminine otherness of the two women. This process of borderlinking would offer Anna and Daphne a role in Freddie’s fantasy and offer all three an understanding that his role in their relationship is not to possess or subdue either of them. The opportunity passes him by. Instead, through his determined observation, he reinforces the barrier separating him from the otherness of the image and its insistence ensures the dynamic of their relations reverts to a more phallogocentric structure.

Freddie emphasises the sombre and ritualistic nature of the encounter, the ‘fashioning and raising of something, a shrine, say, or a domed temple.’²⁴ The idea that phallicism is being inducted into their existence is furthered when he suspects that Anna is making a sacrificial offering of Daphne, for which they wield him like a ‘mere prop [...]

a stone phallus,²⁵ while they writhe and bow about him. And, indeed, Freddie recognises it as a parting ritual between Anna and Daphne, in which Anna surrenders the image of Daphne to Freddie and they exit their pre-symbolic, pre-phallic existence. Anna's sexual pleasure assumes a sinister aspect in a moment in which, according to Freddie:

[she] lifted her bruised, glistening mouth from between Daphne's legs and, glancing back at me with a complicitous, wry little smile, leaned aside so that I might see the sprawled girl's lap lying open there, intricate and innocent as a halved fruit.²⁶

Anna's smile is one of pleasure which is shared with Freddie rather than Daphne. It is achieved by her working for Freddie's pleasure and sharing in it by prioritising and engaging with his gaze. Her sudden complicity suggests the firm restoration of a phallogentric male gaze into which women, too, can be co-opted—in a 'brief passage of renunciation and discovery,' a 'whole future'²⁷ has begun. Freddie marries Daphne shortly thereafter, leaving their old life behind in order to drift aimlessly for ten years in the Mediterranean, a suffering wayfarer driven by a desire to possess the image.

III.2.3. The Breakdown of the Aesthetic

The events which culminate in the murder of the young woman Josie Bell in *The Book of Evidence* revolve around a painting. Hopeful of finding the means of paying his debts in the Mediterranean, Freddie pays a visit to the estate owned by Anna Behrens's father Helmut, an old family friend. He finds his way into the gallery housing Behrens's art collection and is confronted with the images of two women who will impact his life profoundly: the house maid Josie Bell and the figure depicted in a painting Freddie refers to as *Portrait of a Woman with Gloves*. Noting an uncertainty surrounding who the artist is, Freddie eventually attributes it to an anonymous master. Critics of

Banville's work²⁸ have concluded that the painting is based on *Portrait of a Woman* (Figure 1) by Willem Drost (1655), which appears on the cover of some editions of the novel.



Figure 3.1. *Portrait of a Woman* by Willem Drost (ca. 1653-5)²⁹

His conflation of reality and the artificial firmly in place by the time he encounters her, it can be argued that Freddie's description of Josie Bell—the woman he kills—is an ekphrasis, and confusion arising from this results in her murder. Claus Cluver (1997) goes as far as to define ekphrasis as 'the verbal representation of a real or fictitious text composed within a non-verbal sign system,'³⁰ which corroborates Freddie's conflation of the female images with which he is presented: both Josie and the painting are non-verbal sign systems because every embodiment of otherness—particularly feminine otherness—falls under this category. The problem for Freddie is that, up to this point, his mode of perception has facilitated a desire for other people;

he is now confronted with a new problem: the figure embodying his ideal is neither human nor animate. The environment of the gallery heightens this perceptual distortion, so when Josie enters into it, he fails to recognise her as a person. The mistake is produced in part by Freddie's change in environment; entering the Behrens gallery produces in him a sensory overload. The gallery is not just the centre of his tragedy, but the 'vanishing point'³¹ of the 'laid on' world into which he gazed, the climax of his prolonged lapse and the logical conclusion to the aesthetic drift which began when he and Daphne left the United States.

His entry into the house known as Whitewater marks a departure from the real world—which he has semi-managed to negotiate and to which his aestheticised perceptions are subject—and an entry into a world in which these perceptions actually belong. He feels watched by a woman in a Fragonard painting 'with an expression of appalled but lively speculation,'³² hinting that he feels he is in an environment to which he is answerable. Once inside the gallery, his immersion in the virtual is complete: 'The wallpaper was the colour of tarnished gold. The air was golden too [...] I felt as if I had stepped straight into the eighteenth century.'³³ He catches a glimpse of the summer's afternoon through the French window, struck by the perspective of the scene seeming 'wrong somehow.' The relative naturalness of the world outside is being taken simply as part of the backdrop, in which no vanishing point exists, focusing the depth of his perception back onto himself. All this distortion suggests an encounter with the Uncanny. Freud (1919) posits that the Uncanny embodies the emergence of repressed memories and events, in moments...

...when the distinction between imagination and reality is effaced, as when something that we have hitherto regarded as imaginary appears before us in

reality, or when a symbol takes over the full function of the thing it symbolises.³⁴

Suddenly immersed in actual illusion, the outside world is inverted, transposed onto the gallery wall, losing the depth Freddie would have ascribed to it outside. Having shut out the real world, he has entered a state of suspension reminiscent of Macbeth's castle in De Quincey's "Knocking at the Gates". Following the chiming of the half-hour throughout the house, the tooting of a horn and the distant banging of a door, a silence has descended which will only be broken after his encounter with the painting. With the clocks tolling the suspension of the everyday and by stepping into the eighteenth century, he has stepped out of time. The noises of the everyday eventually resume. The sound of a car engine calls him to the door and turning to the French windows he is faced with what ought to be the formality of human life—his personal Lennox and Macduff—in the shape of the surprised Josie Bell.

III.2.4. *Portrait of a Woman with Gloves*

Moments before Josie Bell appears in the French window, Freddie, in his first encounter with the *Portrait of a Woman with Gloves*, gets lost in his imagination. His imaginative rigour has allowed him to retain functional thought to the point at which he reaches the Behrens' house to ask for the money he needs. However, the moment he turns towards the painting, Freddie reflects, 'I seem to myself to be turning still, as I sometimes imagine I shall be turning always, as if this might be my punishment, blurred, eternal, turning towards her,'³⁵ and he is lost. His "aesthetic moment" with the painting is the culmination of this temporary suspension of reality and provides the closest connection with the agency of the Other he has achieved since his tryst with Daphne and Anna ten years before. The force of the gaze returned to him by the figure

in *Portrait of a Woman with Gloves* represents to Freddie an agency stronger than his own: 'I stood there staring, for what seemed a long time, and gradually a kind of embarrassment took hold of me [...] as if somehow I [...] were the one who was being scrutinised.'³⁶ Struck by the painting's apparent subjectivity, Freddie moves closer to the process of recognising the subjectivity of the Other. He makes a connection with the artwork reminiscent of Bernard Berenson's (1948) description of the encounter between spectator and artwork in which he 'ceases to be himself. The two become one entity; time and space are abolished and the spectator is possessed by one awareness,'³⁷ an encounter the British psychoanalyst Marion Milner (1955) deems essential to the "illusion of oneness" which derives from the infant's primary relationship with its mother—as a kind of pre-Oedipal linked subjectivity, this is reminiscent of the idea of linking with others through transsubjectivity in Ettinger's borderspace. The sense of threat elicited by the encounter frightens him, sensing the inadequacy of his own appearance ('this soiled sack of flesh'³⁸). In the context of the moment, in which a real woman (Josie Bell) enters the gallery, his illusions are disastrously misplaced, but Freddie sees her as though she is in a frame through the French windows, before the 'recommencement of suspended life'³⁹ at the sound of a ringing telephone.

Ettinger suggests that the element of the unknown Other in a given painting—such as that which Freddie comes across here—is bound up in both the painter and the looker's experience of the Uncanny in the act of painting and looking, and that the gaze is that which facilitates the looker's experience of the phenomenon:

Since the painter's internal dialogue with the gaze on the screen of the fantasy is externalised onto the painting's screen of vision, something of the

psychic gaze is always contained in the painting, waiting to affect us.⁴⁰

Artworks are created with a charge which is apparently inherent in the subject of the painting and which is beyond the painter's control: 'the painter's stroke does not originate in an acknowledged decision, but rather concludes an internal unconscious stroke that resembles the move of psychological regression.'⁴¹ The painter creates the image as an object for the gaze in spite of this regression (in itself a part of the transgression and engagement with the Uncanny that goes into the artwork). To Freddie, the confrontational pose of the *Woman with Gloves* (fig. 3.1) embodies traces of an agency.⁴² This apparent agency arises from his response to her returning look, as rendered by the artist, and what he suspects to be her relationship with the painter. Thus, he is driven by the strength of feeling and opposition aroused by his confrontation with the image to produce a dialogue with it which is predicated upon his perception of the figure's determined unwillingness to be sexualised and possessed.

Freddie, in his imagining, decides she is in her mid-thirties, keeps her father's house and is prone to depression. Her father wants to have her portrait painted, but she is by her own admission 'no fit subject for a painter.'⁴³ Eventually, she accedes to her father's demand and stands for a painter. Upon being scrutinised by the painter, she realises, 'No one has ever looked at her like this before. So this is what it is to be known! It is almost indecent.'⁴⁴ Her response to the painter's gaze reflects Freddie's own response to hers. His imagined sense of being scrutinised instils in him a self-consciousness, a sense of his own otherness. After being requested to remove her gloves...

...to emphasise the hands [...] she hears the note of amused disdain in his voice. She refuses. He insists [...] In the end she consents to remove one glove, then promptly tries to hide the hand she has bared.⁴⁵

The imagined artist—who suppresses a grin when she removes the glove—experiences both relief and appreciation at the opportunity to see the bared flesh. This is analogous with John Berger's concept of nakedness, in which 'the other delivers to us the sight of themselves and we seize upon it.'⁴⁶ The imagined artist seizes upon it, while Freddie is stricken by it in the moment of seeing. However, he may be recognising his outsider status, only bearing witness to the relationship between the woman and the artist, which is inseparable, and does not deceive himself that she is naked (or displaying a bare hand) for him. Crucial to the power of the image, according to Berger, is that...

...he cannot turn her into a nude. The way the painter has painted her includes her will and her intentions in the very structure of the image, in the very expression of her body and her face.⁴⁷

Unable to master the image, he tries the next best thing by mastering her narrative, utilising the capacity of ekphrasis to do so as 'the voice of male speech, striving to control a female image that is both alluring and threatening,'⁴⁸ in Heffernan's (1993) conception of the technique. Freddie's account of the painting of the portrait begins with a speculation into the woman's chastity, loneliness and truculence, which are expressed in her difficult and resistant attitude towards the painter. Eventually, 'she seems to pass silently through some barrier, and a dreamy calm comes over her.'⁴⁹ She is silent in the sitting, rapt by the artist's gaze and her curiosity about revealing herself. She is not allowed to see the painting and can only watch the easel and the painter working behind the canvas. Only when it is finished can she look, after which 'she feels

numbed, hollowed, a walking shell.^{'50} Seeing her image on canvas presents her with a figure she does not recognise, but somehow knows, and to which her only verbal response is 'Now I know how to die.'⁵¹ Despite her display of humanness and subjectivity, Freddie has seized upon the image of the woman in a way which seeks to pacify it by associating it with death. Patricia Coughlan notes this, too, drawing attention to the death-bound triangle the *Woman* forms with Freddie and Josie Bell within the gallery. Narratively (the painting) and visually (Josie), he has found a way to frame them both.

III.2.5. The Murder of Josie Bell

Desperate for money and beguiled by the *Woman*, Freddie decides to steal the painting. He returns to Whitewater the next day with a rented car and the tools needed for the theft. Josie Bell interrupts the crime, entering the gallery through the glass doors and is again framed by them in Freddie's eyes. As he fumbles with the painting, he is confronted with the *Woman* nose-to-nose, and so cowing is her stare he almost blushes in self-consciousness. Behind the painting Josie stands in the window. She is frozen and silent in the door, wide-eyed with one hand raised, and, in his outrage, Freddie's response to the women's stares changes from submission to dominance: 'How dare the world strew these obstacles in my path.'⁵² It is not that he cannot summon another imaginative foray for this second female presence, he does not need to. The image of the *Woman* is at such close quarters that he is a nervous wreck from the robbery as well as flustered by her gaze. Josie is to Freddie an obstacle to be dealt with, not a presence with moral implications. In this moment, Josie is much more of an object within a frame than *Woman with Gloves*. Both women are hustled out through Josie's frame and into her backdrop. Thus, the whole scene—including the

scene of the murder—is a collective ekphrasis. Freddie has created an environment in which he accounts logically for his lapse; in his construction of a scene with which he can begin a case for the defence, he is setting out an aesthetic basis for his actions for which he can attempt to atone.

Josie Bell is the only reality which manages to disrupt Freddie's fantasy, and her death is its inevitable breakdown. He bungles her and the painting into the back of his rented car and drives away from the house. He may have framed her into objectivity as she entered the French windows, but captive in the back of the car she beats Freddie from behind and shouts. As he starts the car to leave Whitewater, he cannot countenance the thwarted feeling:

Impatience, yes, that was what I felt most strongly—that, and a grievous sense of embarrassment. I was mortified. I had never been so exposed in all my life.⁵³

His feeling of exposure here arises not from the look emanating from the painting, but from others imposing their existence upon his, their not sharing in his fantasy. His imaginary play is causing real-world damage, but he is too invested and too stubborn to give it up. Josie, however, keeps impinging on his play, pummelling and clawing her captor as he loses control of the car and careens into a hedge. He turns to her, realising the hammer he bought for the robbery is in his hand:

Don't, she said [...] I could not speak, I was filled with a kind of wonder. I had never felt another's presence so immediately and with such raw force.⁵⁴

This, of course, relegates his most recent experience with the painting, whose impact has left an indelible mark. He is recognising the power of Josie's difference, her reality, but he does not have the wherewithal to deal with it.

I saw her now, really saw her, for the first time, her mousy hair and bad skin, that bruised look around her eyes. She was quite ordinary, and yet, somehow, I don't know—somehow radiant.⁵⁵

He proceeds to bludgeon her with the hammer. Josie's radiance marks her inextricable association with the portrait in Freddie's eyes. Another triangular relationship has formed; this time the female figures do not figure simply as images turned towards each other, but as confrontational subjects he has turned to face. Freddie's response has been to fix both figures into his aesthetic paradigm. He has fixed the *Woman* with words, constructing, through ekphrasis, a narrative which subdues and silences her until she can say to herself 'now I know how to die,'⁵⁶ in that foreshadowing of the death-bound nature of this triadic relationship. Josie had previously been fixed as an image. In his first visit to the gallery, Josie enters Freddie's reverie:

She must have come in just then and seen me there and started back in alarm. Her eyes were wide, and one knee was flexed and one hand lifted, as if to ward off a blow.⁵⁷

This exact pose is evocative of Balthus's *The Window* (fig. 3.2) (1933) and D'hoker (2002) notes that Banville has claimed that he based it on the painting.⁵⁸



Figure 3.2. Balthus, *The Window* (1933).⁵⁹

Balthus's refusal to grant the publishers the rights to use the image on the cover of the first edition of the book further suggests that the same image is key to Josie's depiction within the text.⁶⁰ Josie appears this way to Freddie both times she walks in on him in the gallery. The first time, she strikes this pose as part of the visual tableau of Freddie's perception; the second, as an obstacle blocking his path, she strikes it again before he walks her out with the painting as though he is stealing her, too. When her reality breaks through the doors of his perception, there is no time to recognise the discrepancy between Josie and the *Woman*. The moment he is struck by the

“radiance” of her presence, he claims, ‘the silence rose around us like water.’⁶¹ As in the gallery the previous day, the aesthetic moment seals off the environment around him and the figure of wonder. Josie’s ordinariness suspends Freddie’s own conception of the ‘ordinary tide and succession of human affairs’⁶² and he is stunned into silence. It is sound again which breaks the spell:

She cleared her throat and sat up, and detached a strand of hair that had caught at the corner of her mouth.

You must let me go, she said, or you will be in trouble.⁶³

His response to the sense of uncontained and unknowable agency in *Woman with Gloves* was to find a means of silencing her. That was achieved by narrating her experience, inducting her into his visual world and silencing her there. The moment Josie speaks, Freddie finds, with his hammer, an immediate means of silencing her, and she, too, is bound with death.

III.2.6. A Note on Subjectivity

Having failed imaginatively as well as being failed by the promise implied by his gender role, Freddie’s failure of the imagination exposes him to the abject through a malfunction of his subjectivity. An abjectness associated with his being a straight white male is stressed in his bemusement over his inability to recognise Josie Bell’s subjectivity. His straight white maleness, as he perceives it, embodies what Claire Cisco King has called the ‘abject hegemony’⁶⁴ of masculinity. King theorises that white masculinity is in fact an ‘abject ideological formation’ which...

...prevails not by expelling that which is Other, but by sacrificing its own fictions in order to absorb, assimilate, and make room for Otherness, offering up, for instance, cherished narratives of masculine strength, aggression, and invulnerability in order to indulge in femininity, passivity, and lack.⁶⁵

However, subjectivity is apparently stable and easily contained within the hegemonic status of masculinity. This, in Freddie's case, appears to have fatal consequences when its precarity is eventually exposed. Freddie's abjectness is apparent at the moment of lapse itself. In the scene of the murder, Freddie, with the hammer in his hand, 'looked at it, startled,'⁶⁶ not seeming to be in control of his own behaviour. The rapture associated with the act of murder has allowed Freddie 'throw himself suddenly *outside of himself*,' as Bataille puts it in relation to such transgressive violence.⁶⁷ The coherence of his identity and the narrative control it implies is thus circumvented. In the pleasure of transgression, the masculine subject, according to King,⁶⁸ is exposed to 'the boundlessness of the real [...] betwixt life and death, self and Other.' Freddie's transgression is not only revelatory of flawed sense of Other, but of the fantastic nature of his own subjectivity.

The *Woman with Gloves*, to Freddie, has taken on her subjectivity, but has circumvented the abject to do so. In the life Freddie imagines for her before the portrait is painted, she is represented as an abject figure. She is prone to illness and depression, 'periods of prostration' which punctuate a life in which she effects the role of a stern matriarchal figure. However, she lacks agency under the tedium of the patriarchal household in which her father dotes on her like a child. When she steps out of this, she meets the male gaze of the painter. She feels its power, but is not victimised by it, though she is dismissed by it in the 'note of amused disdain' in the painter's voice.⁶⁹ However, the painter, despite his dismissal, recognises her subjectivity which manifests in her refusal to display her hands. By consenting to remove one glove and attempting to hide the hand she has bared—thus deciding the

eventual title of the painting—she makes her hands the central signifier of her relation to the painter, the site of their dialogue. Such points of dialogue in painting, Ettinger suggests, provide one of the routes through which men have access to the matrixial borderspace. She says that men...

...like women, are in contact with this (matrixial) time and space [...] via art-objects, art-actions, art-gestures, such as music, painting, and dance.⁷⁰

Freddie, in his recognition of a form of subjectivity the first time he meets the *Woman's* "phantasy eyes", is offered an escape from the crisis presented by the precarity of his subjectivity; the prospect of sharing subjectivity with the Other simultaneously comes into view. His next opportunity is presented to him almost immediately. When he frames Josie in the French windows, he does not register—or can only register—a subject equivalent to that of the painting staring back at him. In both cases and despite the sudden and inexplicable knowledge of his own abjection, he lapses back into his fantasy of masculine hegemony and rejection of the abject. From that point until the murder, he invokes a type of subjectivity in keeping with his own apparently stable one when accounting for the agency he perceives in the *Woman with Gloves*.

III.2.7. Ekphrasis as Abuse

Freddie devotes his time in prison to the dual task of teaching himself about art and its history and learning all he can about the woman he has killed, poring over the newspaper accounts of her life. He comes to realise these investigations are in vain and would have been so from the moment he killed her:

This is the worst, the essential sin, I think, the one for which there will be no forgiveness: that I never imagined her vividly enough, that I never made her be

there sufficiently, that I did not make her live.⁷¹

Here, he is addressing both the failure that is inherent in his aesthetic paradigm—the inability to incorporate other human beings into it—as well as the personal moral failure of allowing himself to murder a woman. Inherent to both is his inability to negotiate a way of relinquishing his control over the image. This is the root of his inability to deal with the perceived subjectivity of the painted figure of the *Woman* and emphasises how perfect Balthus's *The Window* is for the *ad hoc* representation of Josie. According to Andrew Brink (2007), Balthus set up his studio so that when the model for *The Window*, Elsa Henriquez, entered the room 'he could pretend to attack her with a dagger to produce terror.'⁷² In the painting itself (see figure 3.2.), terror and surprise seem to be the woman's primary expressions, and the exposure of one breast suggests and assault is already underway. The horizontal bar behind her back both protects her from falling out and traps her within the frame of the window. Brink suggests that the painting is representative of the violent erotic fantasy which runs through much of Balthus's work:

The fantasy of *The Window* is that of the artist as attacker, wielding the brush as if it were a knife, demanding control over a woman [...] This is indeed an abusive picture in which a "story" of violent attack with unknown outcome is implied.⁷³

It is clear, then, that Banville is associating Freddie's painterly perception of reality with Balthus's approach to the painted subject. His immediate depiction of Josie is an "abusive" one by which his words are wielded like a dagger within the quasi-visual medium of ekphrasis. However, Freddie fails to recognise his ekphrases are satisfying a defensive impulse when he is confronted with the agency of the Other. His earlier encounters with Anna and Daphne as well as his encounter with *Woman with Gloves*

reveal that he is moved profoundly by these experiences, by the presences he must incorporate into his perception of the world around him. His response is to hollow them out and fit them into a paradigm over which he has control.

III.2.8. The Unavoidable Imperative

The failure of imagination underpins the resolution of *The Book of Evidence*. Freddie's devotion to the "perfectible realm" remains intact, but he recognises its misogynistic flaw. He goes on to tell his wife Daphne that he will be pleading guilty and seeking no concessions and is baffled by her devastated response. She vents her frustration with the way she and their son have been treated over the years and how little he understands of the damage he has caused. He immediately trails off into a rumination over his newfound ability to recognise the pain of others by recounting his sympathy for a drunk he prevents from falling to the floor in a prison van. To Freddie, the idea of this kind of sympathy for the ugly ordinariness and failure of others is 'the glimpse of a new continent from the prow of a sinking ship.'⁷⁴ This signifies something to Freddie for the future—a new world in which he can try to rectify his mistakes: 'I killed her because I could kill her, and I could kill her because for me she was not alive. And now my task is to bring her back to life [...] it strikes me with the force of an unavoidable imperative.'⁷⁵ Having washed up on a new imaginative shore for the task, and the imperative nature he attributes to it, are suggestive that his solipsistic narrative methods will be the driving force of this new expedition.

However, it is clear that reformulating his perception is the next step, and central to this project is the re-examination of his own ekphrastic voice, which, in its unexamined state, matches Heffernan's summation of the concept ('the voice of male speech'⁷⁶).

This is one aspect of what Coughlan describes as the ‘unconscious allocation of women *by culture in general* to the realm of death and death to the realm of femininity.’⁷⁷ In this regard, Freddie has not deviated greatly from the ‘attitudes towards women and art [...] which already underpin culture’⁷⁸ consistent with Elisabeth Bronfen’s (1992) and John Berger’s (1972) interpretations of art and literature of the European tradition. Therefore, Freddie’s new obsession, as the trilogy develops, is the framing of female figures as fixed images such as those into which he placed Josie and the *Woman with Gloves* after he has narratively silenced her. As the close of the book hints at in any case, by casting doubt on the veracity of the story so far, this will almost certainly be an entirely theoretical exercise: an attempt to de-gender the masculine ekphrastic voice.

In order to achieve this, he must, in the words of Stephen Cheeke (2009), return ‘the picture to the world of narrative and agency [...] revealing the ethical dimension—a moral pulse, that has been suspended in the still life of the image.’⁷⁹ This moral pulse is reactivated by the spectator. Ettinger, as we have seen, has noted the painter’s part in projecting an ‘internal dialogue with the gaze on the screen of the phantasy’ which is ‘externalised onto the painting’s screen of vision’⁸⁰, a dialogue which waits to affect the spectator. The engagement of the spectator with this dialogue is embodied by the Aristotelian ekphrastic concept of *energeia*, which Emily Bilman (2013) claims ‘represents the energy that is transmitted to the readers of poetry by the poet or painter.’⁸¹ The fact that Freddie has responded to this phenomenon (imagined in the case of Josie) when confronted by female figures suggests his self-examination will be one in which he must interrogate the affront caused to him in these encounters. The

task of restoring life to the feminine image by conveying the *energeia* of the artwork and the Other invokes the myth of Pygmalion. It is clear that the materialisation of a real woman out of love for her image is a challenge to his abilities as a narrative solipsist and a case of objectification *ad extremis*, at odds with anything redemptive in Freddie's sincerity of effort. However, through the failure ensured by this tack, he surely moves closer to an actual opportunity to recognise the faults in his own and a wider cultural way of seeing.

III.3. *Ghosts*: The Essence of Womanhood

III.3.1. Cythera, Ireland

In *Ghosts*, Freddie has come ashore onto the new world he has envisaged from the prow of the sinking ship of the past. He is living out his parole on an island off the west coast of Ireland on which he can continue his study of art history in the service of Professor Kreutznaer who is writing a monograph on the artist Jean Vaublin. He lives with Kreutznaer and Licht, a long-time assistant of the professor who acts as a housekeeper. As he introduces the reader to the island, the narrator makes it clear where he stands in its representation: 'Who speaks? I do. Little god,'⁸² suggesting the setting's association with reality will be as tenuous as it was in Freddie's last account. Banville has himself asserted this in an interview: 'I actually think the narrator is still in jail, imagining the whole thing.'⁸³ Any hope of this being anything more than an intellectual exercise is immediately diminished, but as the close of *The Book of Evidence* suggests, reality has had little bearing on the (mis)representation of the truth in the first place.

The account opens with the shipwreck of a ferry and seven passengers walk ashore on

the low tide: two men, two women and three children. As they grumble, one utters the complaint 'Cythera my foot.'⁸⁴ This is the first indication that Freddie is working the narrative into the fabric of a more idealised world. The Greek island Cythera is the home of Aphrodite, and the comment suggests the character is aware of the symbolic importance of their disembarkation and is ironically commenting on it. It gradually becomes clear, based on his paintings and his life story, that the painter Vaublin most resembles is the French artist Jean-Antoine Watteau (a painting of whom Freddie spots on the wall of the Behrens gallery). The meaning of the Cythera comment which opens the novel is clear: images remain central to the narrative task, though the disillusionment of the shipwrecked suggests that in this case they have not been idealised. Freddie has himself observed the discrepancy in the connection, recognising its potential as 'a background to one of [Vaublin's] celebrated *pèlerinage* or a delicate *fête galante*.'⁸⁵ Spying ridges on the sides of hills, he wonders if vines had once grown on them, only to be told they were potato drills from the famine era: 'Cythera, my foot. Such suffering, such grief.'⁸⁶ He appears to have imagined a ruined Cythera from which the *fête galante* has long departed and he is tasked with re-examining the scene using Vaublin's masterpiece *Le monde d'or* as an interpretive key.



Figure 3.3. Jean-Antoine Watteau, The Embarkation for Cythera (L'Embarquement pour Cythère, 1717)⁸⁷

Le monde d'or (*The Golden World*), with its depiction of the *fête galante* and the *Pierrot* figure within the same painting appear to draw from Jean-Antoine Watteau's *The Embarkation for Cythera* (1717), *Pilgrimage to Cythera* (1718-1719, see Appendix B) and *Pierrot* (also known as *Gilles*, 1718, figure 3.4).⁸⁸ Early on, Flora, one of the castaways, offers the most concise description of the painting when she notices a colour reproduction hanging on the wall of Freddie's bedroom, where, ill, she has been taken by Licht to lie down:

Strange scene. What was going on? There was a sort of clown dressed in white standing up with his arms hanging, and people behind him walking off down a hill to where a ship was waiting, and at the left a smirking man astride a donkey.⁸⁹

Felix, another of the castaways, subsequently enters the room and it is clear he is being associated with the man astride the donkey, the castaways all echoes—or ghosts—of the *fête galante* on their trip to Cythera.⁹⁰

III.3.2. Flora as Object

In line with his commitment in *The Book of Evidence*, Freddie apportions a special role to the female characters, all of whom are chased by the males throughout the narrative. The women of *Ghosts*—Flora and Sophie—are introduced as figures who represent both a looked-at-ness and looking respectively. Flora is chased relentlessly throughout the narrative by Felix, a Mephistophelean figure, who feels ownership over her after they have spent the night together. Every character, indeed, is compelled to look at Flora, often when she is unaware, in another room or sleeping. It is Flora to whom Freddie affords a special attention:

Oh yes, I had spotted her straight away [...] What did I hope for, what did I expect? Not what you think. I have never had much interest in the flesh.⁹¹

For him, Flora is the kind of innocent figure most suitable to satisfy...

...a sort of lust for knowledge, the passionate desire to delve my way into womanhood and taste the very temper of its being.⁹²

Not having ‘much interest in the flesh’ is an accurate characterisation of his behaviour so far, in that his adoration of women seems to spring from their otherness and beauty, rather than his lust for carnal satisfaction. Flora fits the bill for a kind of test condition to which he can expose himself. Her obvious beauty, youth, sexuality and her clear position as an object of desire for those on the island offer a new chance to relate to and to know the ideal realm of the Other.

The other castaways demonstrate a form of scopophilic desire for Flora. Alice—a little girl—watches her sleep, while Sophie—a photographer—is revealed by Felix to harbour a secret desire for her. Sophie is represented as a kind of phallic woman, ‘as old as a mother, but unlike any mother they had ever known, the hungry way she

smoked cigarettes, the way she sat with her knees apart, like a man, not caring...'⁹³ As a photographer, she is also defined by her use of her gaze through the camera—things are only real to her once they have been 'filtered through a lens.'⁹⁴ Her experience and her utilisation of the gaze means she, like the others, acts upon the feminine image rather than embodies it. While Flora sleeps and her three admirers occupy the kitchen, Alice remembers she had promised to take her a glass of water. Felix takes a key from his pocket, revealing he has locked her in, and says, 'a man must protect what is his.'⁹⁵ To Sophie's amusement, Alice takes the key to Flora with the water. Though they all contemplate acting upon Flora in some way, Felix—an apparent reformation of the Mephistophelean character of the same name in Banville's *Mefisto* (1986)—is the most outwardly malevolent towards her.

III.3.3. The Dark Other

In his convoluted musings over the castaways, Freddie reveals in them reflections of darker sides of himself. The two young boys are a telling manifestation of his wickedness. When Pound insults Hatch across the kitchen table, Felix remonstrates with him: 'Bunter, you are a beast,'⁹⁶ echoing Freddie's own name for his darker side in *The Book of Evidence*. Freddie—summing up his own reasons for existing in this place—sees himself as a kind of 'sentinel, a guardian, a protector against that dark prowler, [his] dark other [...]'⁹⁷ In his quiet life of work, and away from the troubles of the past, he seems, here, to have distilled himself down to his most benevolent qualities. If his "dark other" has returned, Freddie is certain 'it is the girl he is after.'⁹⁸ Felix and the others' fixation on Flora and his domination over the group represent the force Freddie must keep out. Their mini squabble over the key can thus be seen as Freddie's inward struggle to wrest control away from his possessive instinct.

Part of Felix's reason for leaving the island at the end of the day is that Freddie brings enough darkness to the place, summing up the problems that underlie the latter's test conditions. From the start, the image of beauty is also that of death. Felix alludes to this when Sophie turns her camera to Alice in the kitchen, saying 'I thought you only took pictures of things that are dead.'⁹⁹ Having come to take photos of ruins on the island for a photo series she describes as "*tableaux morts*", Sophie's photos reveal something of the island's embodiment of death. Reference is made throughout the novel to the stench of death which seems to pervade: dead animals and plant life and even the body of a neighbour and lover of Freddie's. In the night time, he notes: 'they throng about me, the dead ones, yearning to speak.'¹⁰⁰ He compares the dead to the figures in one of Vaublin's paintings, part of a *tableaux*, each character 'the source of its own illumination [...] still and speechless, not dead and yet not alive either.'¹⁰¹ Here is a place, then, where Freddie consigns symbols of the dead, but the interest of his observations lies upon a different aspect: 'it is not the dead that interest me now, [...] Who, then? The living? No, no, something in between; some third thing.'¹⁰² He identifies Flora as the embodiment of this "third thing" an unknown quantity he sets out to isolate, study and protect.

If the castaways are each an aspect of his psyche, he recognises himself in this looked-at otherness. By seeing to it that all gazing elements are removed from the island, it follows that he is separating the active and phallic elements of his psyche from the passive, attempting to leave himself alone with his otherness, to confront it. It is clear, therefore, that he understands and has found a way to confront the mystery which confounded his conflict with Josie Bell. His task from here is to solve that mystery. To

do so, he must balance the blankness of Flora's character—the 'pure clay awaiting a grizzled Pygmalion to inspire it with life'¹⁰³—with the agency in her he hopes to represent. The problem a Pygmalion complex suggests is that the only agency she shall ever display is a product of his creation. Given she is in some sense part of his own psyche, the exercise was never intended to involve other people anyway, just his own otherness.

III.3.4. Sharing the Dream



Figure 3.4. Jean-Antoine Watteau, *Pierrot* (also known as *Gilles*, 1718)¹⁰⁴

However, the narrative voice does appear to slip into Flora's point of view in two scenes, one of which takes place while she sleeps on Freddie's bed and dreams she is within Vaublin's *Le monde d'or* (the second takes place at the midway point of the novel as she exits Freddie's room). In the dream—a clearly signposted ekphrasis—she

is pursued by one of the figures within the painting. Flora's fellow castaways take the roles of the stock characters of the *Comédie-Française*. Felix pursues her while the others, statuesque, pose around her. In a clearing, she can see a figure with an obscured face which seems suspended like a puppet: the Pierrot, to which she runs and finds she can climb inside and shut out her pursuer—she...

...reaches the hollow mask that is the figure's face and fits her own face to it and looks out through the eyeholes into the broad, calm distances of the waning day and understands that she is safe at last.¹⁰⁵

Her flight from her male pursuer and becoming the looker rather than the looked-at suggests that she is accessing some form of subjectivity within her unconscious. It is possible that—through access to the narrative point of view—she is being fitted for a more phallic subjectivity, such as Sophie's, who appropriates phallic signifiers (gaze, cigarettes, spread legs). It is also possible that Freddie, by joining her in the flight and looking with her narratively, is attempting to reform his own subjectivity by accounting for the agency of the Other and sharing in its vulnerability. This resembles the agency he recognises in Josie before he kills her; he has been waiting for it to return, 'the ghost that somehow he must conjure.'¹⁰⁶ Having apparently turned away from his own masculinity, this ghost is perhaps the "third thing", something in which Freddie and Flora must both share. By gazing with/through Flora out through the eyes of the hollowed-out Pierrot, Freddie as omnipotent narrative voice is forging a connection with her within the phallic dimension, narrative groundwork for something more profound to come. He is sharing in the otherness that brought her to this apparent haven as well as the subjectivity that allows them to look out in safety. This is the beginning of what Ettinger describes as *metramorphosis*: 'a process of continuous

investment of *I* and *non-I* in one another, in a joint object, with-in the same event [...]’¹⁰⁷—the linking of the self and the Other. Linking like this within the dream provides them with a fluid experience,

...an asymmetrical reciprocal relation that creates erotic antennae [...] These aerials register what returns from the Other as traces, and transmit a centreless or multi-focal gaze.¹⁰⁸

Ettinger further notes: ‘The matrixial gaze is what metramorphoses *us* into partial-objects and partial-subjects in a matrix larger than our separate one-selves,’¹⁰⁹ which, taken in light of his dream experience with Flora, suggests some form pre-Oedipal, pre-subjective relationality is being sought on Freddie’s behalf. These aspects of their relationship will reveal themselves later in Freddie’s representational breakthrough with Flora at the breakfast table (see section III.3.6). In the event of the dream itself, on Freddie’s terms, the gaze they share *at least* does not foreclose Flora’s otherness within the narrative. When she wakes, she appears to be in possession of herself, she does not seek any form of visual domination in her next encounter, but awaits it in ‘fascinated, breathless expectation.’¹¹⁰

III.3.5. The “Third Place”

Flora wakes from her fever dream clutching the key Alice has given her. She hears a step below her on the stairs and knows someone is waiting for her, that ‘something [is] starting up.’¹¹¹ Freddie, hitherto out of sight, is about to come into her life. In truth, she has already been introduced to him, and the safety he and the island will offer, in the dream. Flora decides not to leave on the boat when it returns with the tide. Her decision to stay in Freddie’s company is an echo of the narrative refuge she takes inside the Pierrot. The key is significant here, too—a phallic symbol of her captivity

wrested away from her chief misogynist tormentor, a visual symbol of the autonomy she will not let go as she steps into the unknown that is Freddie's company. It also suggests that Flora has somehow been masculinised by looking out through the *Pierrot's* eyes in the dream. Patricia Coughlan notes that by climbing into the Pierrot, Flora is aligning herself with the Pierrot-esque male heroes of Banville's stories. These are 'flawed and failed'¹¹² men, and Freddie is the first to admit that he does not measure up to anyone's ideal of masculinity. His sexual desire, he claims, has always been motivated by a 'lust for knowledge'¹¹³ rather than for flesh, to delve his way into womanhood: 'perhaps I have always wanted to be a woman [...] If so, I have reached the halfway stage, unsexed poor androgyne that I am become by now.'¹¹⁴ He is playing down his masculine misogynist side to justify his singling out of Flora. He seeks her passivity which he identifies in her innocence—she is 'pure clay awaiting a grizzled Pygmalion to inspire with life.' He does not seek in her 'the radiant self rising up like a flame in the mirror of the other [...]'¹¹⁵ Freddie faces the contradiction of refusing to objectify and victimise Flora in his attempt to represent her while approaching her as something lacking in life. He is approaching the feminine Other, in all its passivity, from the phallic point of view. However, the process of Freddie's fusing of subjectivities which takes place in the dream highlights Ettinger's idea that "woman" is 'not the preserve of women alone,'¹¹⁶ that Freddie's embracing of his femininity in this context dulls the phallic tendency of his mode of representation and opens up his links to otherness by allowing Flora to fill his hollowed-out Pierrot. In this context, it is she who is inspiring him with life.

When she awakes, it is to the impression of 'openness and clarity, as of light falling

into a vast, empty room.’ The hollowness of the Pierrot resounds—she feels she has ‘made a journey through a dark place [...] then a sudden astonishment of light.’ Sensing Freddie on the stairs outside the room, ‘half in fear, half in fascinated, breathless expectation,’¹¹⁷ she seems aware of the change their new connection heralds.

Ghosts is a difficult narrative to follow. There is no story to speak of, rather it is a disjointed set of recollections based on the imagined arrival and departure of a group of people on an imagined island based on Watteau’s depictions of Cythera. What Flora represents is unclear. Firstly, her otherness and femininity allow Freddie to redeem his failure to conceive of Josie Bell as a human being like himself. Secondly, she is a part of the child in him; she is the otherness he repressed in childhood. As he stands in the silent, sunlit landing before he meets Flora, he is reminded of childhood, just as Flora is when she enters the Pierrot, and he wonders why:

Was there some marvellous moment of happiness that I have forgotten, some interval of stillness and radiance in which the enchanted child lingered on the forest path while his other self stepped out of him and blundered on oblivious into the dark entanglements of the future?¹¹⁸

In a house full of his “Dark Other” it is clear he is associating the castaways’ arrival with the otherness he feels he has repressed or abandoned. Then he meets Flora and immediately begins to idealise and gender her, aware of the violence he can inflict upon her, that she is brittle and that the pleasure in her destruction lies in the imbalance of power between him and girls like her, who, in these moments, cry out ‘like lovers in the extremity of passion.’¹¹⁹ She asks to stay with him on the island, away from Felix, and he accepts. He sees Felix to the boat and it is insinuated that Felix is his double, like the monster is to Frankenstein:

It was as if all along we had been walking side by side, with something between us [...] that was now broken, and I had stepped into his world, or he into mine, or we had both entered some third place that belonged to neither of us.¹²⁰

His desire to keep Flora out of fascination has motivated Freddie to confront Felix. To do so he must break down the barriers which have separated him from his 'feared and desired other,'¹²¹ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's (2008) summation of the double of the Paranoid Gothic. Freddie's double is manifested in the entire band of castaways, Felix and Flora included. As Freddie and Felix step into each other's worlds or a "third place", they all do so together. The feeling of childhood is a sign that the island has been bound up in the Uncanny and suggests they have been moving around the "third place" all day like ghosts. His decision to keep the feminine Other with him in Flora without quite knowing what will come of the encounter suggests a willingness to work out a relationship with her, to work out a mode of representing them which coheres with the physical space.

III.3.6. Working through the Affect

From the moment he meets Flora, Freddie is only willing to perceive his idealised version of her. Her beauty, her brittleness and her silence. She moves to the window and he has 'an extraordinarily vivid sense of her'¹²²—she is framed again, and the ekphrastic voice is at work on the surface of the Other. His instinct this time is to protect her, and he agrees to make Felix to leave so that she might stay. He is filled with emotion in his first moments with her, confronted once again by the mystery of the Other. However, she begins to speak, to moan about her job in a hotel, calling the manager a "bitch". Freddie cannot bear this: 'Stop! I wanted to say, Stop! you're ruining everything! I am told I should treasure life, but give me the realm of art anytime.'¹²³ He acknowledges that he finds the ordinariness of these idealised people

difficult to accept, that he will not allow himself to see it. This revulsion reveals an idealised perception of femininity which is underpinned by the abject. In her uncouth language, she displays symbols which Freddie has already separated from his ideal of her which he has formed within the frame of the window. Even minor transgressions from his conception of order can contain the powers of horror. Julia Kristeva notes that the potency of the pollution 'is proportional to the potency of the prohibition that founds it.'¹²⁴ Flora's use of language disturbs the order of his conception of her femininity and, along with it, his intensity of feeling. According to Mary Douglas (as cited by Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble*), the main function of demarcating transgressions such as Flora's is to regulate and impose a 'system on an inherently untidy experience.'¹²⁵ She goes on to say that 'any kind of unregulated permeability constitutes a site of pollution and endangerment.' This goes some way to explaining his behaviour towards Josie Bell as he bundles her into the car before he kills her. He feels she is a part of the fixed system into which he has categorised the painting, that she bears similar methods of regulation. He responds violently to the danger posed by her "unregulated" behaviour. Flora's unregulated speech is his first challenge as it disturbs a fixed system that affords him fascination and pleasure in the Other: 'That is not what I saw, that is not what I would let myself see'¹²⁶—he is here revisiting his failure of imagination. He then goes directly to accompany and confront the other castaways—aspects of his phallic identity—to the ferry. Doing so suggests an openness, determination and commitment to working through his failure.

The closest he comes to redemption in this way arrives at the end of the first half of the novel, though the scene is a flash forward to weeks or even months after the six

have departed the island. Flora has stayed in the house of the Professor with Freddie and Licht and they have fallen back into a daily routine. Freddie's epiphany happens to arrive on the morning of Midsummer—the anniversary of his murder of Josie. His revelation is a simple one: 'What happened, after all, except that she began to talk?'¹²⁷ He can barely remember what she said, feeling the content was not important to either of them. As she speaks, he realises he is perceiving her ordinariness and solidity for the first time. He recounts seeing her as...

[...]no longer a nexus of adjectives, but pure and present noun. I noticed the little fine hairs on her legs, a scarp of dried skin along the edge of her foot, a speck of sleep in the canthus of her eye.¹²⁸

That he should include an unfeminine marker such as leg hair, desiccated skin of her foot and bodily discharge in the eye in his description of the Other suggests a new openness to abjection as he would formerly have responded it. This suggests he is engaging in a process of deconstructing the sanctions 'that regulate man and woman, me and Other'¹²⁹ as well as what Butler describes as a 'resignification and recontextualisation' of sexuality.¹³⁰ This recontextualization amounts to seeing Flora 'not as a gathering of details, but all of a piece, solid and singular and amazing. No, not amazing. That is the point. She was simply there [...]'¹³¹ The perception and acceptance of the Other amidst the strength of feeling on this particular day is suggestive of progress on Freddie's part, particularly in light of his initial need to control her image. The fact that he does not pay attention to what she says is not as damning as first appears because he remembers enough for the reader to infer exactly what she is talking about and—in combination with the day of the year—to provide a context for the sudden change.

He is unaware of it, but Flora is returning Freddie to “the golden world” of the day the castaways came ashore. He hardly listens to the sense of what she says:

[...] something about a dream, or a memory, of being a child and standing one summer afternoon [...] looking across the roofs of the town to the distant sea while a boy who was soft in the head capered and pulled faces at her.¹³²

Though the content, as he vaguely remembers it, differs from that which Flora dreamt about on the day she came ashore, there is a striking common centrality of a sense of childhood and gazing out over vast distances while in the midst of quasi-demonic attention. What concerns Freddie on reflection is how the present feeds on versions of the past, how pieces of memory form ‘bright and clear and fantastically detailed, complete little islands where it seems it might be possible to live, even if only for a moment.’¹³³ This suggests that the island on which they reside is one such place which he has fashioned in his mind. However, it is Flora’s dream and Freddie’s impression of it which crystallises this idea and produces this sensation. Freddie is as overwhelmed by the experience as he was when he first met Flora and the same cues are present: the sensation of childhood, of a connection to that repressed Other, the visual immediacy of the feminine Other and the destabilising effect of her speech. His new response indicates that their coexistence has elongated their encounter which has allowed Freddie to work through the affect Flora produces in him.

To share this space long enough, the voice, too, eventually assists this working through process. Griselda Pollock notes the inextricable link between the voice of the desired feminine Other and that of the maternal, which contains the lure ‘of both loss of self and the offer of regression into a self-effacing state of yielding to a *jouissance* with and of the other, the m/Other.’¹³⁴ Pollock is here drawing from Kaja Silverman’s theories in

The Acoustic Mirror (1988), in which the female voice is an object under male regulation similar to her appearance in Hollywood cinema, which reveals that the free expression of the female interior voice is akin to abject fluid. The way he has opened himself up to the associations of Flora's voice is one which has similarities to a method of creation described by Ettinger as 'in-formation of the subject via transformation-by-transgression toward others [...].'¹³⁵ The transgression here is the breach of the barrier which separates subject and object, ignoring the need to regulate the feminine object and the othering that takes place when she becomes unregulated and abjected. Within the phallic paradigm, castration separates subject and object. By engaging with the repressed Other—that which castration anxiety cuts off in the subject (see section II.5.3)—the unregulated and previously abjected voice of 'just a girl,'¹³⁶ Freddie is entering the 'the im-pure zone' of the matrixial borderspace and attempting to perform a feat of 'creation-as-castration.'¹³⁷ His comments upon his first encounter with Flora become clearer in light of this process: 'I am, I realise, only at the beginning of this birthing business.'¹³⁸ By the end of the epiphany which eventually comes to pass, it is clear that he is not attempting to give birth to a fully formed representation of Flora, but rather to himself in her world, that he might be 'there among them, at last.'¹³⁹ He is unconsciously positioning himself to receive some form of matrixial sublimation through his encounters and his engagement with the visual aspect of the island as an imagined artwork, as a depiction of otherness. On a conscious level, he has constructed an imaginary island on which he hopes to gain access to the essence of womanhood in order to reproduce it. However, his method is inadequate. Through ekphrasis, he is attempting to render what Griselda Pollock describes as a 'plastic account of two immaterial dimensions':¹⁴⁰ sound and—in Flora's case—sexual

difference.

His instinct is once again an ekphrastic one and he is compelled to 'paint the scene,' though this time he must 'paint it as it was and not as it seemed.' Here he reveals a major fault in his representation of the place. His rendering has only managed to produce a world in 'washes of grey on grey' and a 'densened whiteness.'¹⁴¹ Grey and grey-tinted colours have predominated his descriptions of the island so far. Only when Flora begins to talk does she reveal the full extent of her role in Freddie's island creation:

In her, and in what she spoke, the world, the little world in which we sat, found its grounding and was realised. It was as if she had dropped a condensed drop of colour into the water of the world and the colour had spread and the outlines of things had sprung into bright relief.¹⁴²

This echoes the classical myth of Flora, who is originally Chloris before she is abducted by Zephyrus, the wind of March. Zephyrus marries Chloris and she becomes Flora, the goddess of spring, who spreads the colour of flowers across the land.¹⁴³ The colour she gives the island seems to move Freddie to a more complete rendering. It is only by opening himself up to Flora's invocation of his own otherness that this can be achieved. This is the purpose which is served by the island; it is the zone of otherness he has failed to imagine properly. Only by letting go of his mastery of the object, the phallic strictures on what is pure and impure, the boundary between the abject and 'the perfectible realm,'¹⁴⁴ can he begin to understand what he has been missing. Upon hearing to Flora speak, he is as close to 'being there among them' as he can be—he has not reified them on his terms, but entered into their collective, he is a part of them rather than they a part of his imagining. Freddie, dissatisfied with the phallic path to representation, has held out for a feminine one. Invoking Ettinger's concept of

severality (see endnote 8 [Chapter II]), they emerge within this representation together.

III.3.7. Glimpsing the Reality of the Other

Other interpretations suggest *Ghosts* is a failed effort in Freddie's hopes to replace the woman he has killed. Banville himself has called it his favourite of the Frames trilogy 'because it is such a failure,' that 'the book has to fail' because Freddie cannot create a world from nothing.¹⁴⁵ He also cites Freddie's inability to "construct" Flora and that she fades out as a result. Müller, too, makes the point that the inherent failure to represent the materialised body through the process of representation is linked to the failure of ekphrasis to formulate the signified in words. Coughlan highlights the ever-present nature of Freddie's solipsism throughout the narrative, that despite his moving epiphany with Flora, she is still a blank character who is being acted upon and upon whom Freddie may project any meaning he wants. These are all valid points, but also moot; the reader is under very little illusion that the characters who wash up on the island are projections, just as the island itself is an imaginative construct. *Le monde d'or*, a combinatory ekphrasis of a group of Watteau paintings, is attributed to the painter Vaublin, about whom Freddie is writing a monograph. Little is known about Vaublin before he begins to work in his late twenties, an apparently 'manufactured man.'¹⁴⁶ Vaublin—a near anagram of Banville—has created the backdrop to the story with *Le monde d'or*. However, the narrative rug is pulled from under Freddie's feet as Felix reveals the painting to be a fake and Freddie must face the failed construction of the story as well as his study of Vaublin: 'My writing is almost done: Vaublin shall live! If you call this life. He too was no more than a copy, of his own self. As I am, of mine.'¹⁴⁷ Here Freddie has come to the logical conclusion of his fantasy in the midst of

its material and linguistic constraints. It is an apparent dead end and for all he knows, another failure of the imagination. This is not the case. An exercise in pure imagination, Freddie has accessed insights into why he killed in the first place, into why the perfectible realm of the aestheticised feminine has such a profound effect upon him. He does this by exploring the poor grasp language itself has over events and the rendering of truth. He concludes that, through language, we are simply copies of reality, that representing ourselves as subjects is a faulty enterprise that is nowhere near the truth without rooting out the meaning of our own otherness. Derek Hand (2002) suggests that this is the real revelation of *Ghosts* and Banville's wider oeuvre, describing his characters' oscillation between 'the poles of truth and fiction, art and reality' and their constant attempts to bridge the gap:

There are moments in all of his writing when such a union appears possible, and yet he undermines these brief glimpses in a variety of ways [...] The problem centres around that human construct, language, which—in Banville's fiction—singularly fails to represent the world adequately.¹⁴⁸

These glimpses arrive at moments Freddie is least equipped to deal with them, upon the tremendous feeling that comes when he recognises the presence of the Other. One such glimpse arrives as a fantasy when he sees *Portrait of a Woman with Gloves* for the first time and, in reality, the moments before he kills Josie Bell. On both occasions he fails in his representation of the real and the only glimpse we have of it is through his strength of feeling. Even his first meeting with Flora betrays this strength of feeling without understanding it. Its place in the narrative at the end of the book is significant because the telling comes after his great epiphany with her, which happens later in the chronological sequence of events. Its place at the end of the story suggests a kind of loop back to his default position rather than any resolution to things.

The epiphany allows the reader and Freddie to glimpse a mechanism of representing the reality of the Other in Flora and in oneself. The evocation of childhood, Flora's voice and his own openness combine to open up a narrative pathway to more than just phallic objectification without understanding, but to the exultation in togetherness that is afforded by opening up to the matrixial side of the coin. Freddie decries his failure at the end of the novel: 'I have achieved nothing. I am what I always was, alone, as always, locked in the same old glass prison of myself.'¹⁴⁹ He fails, Hand writes, because language will always be inadequate for his purposes, that words will only ever conjure up ghosts: 'shadowy images of reality, neither part of that reality, nor wholly confined to the prison of human consciousness, but something "other."'¹⁵⁰ In his moments with Flora at the breakfast table, Freddie catches a brief glimpse of the Other. His failure is not just his use of language as a means of representation, but in not remembering that the hearing of the voice of the ghost might conjure him up into the borderspace in which it dwells.

¹ John Banville, *The Book of Evidence* (London: Picador, 1989), p. 220.

² Anja Müller, "'You Have Been Framed': The Function of Ekphrasis for the Representation of Women in John Banville's Trilogy", *Studies in the Novel*, 36, No. 2 (summer 2004), p. 190.

³ 'On a metatextual level, the very idea of the frame is challenged as an instrument that guides our perception and presents us with an immediate sign. The framework as a frame, which usually obliterates itself in order to lure us with the seeming presence of the image within, is now put under scrutiny. Banville's excessive play with frames thus shifts the reader's attention away from the represented women within the frame to the very mechanisms of representation itself.' (Müller, 2004, p. 201).

⁴ *The Book of Evidence*, p. 18.

⁵ *Ibid*, p. 220.

⁶ Helen Meaney, "Master of Paradox", *The Irish Times* (24 March 1993), p.12. 13.

⁷ *The Book of Evidence*, p. 70.

⁸ Joseph McMinn, *John Banville: A Critical Study* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1991), p. 125.

⁹ Ruth Frehner, "The Dark One and the Fair: John Banville's Historians of the Imagination and their Gender Stereotypes", *BELLS: Barcelona English Language and Literature Studies*, 11 (2000), p. 60.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 61.

¹¹ *The Book of Evidence*, p. 17.

¹² *Ibid*, p. 17.

¹³ *Ibid*, p. 17.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 26.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 26.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 65.

¹⁷ Not completely surprising, given their recent nomadic lifestyle.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 17.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 72.

²⁰ Patricia Coughlan, "Banville, the Feminine, and the Scenes of Eros", *Irish University Review*, 66, No. 6 (December 2006), p. 88.

²¹ *The Matrixial Borderspace*, p. 148.

²² *The Book of Evidence*, p. 70.

²³ *The Matrixial Borderspace*, p. 148.

²⁴ *The Book of Evidence*, p. 69.

²⁵ *Ibid*, p. 70.

²⁶ *Ibid*, p. 71.

²⁷ *Ibid*, p. 71,

²⁸ Imhof (1997), Kenny (2009), McMinn (1999).

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http://36.media.tumblr.com/40a11380ea891ba678c0e4826d8edb8c/tumblr_mtn9zjUd1i1sfcoizo1_r1_540.jpg, retrieved: 5/4/2016.

³⁰ Claus Cluver. "Ekphrasis Reconsidered: On Verbal Representations of Non-Verbal Texts", *Interart Poetics: Essays on the Interrelations of the Arts and Media*, ed. By Ulla-Britta Lagerroth, Hans Lund, and Erik Hedling (Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi, 1997), p. 22.

³¹ *The Book of Evidence*, p. 78.

³² *Ibid*, p. 77.

³³ *Ibid*, p. 77. The presence of the Watteau and the golden aspect to the world itself is a clear foreshadowing of *The Golden World of Ghosts*, which will shortly be explored.

³⁴ "The Uncanny" (1919) in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. 17 (1917-1919)*, p. 244.

³⁵ *The Book of Evidence* p. 78.

³⁶ *Ibid*, p. 79.

³⁷ Bernard Berenson, *Aesthetics and History*, The Internet Archive (1948) p. 93.

<https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.166094/page/n7>, retrieved: 1/6/2019.

³⁸ *The Book of Evidence*, p. 79.

³⁹ "On the Knocking at the Gate in Macbeth", p. 6.

⁴⁰ *The Matrixial Borderspace*, p. 134.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, p. 134.

⁴² According to Ettinger: 'Analogous to a certain experience of the sacred, it is the early relations of the Other toward me—when it is I *who is being related to*—that are present in the gesture of painting, if we think of these relations in terms of the *objet a*: I am *subjected* to the gaze of the Other, to a desire on the part of the Other' (*Ibid*, p. 50).

⁴³ *The Book of Evidence*, p. 106.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p. 107.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p. 107.

⁴⁶ *Ways of Seeing*, p. 58.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p. 58.

⁴⁸ *Museum of Words*, p. 1.

⁴⁹ *The Book of Evidence*, p. 107.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, p. 108.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, p. 108.

⁵² *Ibid*, p. 111.

⁵³ *Ibid*, p. 112.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p. 113.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p. 113.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p. 108.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p. 70.

⁵⁸ Elke D'hoker, "Portrait of the Other as a Woman with Gloves: Ethical Perspectives in John Banville's *The Book of Evidence*", *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, 44, No. 1, p. 36n. DOI: 10.1080/00111610209599934

⁵⁹ <https://artfromallangles.wordpress.com/2012/03/19/53/>, retrieved: 13/3/2019.

⁶⁰ "The King of Cats and his Nymphs", *The Irish Times*, Friday, 2 March, 2001,

<https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/the-king-of-cats-and-his-nymphs-1.286494> retrieved: 22/11/2018.

Hedwig Schwall (2006) suggests that Banville parallels Balthus, with 'his own literary means' (p. 119).

The Window adorns the cover of the later Banville novel *Eclipse* (2000).

⁶¹ *The Book of Evidence*, p. 113.

⁶² "On the Knocking at the Gate in Macbeth", p. 6.

⁶³ *The Book of Evidence*, p. 113.

⁶⁴ *The Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, p. 5.

⁶⁵ King, Claire Sisco, "It Cuts Both Ways: Fight Club, Masculinity, and Abject Hegemony", *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*, 6, No. 4 (2009), p. 371.

⁶⁶ *The Book of Evidence*, p. 114.

⁶⁷ Georges Bataille, *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 70.

⁶⁸ She is referring specifically to Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club* (1996). However, the violent encounters in both Banville's and Palahniuk's works offer a similar portrait of the encounter between the masculine subject and the Other. The problems inherent to male subjectivity, with a focus on *Fight Club*, are taken up again in Chapter VI.

⁶⁹ *The Book of Evidence*, p 113.

⁷⁰ *The Matrixial Borderspace*, p.143.

⁷¹ *The Book of Evidence*, p. 220.

⁷² Andrew Brink, *Desire and Avoidance in Art: Pablo Picasso, Hans Bellmer, Balthus, and Joseph Cornell* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), p. 115.

⁷³ *Ibid*, p. 116.

⁷⁴ *The Book of Evidence*, p. 217.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, p. 215-216.

⁷⁶ *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery*, p. 1.

⁷⁷ Coughlan (2006), p, 89.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, p. 89.

⁷⁹ *Writing for Art*, p. 5.

⁸⁰ *The Matrixial Borderspace*, p. 134.

⁸¹ Emily Bilman, *Modern Ekphrasis* (New York & Oxford: Peter Lang, 2013), p. 22.

⁸² John Banville, *Ghosts* (London: Picador, 1993), p.4.

⁸³ Meany (1993).

⁸⁴ *Ghosts*, p. 3.

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, p. 30.

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, p. 31.

⁸⁷ https://www.wikiart.org/en/antoine-watteau/not_detected_229435-1717, retrieved: 13/4/2019.

⁸⁸ See: McMinn (1999) & Müller (2004).

⁸⁹ *Ghosts*, p. 46.

⁹⁰ Jean-Antoine Watteau (1684-1721 inspired a new genre of painting with works such as *The Embarkation for Cythera*. *Fête galante* refers to a new genre of paintings with a theme of idyllic and bucolic merrymaking in which the figures often took on the personas and costumes of the Italian *commedia dell'arte* which was popular amongst aristocrats in the early-eighteenth century (See: "Why So Sad? Watteau's Pierrots", Judy Lund, *Art Bulletin*, 98, No. 3 [2016], pp 321-348).

⁹¹ *Ghosts*, p. 69.

⁹² *Ibid*, p. 69.

⁹³ *Ibid*, p. 14.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 56.

⁹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 133.

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- ⁹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 132.
- ⁹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 34.
- ⁹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 34.
- ⁹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 130.
- ¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*, p. 38.
- ¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, p. 82.
- ¹⁰² *Ibid*, p. 29.
- ¹⁰³ *Ibid*, p. 70.
- ¹⁰⁴ <http://www.journaldespeintres.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/WatteauGilles-Pierrot.jpg>, retrieved: 6/4/2016.
- ¹⁰⁵ *Ghosts*, p. 64.
- ¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*, p. 87.
- ¹⁰⁷ *The Matrixial Borderspace*, p. 164.
- ¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*, p. 117.
- ¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*, p. 87.
- ¹¹⁰ *Ghosts*, p. 145.
- ¹¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 145.
- ¹¹² Coughlan (2006), p. 90.
- ¹¹³ *Ghosts*, p. 69.
- ¹¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 69-70.
- ¹¹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 70.
- ¹¹⁶ *The Matrixial Borderspace*, p. 94.
- ¹¹⁷ *Ghosts*, p. 145.
- ¹¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 236.
- ¹¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 238.
- ¹²⁰ *Ibid*, p. 241.
- ¹²¹ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2008), p. 187.
- ¹²² *Ghosts*, p. 237.
- ¹²³ *Ibid*, p. 239.
- ¹²⁴ *The Powers of Horror*, p. 69.
- ¹²⁵ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (1966), cited in Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York/London: Routledge, 1990), p. 131.
- ¹²⁶ *Ghosts*, p. 239.
- ¹²⁷ *Ibid*, p. 145.
- ¹²⁸ *Ibid*, p. 147.
- ¹²⁹ *The Matrixial Borderspace*, p. 109.
- ¹³⁰ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, cited in *The Matrixial Borderspace*, p. 110.

¹³¹ *Ghosts*, p. 147.

¹³² *Ibid*, p. 146.

¹³³ *Ibid*, p. 147.

¹³⁴ Griselda Pollock, "Ecoutez la Femme: Hear/Here Difference" in *The Femme Fatale: Images, Histories, Contexts*, edited by Helen Hanson and Catherine O'Rawe (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 14.

¹³⁵ *The Matrixial Borderspace*, p. 110.

¹³⁶ *Ghosts*, p. 239.

¹³⁷ *The Matrixial Borderspace*, p. 109. The full quote from Ettinger begins by noting that, in the context of the phallic paradigm...

...[t]he breach of separation between subject and object is presented as perversion. In the phallic paradigm, such a transgression does indeed stand for a collapse of the difference between desire, phantasy, and event, whereas castration establishes the difference between event and representation. In the matrixial paradigm, on the other hand, differentiation-in-transgression stands for a creative principle that does not correspond to the phallic Law and Order, but *does not replace* them either. For the matrix, creation is before-as-beside the univocal line of birth/Creation-as-castration. It is the im-pure zone of *neither day nor night*, of *both light and darkness* (p. 109).

¹³⁸ *Ghosts*, p. 239.

¹³⁹ *Ibid*, p. 147.

¹⁴⁰ Pollock in *The Femme Fatale*, p. 20.

¹⁴¹ *Ghosts*, p. 145-146.

¹⁴² *Ibid*, p. 147.

¹⁴³ See: *The Penguin Book of Classical Myths*.

¹⁴⁴ Coughlan (2006), p. 88.

¹⁴⁵ Hedwig Schwall, John Banville, "An Interview with John Banville", *The European English Messenger*, 6, No. 1 (1997), p. 13.

¹⁴⁶ *Ghosts*, p. 35.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p. 245.

¹⁴⁸ Derek Hand, *John Banville: Exploring Fictions* (Dublin: The Liffey Press, 2002), p. 154.

¹⁴⁹ *Ghosts*, p. 236.

¹⁵⁰ *John Banville: Exploring Fictions*, p. 155.

Chapter IV

Subtext and the Queer Gaze: Monstrous Sexualities and Murder

Man is least himself when he talks in his own person. Give him a mask and he will tell you the truth.

—Oscar Wilde, “The Critic as Artist”, 1891

If motion pictures present stories that will affect lives for the better, they can become the most powerful force for the improvement of mankind.

—The Motion Picture Production Code of 1930 (Hays Code)

IV.1.1. Introduction: The Spectre of the Other Man

Acts of homosexuality have been the focus of persecution more often than not throughout history.¹ In Victorian Britain, homosexuality was seen as an act worthy of imprisonment and disgrace. The act of buggery itself was a capital offence since 1533 in Britain and remained so until 1861 when the penalty was reduced to ten years to life imprisonment, and of course, the disgrace that went with it.²

Victorian mores were rigid, and homosexuality, one of many taboos, was a dark and unspeakable act. It exists in literature throughout the century as a secret and unlawful desire which manifests in behaviours inspired by the panic it creates.³ The gothic novel exemplifies the homosexual panic that helped to structure Victorian social mores and law. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick writes that ‘secularised and psychologized’⁴ homophobia determined homosocial bonds in Britain and America in the early eighteenth century (homosocial in this sense meaning ‘social bonds between persons of the same sex,’⁵ including desire and homophobia). This led to the exclusion of segments of the male homosocial continuum from what constituted male entitlement (that being ‘the

complex web of male power over the production, reproduction, and exchange of goods, persons, and meanings'⁶). According to Sedgwick (1985), male bonding and male homosexuality are both on this continuum. Because non-sexual relationships between men are thought to preclude sexual ones, men deny themselves coherent male-male relations. As an acceptable object of sexual desire, women are required to mediate and compensate for the inadequacies in the male homosocial space—for instance, within the context of a love triangle, where women serve as the apparent object of desire to deny any sexual component to the rivalling men's relationship.⁷ Therefore, within the Victorian homosocial space, men entered into relationships with each other aware of the threat of homosexuality. Paranoid gothic literature⁸ illustrates the emergence of this panic. The protagonist in the paranoid gothic story has a deadly relationship with their double 'where one man's mind could be read by that of the feared and desired other.' The urgency and violence with which his family is ruptured leaves, as in *Frankenstein*, 'a residue of two potent male figures locked in an epistemologically indissoluble clench of will and desire,' forming 'a strangling double bind in male homosocial constitution.'⁹ Simply put, the conflict in the relationship between the protagonist and the figure of fear and otherness is inspired by their similarity and (over)familiarity.

IV.1.2. The Emergence of Homosexual Identities

As the nineteenth century developed, so did the singularity of homosexuality. The medical and legal 'specification of the individual'¹⁰ continued, as the scientific enquiry of sexology and psychoanalysis gained more credibility. The non-normative individual began to fall into categories such as the "sexual pervert" and "homosexual", their sexual practices being read, as Lisa Downing (2016) puts it, 'as clues to reading the

essential identity or ontology of the practitioner.’¹¹ The legal ban on buggery changed to encompass “gross indecency” between men in 1885. This vague expression of the law allowed any act of romance between men to be punished. Such a law could thus be directed at behaviours surrounding the identity of homosexuality as opposed to a single prohibited act. Writers at the end of the nineteenth century were careful about the theme,¹² yet the need persisted to address it as directly as possible within the confines of their allegorical forms. Closeting the queer arts, bringing homosexuality to light through the use of subtext, is both a method of representing homosexuality and a reflection upon the state of free sexual expression. Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* represents a turning point of sexual expression within the British literary canon. Appearing in 1891, Dorian’s own suffering for his perceived vices foreshadowed and became linked with Wilde’s own persecution, making it a prominent work of homosexual literature. The codes of the closet in the novel were to be used against him in his imprisonment for his own ostentatious homosexuality, making it a major work in the emergence of a modern homosexual identity.¹³ *Dorian Gray*, quoted heavily throughout Wilde’s first two trials and remaining unpublished in English for almost twenty years after his conviction, attained its own status amongst the grossly indecent.¹⁴

Wilde’s novel was published at a time when our modern understanding of homosexuality itself was beginning to form. One reviewer referred to the book as being ‘ingenious, interesting, full of cleverness’ but due to its homosexual element ‘it is a false art--for its interest is medico-legal.’¹⁵ Not only was there a social constraint over the visibility of homosexuality, but a linguistic and conceptual barrier existed too. The

term “homosexual” only came into being as an adjective in a translation of Krafft-Ebing’s *Psychopathia Sexualis* and as a noun in 1912.¹⁶ Homosexuality was thus understood as a medical and legal aberration rather than an identity. An unsigned review in *The Daily Chronicle* cites ‘effeminate frivolity’¹⁷ as the downfall of what might otherwise have made a fascinating book of Wilde’s ‘gloating study of the mental and physical corruption of a fresh, fair and golden youth’¹⁸ This review seems to assume the existence of a recognisable trait of the as yet unnameable homosexual and that anything that might bear its expression is poison.

The Picture of Dorian Gray—the tale of a beautiful man who bargains to remain young while his portrait bears his marks of age, enabling him to act out his deepest desires without consequence—thus emerged at a generative moment in the formation of more distinct and visible homosexual identities which are still forming today. The novel also came at the end of the Victorian gothic tradition, which dealt with such matters at arm’s length and were even further from daring to speak their name. Sexuality, according to Halberstam, figures alongside race, class and gender as a feature of the body of the Other, the monster of Victorian gothic literature¹⁹. The monster of the Other incorporates the demonisation of everything that is not ‘male bourgeois humanity.’²⁰ Dorian Gray’s double exists upon the site of his own bourgeois identity. Their indissoluble clench is something Dorian time and again refuses to loosen when given the choice, retaining the element of the Other within his dissonant and fragmented confusion of an identity.

IV.1.3. The Power of Subtext

As the twentieth century progressed, openness in queer literature fluctuated, though

queer representations have largely become steadily more open in Western European and American cultures. Since the latter half of the twentieth century, English Language queer literature and cinema has opened up. Though it remains stigmatised, marginalised and misunderstood from many cultural perspectives, homosexuality is much less the monster we dare not speak of. A significant indication of this change is the popularity and unremarkable publication of Will Self's *Dorian: An Imitation* (2002) adaptation of Wilde's *Dorian Gray*. Self's novel presents sexuality explicitly and the characters' sexual decadence crosses into the realm of the depraved in a way that can only be hinted at in Wilde's novel.

Self is aware of the effect of sexual taboo on Dorian's sense of his own morality and is not convinced a more sanitised and moralistic late-twentieth century public perception of homosexuality necessitates a diminished fear of non-normativity as a monstrous Other. His approach addresses some of the central questions of this chapter: what happens to these characters when their sexuality is suddenly no longer a monstrous secret; when subtext, the unspoken, becomes text, the love that finally speaks its name? The nature of the paranoid gothic monster is thus surely nullified. What happens to Dorian's desire and his double when the idea of embrace is introduced to their clench, when fear apparently declines and only desire remains?

This chapter explores the aestheticism of the homosexual killer, and how sexuality is so entwined with the artistic approach to crime. Firstly, I will introduce the movement known as New Queer Cinema to track the changes in homosexual representations throughout cinema history, using three films based upon the homosexual murderers Leopold and Loeb to do so. I will then analyse how homosexual themes have changed

in adaptations of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and affected our understanding of homosexual people as monsters.

Film adaptations have tracked our understanding of Dorian's monstrous Other in Wilde's novel. Robert Lewin (1945) and Oliver Parker (2009) have directed adaptations which suppress and magnify the homosexual content respectively. At the centre of both works is Dorian Gray's triangular relationship with the artist Basil Hallward and the arch-aesthete Lord Henry Wotton. Much has been written about Dorian's relationship with these two men—it is at the heart of why he is so revered and so powerful; he is their projection of the ideal object of sexual desire. How he enacts their views on life and art matter to how he fares in his indissoluble clench with his double—his ideal form. Therefore, we must also ask is the gaze Dorian's? Or is it upon him? Is he the monster or the victim, or is he both? If the destruction of his soul is bound to his homosexuality still, then is homosexuality still an unknowable force? The answers have a profound effect on the role of a queer gaze in the perception of violence and murder as an aestheticised act. If Dorian's agency is his own—bound wholeheartedly with his homosexuality and therefore the resolution of the paranoid gothic—then, surely, Dorian Gray is a key figure in the undoing of a phallic, masculine male gaze. On the other hand, is Dorian ripped in two by the desirous hands of Wotton and Hallward, their homosexual monster in his cage? Is he doubled, confined by his times and their prejudices to be wheeled out down the decades for a bit of murderous intrigue?

IV.2.1. Gay Cinema under the Hays Code: Leopold and Loeb

The first thirty years of the twentieth century saw the growth of cinema as an art form,

since its beginnings in 1895. The Lumière Brothers in Lyon in France and Woodville Latham and Sons in the United States produced and charged admission to the first public screenings of moving pictures. By the 1920s, filmmakers had constructed the fundamental grammar of cinema as we know it and were experimenting in both form and content to spectacular effect, making the silent era of cinema one of its most creative and unrestrained periods. However, by the late 1920s and early 1930s, the commercial potential of cinema was also being realised. Hollywood had established itself as the global centre of popular cinema and here it was becoming subject to the social mores of America and its vast market, bringing an end to a morally unrestrained experimental period of the medium which embraced Wildean decadence.

Charles Bryant's *Salomé*, a 1923 adaptation of Oscar Wilde's 1891 play, did not hold back from such a decadent aesthetic. The androgyny of the characters, the gyrations of Alla Nazimova in "The Dance of the Seven Veils" and the rumour of the film having an entirely non-heterosexual cast are illustrative of the freedoms Hollywood cinema enjoyed in the 1920s.²¹ By the early 1930s this freedom was coming under pressure from the more conservative male-dominated studio system. Cinema was becoming institutionalised by mass marketing and regulated by the money-makers.²² As a result, such films as Bryant's daring resurrection of Oscar Wilde's play would be stifled for decades in popular cinema.

In 1930, the Motion Picture Production Code, commonly known as the Hays Code was introduced by Will H. Hays and began to be seriously enforced in the mid-1930s, when Christian pressure groups began to threaten boycotts against films which contravened it. The heads of the largest studios agreed to enforce it, so as to avoid any possible

government scrutiny in the face of further public outcry. Suddenly, taboos established themselves in cinema for the first time. Sexual scenes were severely restricted, and so too homosexuality, which was outlawed in the code as ‘any inference of sex perversion.’²³ Again, homosexuality became an illegal and unnameable act. “Sex perversion”, a reincarnation of “gross indecency”, was another vague prohibition onto which to project the fears of the age. Adaptations of Wilde’s work (most notably Lewin’s 1945 adaptation of *Dorian Gray*) would again need to bury non-normative desire under obscure symbolism.

The Hays code began to be flouted as Hollywood came into competition with more sexually liberal European cinema and exploitation cinema from the late 1950s. Thus, the coded representation of sex and “sex perversion” became more explicit again. Though sexuality was once again fair game, the taboo surrounding homosexuality remained. *The Celluloid Closet* (Epstein & Friedman, 1995), a documentary about homosexuality in American cinema, describes homosexuals in films up into the 1980s and 90s as representing some of cinema’s most abhorrent characters who inevitably meet with a nasty end. This trope represents a continuation of the literary tradition of attaching doom to non-normative characters—Dorian Gray’s and Salome’s transgressions are intertwined with their tragic fate.

European cinema, again, led the way in breaking the taboo. Jean Genet’s story of homosexual criminality *Querelle* was adapted by Rainer Fassbinder in 1982. This—the last of Fassbinder’s openly gay films—came just as the AIDS epidemic had taken hold, while, in America, William Friedkin’s depiction in *Cruising* (1980) of homosexual sex reflected the perception of the seedy conditions which brought about the rise of AIDS.

Ultimately, it commits to the Hollywood film tradition of 'linking queer desire with criminality.'²⁴ The film was picketed by 'a combative and diverse gay left'²⁵ and, in the years that followed, a change in how LGBT people were viewed in cinema became evident. Films in the early 1990s began to portray homosexuality in a positive light for the first time. This was the beginning of what B. Ruby Rich first described as "New Queer Cinema."²⁶ *Swoon* (1992), directed by Tom Kalin, is a film which demonstrates this positive and open homosexual representation. *Swoon*—a retelling of the infamous Leopold and Loeb murder case—suggests independent cinema can reformulate mainstream homosexual characters and tropes into rebels enacting their crimes against a world that defines their vaguely effeminate behaviour and homosocial relationship in purely sexual terms. In films such as Kalin's, murder is committed as a response to repression; masculine action heroes sought similar outlets in the same decade (see Section VI.1.3). *Swoon* seeks to reject the otherness that has been traditionally applied to its protagonists and engender their subjectivity through the violence they enact. They seek not to exculpate themselves as criminals, but to use the murder of the heterosexual other as 'the metaphorical destruction of the concept, "sexuality",'²⁷ which has hitherto associated them with the act.

Swoon depicts the real-life story of two brilliant young university students who kill a fourteen-year-old boy as an intellectual exercise inspired by their self-identification as Nietzschean "superman". Nathan Leopold and Richard Loeb were young, wealthy, from respectable German Jewish families, remarkably intelligent and well-educated. This set them apart in the public imagination. Add the well-known Clarence Darrow to this as the lawyer charged with defending them and it is easy to understand why many

considered the case “the trial of the century.”²⁸ Another contributing factor to the huge public interest in the case was the relationship between the two young murderers. Their relationship was close and sexual, and many wondered at the connection between their homosexuality and their having committed a motiveless crime, highlighting the shared status of the homosexual and the murderer as “creative degenerates” in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Such interest combines Mark Seltzer’s ideas about wound culture, Orwellian murder as middle-brow entertainment and the fascination and fear of the Other. The homosexual murderer who is associated with “the artistic” and “the monstrous”, according to Downing, constitutes the latter.²⁹

Two earlier filmic representations of Leopold and Loeb are Alfred Hitchcock’s *Rope* (1944) and Richard Fleischer’s *Compulsion* (1959). No overt reference is made to the sexuality of the boys (renamed in these earlier films) as they were released after the Hays Code had begun to be enforced in 1933. Instead, both films emphasise the dominant-submissive nature of their relationship. Loeb dominates and leads Leopold on in both films. Both films are adapted from the stage; Patrick Hamilton’s 1929 stage production of *Rope* had licence to be more open about the role of sexuality. In the play, Rupert Cadell, the detective character and former high school housemaster to the boys, is more effete, spouting aphorisms which hark back to decadent philosophy and Oscar Wilde. However, in Hitchcock’s adaptation, Cadell’s sexuality is subtextualised to the extent that it was unclear whether James Stewart knew about his character’s sexuality in the film, according to *Rope*’s screenwriter Arthur Laurents’s own memoir (2000).³⁰

Jordan Schildercrout (2011) suggests we, the audience, also play the detective.

However, much of the suspicion we share with Cadell arises from the way the Leopold and Loeb characters (Brandon and Phillip) stand together. Schildercrout asks: 'Isn't there something they're hiding from us about their relationship? We search for clues to ascertain their guilt.'³¹ They are of course conspiring to conceal the murder of a noticeably absent character, but signs of guilt begin to show: they betray their physical familiarity with each other. Taking on the role of the straight white male detective, the audience—party to the male gaze—does not need to make a great leap to inhabit James Stewart's suspicions: their closeness is a sign of further guilt. They become the doomed villains and the monsters of the piece on the back of the audience's identification with a more strait-laced hero's sense that they are different. They are exposed as Other by Cadell's rejection of their talk of murder-as-art and, as Caddell works on our behalf to catch them out, Brandon and Phillip relinquish their grip on their subjectivity which seems so coherent and central to the thrust of the narrative before Cadell imposes a normative moral paradigm.

The erasure of the Wildean effete detective in Hitchcock's *Rope* is evidence of the Hays code at work. Schildercrout writes about the censorship which confronted his stage production of Hamilton's *Rope* in the London of the 1920s:

In a world where homosexuality is legally criminalized and cannot be directly acknowledged on stage, the violent act of murder stands in for the sexual act, merging to become a "sex crime" made up of a sexual murder and a murderous sexuality.³²

The same can be said of American cinema after the implementation of the Hays Code.

The boys reveal too much about the deeds they are capable of through their homosocial affections. Physical familiarity and significant looks are tell-tale signs of

young men at war with their own monstrous demons in a filmic furthering of the paranoid gothic. By recognising these signs, Rupert Cadell recognises monsters and comes to the logical conclusion that they have killed their friend. They are signs readers immediately attributed to Oscar Wilde's monster Dorian Gray at the turn of the 1890s—despite the opportunity to pin his crimes on the supernatural and vague acts of excess—and which they would continue to do so, regardless of the liberalising of attitudes. Kalin's *Swoon* suggests it is possible to disentangle the non-normative from the criminal, but the visual paradigms of *Dorian Gray* suggest that sexuality is at the heart of his monstrosity.

IV.2.2 Trapped in the Closet: Robert Lewin's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1945)

Robert Lewin's 1945 adaptation of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* inevitably faced the same need to bury overt references to homosexuality. In Wilde's story, Dorian, a beautiful, young and wealthy socialite has become the muse of the artist Basil Hallward. Basil is obsessed with Dorian's beauty and paints him into the portrait that becomes his masterpiece. As Basil paints, Dorian speaks with Basil's old Oxford friend and dandy Lord Henry Wotton. Wotton, alighting on Dorian's youth and beauty, immediately attempts to convert him to a decadent approach to life. As he listens to Wotton's speech, Dorian is awakened to the knowledge of the pleasures life has in store for him if he lets go of a moral life in favour of one in which meaning is derived from the surface pleasures of aesthetic beauty. This inspires Dorian to barter his soul in exchange for the eternal youth and beauty bestowed upon Hallward's painting. In the film, Dorian's wish to remain young is seemingly granted by the statue of an Egyptian god rather than his painting being enchanted by Hallward's strength of feeling while he paints in Wilde's original novel. Yet Henry Wotton's speech still

courses through Dorian and the camera lingers upon Dorian's face during this moment of corruption, a moment which provides Basil with the finishing touches to his friend's expression in the painting. Dorian stands 'as though under a spell' (as the narrator puts it). Henry espouses a philosophy that 'the only way to get rid of a temptation is to yield to it,'³³ while catching a butterfly and steeping it in a saucer of solution. As the speech closes we are presented with the shot of the butterfly still struggling, which is overlaid with the faded-in image of a figurine placing a hand upon a phallic outcrop and the narrator proclaims: 'it was as if a stranger had revealed his own most secret thoughts to [Dorian].' Wotton strolls up to Dorian with his catch and declares 'my visit to you hasn't been wasted Basil; I have found a rare and beautiful butterfly.'³⁴ The homoerotic subtext builds despite the influence of the feline statue.



Figure 4.1. and 4.2. Interweaving symbols: Dorian overlaid by a butterfly, which is then overlaid by a sculpture with a prominent outcrop. Stills from Robert Lewin's (dir.) *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (USA: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1945).

The sense that Dorian is undermined by the enchanted Egyptian cat persists too, but the cat itself symbolises the influence of the oriental, to which Dorian, though frightened, has opened himself. His affiliation with dangerous pleasure-seeking is sealed when instead of allowing Sybil Vane to leave his house, he reads the poetry of 'a brilliant young Irishman out of Oxford':

Get hence, you loathsome mystery! Hideous
animal, get hence!
You wake in me each bestial sense, you make me
what I would not be.

You make my creed a barren sham, you wake
foul dreams of sensual life³⁵

The Irishman is Oscar Wilde and the poem is "The Sphinx" (see Appendix A), published in 1894, in which the narrator questions a silent sphinx about its previous affairs in love. Patricia Flanagan Behrendt (1991) notes that 'the sphinx was a popular image in the Victorian decorative arts, and it is likely that Wilde's sphinx was inspired by a statuette, a bookend, a table leg, or even a museum reproduction.'³⁶ This is a striking connection for the film to make just when it seemed the use of the cat was to do away with Dorian's agency in choosing the path of immorality. In the poem, the narrator falls into a reverie over the Sphinx's lovers down the centuries and reveals himself through sordid curiosity while the Sphinx remains silent. Even in an era of extreme censorship a retelling of Wilde's novel cannot escape or ignore how invested the original text and author are in exploring sexuality. In spite of studio efforts to subdue the subtext of the original in favour of a more commercially appealing horror film, its dedication and reverence to Wilde's *oeuvre* make a strong statement of defiance. To

some, the film has no place in the canon of queer cinema, Wilde's original insinuations 'buried under a layer of heterosexual MGM pomp', while others regard it as 'the apex of forties queer cinema.'³⁷ So successful was the film at subtextualising Wilde's already censored work that the Legion of Decency passed the film with an A-2 rating: ('Morally unobjectionable for adults'³⁸). As Dorian's blackmail of his old friend Alan Campbell suggests in Lewin's film, as it did in Wilde's novel, his past is tied with unspoken and criminal dealings with other men. Nothing is spoken of the nature of their past in the film and, given Lewin's determination to be true to the author of the source material, it was impossible in this context to be anything but silent.

IV.3. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890): Exchanging Secrets and Symbols

Dorian Gray's suggested sexual transgressions stem from the relationships which begin Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. He is taken under the wing of Basil Hallward, a moralistic artist who is obsessed with Dorian and wishes their relationship to remain a secret. He is then courted by Lord Henry Wotton, a friend of Basil's and a dandy who preaches the joys of amoral decadence. 'The body sins once, and has done with its sin... Nothing remains then but the recollection of a pleasure, or the luxury of a regret,'³⁹ says Lord Henry, as Basil completes his portrait of Dorian. Upon seeing the completed painting, Dorian wishes to never grow old and remain as young and beautiful as the picture promises to be. His wish granted, the painting will bear the marks of age and the life Dorian chooses to live, leaving Dorian himself as pristine as Basil painted him in the picture. Dorian's life becomes progressively more hedonistic as he seeks newer ways to transgress and thus eek out as much pleasure as life has to offer. His search for the newest of life's pleasures take him to seedy bars and music halls, where he immediately crosses class boundaries and falls in love with Sybil Vane,

a stage actor whose turn as Juliet enthralls him. Speaking to Lord Henry about her, he says, 'You know how a voice can stir one. Your voice and the voice of Sybil Vane are two things that I shall never forget.'⁴⁰ Here we see an indication that Dorian has aligned himself and his ideals with artificiality. Through the sincerity of her love of Dorian, Sybil drops the artifice of Shakespeare's character: 'My love! [...] I have grown sick of shadows. You are more to me than all art can ever be.'⁴¹ Dorian immediately rejects what she reveals as her true offstage self. His disgust over Sybil's sincerity and love represents a violent symbolic departure from Basil's influence, and alignment with Lord Henry and a commitment to the illusion afforded by artifice.

Illusion—according to Halberstam (1995)—is associated with homosexuality in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, while heterosexuality is associated with reality. Dorian's rejection of Sybil is thus symbolic of a rejection of heterosexuality. Sybil, in her rejection of artifice, has killed Dorian's love for her as the projection of the artist's imagination. She has betrayed what he is coming to see as his existence—the embodiment of beauty for its own sake. Hence, Basil refuses to display his painting of Dorian. He feels he has 'shown in it the 'secret of (his) soul,' his love for other men conveyed upon its surface. Basil has 'grown to love secrecy' because it 'seems to be the one thing that can make modern life mysterious or marvelous.'⁴² Wise to the rejection he would receive if his true self is revealed to the public, Basil employs secrecy like any gay man willing to express his sexuality with minimum cost to his social standing. His revelation to Dorian of his reasons for keeping the portrait a secret is effectively a declaration of love, and the moment of Dorian's break from Basil in favour of Wotton's mentorship. Dorian rejects the real desire which Basil has betrayed

in the painting for a suddenly awakened and possibly sexualised Dorian, in favour of the relentless talk of surfaces with Wotton. Wotton speaks in paradoxes, never betraying his private self (which Basil suspects to be fundamentally benign and banal). Dorian takes things a step farther, marrying Wotton's words with action while maintaining a surface beauty so pristine no one could believe the rumours to be true of him, his actions not to have left their mark. Those who become close to him, however, are not so lucky. Lord Gloucester, Lady Gwendolyn and Alan Campbell all die as a result of their intimacy with Dorian. The nature of their downfalls is not made known to us, except that Dorian has led them into unspoken vice and that the threat of revealing their secrets is enough to encourage suicide. Dorian survives because his accusers dare not broach whatever taboos he has transgressed, and his secret, expressed only by his portrait in its state of grotesque decay, remains sealed in his old school room at the top of the house. While the transformed portrait reveals the marks of sin, Dorian is the embodiment of its original display of Basil's secret idolatry. Unknown to him, Basil's secret is hidden in plain sight.

Dorian and Basil have their secrets in common, but, as Dorian's doubling indicates, the natures of these secrets differ. The sincerity of Basil's love for Dorian's beauty is expressed through the painting, and subsequently through Dorian, once he has assumed the permanent properties of the painting. Dorian's actions—his secret—combine with Basil's and form a new and changing set of symbols, to become the portrait. Dorian's moment of erotic awakening is the subject of Basil's gaze and the painting reveals the desire in the gaze. Dorian is thus a permanent object of the gaze. He is a walking erotic moment and a work of art in human form. His present moment is

one of transgression which Victorian sensibility cannot express, and though he is shunned by much of society, his crimes are best left unsaid and are thus not addressed openly by the legal system so effective in his author's own undoing. Dorian's true self is almost literally closeted in the attic school room. Dorian, suitably doubled, can exist both as his true self, the subject, suppressed and out of sight, and the surface—the erotically represented object of the gaze. He can operate as the former—a homosexual man in a society in which homosexual men are shunned—and functionally so with the social status, suggested purity and beauty afforded by the latter.

IV.4. The Secret Disease of Perversity in Self's *Imitation* (2002)

In *Dorian: An Imitation* (2002), Will Self relocates Wilde's *Dorian Gray* to the end of the twentieth century—another time and place of decadence. Self's Dorian is a gay man caught up in the hedonistic gay scenes in the London and New York of the 1980s. He represents a 'new generation, the first gay generation to come out of the shadows.'⁴³ Another update is the form of Dorian's portrait. Baz Hallward films Dorian Gray for a video installation on nine screens. In an echo of their forebears in the previous century, Hallward and Henry Wotton, fuelled by desire, exert their influence upon Dorian Gray, who barter his soul for the sake of beauty. Again trading his soul for eternal youth, Dorian embodies the beauty and transcendent qualities of Hallward's video installation, while the video installation will bear the brunt—the human cost—of a life lived according to the aesthetic parameters set by Hallward's physical creation and the decadent philosophies of Wotton. Wotton, feeling that 'before this jaded century is utterly exhausted, at least one individual should have pleased it thoroughly,'⁴⁴ suggests that Dorian, with his youth, class privilege, wealth and beauty, is well-placed to do so. As well as this, Dorian's portrait is a work of art created in a

context which has already seen the decline of the medium through which it was produced. Televisual media in the form VHS and MTV have proliferated around video installation art in the form of easily accessible videotape pornography and the music video. The portrait, in turn, has shifted into a context which proliferates across the media landscape. Dorian thus fulfils Wotton's ideal of aesthetics, which recognises the importance of beauty and style standards within the dominant visual culture: 'we are in an age in which appearances matter more and more. Only the shallowest people won't judge by them.'⁴⁵ By acceding to Wotton's appropriation of his life, Dorian can fulfil Hallward's prophecy of his work degenerating to 'a level of crude autobiography.'⁴⁶

In contrast to its hidden and criminal nature in Wilde's time, Dorian, as a homosexual at the end of the twentieth century, is part of an openly gay community which can freely express its sexuality. He is a drug abuser, too, but drugs form only one aspect of his life of vice, which is led primarily by his libido. It being the 1980s, the HIV virus is a new and frightening threat to the gay community. Dorian's promiscuity, which can only be hinted at in Wilde's novel, leads him to become a carrier of HIV. The physical decline of his portrait is thus replete with the symptoms of the virus. However, as a carrier of HIV, Dorian freely passes it on and his friends die off around him as his looks and desire for excess persist unabated. Self here points to the fact that that sexual acts, in themselves, remain a transgression by suggesting Dorian's sexuality brought the HIV virus upon him. Self's aligning of homosexuality, AIDS and personal degradation reflects Leo Bersani's summarisation of AIDS as the physical reinforcement of the 'association of anal sex with self-annihilation [...] originally and

primarily identified with [...] female sexuality'.⁴⁷ Dorian knowingly transmits his virus upon those around him with a drive to destruct and degrade. He is Self's notion of history repeating itself—an outlier of society worming his way through the rotten core of the politically correct and commercialised Britain at the end of the twentieth century, just as Wilde's Dorian did in Victorian Britain. On the back of this AIDS-fuelled moral panic, Self is allowing for the notion that homosexuality's place within this culture is monstrous and Dorian—its herald—is Self's reincarnation of the monster of the paranoid gothic. Baz reports that, with the virus rampant, Dorian...

[...] became a pariah. People got to hear about him [...] and his name became associated with all the guilt and shame surrounding the old bath-house scene. It was even rumoured that Dorian was the AIDS Mary, the malevolent and intentional transmitter of the virus.⁴⁸

Old stigmas find new ways to taint his reputation.

Self includes an epilogue to *Dorian: An Imitation* that provides a conclusion to an alternate version of the story. In it, Dorian, instead of making a Faustian pact to preserve his appearance and allow his portrait to age for him, has lived the life of a paragon of late-twentieth century gay virtue. He is a philanthropist, involved with the running of successful charities, a friend of the rich and famous and an ally of those involved in personal struggles with HIV and AIDS. The old Dorian, enchanted with eternal youth, seems to have only existed in a *roman à clef* written by the recently deceased Henry Wotton. However, instead of undermining the novel's plot, this alternate version of himself is most likely a latter-day fantasy of the Dorian who has debauched his way through the narrative up until this moment. As the alternate, virtuous Dorian goes about his life of meetings and celebrity events, he is plagued by the narrative voice of the *roman à clef*, which insists "“you've been living under an

assumed identity,”⁴⁹ until it is finally revealed he is still in the thrall of the enchanted portrait, despite his denial. The alternative Dorian is an idealised and de-stigmatised homosexual, presenting sexuality in a positive light against the backdrop of the AIDS epidemic. Self has, like Wilde, internalised Dorian’s double and has gone as far as presenting their conflict explicitly to the reader: the monster of the paranoid gothic in a metatextual clench with the hero, retaking the form and preserving the dynamics of its novelistic counterpart of a century before. The alternate take on the story depicts a life in which Dorian’s sexuality is not a weapon and a disease entwined with death, but something which allows his life to continue, unhindered and productive. Therefore, sexuality itself is not a precondition of his monstrosity. This is not to say he has not secreted his sense of perversion. Judith Halberstam writes:

Certainly in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* [...] the gothic monstrosity of Dorian [...] has] everything to do with the sexual secrets [he represents]. We cannot therefore explain the monstrosity of [...] Dorian Gray by saying that [he embodies] sexual secrets, rather we must say that [he] creates secrecy as the precondition for sexual perversity.⁵⁰

Taking this delineation of perversity and sexuality within Wilde’s *Dorian*, we are allowed to reason that Self, by identifying Dorian with public virtue in the epilogue to *Dorian: An Imitation*, is outlining exactly what Dorian has rejected in the main body of the novel to become the monster of the portrait. In choosing to live out Wotton’s rhetoric, Dorian has chosen to make himself Other and to appropriate the identities and behaviours feared by his age. Referencing Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish* (1975), Halberstam suggests perversity represents a rupture in the “political anatomy”. Dorian thus suffers for his rejection of the social norm—he becomes a secret societal disease—and is expunged from the organism by way of his social ostracisation and

eventual death.

IV.5.1. Otherness and the Gaze

In Wilde's novel, Basil has been attempting to keep Dorian a secret from Wotton.

Wotton's influence is the birth of Dorian's self-consciousness, moreover it is the birth of self-consciousness at exactly the wrong time. The moment Dorian decides it is his image on canvas that will age is the moment he meets Wotton. In Self's adaptation, he looks, as Wotton puts it, 'like a ripe grape dusted with yeast.'⁵¹ Dorian is on the verge of something, possibly that of his own aesthetic—or erotic—consumption. He is consumed by the gazes of Wotton and Hallward, their faces 'soiled with lust' as they watch:

Nine naked Dorians and one clothed. In synchrony, youth and the images of youth [waltz] to the heavenly and eternal music of self-consciousness⁵².

In this passage—unlike the passage from which it is adapted in Wilde's original—Dorian is knowingly eroticised. He is aware of his sexuality and knowingly objectified. He is openly desired by both Hallward and Wotton. Wilde's Dorian, upon hearing Wotton's speech, commits his secret to Basil's image and Wotton's words. For Self's Dorian, the state of objectivity, knowing objectivity, instils in him his approach to life. Wotton's words mean less—the portrait is already finished when Dorian and he meet in Self's *Imitation*. Instead, it is as the object of the gaze that Dorian and his portrait resonate, both the gaze of Wotton and Hallward, and his own. Dorian, in this moment, finds himself as both subject and object, masculine and feminine. This is the fluidity with which he approaches his life from there on, as Wotton's love-object, as well as a cruel and controlling subject. Dorian, the bisexual philanderer, wanders to and fro on the homosocial continuum at a time of AIDS, when homosexual love is medicalised and

promiscuous homosexual love is fatal, while his drug use and heterosexual relationships make him an unstoppable social metastasis.

In Wilde's novel, Dorian only fully comprehends Wotton's words upon seeing his portrait, which has sealed his expression of bewilderment in his final sitting for Hallward, the painter. When he sees his own expression later, however, he knows just what Wotton means when he says 'you [Dorian] have had passions that have made you afraid [...] day-dreams and sleeping dreams whose mere memory might stain your cheek with shame –'⁵³ and he recognises himself 'for the first time.'⁵⁴ It is Wotton's words which are his awakening in Wilde's novel; he is not in synchronicity with the image like Self's Dorian. For Basil, the surface can represent the truth, but for Wotton, Dorian's surface is merely his own aesthetic potential. This highlights a clear difference in the type of gaze represented by the authors in each novel, and the role subtext plays in creating the sense of otherness.

It is significant that the portrait of Self's novel takes the video form. Its explicit onscreen eroticism moves in real-time with Dorian's own body. However, Wilde's painting represents a different kind of figure. He is indeed beautiful, but his beauty and the way Dorian himself perceives it is rather a type of coded recognition between men. A.A. Markin (2001) writes that homosexual novelists of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, such as Wilde and E.M. Forster, perceived and 'reconfigured the gaze to allow for a male Other.'⁵⁵ Markley suggests the female Other as object of the gaze is reconfigured by these authors to represent the male. Upon gazing at his own portrait, Dorian is joining in a shared recognition of the inhibitions imposed on their desire. This is the knowledge of self that Wotton has so dexterously instilled in him and

that Hallward fears. In this scene, Dorian recognises himself and we recognise him in the coded terms of a homosexual gaze; rather than being objectified in life, he is recognised. Presuming, as we are, that Dorian's image in the painting has been eroticised, he has been made Other by Hallward and Wotton. Dorian recognises this and the terms of the triangular relationship of the three men has been set.

IV.5.2. Parker's *Dorian Gray* (2009) and the Doubling Effect of Sedgwick's Love Triangle

In Oliver Parker's 2009 adaptation of Wilde's novel, *Dorian Gray*, art no longer conceals the subject. Basil's private expression of desire is now a public one. The work is displayed publicly to great acclaim soon after its completion. Basil's desire to look at Dorian is open and, eventually, Dorian seduces Basil. Dorian, the living projection of desire disguised as art, makes the disguise an open secret. Basil's love for him is transformed to an openly sexual one in the film, and Dorian's indiscretions are played out before the viewer's eyes. The taboos of sex and homosexuality are expressed openly, and the result is the uninhibited representation of Dorian's hedonism, involving endless sexual experimentation and drug-taking. His hedonism eventually leads to his seduction of Basil, whom he soon murders. The codification of the characters through their engagement, conflation and investment in art is no longer needed to recognise their deviance in Parker's film. Basil's desire for Dorian is not displayed through secret recognition. Dorian, let in on the secret by Wotton, is able to use the erotic appeal Basil projects onto him and use it as part of his experimentations in vice. Basil is therefore seduced, satisfied and slain as a result of his objectification of Dorian Gray. Dorian, as the desired object, manipulates Basil's gaze in order to destroy him. He does not relinquish this power over Basil until he has killed him. Dorian is thus

more of a *femme fatale* in Parker's adaptation: exploiting the male gaze to his own ends, for which he and everyone he comes in contact with will suffer.

Parker's own twist on the narrative is Lord Henry's role as both Dorian's mentor and moral judge. After Dorian falls in love with Wotton's daughter Emily, the latter begins to suspect the role of the painting in preserving Dorian's youth. Upon finding it, it is effectively he who destroys the painting with fire and burns Dorian along with it, both to protect his daughter and in disgust at seeing his true effect on Dorian's soul. Unlike Hallward, Wotton and Emily survive the ordeal with the portrait and Wotton keeps Dorian's picture, now restored to its original form. This ending, perhaps unknowingly, provides Wotton with the most powerful signifier of his own true nature in the film when it is taken as a transposition of the novel. His promiscuity and drug-taking in Parker's film is of no consequence in this light, but the film highlights the fact that his relationship to Dorian's portrait is as important as Basil's. His worship of the image to which he was introduced at the beginning of the story has not flagged. He relates to it as he did when he first saw it with Basil. Parker thus highlights the centrality of this triangular relationship to all interpretations of Wilde's novel.

The homosocial Basil/Henry/Dorian triangle which Wilde instituted allows for queer readings in which Dorian's position is turned against him as the locus of the fears of the age at every new interpretation. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick describes the triangular relationship in which two men desire a third female figure. The bond between the two active participants in the erotic triangle is 'as intense and potent as the bond that links either of the rivals to the beloved.'⁵⁶ The symmetry of the erotic triangle is 'relatively unaffected by the power difference that would be introduced by a change in gender of

one of its participants.⁵⁷ In this dynamic, according to Sedgwick, the desire for the beloved in one participant is initiated by the pre-existing desire of his rival. This is certainly true of Wotton's desire for Dorian. Henry becomes enamoured by Dorian before he has even learned his name and is introduced to him through Basil's secrecy and art—the medium of his desire. It is through Basil's infatuation that Henry first directs his desire. Dorian, trapped in a moment of objectification under the gaze of the other two, is subject to the desire of his friends and the masculine power that goes with that. He is made Other by the two men, though not because of their recognition of him. Instead, they recognise in each other a rivalry for his friendship. He is thus doubled: the monster unmoored from sexuality and gender by the desire of his friends on one side, and the unseen subject on the other side made to suffer for it. The monster is thus the projection of that which all three fear in themselves, but which Dorian is given the opportunity to explore and unleash onto society, estranged from his sense of self.

An essential element of Dorian's monstrosity thus survives beyond the more sexually liberal times in which the story of his life has been retold. The undercurrent of perversion and taboo of a certain cultural context does not define the monster Dorian becomes, but his objectification goes a long way to doing so. His investment in his role as the desired, de-gendered and Othered object of the gaze has allowed him to become everything he and his friends are afraid their true selves might be, and everything society fears about him. Dorian is a moral lesson in the dangers of being removed from the norms of gender and sexuality, society's cautionary tale and, moreover, an indicator of the power of the gaze as a form of domination and a means

of generating violence as an aestheticised act which satisfies desire.

IV.6.1. Dorian's Portrait as Ekphrasis: Representing the Other

Dorian's decision to take a knife to the painting constitutes an attempt to destroy the Other, specifically own otherness. Upon seeing his corrupted soul on canvas staring back at him, he is presented with an inversion of the otherness inherent in the work of art. The artwork is a typically passive object, requiring the agency of description to bring it into literary existence, that being the process of ekphrasis. Unlike the inanimation of *Portrait of a Woman with Gloves* in Banville's "Frames" trilogy, Dorian's picture teems with the life he puts into it, that being the life he lives. It is he who embodies the inanimation of a painting. At the same time, the picture is merely oil on canvas and remains a picture with no power of description or agency, while Dorian in body has retained this power. Dorian thus finds himself in the unusual situation of being both an artwork and a human body capable of perception and description, confronting an image that is not quite still and bears an active gaze.

Both Lewin's and Parker's adaptations of *Dorian* emphasise the apparent agency of the painting. Lewin used technicolour film for shots of the portrait, which, given the otherwise austere monochrome colouring of the film, vibrantly emphasise the discombobulating marks of decay Dorian has accumulated.



Figure 4.3. and 4.4. stills from Robert Lewin's (dir.) *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (USA: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1945).

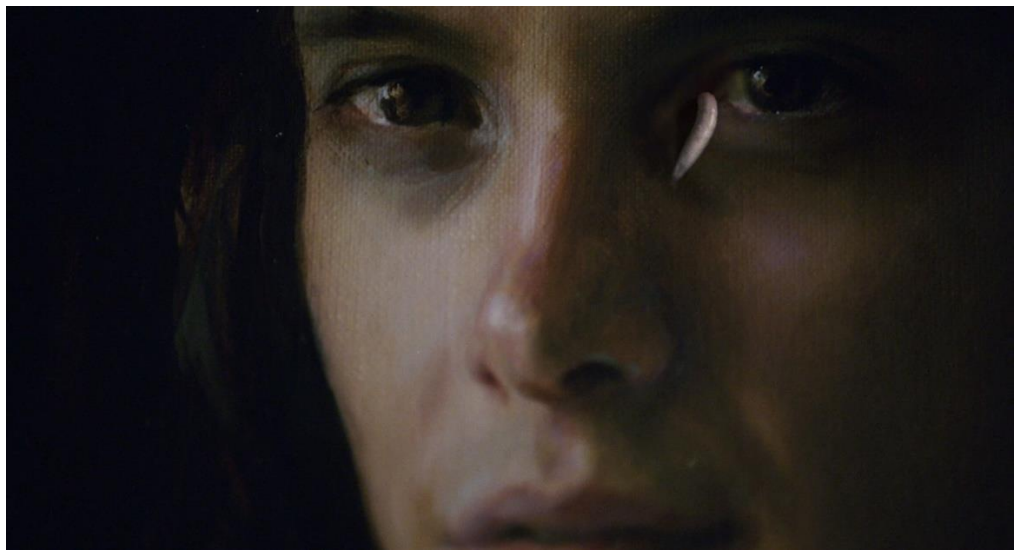


Figure 4.5. Maggot coming through the canvas. Still from Oliver Parker's *Dorian Gray* (United Kingdom: Alliance Films, 2009).

Parker's portrait of Dorian is literally bursting through the canvas and his groans are evidence of both a voice and a comical sense of timing when it comes to shocking the audience. Both films, in fact, produce shocks through the art represented onscreen. Lewin's simple, yet jarring, switch in colour scheme is undoubtedly more deftly

achieved than Parker's use of a modern stock shock cinema technique. Nevertheless, the paintings in both films are not passive under Dorian's gaze and suggest achieving mastery over it as an agent of fear is not easy. The key to it may lie in its being an artwork (in the physical sense, at least) and the object of the possessive power of ekphrastic language.

Dorian's narrative invitation to the reader to participate in the gaze is through his awed description. Wilde is thus creating another triangular relationship—in this case, an ekphrastic one. Gazing at the painting and its description in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* initially falls into the trap of objectification and again the gazers suffer for their error. No sooner has Dorian seen his own idealised image than he asserts bodily ownership over it. Henry seeks to possess it and does so in his influence over, and control of. Dorian's behaviour. Basil, too, seeks to possess Dorian, but the openness of his love has weakened him, and he is rejected. However, once his portrait begins to alter, Dorian's relationship to it is akin to the shock of the audience upon seeing it represented onscreen: it begins to move and horrify the viewer. Instead, the portrait has taken on the agency Dorian used to enchant it in the first place, when Henry's words touch 'some secret chord' that have never been touched but are suddenly 'vibrating and throbbing to curious pulses.'⁵⁸ This is Dorian's only moment of agency, and it operates symbiotically with the features of the portrait. His outward bodily appearance is a projection of his objectivity, both passive as Basil's and Henry's love-object, yet with a will of its own and, in the spirit of a feminised object of desire, Other.

IV.6.2. The Glance and Agency of Paintings

The moral decay betrayed by Dorian's portrait manifests as a result of not just

homosexual experimentation, but also because of outbursts of violence and womanising. His violence and promiscuity amount to the actions of the medicalised Ripper-esque sex beast identities emerging in the late Victorian period.⁵⁹ Halberstam (19995) compares Dorian's hoarding of sexual secrets to that of Robert Louis Stevenson's Mr Hyde (1886), stating that their fearsome secret beast-like appearances are the inscrutable evidence of perversity which must be hidden away.⁶⁰ His behaviour, the eroticised appearance of his body and the unknowable vision of his otherness on canvas all contribute to his status as an "outsider" identity. In a visual sense, he is a kind of doubled Other. In his interaction with his painted image, his lack of a coherent male subjectivity undercuts the sense of ekphrasis being the voice of male speech. And, indeed, Heffernan asserts the ambiguity of ekphrasis in representing the power of the voice of male speech, suggesting that the painted figure can assert a power of its own, depending on its expression. For instance, if the painting captures a figure's glance as opposed to its gaze, the agency of this figure can be altered. He cites the distinction: 'the gaze is timeless, magisterially synoptic, and rational; the glance is time-bound, fragmentary, and restless.'⁶¹ As Basil completes his painting, Dorian, contemplating the words of Lord Henry, is caught in a moment of if his own clarity—'motionless, with parted lips, and eyes strangely bright [...] dimly conscious that entirely new influences [are] at work within him.'⁶² He is in the moment of passing as an object of desire between Basil and Henry, moving from one sphere of influence to another. He is achieving the one moment of agency in which he is aware of the possibilities of his own youth and beauty, and of the pleasure he can take from life. He is caught by the painting in a liminal moment and so cannot be completely objectified. This is Basil's great achievement. Though beautiful, the Dorian of the

completed painting is not completely passive. By making his wish, he freezes this moment, takes it out of time and makes it flesh. In doing this, he opens a dialogue between himself and the painting in which they trade appearances and share the kernel of subjectivity which has inspired it.

Portraits, according to W.J.T. Mitchell (2005), have some kind of need or desire. They need the materials from which they are formed and want to be looked at and admired; most portraits accrue a lack of recognition, knowledge and admiration with the passage of time. Portraits such as Wilde's picture of Dorian do not suffer from such a lack, given that, according to Mitchell, 'it has registered upon its surface the disfiguring effects of every unbounded drive to which Dorian has surrendered himself.'⁶³ This lack of need from its only viewer allows Dorian's portrait the power to defeat him. Its restoration to its original form even grants it the future possibility of fulfilling its desire to be looked at. This in fact comes to pass in Parker's adaptation, in which Dorian's painting ends up residing in Lord Henry's own attic. Henry's pity for the painting is clear: 'Poor boy. Who can bear to look at you now?'⁶⁴ He closes the door and the camera closes in on the figure's eyes, still bright with life, emphasising the fact that its agency can only exist when a dialogue can be created around it. To be lost and forgotten and 'not talked about'⁶⁵ (as Lord Henry puts it in Wilde's novel) is the ultimate suppression of the image.

This refutes the notion that ekphrasis is simply another masculine device for the objectification of a passive feminine image. Mitchell suggests that ekphrasis is not necessarily the triangular relationship which 'invariably places a feminised object "between men"'⁶⁶ in his own echoing of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. And our ekphrastic

reading of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* suggests Dorian is neither completely feminised nor completely passive. He is in fact defined by the agency of an immortal glance captured in his portrait. This moment is taken out of time and eternal, but it is supposed to be eternal only in art, not in life. His 'rose-red youth' is only meant to last 'for a season', but he carries the moment with him. In doing so, he carries the unique moment of its coming and its loss, which becomes more evident as Dorian's actions deface his image on canvas. This constant negotiation with his liminality offers the chance to explore the idea that Dorian, as a subject, is in dialogue with his own otherness, with a borderspace at the edge of phallogentric representation.

IV.6.3. The Object of Unfixed Desire

With the *Eurydice* series of portraits, Bracha L. Ettinger is emphasising this type of moment in her representation of Eurydice, the wife of Orpheus in Greek myth. Basil, upon seeing Dorian with his deformed portrait in the attic room, apprehends Dorian on canvas already lost, whose soul has already been condemned. Yet in flesh, Dorian may still "come forth". As Lord Henry's words suggested on the day Basil completed the painting, Dorian is apprehended only as loss. His body only acts as a cipher which represents a moment which, upon looking at him, is both alive in the present moment and long gone. Basil realises that this is the result of the way he has looked and acknowledges that Dorian has been just as guilty: 'I worshipped you too much. I am punished for it. You worshipped yourself too much. We are both punished.'⁶⁷ And, indeed, it is Dorian, locked by his body into a constant narcissistic gaze, who feels his divided subjectivity. Basil finally faces this—the notion that Dorian is not simply a surface that represents the soul. He suggests they may both be redeemed, but Dorian, already aware of his receding sense of self, knows 'it is too late.'⁶⁸ In the scene, the

traumas of Dorian's past are thrust upon Basil. Basil and Lord Henry have objectified (and pacified) the image of Dorian, but for the glance they inspire in him upon the completion of the painting. In this glance, Dorian attains partial subjectivity in concert with his image as a phallic Other which neither of his admirers can understand or contain. When faced with it, Basil attempts to lead Dorian back to a life lived before this glance, to control and subdue its agency. 'You have done enough evil in your life. Don't you see that accursed thing leering at us?' Basil asks, backing Dorian's agency into a corner and inviting him to return to a path consistent with phallic normativity. His image thus attacked, 'Dorian Gray glanced at the picture, and suddenly an uncontrollable feeling of hatred for Basil Hallward came over him, as though it had been suggested to him by the image on the canvas.'⁶⁹ This is an echo of his having first seen the painting, when 'his cheeks flushed for a moment with pleasure.'⁷⁰ His response to his recognising his own agency is felt bodily and the 'pleasure' in the earlier episode is contorted into his intolerance of a subject attempting to prize him from it, to make him its object again. His only defence is to kill Basil. Unbeknownst to his creators, Dorian is defending his position outside of a sense of the gender binary. That is, away from the assumption that to homosexual men he is a feminised love-object. Those he has affected with his non-normative behaviour are inevitably destroyed, while engagement with patriarchal marriage mores are entertained only in the knowledge that heterosexual love is artificial. He only understands Sybil Vane's love in the way she performs it as Shakespeare's Juliet, and he the Prince Charming projected by her own imagination.

Dorian is infantilised by the men and women who desire him, and this is a response to

their not quite knowing how he fits into their conceptions of a patriarchal dynamic. His child-like appearance and the attachments he forms with his older friends underscores his queerness, according to Holly Blackford (2013). Dorian is ‘ultimately unfixable and alien to the people seeking to define [him]. The crux of this adult longing involves longing for a state of unfixed desire.’⁷¹ Blackford is here referring to Dorian being Wilde’s projection of the desire of a pederast. His boyish beauty is desired, yet unknowable; he is an unfixable and mysterious figure, whose agency, when recognised, comes forth, overwhelming any would-be oppressor. In the novel’s adaptations, Dorian loses the childhood associations of his boyishness and becomes, as an object of desire, a paragon of the beautiful young man, object of a masculinised gay gaze, or of a conflicted queer one.

IV.6.4. Matrixial Ekphrasis: Dorian as a Non-Phallic Rupture

In Dorian’s portrait, therefore, we have an example of ekphrasis that is as unfixed as Dorian himself. With such a similar approach to their use and representation of art in their texts, this study would thus be better served not to align Wilde’s portrait of Dorian with Bracha Ettinger’s concept of the matrixial borderspace, but to align the ekphrases—the media by which both draw from the image to invoke art-making and relations with art within the text. One major difference between Ettinger’s and Wilde’s ekphrases is that the portrait of Dorian Gray is imaginary and thus an example of notional ekphrasis. Ettinger, on the other hand, is in an intertextual dialogue with her own art. Therefore, her textual representation is not just an example of actual ekphrasis, but the artist’s own interpretation of the work. Wilde, in creating the textual version of Dorian’s portrait, can claim to share this process of controlling how the art is represented and, through text, directing the reader in their interpretation of the work.

They can be said, therefore, to be owners of their images within the confines of the books and, like gallery curators, have mastery over how and when the art is to be presented.

Another commonality between Ettinger and Wilde is that the paintings they ought to master—as the authors of the works—are each resistant to any such mastery within their respective texts. Bracha's *Eurydice* operates as a kind of neutralising locus of energy. The figure of Eurydice—fading away from the looker—eludes our mastery, creating a space by which our desire, in a Lacanian phallic sense,⁷² dissolves and we are left with a simultaneous sense of loss and hope—hope in the sense that the image simultaneously fades *and* emerges. According to Ettinger:

The gaze corresponding to this kind of activity is not the lost object of phantasy; rather, it is a link between trauma and the phantasy of *I* and *non-I* [see Chapter II endnote 140]: a link that is at the same time a matrixial borderspace and a metamorphic borderlink. The desire corresponding to its activity is not for a lost object, but for linking with the Other. The gaze is a vacillating trace of an almost-missed relation (of borderlinking, encounter) with a *non-I*.⁷³

Wilde's Dorian portrait is represented not as a way to neutralise desire, but as a way to confront it. Dorian as a conduit for the artwork, with his glance representing a sudden surge of agency, emerges too, but the phallocentric space in which he is situated is hostile. Basil, in his attempts to master the image and objectify Dorian, is not tolerated once the work is complete. By exposing his own homosexual desire, he others himself and loses control of the gaze in the act of painting.

Dorian is situated within a different symbolic space to his peers. It forms closely around him out of his confused response to the desire and objectification which went

into the creation of his image in art and subsequently in body. Their role in the creation of his identity displaces his subjectivity, blending it with the artist's gaze. Dorian, as the embodiment of the artist's gaze is—through his own point of view—Basil and Lord Henry's blind spot (as Ettinger puts it) concerning his agency and reality (a 'Thing in no-time and no-place'⁷⁴). On this basis, he resides...

...incarnated in painting beyond appearance, behind image, as an absence. An outside element is captured inside and lost by a split...' ⁷⁵

This split (see section VII.1, pp. 288-289) is the agency onto which the picture holds, takes out of time and into human form. Dorian's space is a kind of phallic grave-space, in which the objectification and the subjectivity of the would-be gazer cannot exist. It can only exist, as Ettinger puts it, as 'a *stain* in the painting,'⁷⁶ embodied by the most unknowable elements of the defaced picture of Dorian. He is subject to this stain upon his soul—a moral stain upon a male subject within the social context—and the visual aspects of the desirous gaze of the lookers. These manifest as a blend of his own agency as a subject—in the glance Basil caught sight of and froze onto the canvas—and the effects of Basil and Henry's shared secret desire. Dorian comes to embody the former like a marionette, held up by the latter—the figure in the portrait, a secret agency within gaze of the artists—over which he has no control. Dorian's only means of destroying it is to destroy himself, to cast the illusion of his own free-will as a non-normative subject back into the painting and into a position of objectification. He thus destroys the open channel between him and his monstrous Other, which had heretofore been left open, uncleft, unfused. In a declarative act of phallic symbolism, plunging the knife into the painting, Dorian severs the connection with the *non-I* that has corrupted the phallic societal sphere.

IV.6.5. The Question of the Homosexual Void

Ettinger's Eurydice is distinct from Wilde's Dorian for being female, yet the symbolism from which she is constructed is similar to that which constructs Wilde's Dorian. However, Eurydice does not represent a void in the way Dorian does. The faded and photocopied image of Eurydice recedes into space; her image matters less and less, while her personhood is emerging (though determinedly out of the viewer's reach). On the other hand, Dorian's image fills with ever more detail as the years pass, though is bodily untouched by his acts. The pleasures and pains of his soul do not exist in a biological form and are instead added to the surface of the painting as symbols of his bodily acts while his body is unaffected. His personhood amounts to the dialogue of symbols between his acts and his image on canvas, inflicting no meaning upon his body, forming a triptych of surface acting the part of the sovereign subject. His homosexuality, when confronted in the form of ekphrasis is simply a void. As a homosexual, Dorian is, as George E. Haggerty puts it when referring to queer self-identity from a Lacanian perspective,

...the symptom of a culture that is so caught up in its own sexuality that it cannot even see its sexual obsessions for what they are [...] the threat of the sexual relation that cannot be symbolised [...] foreclosed in the Symbolic and return[ing] as a symptom of the culture that would reject him.⁷⁷

Stemming from the same Lacanian identity theories, this foreclosure represents the void of feminine female identities Ettinger is attempting to subvert in her work, too. Ettinger, however, has reformulated ekphrasis in her approach, creating a mode of representing gender in ekphrasis which sacrifices the surface and its attendant symbols to bring forth a representation of the Other as a subject. According to Butler, Ettinger 'catches [Eurydice] in an irresolvable ambiguity. She is not lost to us forever,

prior to representation, foreclosed from knowability.⁷⁸ In doing so, Ettinger captures the time-bound, fragmentary and restless nature of the glance, fusing it with the ‘vacillating trace’⁷⁹ of desire to link with the Other embodied by the phallic gaze.

Wilde’s ownership and control of the image as a notional ekphrasis in *Dorian Gray* offers it up as a test site for the empowerment of the Other, similar to Ettinger’s ekphrastic representation of the feminine Other through her writings on her artwork. Therefore, we are left to wonder whether queer representations have developed in such a manner as to generate co-existing subjectivity between the gazer and the gazed-upon, or whether the homosexual is still represented as a symbolic void in culture in order to regenerate its monstrosity. This is a question that will be returned to later in the thesis (section VII.2), but the nature of Wilde’s Dorian’s situation is his constant dialogue with his own otherness. Translating that dialogue into an ekphrasis without making a monster of the Other or leaving it unspoken is, like Freddie’s in Chapter III, the challenge presented to adaptors of *Dorian Gray* reacting to ever-evolving social conceptions of sexuality.

IV.7. Formulating the Other in Self’s *Imitation*

How are we to reconcile Wilde’s non-representation of any form of subjectivity in Dorian Gray’s portrait with more explicit interpretations of the novel? The contrast between his and Ettinger’s ekphrases denies Wilde that possibility, as the principles of decadence which precede *The Picture of Dorian Gray* set out:

All art is at once surface and symbol. Those who go beneath the surface do so at their own peril.

It is the spectator, and not life, that art really mirrors.⁸⁰

Wilde is here suggesting that the artist should not seek to represent subjectivity as

anything more than is visible; to do so would ruin art, render it badly done or (heaven forbid) useful. Going beneath the surface would be to move beyond 'surface and symbol' and into the real, which is incommunicable under these circumstances. This is what proves fatal to Dorian. In destroying the painting, he destroys the surface and symbol which make up his identity to face the void of his real self, and by destroying the trappings of his identity he destroys himself. Dorian, in attempting to confront his double, is defeated and the monstrosity of homosexuality and Victorian vice lies in its inexpressibility and lack of subjectivity.

In the alternative ending of *Dorian: An Imitation*, Will Self initiates a dialogue between the side of Dorian which is aligned with the fears of the age—the elements of his lifestyle which have made him such a monster in Self's faithful imitation of Wilde's novel—and a version of himself in which his sexuality is something to be worn with pride. In his alternate life, Dorian is the head of a major AIDS charity and keeps the company of Princess Diana, a major HIV advocate. He lives cleanly, is well exercised and extremely well groomed. His identity is made up of much of the most positive gay symbolism of the 1990s: '--I like to look good - a lot of gay men do [...] it doesn't make us *evil* people.'⁸¹ The alternative Dorian is an openly gay man, living morally, as Baz (Basil) had wanted rather than Henry. This is still a world in which Baz has created *Cathode Narcissus* and the alternative Dorian still gets to gaze upon his own image. He has plans to re-contextualise the work which will align with his own positive sexual identity, so that it becomes synonymous with:

[...] male beauty and a new mature pride in homosexual identity - not a pride based on militant identification with an underclass, or a persecuted ethnic minority, but the true pride that came with assuming the responsibility proper

to an era, when for the first time gay men and lesbian women were openly assuming positions of power.⁸²

The reasons and righteousness of Dorian's old self seeking to re-stake its claim on Dorian's identity are clear here. The alternate identity does not seek its subjectivity in benevolence and clean living. Dorian is still maintaining his youthful appearance out of vanity, gaining a sense of self from power assumed largely thanks to his connections and social class, all the while attempting to dissociate homosexuality from its connections to medicalisation and oppression in his own perception of the concept. He is essentially aestheticising his identity for the 1990s. In the end, his own portrait still haunts him. The voice of his real self represents what is feared about homosexuality in the twentieth century, it is the true voice of his otherness, his double, in the void and unseen. However Dorian constructs his identity, he does not get at the desire and objectivity which formed it in the first place. He can instead only desire and embody his own look in the portrait in that moment in which he recognises his erotic possibilities. This is a triumph of his transgressive spirit. Self is suggesting that the lionisation of the decadent individual is caused by acts of defiance and self-interest rather than the construction of a sanitised sexual identity for the 1990s, repurposing the aesthetics of the past.

Self's construction of 1980s decadence is thus illustrated as degeneracy with no end, employing our most irrational prejudices to fuel it as an aesthetic movement. Engaging in sex alone is not enough; though engaging in the often-misunderstood discourses and symbolism surrounding sex and disease create a sense of dangerous excess. Receiving anal sex is both a degradation of Dorian's portrait and a subversion of his masculinity. It is an element of his identity he and society repress in the epilogue,

foreclosing homosexual identity and making it unspeakable, yet it is a transgressive undercurrent of his otherwise sanitised existence. This represents the underlying existence of the decadent spirit, continuously subdued by progress and moral caution when it is confronted, but a persistent reminder of dangerous desire and Bersani's rectal grave. Defined by effeminacy and homosexuality in Self's rendering of the 1980s "scene", decadence is foreclosed beneath an aestheticised and inoffensive surface, constructed with the phallic symbolism of power and privilege, but like Ettinger's Eurydice, it is a form agency forever coming forth. The notion of decadence as a spiritual fuel for transgression and creativity is thus tied to the unspeakable subtexts of early to mid-twentieth century cinema. Wilde's decadent writing, Self's exploration of neo-decadence and Lewin's closeted adaptation of *Dorian Gray* reveal—by its very concealment—the foreclosed Other in plain sight.

¹ Particularly within the domain of the three main Abrahamic religions. In the Middle Ages, China and Japan demonstrated that 'same-sex relations could be recognized and on occasion honored in the post-classical world' (Louis Crompton, *Homosexuality & Civilization*, London: Harvard University Press, 2003, p. xii).

² Matt Cook, Robert Mills, Randolph Trumbach, H.G. Cocks, *A Gay History of Britain: Love and Sex Between Men in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Greenwood World Publishing, 2007).

³ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, in *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1990), p. 192, notes William Thackeray's bohemian bachelor characters as 'a possible path of response to the strangulation of homosexual panic [...] a garrulous and visible refusal of anything that could be interpreted as genital sexuality, toward objects male or female.' Such temporal spaces were necessary outlets for young Victorian men to navigate their "homosexual panic".

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 185.

⁵ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), p. 30.

⁶ *Epistemology of the Closet*, p 185.

⁷ Joseph W. Childers and Gary Hentzi eds., *The Columbia Dictionary of Modern Literary and Cultural Criticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), pp. 139-140.

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- ⁸ Paranoid Gothic refers, according to Sedgwick, to "Romantic novels in which a male hero is in a close, usually murderous relation to another male figure, in some respects his "double," to whom he seems to be mentally transparent. Examples include *Frankenstein*, Ann Radcliffe's *The Italian*, William Godwin's *Caleb Williams*, and James Hogg's *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*." (*Epistemology of the Closet*, p. 186).
- ⁹ *Ibid*, p. 187.
- ¹⁰ *The History of Sexuality Vol I: The Will to Knowledge*, pp. 42-43.
- ¹¹ Lisa Downing, "Dying for Sex: Cultural and Forensic Narratives of Autoerotic Death", *New Formations*, No. 89-90 (2016), p. 139.
- ¹² The "Uranian" set of poets in England pushed boundaries in terms of representing 'heavenly love' between males, though intellectualised the relationship as one that was innocent and asexual 'superior to the blind urgencies of a merely animal sexuality.' This rationale underpinned Wilde's defence in the Old Bailey. See Linda C. Dowling, *Hellenism and Homosexuality in Victorian Oxford* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), p. 115.
- ¹³ See Simon Stern, "Wilde's Obscenity Effect: Influence and Immorality in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*", *The Review of English Studies*, 68, No. 286 (2017), pp. 756 – 772, DOI: 10.1093/res/hgx035
- ¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 762.
- ¹⁵ Nicholas Frankel quoting W.E. Henley, Introduction to *The Uncensored Picture of Dorian Gray*, Oscar Wilde (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press), p. 6.
- ¹⁶ Nicholas Frankel, *ibid*, p. 7.
- ¹⁷ Frankel quoting *anonymous reviewer*, *ibid*, p. 5.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 5.
- ¹⁹ *Skin shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters*, p. 111.
- ²⁰ *Ibid*, p. 110.
- ²¹ See Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).
- ²² See Mark Cousins, *The Story of Film* (London: Pavilion, 2004).
- ²³ Motion Picture Production Code of 1930,
[https://wikicommedia.wikispaces.com/The+Motion+Picture+Production+Code+of+1930+\(HAYS+CODE\)](https://wikicommedia.wikispaces.com/The+Motion+Picture+Production+Code+of+1930+(HAYS+CODE)),
retrieved: 2/10/2017.
- ²⁴ Thomas J. Roach, "Murderous Friends: Homosocial Excess in Alfred Hitchcock's *Rope* (1948) and Gus Van Sant's *Elephant* (2003)", *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, 29, No. 3 (2012), pp. 225-236, p. 232.
- ²⁵ Michael Schiavi, "Looking for Vito", *Cinema Journal*, 49, No. 1 (2009), pp. 41-64.
- ²⁶ B. Ruby Rich, "New Queer Cinema", *Sight & Sound*; London Vol. 2, No. 5 (Sep 1, 1992), pp. 30-39.
- ²⁷ Roach (2012), p. 235.
- ²⁸ See: Charles E. Morris, "Passing by Proxy: Collusive and Convulsive Silence in the Trial of Leopold and Loeb", *The Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 91, No. 3 (2005), p. 264.
- ²⁹ *The Subject of Murder*, p. 127.
- ³⁰ Arthur Laurents, *Original Story By: A Memoir of Broadway and Hollywood* (New York/London: Applause, 2000).

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- ³¹ Jordan Schildercrout, "Queer Justice: The Retrials of Leopold and Loeb," *Journal of American Culture*, Vol. 34, Issue 2 (2011), pp. 175-188.
- ³² *Ibid*, p. 178.
- ³³ Robert Lewin dir., *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (USA: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1945).
- ³⁴ *Ibid*.
- ³⁵ *Ibid*.
- ³⁶ Patricia Flanagan Behrendt, *Oscar Wilde: Eros and Aesthetics*, (London: McMillan, 1991), p. 59.
- ³⁷ Richard Barrios, *Screened Out: Playing Gay in Hollywood from Edison to Stonewall* (New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 193.
- ³⁸ *Ibid*, p. 196.
- ³⁹ Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (London: Penguin, 1890), p. 23.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p. 55.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid*, p. 95.
- ⁴² *Ibid*, p. 4.
- ⁴³ Will Self, *Dorian: An Imitation* (Penguin: London, 2002), p. 12.
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p.21.
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p. 20.
- ⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p. 13. Hallward is aware of the corporate and technological machinery which is enveloping visual media: 'From now on, conceptual art will degenerate to the crude level of autobiography, a global village sale of shoddy, personal memorabilia for which video installations like this will be the TV adverts.'
- ⁴⁷ Leo Bersani, "Is the Rectum a Grave?", *October*, Vol. 43, AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism (Winter, 1987), pp. 197-222.
- ⁴⁸ *Dorian: An Imitation*, p. 113.
- ⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p. 271.
- ⁵⁰ *Skin shows*, p. 71.
- ⁵¹ *Dorian: An Imitation*, p. 22.
- ⁵² *Ibid*, p. 22.
- ⁵³ Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, p. 24.
- ⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p. 30.
- ⁵⁵ A.A. Markley, "E.M. Forster's Reconfigured Gaze and the Creation of a Homoerotic Subjectivity", *Twentieth Century Literature*, Vol. 47, No. 2 (Summer, 2001), p. 288.
- ⁵⁶ *Between Men*, p. 21.
- ⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p. 23.
- ⁵⁸ *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, p. 24.
- ⁵⁹ *The Subject of Murder*, p. 17.
- ⁶⁰ *Skin Shows*, p. 70.
- ⁶¹ *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery*, p. 144.

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- ⁶² Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, p. 24.
- ⁶³ *What do Pictures Want?: The Lives and Loves of Images*, p. 73.
- ⁶⁴ Oliver Parker dir., *Dorian Gray*, (United Kingdom: Alliance Films, 2009).
- ⁶⁵ Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, p. 4.
- ⁶⁶ *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representations*, p. 165.
- ⁶⁷ Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, p. 163.
- ⁶⁸ *Ibid*, p. 163.
- ⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p. 164.
- ⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p. 25.
- ⁷¹ Holly Blackford, "Childhood and Greek Love: Dorian Gray and Peter Pan", *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, 38, No. 2 (Summer 2013), pp. 177-198, p 181.
- ⁷² By which the subject desires the Other, particularly what the Other themselves desires or lacks, and, as Ettinger puts it, 'every lacking object is a phallic one, the result of a symbolic "castration" process—and this holds true for the *objet a* of the gaze as well' (*The Matrixial Borderspace*, p. 42).
- ⁷³ *The Matrixial Borderspace*, p. 124.
- ⁷⁴ *Ibid*, p. 134.
- ⁷⁵ *Ibid*, p. 134.
- ⁷⁶ *Ibid*, p. 134.
- ⁷⁷ George E. Haggerty, "Anne Rice and the Queering of Culture", *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, Vol. 32, No. 1, Reading Gender after Feminism, (Autumn, 1998), Duke University Press, p. 9.
- ⁷⁸ Judith Butler, "Foreword" to *The Matrixial Borderspace*, p. viii.
- ⁷⁹ *The Matrixial Borderspace*, p. 124.
- ⁸⁰ "Preface", *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, p. 3.
- ⁸¹ *Dorian: An Imitation*, p. 260.
- ⁸² *Ibid*, p. 270 – 271.

Chapter V

Cool Girl and Salome's Bed: New Sites of Conflict for Postfeminist Femmes Fatales

I admit that I am cruel – since the word gives you so much delight – but am I not entitled to be so? It is man who desires, woman who is desired; this is woman's only advantage, but it is a decisive one.

—Leopold von Sacher Masoch, *Venus in Furs*, 1870

In the mirror, I saw my eyes glitter.
I flung back the sticky red sheets,
and there, like I said – and ain't life a bitch –
was his head on a platter.

—Carol Ann Duffy, "Salome", 1999

V.1. Myth as a Source of Female Othering

Between Freddie Montgomery's struggle to deal with his absolute power as narrator in *The Book of Evidence* and Dorian Gray's eroticised objectification under a male gaze, it is clear that the idea of masculine dominance is troubling to many of the male characters within these texts, even to those who employ the gaze. They give expression to the urgency to disentangle oneself from masculine subjectivity once its dangers have been realised. The male gaze, driven by the looker's sense of gender identity and sexuality seeks to render its object passive and thus gains a sense of control over it. In the terms of a gender binary, this is a process of making the object feminine. Freddie Montgomery and Dorian Gray both experience a sense of powerlessness to escape their roles as the gazer and the gazed upon, respectively. From both examples, it is evident that the all-powerful male gaze is often the downfall of those who practice it and the destruction of those onto which it is inflicted.

Resistance to its power in culture is rooted in myth. Those who do not submit to the subjectivity of the male are warnings of the dangers of women who exercise agency and cautionary tales of the blind desires of men for the women they objectify. The concept of the fatal woman is clear from the earliest narratives, having been depicted as humanity's downfall since its mythical beginnings.

In the book of Genesis, Eve's choice to bite from the apple of knowledge—and her persuasion of Adam to do likewise—instigates the archetype of the dangerous woman: she is the original *femme fatale* of the Christian faith and upon her the blame for Adam's (and man's) downfall firmly rests. The characteristics of the *femme fatale* are unfixed, but in her eating of the fruit of knowledge, Eve attains one its most alluring characteristics: experience. Adam, as generic a man as has ever existed, is powerless to resist it. The possession of wisdom suggests a subjectivity associated with adulthood and a more developed personality which is either lacking or typically taken for granted by men. Being confronted by his own lack offers Adam the chance to accept it or demonise Eve for its introduction to his hitherto simple-minded hegemonic sense of existence. As Edwards (2010) puts it, 'it seems that committing himself fully to an adult relationship is so terrifying that it is easier to blame Eve and (symbolically) kill her off than to share the "blame" with her.'¹ Eve's encroachment upon Adam's hegemony is the formation of a sense of female threat. In Greece, Pandora fares little better. The first woman, given by Zeus as a gift to Epimetheus, Pandora brings a *pythos* as her dowry: a jar (later mistranslated to "box") containing sorrows, disease and labour, which she promptly opens, ending a blissful men-only golden age. Hope survives the onslaught; Pandora introduces the mortal cycle of life in death and birth, as well as the

knowledge that her kind is a threat to man's last entitlement.

Examples of dangerous women recur throughout the bible and ancient Greek myth.

Helen's beauty is the cause of the Trojan War, but she plays no active role in her abduction by Paris. Homer, in *The Iliad*, does not suggest she is to blame, but she becomes a scapegoat for the war, nonetheless. According to Jenny March (2008), hostility towards Helen pervades what is known of fifth century B.C. Greek tragedy.²

The chorus in Aeschylus's *Agamemnon* (458 BC) treat Helen as a dangerous woman in terms still recognisable as central to the character trope today. They sing of her 'stepping lightly through the gates of Troy, bringing the Trojans her dowry, death.'³

The chorus's description is easily confused with a Dashiell Hammett *femme fatale* despite appearing over two millennia before. Helen embodies one of the more fixed characteristics of the *femme fatale*: 'her powerfully attractive visual appearance, which is held in tension with the desire to uncover her hidden essence.'⁴ A hidden essence in this instance is plainly that which is adjudged to be her portion of blame for the war and the failure of men to control themselves. The essence arises from an ambiguous sexuality behind alluring looks, onto which men project their gaze and their desire, according to Hanson and O'Rawe (2010). This place of potential for sex is also the seat of her narrative agency; she uses it repeatedly and to mixed effect. As will be explored in Wilde and Duffy's *Salome's* and Flynn's *Amy Dunne*, it is also a screen onto which blame and revulsion can be projected—the outer limits of a phallogentric prison in which gains can be made, but escape practically impossible.

Another figure taken up by fifth century BC tragedians is Medea, who—having murdered her sons to avenge Jason, her adulterous husband who married another

woman—is vilified as a witch and an abhorrence to motherhood. Medea’s evil is defined by her depiction in Greek tragedy, rather than more ancient depictions. It is Euripides who adds the element of infanticide to her story in 431 BC, rendering her revenge upon her husband even more extreme. Medea goes against her own supposed nature as a mother within the play in order to deprive Jason of sons. By doing so, she dehumanises herself, ascending in a chariot sent by Helios, and cleansed of human consequences. On one hand, Euripides marks Medea out as Other. On the other hand, he gives her voice, will and power—she transgresses gender and class boundaries and appropriates the highly prized attribute of the male subject: oratory. By appropriating this skill, Medea is taking on masculine qualities in order to bend her circumstances to her will and overcome a patriarchal circumstance in which she is doomed.⁵

Helen and Medea are othered through a process of adaptation. In both cases, their monstrosity is heightened by dramatists. They are refined by each new interpretation into the monsters recognised by modern readers and audiences. Medusa is another figure whose image is altered over time. One of the three Gorgons, she is depicted as an ugly monster whose gaze turns those who glance upon her to stone, and with hair of snakes, she is a horror to behold. Again, however, her monstrosity is contorted femininity. Several of her earliest literary appearances suggest she was sexually attractive to the gods, having lain with Poseidon, according to Hesiod’s *Theogony* (700 BC).⁶ A later telling adjudges her indiscretion as having provoked Athena into deforming the once beautiful Medusa, setting up a narrative legacy in which femininity and monstrosity are in a constant fluctuating bind.

Aside from Medusa, the woman on whom this chapter focuses comes from the New Testament, the source text by which she is defamed, sexualised and de-feminised by many of her literary interpreters. Salome is a bane to the male guidance of Herod and John the Baptist and is made to suffer for it in various interpretations of her story. This chapter explores representations of women who dare to exercise agency in spite of patriarchal social structures, and thus whose role is defined by their ability to utilise their objectification under the male gaze in order to destroy and to kill. As a consequence, their monstrosity consumes their identity as women and they are made Other within the traditionally patriarchal cultural framework.

Salome's story has been reinterpreted widely since her own lifetime and her appearance in the gospels of Mark and Matthew. She has, since then, been defined by her ability to utilise both the male gaze and her own; she is a female agent, but is made to suffer for it. How can a woman enact these crimes without being made the scapegoat for the human race and reinforcing common disdain for shows of female strength? Women like Salome and Medusa counter the objectification to which men subject them and punish them for it, but are ultimately subdued for their troubles. They act as both an inspiration to women and cautionary tales, warnings about rising up against male exceptionalism or using their otherness for their own good. Finally, through contemporary representations of their myths, and new incarnations in the figure of Amy Dunne from Gillian Flynn's novel *Gone Girl* (2012), this chapter seeks ways of forging female symbols such as Salome and Medusa anew, no longer cautionary tales, but warnings against the objectification which wrought their demises.

V.2.1. Medusa

The modern conception of the *femme fatale* is defined by her role in *noir* cinema of the 1940s and 50s. The *Film Studies Dictionary* (Blandford, Grant & Hillier, 2000) defines her as: 'a female character who uses her beauty to lure and entrap men, leading to their downfall and, usually, death.'⁷ Essentially an agent of feminine evil, her characteristics change from film to film. The archetypes that inform her makeup are many; one of these is the Medusa archetype. The "medusa look" is an aspect which has been incorporated into the cinematic *femme fatale's* armoury. Mary Wood (2010) describes this as a look that 'freezes time whilst we infer what she is thinking.'⁸ As she plans the downfall of he who has wronged her, she invokes a foreshadowing of violence. She is an avenger and destroyer of those who seek to possess her. Medusa renders all who fall under her gaze passive objects; she is defeated by Perseus, who beheads her. He goes on to use her head as a weapon, emblazoned on his shield, from which her gaze petrifies his enemies. Medusa sets a precedent for female revenge and rage at the men who co-opt their agency to satisfy their own ends. This vengeful side stems from the Roman Ovid's telling that, having once been the most beautiful of the gorgons, Medusa is raped by Poseidon (Neptune) in the temple of Athena. Athena is offended by this and punishes Medusa.⁹ Ovid thus provides a jackbooted patriarchal context at which she may rage.

Medusa is a powerful archetype of the female gaze which has permeated literature to the present day, having been reinterpreted by authors such as Sylvia Plath, Angela Carter and Margaret Atwood, who, by repurposing her gaze, are 'uncannily empowering [their] subject, and reversing the gaze women are commonly subjected to.'¹⁰ However, Medusa is also a victim. Raped by Poseidon in Ovid's version¹¹, and

beheaded by Perseus in most versions, she is subdued, resists and is subdued again. As a figure of female resistance, her final lack of success in the face of patriarchal societal structures sets a precedent for dangerous women in literature and the narrative constraints with which they must contend. One of the defining features of the *femme fatale* is that she is doomed; her ambition leads her to both the destruction of others and, ultimately, herself. However, as a symbol of female rage against the patriarchy, she comes into her own. Feminist theorists treat her as an undefeatable symbol, engraved upon the shield of Athena, a sign with which to arm oneself against the threat of patriarchy.

V.2.2. Carol Ann Duffy's Medusa as Agent

Medusa's role as a symbol of female resistance is explored in Sigmund Freud's 1922 essay "Medusa's Head". In Freud's interpretation, the severed head is a representation of a castrated penis while her head of snakes symbolises female pubic hair; the sight of female genitalia inspires a stiffening terror in the child who witnesses—for the first time—pubic hairs which themselves represent a tangle of penises. Thus, for Freud, a beheading is an act of castration. In this light, Medusa's slaying at the hands of Perseus is a corrective measure against a woman who has incorporated a phallic symbol into her identity to be used in her vengeance of patriarchal oppression. Medusa's rage and desire for revenge survives and fits into the common understanding of the monstrous fury of the scorned woman, to the extent that she is amenable to narratives of female empowerment. In Carol Ann Duffy's poem "Medusa" (1999, see Appendix A for full poem) the titular character is consumed by a mistrust of her husband, these anti-male thoughts embodied by the hissing and spitting snakes in her mind. She embodies both a rage against and a melancholy over her current

position, condemned to petrify every living thing she gazes upon, therefore living in a world of stone. Yet she retains a determination to avenge her lover's wrongs against her:

Are you terrified?

Be terrified.

It is you I love,

Perfect man, Greek God, my own,

But I know you'll go, betray me, stray

From home.

So better for me if you were stone.¹²

Duffy's Medusa voices her love and her suspicion—she is at once vulnerable and cruelly detached. The fact that she is both suggests she is giving voice to more than simply a masculinised female revenge, but something more nuanced. She does not seek to destroy him but instead to neutralise him and make him the same as everything else she sees. Her jealousy of his actions has made her the monster she is, and she cannot tolerate this unassailable agency which forsakes any compromise for the sake of their relationship.

V.2.3. "The Laugh of the Medusa": A Call from Beyond the Horizon of the Masculine Paradigm

Duffy's Medusa's negative status relative to her lover's positive one is what has made Medusa the monster she is. Bracha Ettinger (2006) notes that within a phallic system of signs, the woman, as the object of the male gaze, 'is constructed within a paradigm that deals with femininity only from the perspective of phallic castration' as a phallic void, she can only represent lack within this 'masculine model [of looking] viewed *only* from the *male's side*.'¹³ This model has formed before the hairs on Medusa's head are turned 'to filthy / snakes.'¹⁴ She is now building herself out of this negative condition

to meet her ex-lover squarely. This process constitutes the mobilisation of her own gaze. She recalls that she initially 'glanced at a buzzing bee.' This glance is an unsure one, nervous and afraid of the power of her look. Later, she 'looked at a ginger cat [and a] snuffling pig.' She recalls eventually having 'stared in the mirror' and with it the end of a process of building a sense of her own agency. She recognises in her reflection a gorgon resulting from 'love gone bad'—the effect of her lover's dehumanising treatment. As a gorgon she is Other, and her rage is a dragon's. Her stare makes a mountain of the dragon, still spewing the fire of her rage. By associating herself with a volcano, she is no longer a monster of fantasy, but one of stone, more natural and neutral, but immense and no less frightening to a subject adhering to masculine and Romantic ideals. Finally, Medusa awaits her lover's return—he is undoubtedly expecting her to be as 'fragrant and young' as his other girls. Her invitation is a simple, self-accepting, and threatening: 'Look at me now.'¹⁵ Duffy captures Medusa in the process of transforming her own self-image from that of a lonely and livid monster to one who recognises the traumas which have made her this way, who is willing to inflict her own newfound agency and sense of control over it upon someone who has too high an opinion of theirs. She is ready for self-defence, vengeance and empowerment on behalf of her sex.

As a representation and an understanding of Medusa as a woman and a monster, Carol Ann Duffy's poem builds upon Hélène Cixous' call to arms in her essay and rallying cry to women, "The Laugh of Medusa". Duffy's "Medusa" positions the character in the space between her role within the world owned by her Greek god lover and a world in which, firstly, she must act and give an account of herself. Cixous

maintains:

...writing has been run by a libidinal and cultural—hence political, typically masculine—economy; that this is a locus where the repression of women has been perpetuated, over and over, more or less consciously, and in a manner that's frightening since it's often hidden or adorned with the mystifying charms of fiction.¹⁶

Duffy is thus engaging her Medusa in a conversation she needs to have. Her monstrosity lies in the way she seems to be unreachable. She is beyond the powers of the male gaze, but this alone is not empowerment. By giving voice to her grievance and her capability, she is at least able to demonstrate the reason behind the apparent madness. By proffering her side of a masculine fiction, not only is she exalting herself, but humbling the patriarchal discourse. Carol Ann Duffy confirms in interview that the lover with the 'shield for a heart' and a 'sword for a tongue' is indeed Perseus and that in the end 'we know what happens.'¹⁷ We are thus coming to the poem knowing he will eventually behead Medusa, we know her sense of being and dominance is not so total that she kills him or subdues him in some way. Duffy is thus forging a new sense of female identity in someone who is accepted to have a particularly corrupted one.

According to Cixous: 'They riveted us between two horrifying myths: between the Medusa and the abyss.'¹⁸ In this way, women can represent monstrosity, lack or a toxic mix of the two, in which context the safest thing is to honour their apparent symbolic lack and go along with the patriarchal phallogentric codes of behaviour. Medusa, in Duffy's poem, though doomed, wants to exist on new terms. These terms allow 'the immense resources of the unconscious to spring forth.'¹⁹ In writing this new version of the story, Duffy takes on the archetype in a way which forces readers to confront a new kind of monster in Medusa, one we recognise as a subject in the way we

recognise ourselves—yet deadly all the while. From Ettinger's point of view, within the complex of an enveloping masculine gaze, this parallel identity of the subject and the sense of lack the gaze elicits from them 'takes the form of a strange contingency revealed by an "uncanny feeling", an *Unheimlich* signalling to us that we are on *the horizon of experience*.'²⁰ Freudian concepts of the Uncanny are linked with fantasies and ghost-memories of the womb—'the matrixial phantasy (from *matrice*, for womb).'²¹ The emergence of the Uncanny thus causes the panic at the re-emergence of something which is repressed, despite the fact that something such as womb-memory is a positive aspect of one's existence. And so, the laugh of the Medusa is released from the safety of the matrixial experience into the masculine paradigm under the guise of the Uncanny.

Cixous' conception of Medusa is one which bears no threat except the fear she inspires as a woman: 'You only have to look at the Medusa straight on to see her. And she's not deadly. She's beautiful and she's laughing.'²² This is in opposition to Freud's conception of the horror she inspires, as well as to the prevailing idea of her feminine evil embodied by popular depictions of the *femme fatale*. To Freud, her snake-covered head is a combination of identifying symbols: female pubic hair—thus female castration—and a multitude of penises; and so, her lack in itself becomes a symbol of the phallic order (the very notion Cixous is railing against in her essay). Her decapitation is the decapitation of the phallic snakes and thus the terror she inspires is that of castration. Such, according to Freud, is the role of beheading: a feminine assault on the masculine subject which Athena—who took Medusa's head from Perseus—bares upon her shield.

Freud offers only the male perspective on this fear of castration, allowing Cixous and Duffy to fill in the blank from Medusa's perspective. Freud posits that the fear stems from the fact that 'the Greeks were in the main strongly homosexual,'²³ in his contemporary understanding of the concept at a time in which homosexuality and its emerging cultures have a subversive influence on culture. In spite of Freud's early and lopsided thesis of a connection between Medusa's severed head and castration complexes, much of its underlying assumptions remain embedded in the present-day cultural consciousness. The symbols surrounding the Freudian Medusan head were adapted by French and English artists, such as Gustave Moreau and Aubrey Beardsley, at the end of the nineteenth century. They set a foundation of understanding of feminine evil as well as its relationship with gender ambiguity and modern conceptions of homosexuality. Meanwhile, women's rights movements gathered speed throughout the century and resistance to male dominance was widespread by the turn of the twentieth century, pushing back against the patriarchal narrative structures of the new century and beyond.

V.3.1. Salome, Severed Heads and the Birth of the *Femme Fatale*

Contemporary understandings of dangerous women were, like current conceptions of the homosexual identity, shaped by Victorian historicising of classical and biblical narratives and given a modern twist by the symbolist and decadent writers of the *fin de siècle*. According to Rebecca Stott, the *femme fatale* is, in the late nineteenth century, 'a sign, a figure who crosses discourse boundaries, who is found at the intersection of Western racial, sexual and imperial anxieties.'²⁴ Salome—the biblical daughter of Herodias, who marries into the court of Herod—went through a revival in interest at this time, sparked by French artist Gustave Moreau's *Salome Dancing*

Before Herod and *The Apparition*, both of which depicted Salome and were completed in 1876, and followed in 1877 by Gustave Flaubert's short story "Hérodias". Moreau's subjects included Eve, the Sphinx, a decapitated Orpheus, and Medea: dangerous women and their victims aplenty. Joris-Karl Huysmans and Oscar Wilde were particularly captivated by Moreau's Salome, and she became one of the chief symbols of decadent writing in England and France²⁵. Huysmans, in his 1884 novel *À rebours* (*Against Nature*) describes her:

No longer was she merely the dancing-girl [...] she was now revealed in a sense as the symbolic incarnation of world-old Vice, the goddess of immortal Hysteria [...] a monstrous Beast of the Apocalypse, indifferent, irresponsible, insensible, poisoning.²⁶

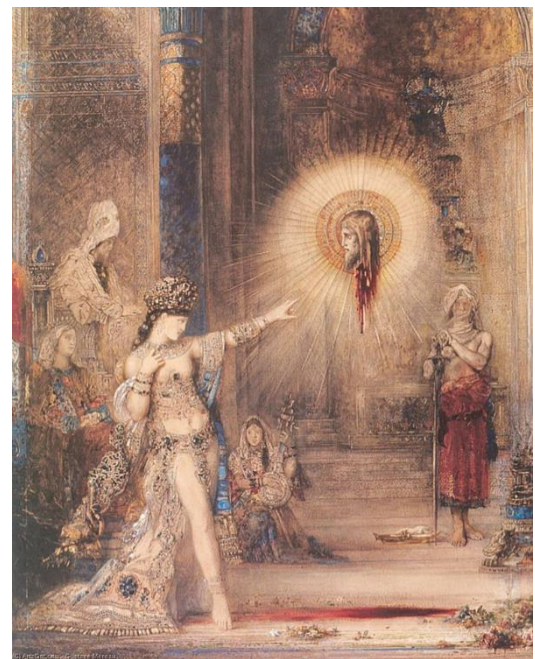


Figure 5.1. Detail from Gustave Moreau's *Salome Dancing Before Herod* (1876) and Figure 5.2. Detail from Moreau's *The Apparition* (1876)²⁷

The jewel-encrusted musky setting, Salome's eroticism, and her seeming power over an otherwise listless court in Moreau's painting provides Huysmans with a symbol of hedonism and otherness to confound prevailing representations of power on canvas

while retaining a prominent place in academies. By infusing Salome with the agency of 'world-old vice', Moreau is taking what had been a docile female character in other depictions and makes a monster of her.

In Gustave Flaubert's "Hérodias", it is Salome's mother, Herodias, who is pulling the strings. Herodias uses Salome to seduce Herod. She achieves this, and Herod offers anything she wants in exchange for her to dance at his pleasure. This is closer to Mark's biblical account, in which 'the daughter of Herodias' dances for Herod and his birthday guests. Herod is so pleased by this, he offers Salome anything she desires ('...up to half my kingdom'). Salome consults Herodias, who directly responds 'The Head of John the Baptist,'²⁸ and Salome offers her request to the king, who reluctantly accepts. By the time Oscar Wilde comes to write his play in 1891, Salome is so augmented in the decadent culture as to assume the role of power in the story. As a woman and an icon of vice throughout history, this is also the role of monster, an archetype of the *femme fatale*. Wilde makes her both a monstrous woman, yet also not quite a woman. In Wilde's play, she shares a complicity only with the moon. The moon represents chastity, and Salome's respect for its femininity and quiet dignity amount to the sum total of her loyalties. The moon lights the set and provides Herod with an excuse to draw the banquet outside and into Salome's presence. Salome's admiration for the moon mirrors the Young Syrian's admiration of Salome's, which creates a central ideal of femininity and chastity, which she works to confound throughout the play.

This immediately becomes apparent in her role as object of the male gaze: those who seek to possess her ultimately suffer. Narraboth—the Page of Herodias—warns the

Young Syrian of the dangers of looking at the princess: 'You look at her too much. It is dangerous to look at people in such fashion.'²⁹ The Young Syrian obsesses over her virginal purity, comparing her to 'the shadow of a white rose in a mirror of silver.'³⁰ The page contrasts the Young Syrian's appraisal of Salome with his own of the moon (they are being aligned in the opening moments of the play): 'She is like a woman who is dead. She moves very slowly.'³¹ Through his jealousy, it is immediately clear that Narraboth is in love with the Young Syrian, who is himself in love with Salome. We know this because he cannot stop looking at her, and that Herod desires her, too, because he cannot stop looking at her either. However, Salome is not simply desired; she desires to see Jokanaan. Wilde adds an element of symbolic androgyny to Salome, in terms of her role in the triangular relationship between Narraboth, the Syrian and herself. Her role is neither passive in the sense of Lacanian femininity, nor does she fit into Eve Sedgwick's focal point of two homosexual men. Her agency and objectification of Jokanaan hints at her own masculinity. In her effort to persuade the Young Syrian to bring Jokanaan out of his cell, she offers to 'let fall for you a little flower, a little green flower.'³² Joseph Donaghoe (1997) suggests that the green flower is a green carnation, a Parisian symbol of homosexuality.³³ The signs, looks and jealousies which manifest in this early exchange are rife with ambiguity of gender and sexuality. Wilde sets Salome up as woman nominally, capable of manipulation and seduction, but beneath this is an inventory of masculine-coded traits with which she can dominate others.

In her appraisal of Jokanaan, Salome draws him into her fascination with the moon. To her he 'is as chaste as the moon. He is like a moonbeam, like a shaft of silver.'³⁴ She objectifies him as Herod and the Young Syrian objectify her: in feminine terms. For

Jokanaan's refusal to bend to her wishes, Salome has him beheaded, a symbolic castration and suppression of his subjectivity. However, she gets her own comeuppance in Wilde's narrative. Having been seduced into ordering the death of Jokanaan, whom he believes to be a holy man, Herod has the last word against his stepdaughter: 'Herod: [*Turning around and seeing Salome*] Kill that woman!'³⁵ However, Salome has already had her say. Her final speech is directed at Jokanaan's severed head, and in it she reveals both her own unquenchable desire for him and a desire to be looked upon by him, telling him: 'If thou hadst looked at me thou hadst loved me.'³⁶ Readers are left both with the sense that Salome has been left unsatisfied by a Jokanaan she may now kiss but who will never look at her; and an impression of her triumph over the oppression of her fate in the narrative, declaring 'the mystery of love is greater than the mystery of death.'³⁷ In this embrace with death, Salome embraces herself. By drawing Jokanaan into her association with the moon, she creates in him a reflection of herself. Every time she imputes upon him their shared qualities, she is rebuked and casts upon him a tide of insults: 'Thy hair is horrible [...] It is like a crown of thorns placed on thy head. It is like a knot of serpents coiled around thy neck. I love not thy hair...'³⁸ The association with medusan hair invokes a phallic image, further confusing his androgyny. An object of desire and charged with phallic symbolism, he serves as Salome's double, a screen for her self-projection.

Salome's death is the result of her self-imposed ostracisation from the patriarchal power structure of Herod's court. She is both masculine and feminine and its result is monstrosity. Unlike Herod and the others, she follows through on her desire. Her position is confusing to all; no one can claim power over her. In her objectification and

symbolic castration of Jokanaan, she transforms him into a phallic object. According to Amanda Fernbach, taking Jokanaan as a phallus is further complicated as Salome 'takes an external love-object that is also a subject, a subject who is figured as a woman.'³⁹ In her acquisition of Jokanaan's head, she lays claim to the role of subject within the network of gazes onstage, taking on the role of the "phallic woman",⁴⁰ not simply in being the phallus ('the path of "normal" [Lacanian] femininity'⁴¹), but in having it (masculine position). Jokanaan is made female, Salome feminising and taking ownership of his image to the extent that her love-object is a lesbian one. In having him beheaded, she compounds her masculine dominance in an act which symbolises his castration. Her dominance and destruction of Jokanaan is the threat faced by the social, sexual and gender order of the court, which she has already plunged into a bloody chaos. Her fetishisation of Jokanaan's femininity is a social and sexual insurgence Herod must put down, with Salome's own swift execution.

V.3.2. Fetishism as a Polycentred Perversion

Sexual fetishism, according to Freud, involves the failure to accept 'the unwelcome fact of female castration.'⁴² The fetish is thus a substitute for the castrated penis in the eyes of the male, 'a token triumph over the threat of castration and protection against it... making women tolerable as sexual objects.'⁴³ The fetish itself constitutes an object of arousal used as a substitute for the absent penis of the mother—a signifier for which there is no referent, 'an absence so disturbing that it requires the presence of a fantasy to mask it.'⁴⁴ Freud's analysis is limited by taking only the male perspective into account, but the Oedipal male's phallic obsession is not the whole story.

Feminist fetish theory suggests that women can engage in the process of fetishisation.

According to Laura Mulvey, the sexual surface of the female body itself is the first 'defence against the taboos of the feminine that patriarchy depends on,'⁴⁵ and Salome is an example of a fetishist who desires femininity. She attributes feminine features to Jokanaan as the foundation of her desire and moves to emphasise his symbolic castration whenever he rejects her love. In this sense, she represents a threat to the order of fetishism as the insertion of the phallus into the dynamic as opposed to its removal. Her punishment amounts to the patriarchal court of Herod's rejection of what Fernbach calls 'fetishism as a polycentered perversion'⁴⁶ within *fin de siècle* imagery and a disavowal of the possibilities of sexual difference. Salome is thus more than just a projection of Freudian castration anxiety in her beheading of the saint. She is an outlier of feminine agency, in that she embodies femininity, masculinity and homosexuality, and finds a way to fetishise the feminine. In this sense, she is a contradiction to the twentieth century discourse surrounding fetishism and the ability of women to enact it.

V.3.3. Salome Onscreen: *Salome's Last Dance* (1988)

In Ken Russell's 1988 filmic adaptation of Wilde's play—*Salome's Last Dance*—gender and sexuality are toyed with from the start. The film depicts a fictionalised staging of Wilde's play in an upstairs room of a brothel. Oscar Wilde, who is the only audience member, gets involved in a tryst during the action with the prostitute and actor playing the role of Narraboth, forging a connection between the onstage homosexualities of biblical fantasy and those of the Victorian flesh. Salome performs the Dance of the Seven Veils to Greig's "In the Hall of the Mountain King", which builds to a chaotic frenzy in the casting off of her final veils. In the dance's final throes, Salome, who is switching between male and female bodies at every cut, splits in two: the slim

androgynous body of Imogen Millais Scott, who has been playing Salome throughout the film, stands beside the muscular veiled male dancer. Upon the removal of the last veil, the male dancer exposes his genitals, in the next shot he has transformed into Scott, who is exposing hers. Herod watches, completely disoriented by the spectacle, but his expression betrays a determination to believe that he is seeing the feminine ideal of Salome rather than recognise a vision of her phallic dominance, which she embodies in every other sense. Staging the dance like this also delineates not simply the fluidity of Salome's self-perception, but a duality of male and female signs of which her character consists in a phallic sense. She demonstrates an adjacency of identity which allows her to embody a set signs of the phallic order. In her use of these signs, she is able to embody the feminine—just as John the Baptist does—and the moon; the perceptions of each are malleable, with new signs attached for different purposes. As Herod listens in on Salome's final speech, he is confronted with her inextricable association with blood. As she position's John's head between her legs and lowers herself, she asks: 'Is that the taste of blood?'⁴⁷ Between her legs this comes to mean menstrual blood. The beheaded John and the menstruating Salome are two castrated beings from which Herod recoils. Now a monstrous vision who exists outside the phallic order, he orders the guards to kill her.

As retellings of the story subsequent to Wilde's play show, authors, composers and directors stay true to Salome as a female-idolising outlier and to Wilde's version of events, as speculative as it may be. The prevalence of film adaptations of Wilde's play indicate that this version of events has prevailed as the touchstone of the Salome story. If not directly adapted from Wilde, she remains true to the *fin de siècle*

‘incarnation of world-old vice’. For instance, though not based on Wilde’s version, Carlos Saura’s 2002 flamenco-ballet film depicts a Salome who needs no prompting from her mother to demand the head of John the Baptist and also meets her own grisly demise through suicide. This is not to say that other versions of the story exist in popular culture; William Dieterle’s 1953 epic, in which Rita Hayworth as Salome performs The Dance of the Seven Veils in an attempt to save John the Baptist, proved a commercial success.⁴⁸ Her survival in the film is certainly somewhat closer to the actual events (historical accounts record Salome going on to become the queen of Chalcis and Armenia Minor⁴⁹). The prevalence of Wilde’s work, apart from being an opportunity to indulge in the height of *fin de siècle* decadence, is partly due to the narrative platform it offers to explore sexual and gender ambiguities with more freedom and in defiance of prevailing academic understandings of these concepts. Salome sets a precedent for twentieth century *femmes fatales*, and it is appropriate that at the height of psychoanalytic critical theory, *film noir* was also reaching its zenith. The 1940s Freudian and Lacanian understanding of gender allowed these women transgress their social and sexual boundaries in a shroud of feminine mystery, but their oppression at the hands of both the cinematic morality of the Hays Code, and the phallic order into which they were born, meant they never stood a chance of surviving it.

V.3.4. Salome Onscreen: Nazimova, the Medusa Look and *Film Noir*

Before it ever made it to the stage, Wilde’s play was banned by the censor. He never got to see it performed, though a Paris production was staged during his time in prison. Thereafter the play gained a cult status, particularly Salome’s Dance of the Seven Veils. In a craze known as “Salomania”, dancers performed what was ostensibly

a cross between a striptease and a belly dance; the most infamous of these dancers, Theda Bara, brought it to the screen in 1918 (J. Gordon Edwards dir.). Bara came to define the “vamp” archetype, part of a recent tradition with which those who portrayed The Dance of the Seven Veils had become ubiquitous on stage and screen. According to Mary Simonson, Salome had become...

...everybody’s favorite bad girl, the original dancing vamp, a launchpad for discussions of [...] insecurities and fascinations with women, national identity, imperialism, the Oriental “Other,” and the female body.⁵⁰

This could easily be a description of a typical *femme fatale* in *film noir* decades later. However, Alla Nazimova’s depiction of Salome and Charles Bryant’s direction produced a film by which Wilde’s story and style could resonate throughout the *noir* era.

Nazimova revives the character in *Salomé* directed by Bryant in 1923 in, to that point, the most explicitly gender-ambiguous adaptation of Wilde’s play. The production is reputed to have employed non-heterosexual cast members only and many of the attendant characters appear in drag. The sets and costumes are designed in a style which are credited in the opening titles ‘after Aubrey Beardsley,’ which is an indication of the film’s determination to capture the decadent spirit Wilde intended for the original in choosing Beardsley to provide the illustrations for the play’s publication. The opening titles reveal, too, that Salome ‘remains an uncontaminated blossom in the wilderness of evil,’ yet as an heiress to the passions and cruelties of her day, ‘she too kills the thing she loves; she loves the things she kills.’⁵¹ Her duality is thus highlighted, and in her gendering within the film, she is being set up as the heroine Wilde perceives her to be, while defining the conventions of her cinematic archetype.

Bryant’s *Salomé* is a direct adaptation from Wilde’s play and thus is the first to invite

the audience onto the stage and take part in the looking which is integral to the characters' relationships. The scene in which Salome seeks to release Jokanaan from the cistern is one in which we are made complicit both in Salome's gaze and that of Narraboth, experiencing a form of male gaze in both viewpoints. Firstly, we enter Salome's point of view, as she realises Narraboth has the key to Jokanaan's cell. Narraboth is adorned in a necklace of enormous pearls, the colouring of his nipples is exaggerated, and the stylised artificial curls of his hair resemble those of the feminised Jokanaan and Salome in Beardsley's illustrations *The Climax* (1893) and *The Dancer's Reward* (1894, see Appendix B). By entering into—and becoming complicit in—Salome's objectifying gaze upon Narraboth, the audience enters into Mulvey's male gaze dynamic, the masculine coding of which is made even more palpable by the phallic tassels she sways between her legs (a foreshadowing of Ken Russell's interpretation of the same scene decades later in *Salome's Last Dance*).

We also take on Narraboth's point of view in a shot in which he realises the princess is about to close in on him. All we can see is the inescapable glare of her heavily-lidded eyes—eyes which come to define a cinematic *femme fatale* look (see figure 5.4.), according to Petra Dierkes-Thrun (2011): 'narrow eyes, not twitching, closely watching the object from a slightly upward-tilted angle.'⁵² Protruding from Narraboth's pocket is an enormous key, and in a scene of phallic exchange he drops to his knees before her swinging tassels and surrenders the key.



Figure 5.3. 'Phallic exchange' between Salome and Narraboth, detail of a still from Charles Bryant's (dir.) *Salomé*



Figure 5.4. The Medusa look, Alla Nazimova as Salome in still from Bryant's *Salomé* (U.S.A.: Nazimova Productions, 1923).

Considered as one of America's earliest art films, *Salomé* was not released by any major studio due to its direct approach to gender and sexuality.⁵³ Yet, its expressionistic approach to the representation of the *femme fatale* permeated cinema through the more formal trope of onscreen gazing rather than its more outrageous visuals. Therefore, the more explicit representations of homoeroticism blazed much less of a trail in light of growing censorship in the decades immediately following the

film's release. However, it is set apart by its pushing against the boundaries of the roles of female filmmakers and characters in the industry. Nazimova is credited as a producer, the star and one of the financiers of the film, enacting 'the feminist, as well as the artistically and sexually transgressive potential of Wilde's *Salome*'⁵⁴ within the context of the male-dominated industry, according to Dierkes-Thrun. The personal cost production—the considerable slowdown of her career—parallels Wilde's own struggles with the play. This is a typical marker of active and creative women in cinema as it moves towards the later years of the silent period. The codification of a feminine threat to masculine control becomes ever starker onscreen with the development of the *femme fatale* in *noir* cinema of the 1940s and 50s.

Salome's duplicity and unscrupulousness are evident in the way she achieves her aims within Wilde's play. Nazimova's Salome demonstrates her ability before the viewing eye of the camera. She seduces its gaze by coercing its function of looking and objectifying to get what she wants. She achieves this with Narraboth. She then seduces Herod into giving her what she wants without revealing her true intentions of killing Jokanaan, leading to her own downfall. This is in keeping with the suffering which awaits most who presume a masculine power who are not white heterosexual men. As Elisabeth Bronfen describes Phyllis Dietrichson, the *femme fatale* of *Double Indemnity* (Billy Wilder dir., 1944), 'she entertains a narcissistic pleasure at the deployment of her own ability to dupe the men who fall for her, even as she is merciless in manipulating them for her own ends.'⁵⁵ In her portrayal of Salome, Nazimova may not be reinventing the *femme fatale*, but she is helping to construct the cinematic grammar through which the motif will be expressed in the decades to come.

The connection can therefore be drawn between Moreau's 'symbolic incarnation of world-old vice'⁵⁶ and the *femme fatale* as a defining character of *noir* cinema. The *femme fatale* is associated not just with Salome, but with a host of ancient symbols of feminine evil. Michael O'Hara's voyage in Orson Welles' *The Lady from Shanghai* (1947) is emblazoned with the symbol of doom on the side of the yacht on which the characters are travelling: "Circe". The name of the vessel is a sign that O'Hara is in dangerous terrain, and Rita Hayworth's eponymous character proves this to be so, as Hayworth has been playing everyone against each other for her own gain. Hayworth's *femme fatale* in *The Lady from Shanghai* and *Gilda* (Vidor dir., 1946) also echoes the Sirens, as does Marilyn Monroe in *Niagara* (1953). Their singing in these films is, like Salome's dance, a weapon to draw men in and render them powerless (we will return to this theme shortly). As discussed, Medusa also infuses representations of the character through the "Medusa look". This, according to Mary Wood, is a position which 'resents and rejects' the constraints of masculinist power:

The Medusa look indicates both the violence of female resentment which, nonetheless, has to be contained, and the metaphorizing of the violence which patriarchal power does to those subjected to it.⁵⁷

It is thus a look which expresses both an aggression and an implied challenge raised to the patriarchal system to which she who employs it is subject and we, as audience, are party. Within the constraints of cinema and Laura Mulvey's conception of the male gaze, her challenge invites us to will a return to phallocentric law and order so as to exact pleasure from the experience. Our part and pleasure in the avenging of the *femme fatale* is in part due to our willingness to suspend time in the presence of a singing Marilyn Monroe or a dancing Alla Nazimova. The aural titillation in which we

indulge (in the case of Monroe's singing in *Niagara*), according to Griselda Pollock, offers 'a woman spectator, and anyone else willing to draw near [...] the beautiful sound memories of archaic pleasures as well as the pain of our inevitable sense of loss and estrangement.'⁵⁸ The same can be said of a visual experience with Nazimova's Salome and her fatal dance. In light of the challenge of her Medusa look, our visual pleasure renders us, as audience, an opposition to her as looker; we become the quarry. We thus become complicit in making her a *femme fatale*, we are making her Other by becoming complicit in the desire to punish her. In Mulvey's analysis, this arises as soon as the fetishised image of the woman threatens to expose the spectator's castration complex,⁵⁹ and she concurs with the notion that our pleasure comes in the knowledge of the simultaneous estrangement which is taking place. Thus seduced, we are convulsed to complete the phallogentric narrative to which we have committed, to strike back and subdue.

Pollock challenges women, and those who aspire to the creation of non-phallogentric art to the reimagining of decadent visual and aural pleasures of these othered fatal women into something more akin to Cixous's laughing Medusa, 'not grotesque and deadly, but beautiful, and singing.'⁶⁰ This challenge is an indication of how little has changed in female representation. In Carol Ann Duffy's "Salome" (1999) and Gillian Flynn's *Gone Girl* (2012) we can explore reimaginings of patriarchal paradigms which seek the survival of fatal women within this long-standing gendered representational system.

V.4.1. Postfeminist Femme Fatale: *Gone Girl*

Gillian Flynn's 2012 novel *Gone Girl* has been hugely popular since its publication,⁶¹

and has led to a film adaptation, directed by David Fincher in 2014. The response to the apparently feminist idea of a woman who violently rejects the standards required by her gender role is mixed, with many believing Amy's attitude to women to be sexist. In a *Time* magazine article, Eliana Dockterman writes 'nobody can agree if it's a sexist portrayal of a crazy woman or a feminist manifesto,'⁶² following the film's release—representing much of the tense discourse surrounding our current understanding of gender. The relationship between the book and its adaptation to film is vital to this. The film's screenplay is written by the book's author Gillian Flynn, though the film changes the detail-led mystery element of the book into a modern iteration of *film noir*, and its central character, Amy Dunne, is its *femme fatale*.

The story initially revolves around Amy's disappearance and the inability of her husband, Nick, to disentangle himself from the suspicions of the police and the media that he is responsible. In a plot twist, we discover that Amy is engineering this suspicion in an attempt to get Nick arrested and condemned to death for murder. Her reasons for the plot against Nick revolve around her dissatisfaction with him and their life together as well as the fact that she has compromised her identity and sense of self to make the relationship work. To Amy, the cause of this particular type of compromise centres around her having to conform to a set of prescribed behavioural traits which she collectively describes as "Cool Girl":

Men always say that as the defining compliment, don't they? She's a cool girl. Being the Cool Girl means I am a hot, brilliant, funny woman who adores football, poker, dirty jokes, and burping [...] Cool Girls never get angry; they only smile in a chagrined, loving manner and let their men do whatever they want.⁶³

Amy describes a male fantasy of a woman which she must embody in order to please

her man and maintain their relationship. To do so, she is required to enact a set of hypermasculine behaviours centring on slobbishness without it affecting her appearance as an ideal feminine sex object. Having met this idealisation for so long, Nick has still become bored with Amy's performance and has moved on to 'a newer, younger, bouncier cool girl.'⁶⁴ The suspicious disappearance she engineers is thus an act of revenge upon Nick, as well as a rejection of the concept of "cool girl" and a misogynist environment which requires the women who want to thrive within it to adopt and aspire to artificial identities tailored to male desire.

As well as the "cool girl" of Nick's dreams, Amy is also running from another ideal up to which she is held. Since she was a child, Amy's parents have been co-authoring children's books based on her life, the "Amazing Amy" series, in which the fictionalised Amy continually achieves more by her parents' standards than Amy herself can manage: 'I can't fail to notice that whenever I screw something up, Amy does it right.'⁶⁵ Despite Amy's lack of interest in the violin, sport and hard work, her parents make her ideal fictional self a musical prodigy and a spirited sportsperson. In light of the real Amy showing no sign of marrying, the latest in the series is about an adult Amy and her wedding. "Amazing Amy" offers a traditional counterpoint to "cool girl" and Amy lives in the shadow of both, having just realised the latter is just as impossible an ideal to live up to as the former. The "Amazing Amy" series is also widely read by the American public, making the character not just an idealised version of herself to which she fails to live up, but one to which all young female readers of the series are expected to aspire. Through her privilege, Amy does live up to much of her alter-ego's standards. However, though the beautiful, white, Harvard-educated Amy, according to

Lori Marso...

...seems to literally have it all and is indeed a picture of idealized femininity [...] she sees herself as falling short [...] Like most girls subject to the demands and expectations of myths crafted under patriarchy, Amy longs to get married.⁶⁶

This longing is the medium through which she embraces 'femininity's tried and true roles'⁶⁷ Her marriage to Nick is an embracing of these two great myths of femininity and an attempt to escape the shadow they have cast over her identity. However, she expects Nick to compromise and live up to her ideal of the intelligent, ambitious and successful man in exchange. Once Nick regresses to his old slobbish self, Amy gives up on her ideal man and on herself as anyone's ideal. Amy's primary motive is thus driven by the profound sense of disappointment with the patriarchal system into which she has invested by marrying Nick. Her actions amount to the rejection of this system.

Amy and Nick's marriage collapses as a result of the downturn of their economic fortunes. Both lose their jobs in the economic crash of 2008 and move to a ghost estate⁶⁸ in Nick's hometown in Missouri. Nick's unemployment fuels his sense of emasculation and lowered ambitions, and the ghostliness of the expensively built town is just another effect of the economic and social collapse. These serve to remove Amy's suspension of disbelief in the identity to which she committed in her marriage to Nick. In moving to a house built for the new wealth of the pre-crash mortgage bubble of the early 2000s, they display the ambitions of the neoliberal subject.

According to Emily Johansen, 'the quickness with which these houses and subdivisions become ruins suggests that neoliberal success is disposable and thus built on shifting sands.'⁶⁹ The same can be said of the identity that comes crashing down around Amy.

Nick's own emasculation upon losing his job is, to him, not an indicator of a failed

system into which he has bought. However, Amy's disillusionment with her "cool girl" role means she has become incompatible with it. Their marital breakdown is centred on his refusal to recognise their inherent failure as neoliberal subjects and his subsequent regression to stereotypical male activities of beer, sports and video games while he is out of work. He is here allowed to fall back on these practices with the cushion of male privilege⁷⁰ to break his fall without considering the vast emotional labour needed to confront his circumstance and the change of attitude and self-perception that the new economic reality requires of him. In his insistence they persist with what she recognises as an artificial identity, Amy recognises the attempted murder of her subjectivity of which, through divorce, Nick can wash his hands. Amy's reason in refusing this is fuelled by revenge: 'I won't divorce him because that's exactly what he'd like. And I won't forgive him because I don't feel like *turning the other cheek*.'⁷¹ Instead, she is exacting a revenge which necessitates disproportionate violence. In striking her own face with a hammer, she strikes at the patriarchal signifiers she has adopted.

However, the patriarchal norm rapidly returns the blow. Lola, the woman Amy befriends at the motel in which she is hiding, steals her money to escape with a male lover. Without means, Amy is forced to compromise while continuing the fight she has begun. She seduces her ex-lover Desi, only to murder him and claim the act to be in self-defence in order to fake her own kidnapping at the hands of Desi and cut her losses by returning to her old life with Nick. He is forced to accept this as she has used his previously banked sperm to impregnate herself, threatening that any action by Nick against her disrupts the life of her unborn child. Thus, Amy's final elaborate stand

against her neoliberal heteronormative existence with Nick is to take the prospect of their nuclear family hostage. Nick does not leave or expose Amy and they return to their hollow existence, but neither has won. Amy cannot escape the myths of femininity she has adopted, and Nick recognises that he is living with an aberration.

Amy's failed attempt to form a sororal bond with Lola in the motel is the last step Amy manages towards the reestablishment of her identity outside the patriarchal constraints of her old life. Lori Marso recognises this as an attempt at taking collective agonistic action and building solidarity towards a 'perverse [form] of protest'⁷² against conditions which grant her agency within the framework of heteronormativity so long as she conforms to the "cool girl" and Amazing Amy conventions. Marso suggests this is a way of accessing a representation of 'sexualities and agencies [...] outside patriarchy's vision.'⁷³ Her return to normativity is welcomed by none who know the facts. Nick conspires with the police detective Rhonda Boney and his sister Margo to have Amy punished for her crimes, but she traps him in his own marriage. Her actions, seen as psychopathic, are a determined assault on the patriarchal system and her compromise when it goes awry is, in effect, to call it a draw. She has at least jolted Nick into recognising she does not fit into his understanding of society, but the cost is having to exist peacefully in that society in order to avoid the punishment she would otherwise receive for having been caught. As a *femme fatale*, Amy is negotiating hard with her preordained fate. Her monstrosity within the film is clear, yet only on the terms of the other characters. In its construction of the concept of "cool girl" the narrative both demeans women who sexualise their feminine traits while pursuing traditionally masculine interests, and posits their existence is the unknowing symptom

of a perpetually male-dominated cultural landscape. Either way, it supplies Amy with an ambiguous motivation to achieve a new form of self-identification by whatever means necessary. She subverts the *femme fatale* myth by seeking to attain Otherness, rather than conforming to the privilege of white heteronormativity. By the end she is recognised as Other only within her marriage and knows survival means staying there. Having lost the opportunity to form a resistance of collective agency through Lola's abandonment of her in favour of capital and heterosexual banditry, Amy is denied a surer path to a satisfactory revenge.

Amy's role as a *femme fatale* is subversive at first glance. Unlike many archetypal *femmes fatales* of the twentieth century, such as Catherine Tramell in *Basic Instinct* (Paul Verhoeven dir., 1990) and Elsa Bannister in *The Lady from Shanghai* (Orson Welles dir., 1947), there is little about her cultural background or sexuality that makes her alien to her cultural context. She is born into a place of privilege and her sexuality is not a pressing concern to herself or others. To make a success of her relationship with Nick, she has compromised her own sense of self: 'Nothing had a consequence, I was living in the moment, and I could feel myself getting shallower and dumber. But also happy.'⁷⁴ Life as "cool girl" with Nick offers her a chance to escape the only other identity she has known: 'Until Nick, I'd never really felt like a person, because I was always a product. Amazing Amy has to be brilliant...'⁷⁵ She enters into the relationship with Nick as "cool girl" because it provides the conditions in which both can live happily. Once the economy which supports this collapses, so does Nick's happiness. As soon as she realises she is producing her identity with no happiness to show for it, she withdraws from the identity and Nick begins an affair with another "cool girl". Amy

perceives this as an indicator of her disposable value in Nick's eyes, and is left without a discernible identity, any sense of self murdered by her husband.

Amy is a proto-*femme fatale* in the sense that she is represented as having just broken from patriarchal convention. This is in contrast to an archetypical *noir* cinema *femme fatale* such as Elsa Bannister. Elsa has seen the world, has worked in Shanghai, speaks Chinese and associates with the Chinese community in San Francisco. This reveals a heart of darkness in the years immediately following the Japanese attacks on Pearl Harbour and the Second World War, when suspicion of Asian cultures is at its highest. Her lover Michael O'Hara projects these fears onto his conception of Elsa's past, whereas Amy is forming her own set of unknowable characteristics, having rejected normative identities. The normativity she is stepping away from is a postfeminist one, in which she is recognising women's role in undermining their subjectivity for the sake of success in an unassailable patriarchal socio-economic system. This context highlights the transtemporal persistence of *femme fatale* resistance to male domination.

Amy is recognising that her willing acquiescence to a patriarch-appropriated version her identity is a postfeminist process. Angela McRobbie (2004) introduces postfeminism as the 'active process by which the feminist gains of the 70s and 80s come to be undermined.'⁷⁶ In gaining institutional recognition in law and in the media, McRobbie posits that the successes of feminism have allowed for the reinstitution of sexism on a new ironic level which depends on women entering into objectified positions knowingly and of their own volition. As an example of this, McRobbie uses the Wonderbra advertising of the 1990s, featuring...

...Eva Herzigova, looking down admiringly at her substantial cleavage enhanced

by the lacy pyrotechnics of the Wonderbra [...] It was, in a sense, taking feminism into account by showing it to be a thing of the past, by provocatively “enacting sexism”.⁷⁷

Under these guises, the male can assume his gaze and, having recognised feminist concerns, is free to share in the irony, ‘while for the girls what is proposed is a movement beyond feminism, to a more comfortable zone where women are now free to choose for themselves,’⁷⁸ whether or not to be represented sexually, whether or not to be a “cool girl”. For Amy, this means choosing to ‘never get angry; [they] only smile in a chagrined, loving manner and let [their] men do whatever they want.’⁷⁹ By rejecting “cool girl”, Amy is suggesting women have made an unfair compromise in the name of equality, while enacting an extreme critique through her widely discussed⁸⁰ “cool girl” monologue, as well as through her reversion to a *femme fatale* as an expression of otherness in preference to the identities necessary for privilege. She uses an old myth which offers empowerment through protest to combat the new myths thrust upon her by a persistent hegemonic patriarchy. Others have used the older myth as a way to prey upon the new. Salome is one of these.

V.4.2. Postfeminist *Femme Fatale*: Duffy’s “Salome”

In her 1999 poem, “Salome”, Carol Ann Duffy (See Appendix A for full poem) introduces the eponymous biblical figure to late-night drinking and one-night stands, and we are introduced to her on one of the mornings after. As she acknowledges an unfamiliar head on the pillow beside her, we are made to understand that she is used to casual sex and no longer feels compelled to keep track. However, once it is suggested her bedfellow’s name is John, it becomes clear that Salome has not brought him home for sex alone. His lips are ‘colder than pewter’ because she has already killed him; she lies next to ‘his head on a platter.’⁸¹ The poem is a quick update of

Salome for the turn of the twenty-first century in which she has retained her position in society yet engages in drinking culture and nightlife (not unlike Will Self's 2002 update of *Dorian Gray*). Given that she 'rang for the maid' and that she has taken pleasure from the novelty of the maid's 'regional patter', it is clear that Salome is rich and most likely privately educated, thus it is not out of the question that Salome in Duffy's version has her own royal connections. However, her own vocabulary is infused with a traditionally masculine approach to drinking culture, and expressions such as 'A night on the batter'—a slang term for binge drinking. This, along with terms such as 'the booze and the fags' when referring to her vices, suggest she is well versed in female drinking culture at the turn of the twenty-first century, or "ladette" culture. In a sociological study, Bailey, Griffin & Shankar (2015) note that these young women:

...are called on to operate as pleasure seeking subjects and engage in practices that are traditionally associated with masculinity on particular conditions; especially that they display a heterosexually attractive hypersexual femininity.⁸²

Living up to these hypersexual standards allows women entry into and to display behaviours associated with masculine drinking culture. In declaring her need to 'clean up [her] act / get fitter / cut out the booze...'⁸³, Salome embodies the same anxieties over her ability to live up to a postfeminist reality. Her victim is simply an afterthought to this. In spite of her vague willingness to slow down, Salome remains ensconced in a culture which is psychologically, if not financially draining. Like Amy in *Gone Girl*, Salome's only opportunity to inject subjectivity into her pleasure-seeking is to make her partner suffer. John, as a male within this culture and embodying its privilege, is a pleasure-giver. Salome's participation depends upon his approval, and it is he she must attract for sex. He does not bargain for subjugation, but the 'deep lines around his

eyes, / from pain [...] maybe laughter' are suggestive of Salome's swift removal of his pleasure and control. Her murder of John also affords her the chance to objectify him, and she lingers over his 'beautiful crimson mouth' in an echo of Wilde's Salome revelling in the sight of a mouth like 'a band of scarlet on a tower of ivory.'⁸⁴ Duffy's Salome, echoing Wilde's conception of a *femme fatale*, operates within a system of looking and gender appearance in order to exercise her subjectivity. However, Wilde's Salome sets up the murder of Jokanaan as a form of public display. She is, in effect, coming out as a subject deviant of patriarchy. Duffy's Salome, on the other hand, practices her deviant subjectivity secretly. She sees male beheading as a viable form of surviving as a subject while living with the demands of her postfeminist identity, in the short term at least. As her sense of fatigue and Amy's requirement to return to married life indicate, female subjectivity beyond the role of *femme fatale* remains out of reach in postfeminist contexts.

V.5.1. Bloody Beds: The Matrixial as a Site of Resistance

Having shared a bed stained with a man's blood is also significant and highly symbolic for both Salome and Amy. Salome wakes up to a bed soaked in John's blood; Amy drenches the bed she shares with Dessi with the latter's blood as she stabs him in the neck. This symbolically inverts the association of female bodies with their own menstrual blood. As Linda Mizejewski (2005) puts it, postfeminist female detectives—and for our purposes, their mirror-equivalent female killers—as outsiders, are '[bodies] out of place, at odds with a biologically bound social order.'⁸⁵ Mizejewski suggests that the association of menstruation with waking in blood (even that of a man) is a reminder of the female sexuality which undermines her authority and the agency with which she is enforcing it, exposing her displaced body to a misogynist backlash.

However, the blood is also a symbol of fertility, and Amy utilises hers both as a form of self-protection and continued subjugation of Nick. The symbolism of the bloodied bed foreshadows her taking control of the 'biologically bound social order' for her own ends. She remains ensconced in her postfeminist identities, but uses her body as a form of resistance within it.

For Salome, her bed, soaked in blood, is a place defined by her femininity. She takes 'the beater or biter, / who'd come like a lamb to the slaughter / to Salome's bed'⁸⁶, a place in which she neutralises patriarchal subjects, merging them with the feminised space. The bed, as a symbol of the fertile or menstruating womb, is, according to Bracha Ettinger, a place of 'pre-life and non-life,'⁸⁷ and in the act of killing them, Salome ensures that this is their fate. By filling the bed with blood and forming menstrual visual associations, she is abjecting the space and othering herself. By creating a womb-image—which undermines her phallogentric symbolic agency—she is akin to a mother who kills her children in order to:

...disbirth, to de-mother and unmother Mother [...] This is a trace of the cry of the *enigma of the primal scene*, the quest concerning not only what was the sexual desire between the parental figures but also what is love.⁸⁸

Ettinger is here outlining the use of womb imagery to open up a critical enquiry into subjectivity of a mother as Other and re-associating the Other with sexual desire.

Through the murder of John, Salome begins the deconstruction of her otherness, both as an objectified woman and as an agent of evil.

Duffy and Flynn's representations of women opposing patriarch-defined identities are faced with the inevitable reversion to the *femme fatale*—independent of convention, but made to suffer for it. However, both have struck upon a form of compromise in its

wake. Amy uses her womb to resist her husband's backlash for her actions, while Salome's bed acts as a womb out of her societal space in which she can explore her subjective relation to the world. Ettinger outlines a context in which:

...[w]omen suffered and still suffer from interpretations concerning penis lack and penis envy and the foreclosure of the maternal (archaic motherhood) in the process of subjectivization in our culture.⁸⁹

In their use of the womb as a site of action (in Amy's case the final site of action, using pregnancy as her last line of defence against Nick and her pursuers), these women are accessing an element of femininity in the 'foreclosure of the maternal', or what Ettinger describes as the 'expanse of the psychic *foreclosure of the mother*'⁹⁰ (Ettinger's italics). This "expanse" is a concept of identity which is not recognised within a phallogentric system of symbols in the same way Dorian Gray cannot be identified as a homosexual without emerging as "unnatural" through use of the only available set of symbols. Such reformulations in patriarchal contexts produce monsters of the paranoid gothic such as Dorian, or even more lasting ones such as the *femme fatale*. However, both Amy and Salome use their foreclosed subjectivities as lairs into which they lure the male and subdue him. They use this space as a form of continued opposition to their cultural reality rather than as the foundation of a new approach to their encounters with it. This suggests that they are accessing both a last line of defence and a place to begin a process of subject-to-subject relations should hostilities with the symbolic environment cease.

V.5.2. Pervading Phallicism

However, having found these foreclosed spaces outside their male-dominated cultures, the use to which they put these spaces are fraught with symbolic trappings

with which they must negotiate the real world. Amy impregnates herself with Nick's sperm without his consent. This is an act of subjugation not just of Nick, but herself. In preventing Nick generating her punishment by revealing her crimes, Amy casts herself back into the phallocentric culture from which she attempted to escape. Salome's use of a foreclosed space in which to enact her opposition is also an act of its sully with a phallocentric idea, which works in two ways. Firstly, she invites us as readers into her private space and confronts us with a representation of herself:

In the mirror, I saw my eyes glitter
I flung back the sticky red sheets,
And there, like I said – and ain't life a bitch –
Was his head on a platter.⁹¹

The glitter of her eyes is an echo of Toudouze's *fin de siècle* representation of the scene, *Salome Triumphant* (1886, see appendix B). Unlike Moreau's paintings, Toudouze's Salome is framed within a smaller space, her eyes meeting the viewer's, her cheeks almost cracking a juvenile and mischievous smile, elements of the *laissez faire* of Duffy's representation. Taking us into the scene invites the reader to witness her triumph in her work. Her beheading of John is an act of opposition to and defiance of those who objectify her. However, it is also an act of provocation of the male gaze in the same way Toudouze invites the viewer to consume an infantilised and sexualised Salome in the knowledge her transgressions will be punished. As it is made apparent by Duffy that beheadings are part and parcel of her routine one-night-stands, however, the notion that she is unassailable is suggested to the reader. Duffy is thus protecting the foreclosed space by weaponising it with phallocentric symbolism. This is both reliant upon, and the cause of, the second way Salome contradicts the matrixial nature of her maternal enclosure: the association of beheading with castration.

In her suggestion that her victim's name is John, Salome summons her own myth into the narrative. John's beheading allows her to briefly engage in the inversion of the Medusa myth in its Freudian sense, which essentially demonstrates 'an avoidance or denial of the female power, and a male liberation fantasy in her decapitation,'⁹² according to Jessica Elbert Mayock. Through Salome's feminising of John by way of his objectification, he becomes the fantasy of the Medusan head upon his beheading, stripped even of his non-masculine subjectivity. The beheading is an act which strikes back against both her postfeminist cultural context, in which she is still essentially objectified, as well as the concept of the "Medusa Complex". This, according to Mayock in an article in which she explores the dangers of Freudian and Lacanian phallocentrism, is a system of male fantasies designed to inhibit female agency to the extent that masculinity becomes the only contributing factor in its own perpetuation. This is 'the desire to appropriate the female generative power.'⁹³ Medusa, in Greek myth, is a female agent, punished for challenging Athena. Athena is seen by a patriarchal Zeus as the result of a motherless birth because she springs from his forehead (a result of his eating her mother, Metis).⁹⁴ Athena, in her punishment of Medusa, giving her snakes for hair, is acting on behalf of a patriarchal system. In a further oppression of Medusa as a powerful avenging female agent, Athena guides Perseus in her beheading. Therefore, she acts upon this desire to appropriate female power:

...through the theory of castration, which the decapitation of Medusa symbolizes [...] The Medusa Complex is comprised of the two intertwined male fantasies of female castration and male parthenogenesis⁹⁵

Thus, the theory of castration 'is an attempt to conceal the powerful maternal body

and assert male superiority and dominance'⁹⁶ by inflicting phallic symbolism upon it and its subsequent castration: male symbolism begetting male dominance. By beheading John, Salome inverts the Medusa complex, striking back against the patriarchy by appropriating its symbolic apparatus.

In Duffy's telling, Salome's approach, though extreme and hedonistic, is cold and efficient. However, in Wilde's play, Salome is driven by her desire and love for Jokanaan, saying, 'Oh how I loved thee! I love thee yet,'⁹⁷ upon his execution. Scorned by his rejection, she takes no pleasure in her actions, save the satisfaction of having kissed his mouth, which of itself is an ambivalent experience:

There was a bitter taste on thy lips. Was it the taste of blood...? But perchance it was the taste of love... They say that love hath a bitter taste...⁹⁸

No such love exists for Duffy's Salome, for whom John (if that is his name) is one of a long line of one-night-stands, a 'blighter', a 'lamb to the slaughter'⁹⁹, an insignificance whom she has stripped of agency. Duffy's Salome adapts both the maternal space, the phallogentric symbolism of the Medusa complex and her own myth in order to enact a subjugation of her cultural context. In her use of the foreclosed feminine space of her bed she subdues and feminises John. By beheading him she is symbolically castrating him, a Medusan head. Her triumph is aligned with Athena in this case, as she continues to appropriate and achieve subjectivity in the extreme, a phallically charged masculinity, making victims and not accounting for the fact that from Medusa's head also springs forth new life, not recognising the creative possibilities of a foreclosed space with which she destroys.

Both Salome and Amy are thus finding new expressions for the *femme fatale*. In

accessing the maternal aspects of their femininity, they broach the possibility of a new way to express feminine agency. The *femme fatale* is nominally a killing subject, a monster, a Medusa who must be punished in order to restore the driving force of patriarchy and its fantasy of female castration and self-perpetuation. Matrixial theory offers characters such as Amy and Duffy's Salome —modern *femmes fatales*—a method of living and expressing an identity beyond phallic symbolism. Neither can repurpose themselves to escape their postfeminist identities, but their efforts have led to their survival and the chance to begin the destruction of the misogyny inherent in the concept of the *femme fatale*.

¹ Karen L. Edwards, "The Mother of All *Femmes Fatales*: Eve as Temptress in Genesis 3", from *The Femme Fatale: Images, Histories, Contexts*, Catherine Hanson & Helen O'Rawe (Basingstoke: Palgrave & Macmillan, 2010), p. 43.

² *The Penguin Book of Classical Myths*.

³ *Ibid*, p. 466.

⁴ Helen Hanson and Catherine O'Rawe, *The Femme Fatale: Images, Histories, Contexts* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 2.

⁵ Marina Carr, who adapted Euripides's *Medea* to her play *By the Bog of Cats* (1998), says of the Athenian tragedians: 'They were the first ones that gave half the voice to women – I mean Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides. These women are so articulate, they are so eloquent, they are transgressors, they take power, because power is not allowed them, and they will it, they can argue like men.' From: Melania Terrazas, "'Writing is essentially and very, very innocent thing': In Conversation with Marina Carr", *Estudios Irlandeses*, No. 14 (March 2019-Feb. 2020), pp. 190-197, p. 193.

⁶ Miriam Robbins Dexter, "The Ferocious and the Erotic 'Beautiful' Medusa and the Neolithic Bird and Snake", *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, 26, No. 1 (Spring 2010). DOI: 10.2979/fsr.2010.26.1.25

⁷ Blandford, S., Grant, B. K. and Hillier, J. (eds), *The Film Studies Dictionary*, (London: Arnold, 2001), p. 95-96.

⁸ Mary Wood, "The Femme Fatale of Italian Noir", from *The Femme Fatale: Images, Histories, Contexts*, Catherine Hanson & Helen O'Rawe (Basingstoke: Palgrave & Macmillan, 2010), p. 160.

⁹ Robbins Dexter (2010).

¹⁰ Gillian M.E. Alban, "Medusa as Female Eye or Icon in Atwood, Murdoch, Carter, and Plath", *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature*, 46, No. 4 (December 2013), p. 180.

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- ¹¹ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 4.770, "The Story of Medusa's Head", trans. by Sir Samuel Garth, John Dryden, et al., The Internet Classics Archive, <http://classics.mit.edu/Ovid/metam.4.fourth.html>, retrieved: 17/9/2018.
- ¹² Carol Ann Duffy, "Medusa", *The World's Wife* (London: Picador, 1999), p. 40.
- ¹³ *The Matrixial Borderspace*, p. 46.
- ¹⁴ *The World's Wife*, p. 40.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 41.
- ¹⁶ Hélène Cixous, Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen trans., "The Laugh of Medusa", *Signs*, 1, No. 4 (Summer, 1976), pp. 875-893.
- ¹⁷ Barry Wood, "Carol Ann Duffy: The World's Wife" interview, 2005, <http://www.sheerpoetry.co.uk/advanced/interviews/carol-ann-duffy-the-world-s-wife>, retrieved: 26 April, 2017.
- ¹⁸ Hélène Cixous (1976), p. 885.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 880.
- ²⁰ *The Matrixial Borderspace*, p. 46.
- ²¹ *Ibid*, p. 47.
- ²² Cixous (1976), p. 885.
- ²³ Sigmund Freud, "Medusa's Head" (1922), from *The Medusa Reader*, Marjorie Garber & Nancy J. Vickers Eds. (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 85.
- ²⁴ Rebecca Stott, *The Fabrication of the Late-Victorian Femme Fatale: The Kiss of Death*, (Basingstoke, Hampshire: McMillan, 1992), p. 30.
- ²⁵ Terms for the movements are moveable themselves, but the movement known as the decadence took place in France, while aestheticism is chiefly used to describe its corresponding movement in Britain.
- ²⁶ Joris-Karl Huysmans, Robert Baldick trans., *Against Nature* (London: Penguin, 1884), p. 44.
- ²⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salome_Dancing_before_Herod#/media/File:Salome_Dancing_before_Herod_by_Gustave_Moreau.jpg, retrieved: 1/6/2019;
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/L%27Apparition#/media/File:Gustave_Moreau_-_The_Apparition_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg, retrieved: 1/6/2019.
- ²⁸ Bible (Mark 6:21–28).
- ²⁹ Oscar Wilde, *Salome*, from *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, J.B. Foreman Ed. (London: Collins, 1986), p. 553.
- ³⁰ *Ibid*, p. 553.
- ³¹ *Ibid*, p. 552.
- ³² *Ibid*, p. 557.
- ³³ See: Joseph Donohoe, "Distance, Desire and Death in Salome", in *The Cambridge Companion to Oscar Wilde*, ed. by Peter Raby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 118-142.

³⁴ Wilde, *Salome*, p. 558.

³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 575.

³⁶ *Ibid*, p. 574.

³⁷ *Ibid*, p. 574.

³⁸ *Ibid*, p. 559.

³⁹ Amanda Fernbach, "Wilde's Salome and the Ambiguous Fetish", *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 29, No. 1 (2001), pp. 159-218.

⁴⁰ A woman taking on 'an object outside of her body as a substitute for the phallus' (Fernbach, 2001, p. 214) to achieve a semblance of masculine subjectivity. Such characters can constitute a domineering "phallic mother" whom Butler describes as 'devouring and destructive, the negative fate of the phallus when attached to the feminine position' (*Bodies that Matter*, p. 102). The postfeminist action hero is a more recent example (see section II.3.5).

⁴¹ Fernbach (2001), p. 213.

⁴² Sigmund Freud, "Fetishism", from *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. XXI, pp. 147 – 157, p. 156.

⁴³ *Ibid*, p. 154.

⁴⁴ Claire Pajaczkowska, "Perversion and French Avant Garde Art", in *Perversion: Psychoanalytic Perspectives/Perspectives on Psychoanalysis* by Lisa Downing & Dany Nobus Eds. (London: Karnac Books, 2006), p. 180.

⁴⁵ Laura Mulvey, *Fetishism and Curiosity*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), p. 14.

⁴⁶ Fernbach (2001), p. 214.

⁴⁷ Ken Russell dir., *Salome's Last Dance* (United Kingdom: Vestron Pictures, 1988).

⁴⁸ See Kevin Brianton, *A Hollywood Divided: The 1950 Screen Directors Guild Meeting and the Impact of the Blacklist* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2016).

⁴⁹ Flavius Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, Book XVIII, Chapter 5, 4, Project Gutenberg <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/2848/2848-h/2848-h.htm#link182HCH0005>, retrieved: 18/9/2018.

⁵⁰ Mary Simonson, "'The Call of Salome': American Adaptations and Re-Creations of the Female Body in the Early Twentieth Century", *Women & Music*, 11 (2007), p. 1.

⁵¹ Charles Bryant dir., *Salomé* (U.S.A.: Nazimova Productions, 1923).

⁵² Petra Dierkes-Thrun, *Salome's Modernity: Oscar Wilde and the Aesthetics of Transgression* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011), p. 155.

⁵³ *Ibid*, p. 157,

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p. 157.

⁵⁵ Elisabeth Bronfen, "Femme Fatale: Negotiations of Tragic Desire", *New Literary History*, 35.1, "Rethinking Tragedy" (Winter 2004), p. 106.

⁵⁶ *Against Nature*, p. 44.

⁵⁷ Mary Wood, *The Femme Fatale: Images, Histories, Contexts*, p. 160.

⁵⁸ Griselda Pollock, *Ibid*, p. 30.

⁵⁹ "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema".

⁶⁰ Griselda Pollock, *The Femme Fatale: Images, Histories, Contexts*, p. 31.

⁶¹ Alex Clark, "Gone Girl: what makes Gillian Flynn's psychological thriller so popular?", *The Guardian* (9/3/2013), <https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2013/mar/19/gone-girl-gillian-flynn-thriller>, retrieved: 5/5/2019.

⁶² Eliana Dockterman, "Is Gone Girl Feminist or Misogynist?", *Time*, 7/10/2014, <http://time.com/3472314/gone-girl-movie-book-feminist-misogynist/>, retrieved: 17/5/2017.

⁶³ Gillian Flynn, *Gone Girl* (Weidenfield & Nicolson, 2012), p. 250.

⁶⁴ David Fincher dir., *Gone Girl* (USA: 20th Century Fox, 2014).

⁶⁵ *Gone Girl*, p. 32.

⁶⁶ Lori Marso, "Perverse Protests: Simone de Beauvoir on Pleasure and Danger, Resistance, and Female Violence in Film", *Signs*, 41, No. 4 (2016), p. 882.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, p. 883.

⁶⁸ 'A housing estate built during an economic boom but unfinished or unoccupied during a recession.' Collins Dictionary, <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/ghost-estate>, retrieved: 17/5/2017.

⁶⁹ Emily Johansen, "The Neoliberal Gothic: *Gone Girl*, *Broken Harbor*, and the Terror of Everyday Life", *Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 57, No. 1, Spring 2016, p. 34.

⁷⁰ Stemming from the white male's privileged position within global patriarchal discourses, social symptoms, such as "mansplaining" and "manspreading" have entered popular critical discourse. In *Everyday Feminism's* 160+ list of "Examples of Male Privilege in All Areas of Life", 34 on the list declares that, as a man in a relationship with someone of another gender, 'you're not expected to do more emotional labor in the relationship' while other examples allow men to 'forego regular grooming' and ignore body-hair growth without being judged for not adhering to gender expectations (<https://everydayfeminism.com/2016/02/160-examples-of-male-privilege/>, retrieved: 8/9/2018).

⁷¹ *Gone Girl*, p. 263.

⁷² Marso, 2016, p. 889.

⁷³ *Ibid*, p. 892.

⁷⁴ *Gone Girl*, p. 251.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, p. 251.

⁷⁶ Angela McRobbie, "Post-Feminism and Popular Culture", *Feminist Media Studies*, 4, No. 3 (2004), p. 255.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, p. 258.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, p. 259.

⁷⁹ *Gone Girl*, p. 250.

⁸⁰ The "cool girl" monologue was the most discussed section of the original novel, and, upon the release of Fincher's adaptation, was subject to scrutiny in the film version for its difference from the novel's version. Fincher chooses not to emphasise the artificial nature of the persona in the way it has been

tailored for men, particularly clear in Flynn's line 'Men actually think this girl exists' (p. 250), whereas, in the film, the speech played over images of women without men. *Slate*, *Salon*, *Bustle*, *Time*, *Jewish Journal*, *Metro* and *BuzzFeed*, all published analyses of the polemic at the time of the film's release.

⁸¹ *The World's Wife*, p. 57.

⁸² Bailey, Lin, Christine Griffin and Avi Shankar. "'Not a Good Look': Impossible Dilemmas for Young Women Negotiating the Culture of Intoxication in the United Kingdom', *Substance Use & Misuse*, 50.6 (2015), p. 754.

⁸³ *The World's Wife*, p. 57.

⁸⁴ Wilde, *Salome*, p. 559.

⁸⁵ Linda Mizejewski, "Dressed to Kill: Postfeminist Noir", *Cinema Journal*, 44, No. 2 (2005); Screen Studies Collection, p. 125.

⁸⁶ *The World's Wife*, p. 57.

⁸⁷ Bracha Ettinger, "Demeter-Persephone Complex, Entangled Aerials of the Psyche, and Sylvia Plath", *English Studies in Canada*, 40.1 (2014), p. 139.

⁸⁸ *Ibid*, p. 139.

⁸⁹ *Ibid*, p. 124. See section II.1.2 For Ettinger's analysis of the foreclosure of the mother in the formation of Oedipal subjectivities.

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 124.

⁹¹ *The World's Wife*, p. 57.

⁹² Jessica Elbert Mayock, "The Medusa Complex: Matricide and the Fantasy of Castration", *philoSOPHIA*, 3, No. 2 (Summer 2013), p. 161.

⁹³ *Ibid*, p. 159.

⁹⁴ Marguerite Rigoglioso, *The Cult of Divine Birth in Ancient Greece* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009).

⁹⁵ Mayock (2013), p. 159.

⁹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 159.

⁹⁷ Wilde, *Salome*, p. 574.

⁹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 575.

⁹⁹ *The World's Wife*, p. 57.

Chapter VI

The Masculine Subject: The Perverted Fantasies of *Fight Club* and *Crash* on the Borderspaces of the Other

The nightmare marriage of sex and technology that I wrote about in *Crash* may not have taken place. Still, I would maintain that the thesis advanced by *Crash* may be just beginning, if not literally, then at least imaginatively: with video arcade games, a culture of violence in the cinema, the first hints of virtual reality systems, a culture of sensations for its own sake.

—J.G. Ballard, 1995¹

The living being is only a species of the dead, and a very rare species.

—Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 1882

VI.1.1. Masculine Convulsions within the Postfeminist Milieu

The advancement of women's, LGBTQ and racial rights—a cornerstone of Western liberal culture in the twentieth century—has been met with resistance through new forms of media in recent years.² As the emergence of far-right movements in the early twenty-first century is demonstrating, the status quo of traditional patriarchal social structures is not being surrendered without a fight. That fight, to give it its due, is dealing a swift counter-punch to neo-liberal economic and cultural progress. Donald Trump's rise to the American presidency is seen by many as both a result and a vindication of the counter-cultural clout wielded by the racist and misogynistic meme-creators of the 4Chan and Reddit fora. Such online spaces allow the generation of networks dedicated to schools of cultural interpretation which are impacting on how people receive knowledge online. According to Angela Nagle (2017), new online

discourses are dominated by “alt-right” and “alt-lite” networks, who promote libertarian, traditionalist patriarchal and racially determined ideals, as well as what she calls the “Tumblr left”, who engage in a constant discussion of popular culture and media, developing a rigorously self-policed discourse in intersectional feminism and identitarian politics.³ The nit-picking nature of the discourse has contributed, according to left wing commentators such as Nagle and Mark Fisher (2013), to the incoherence of the intersectional left. The rise to prominence of these identity politics has come to be perceived as ‘enforced by centres of power in government and the media.’⁴ The increased focus of left-liberal cultural critics on the oppression of the Other enacted by the figure of the “straight white male” as one of its roots has created a space for those on the right for a corresponding identity-based motivation, victimised by their vilification by the left. According to Phillip W. Gray (2018), this generated ‘an atmosphere for a response giving “whiteness” a content outside of amorphous “privilege” and oppression [of the Other]; in such a social space, the alt-right was ready to provide that content.’⁵ By entering the same discursive space, a new platform is provided for the alt-right on which they can confront mainstream progressive ideals with misogyny and racism.

Nagle notes an early iteration of the 4Chan forum’s “Rules of the Internet” which includes Rule 30’s assertion that ‘there are no girls on the internet.’⁶ This applies to what the posters consider ‘the real internet’, venues of discourse in which ‘women are discussed in a way which presumes their absence,’ where users’ ‘grievances [can] be aired to a sympathetic implicitly male audience.’⁷ The misogyny associated with these online groups entails flagrant abuse inflicted on women online, including body-

shaming, rape fantasies and death threats. Founded upon aesthetics of transgression, pornography and violence (see section II.1.4), the abuse constitutes a reaction to the perceived feminisation of mass culture.

In David Fincher's 1999 film *Fight Club*, the protagonist Jack's⁸ life as he sees it has been spent as an emasculated slave to the 'IKEA nesting instinct.'⁹ Deprived of a traditional father-figure in a time without the need for army conscription, he has fallen short of the traditional masculine ideal. Tyler Durden appears in Jack's life to counteract this lowly state. Durden's life is devoid of Jack's mass-produced comforts. Making a living from soap he produces from the rejected fat of women who have had liposuction, he fuses 'rebellion against consumerism with disdain for feminine vanity,'¹⁰ founding fight clubs and, later Project Mayhem. The online "alt right" and "alt lite" communities have incorporated Durden's subcultural ideas and aesthetics into their own rebellion against the threats to the total subjectivity offered by traditional models of masculinity, which imply the right to work and a wife to call their own.

These online groups do not exist in isolation. According to Nagle, they project Nietzschean ideals of the heroic artist-philosopher onto the perception of their crusade, standing alone against the feminised masses of mainstream culture. Since the Romantic movement of the early nineteenth century, cultural productions of this hero figure—be it Victor Frankenstein, Tyler Durden or Hannibal Lecter—have provided a moral template by which those reacting to emasculating circumstances may apply their own standards of acceptable behaviour. There is thus an element of Thomas De Quincey's murderer-as-artist that is still pervasive in popular discourse and—despite

the social progress of women, LGBTQ communities and people of colour—it seems not only to be as prominent, but in the midst of an assault on the feminist ideas which threaten it. The question here is whether this is its rebirth, or the convulsion of a monster in its final throes?

Given the violence, misogyny and murder which continues to result in response to fears of the threat of feminine power, it is worth identifying the different ways masculinity fits into the aestheticisation of violence. Firstly, how does failed masculinity make a monster of the murderer? Is this monster either feminised (Norman Bates) or made hyper-rational (Hannibal Lecter)? Is there a combination of both? And what of the masculine male murderer? Is he othered the way a feminine male or masculine female would be? Is misogyny inherent in every aestheticisation of murder, whether in the depiction of the killer, or in the representation of the murder itself? And most importantly within this chapter: where does masculinity figure in a reformulation and a resolution of misogynistic violence? Throughout the work of J.G. Ballard and Chuck Palahniuk, different masculinities are formulated to enact violence, murder and the enforcement of male subjectivities. Hollywood cinema of the 1980s and 90s, too, reacts to the societal changes imposed upon its archetypal masculine hero. This chapter seeks to analyse how a certain kind of misogyny, thriving in the new media of the twenty-first century, feeds off the violence and the aestheticisation of this violence within these texts and films.

It emerges in the texts that a kind of death drive is inherent to the masculine desire for control and subjectivity that is bound up in and perpetuated by the phallogocentric visual culture of technology and advertising. The death of Dr Robert Vaughan in *Crash* shows

us that the fulfilment of his transgressive impulse, bringing it to its logical conclusions, is the only way to break out of its phallogentric and pornographic cycles. He attains meaning in transgression by moving beyond the reproduction of the subjectivity and eroticism to which he is confined within acceptable culture. As shall be demonstrated, Bracha Ettinger's concept of the matrixial borderspace helps to contextualise Palahniuk's Jack and Ballard's Vaughan to a phallic system of signs as they 1) face their emasculation within it, 2) seek to break free from it and 3) live independently of it. The matrixial context offers a set of positive symbols and subjectivities to draw from, allowing a new analytical nuance to the exploration of misogynistic and non-misogynistic representations of masculinity.

VI.1.2. Representing Maleness: Body and Mind

The formation of gay identities at the end of the nineteenth century, represented by artists such as Aubrey Beardsley and Oscar Wilde, happened within an alarmingly diverse artistic community. This was facilitated not just by homosexuals writing on themes of homosexuality, but also by the female writers contributing to the literary milieu, empowered by the New Woman movement. Sally Ledger (2007) notes that 'aestheticism and Decadence were part of an avant-gardist cultural formation thoroughly peopled by women as literary and artistic subjects, not simply as objects of the male Decadent gaze.'¹¹ The spirit of decadence which carries forth from this period was captured at the time by texts such as *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890). This spirit is coloured, too, by femininity and the fears surrounding the rise of early feminism. A literary marketplace in which women writers wrote under male pseudonyms, heralded the perceived feminisation of male writing. In his story "The Death of the Lion"—a contribution to the first edition to *The Yellow Book* (1894)—Henry James observes 'one

gets lost among the genders.’¹² The story lampoons women writers writing under male pseudonyms. In the same volume, Arthur Waugh (2018) aligns the writing style of New Woman writers with decadence by accusing it of playing with ‘the subtler emotions of sensual pleasure’ and describing it as ‘literature for art’s sake.’¹³ Thus, through both its pioneers and those it alarmed, the emergence pre-1890s female writing contributed to decadence as we know it and as it is understood in one of its seminal British texts.

However, decadence did not only leave us in alarm over women’s threat to the subjectivity of the male artist, it also had a role in defining the Other in male identities.

As *The Picture of Dorian Gray* illustrates, late Victorian decadence is a period which has proven formative to male identities, particularly that of the feminised male. Wilde’s novel focuses on the role of the dandy in relations between men and is representative of the social significance of the figure in the period. The dandy emerged as a transgressive reaction to masculine fashions. Tracking the development of male dress, Angus McLaren (1997) notes that from the early nineteenth century, the male form became less and less emphasised. As female sexuality became more magnified, that of the male was hidden: ‘Tight breeches were replaced by the 1830s in England by looser fitting trousers.’¹⁴ The utilitarian change in men’s clothing was inspired by the pragmatic dress of the American and French revolutionaries. Tight breeches, stockings, corsets and cosmetics for men became a laughing stock amidst the widespread acceptance and encouragement of discreet male dress.

Throughout the mid- to late-1800s, dandyism affected a response both as a means of transgression and as an artistic mode. Wilde and Beardsley took up the pose, defining its role as a cultural deviation for the twentieth century. They were responding not just

to sartorial fashions, but to paradigms of masculinity and “manliness” which had been emerging in middle class domestic structures throughout the nineteenth century. One of the founding features of this identity is the quality of self-discipline, previously thought to be attainable to all and a key characteristic of an ideal domestic woman. It had been considered the role of the woman to embody self-discipline while her husband went about the business of accumulation. According to James Eli Adams (1995), ‘as both manhood and masculine labour [were] constructed in increasingly agonistic forms,’¹⁵ self-discipline became a distinguishing feature of the middle-class man within the discourses of political economy and professionalism. Their wives, on the other hand, were reduced to a kind of “passionless” state, de-sexualised and relieved of any economic participation. In an ideology in which Michael Kimmel observes, ‘real men held their emotions in check, the better to channel them into workplace competition,’¹⁶ they were masters of their own repression.

By adopting a ‘traditionally aristocratic “effeminacy” of demeanour’¹⁷ dandies from the upper middle classes—such as Wilde—could subvert the emergent masculine ideals. So strong was the contrast that Wilde brought a recognisable otherness into public consciousness during his trials: “the homosexual type”. Assigning this label—one of illegality—to a threat to prevailing masculine identities, according to Adams, serves to contain Wilde’s disturbing influence while keeping society pure and law-abiding. Most importantly, the stigmatisation of Wilde’s brand of dandy aestheticism helped to quell what had been a decade of ‘tremendous upheaval in sex and gender roles.’¹⁸ Thus the prevailing masculine identity of middle-class restraint and strength carried itself forth. However, in the century of war and female empowerment which

followed, women constantly successfully broke away from their passive confinement to the home, and masculinity—in the form of an ideal protector of its own patriarchal ideals—constantly fell into its own self-doubt.

In a 2003 survey of masculinity in young adult literature, Tami Bereska concludes that 'masculinity is bounded by three conditions: (a) heterosexuality, (b) embodiment¹⁹ and (c) no sissy stuff.'²⁰ The concept of embodiment is crucial to the notion that the right male body is central to the production of a masculine performance, which must include the other two criteria. This speaks to Simone de Beauvoir's understanding of the immanence of masculinity and its fragile state as an essentialist social construction, that if one deviates from too many of the masculine ideals, rejection from the state of manhood will result. However, this does not limit the enactment of masculine behaviours to a single combination; it offers the opportunity to demonstrate a certain amount of difference while maintaining a "manly" identity. In a collation of such studies as Bereska's, Robert J. Zeglin (2016) demonstrates the performativity and malleability of masculinity, as well as its exclusivity. His study, analysing male identification with masculinity in twentieth century cinema, underlines the prevalence of masculine criteria, such as 'violence [...] emotional control [and] the primacy of work;²¹ criteria which appear to have developed from the Victorian consolidation of masculinity and have been maintained in English-speaking cultures through the emergence of the romantic action hero of British and American cinema.

VI.1.3. Performing Masculinity in 80s/90s Action Cinema: The White Male Hero as Victim

Mainstream cinema of the twentieth century conventionally avoided showing the nude male, particularly genitalia, according to Peter Lehman (2007). Lehman states

that in order to take it seriously and develop a sense of awe for it, one must not see the 'literal truth'²² of the powerfully ideal male body. By the 1980s and 90s Hollywood cinema began to accentuate this type of body in its most popular action films, fetishising the hero's muscular physique and the guns with which they enact violence. In these films, the spectacle of manhood overtakes the need for plot and characterisation. Despite the focus on the objectification and sexualisation of women in film studies, it is clear that by the 1980s, filmmakers had also turned the gaze onto a masculine ideal, engaging similarly muscular enemies in mortal combat. This change challenged Laura Mulvey's assertions that 'the male figure cannot bear the burden of sexual objectification [... and that] man is reluctant to gaze at his exhibitionist like.'²³ The change highlighted the absence of a masculine object for the male gaze up to that point. The emergence of action heroes such as Bruce Willis, Sylvester Stallone, Arnold Schwarzenegger and Steven Seagal allowed for the enactment and display of a hypermasculine sexuality in which the reality of the male body is taboo.

Lehman notes that the sight of a male character's penis by a female character—in the perfect expression of "embodiment"—often works to advance the plot. In *Hard to Kill* (1990), Steven Seagal emerges from a coma as the attractive nurse Kelly Lebrock, upon sizing up his genitalia beneath the sheets, out of the audience's view, implores him to 'please wake up,'²⁴ clearly feeling what a great loss this is. He immediately responds, awoken and ready to begin the quest to avenge his family. Instead of directly confronting the physical reality of the masculine male form, the film invites the audience to participate in the activity of masculinity (violence, emotional control, lionisation of work and dominance) with the hero, taking part in the consolidation of

his subjectivity through phallic glorification. The audience cannot enact and embody the nurse's gaze and know what she can see. Thus alienated, we can at least participate and take pleasure in such ego-boosting and rejuvenating admiration. Such depictions, in fact, serve to corroborate Mulvey's thoughts on the inability of filmmakers to place the burden of sexual objectification upon the masculine figure. Instead, we can appreciate a hyper-masculinity which the hero embodies on our behalf.

80s/90s action cinema offers up the hypermasculine male body as a spectacle in and of itself, a signifier on which the anxiety of the signified is played out. Yvonne Tasker (1993) suggests that the body of the hero is out of place. The meaning of a body which is sculpted for and by its purpose within the world of work is suddenly commodified for a gender-diverse marketplace in which the function of brute force is reduced. Cinema repurposes these bodies by giving them arenas in which to perform their masculinity. In their struggles to stop evil organisations, Stallone's Rambo (Rambo trilogy, 1982, 85, 88) Willis's John McClane (*Die Hard*, 1988) and Schwarzenegger's Douglas Quaid (*Total Recall*, 1990) act independently of state authorities who treat them as pawns in their own games. A police detective, McClane finds himself out of his New York jurisdiction, caught up in the heist of an LA-based Japanese corporation for which his wife works as a CEO and which has been taken over by effete and lethal German terrorists. His estrangement from his wife centres on her choice to have a career. The only emotional connection which sustains him through the ordeal is that of a fellow working policeman with whom he has radio contact from within the hijacked building.

As their suited superiors in the police persist in their failure to control the situation, McClane and his radio friend Al are the only characters certain that McClane's capacity for violence and suffering is the only trustworthy agent acting against the foreign threat. They find themselves in a position in which the body, 'though it may be damaged, represents almost the last certain territory.'²⁵ Once considered the exemplar of the ordinary, the action hero has been robbed of the ability to reason with a world that has moved on (McClane associates himself with Roy Rogers—the epitome of the Hollywood cowboy of the 1940s/50s) and can only communicate through the medium of action. Assaulted from all sides by modernity, technology, foreignness and effeminacy, 'the sole narrative space that is safe'²⁶ is the body itself. Tasker suggests that the heroes of these films are working out 'a series of problematics to do with class and anxiety within a cultural context in which masculinity has been, to an extent, denaturalized.'²⁷ The anxieties that play into the motivations of these characters suggest that the objectification of a commodified male body is an urgent problem at the centre of a wide web of anxieties over the increasingly functionless masculine ideal. The solution is to play out this ideal as a kind of drag performance in which the anxiety is waylaid by comedic elements of self-parody and the character's own suffering. The hero is resigned to the one-dimensionality of his methods, but is under no illusions of the success, failure and absurdity of his masculinity within modern contexts.

McClane and his fellow action heroes represent a throwback by the turn of the 1990s, representative of old-fashioned masculinity, while the concept itself became fragmented. Tim Edwards (2006) identifies distinct new masculinities in the emergence

of the “New Man”—sensitive, stylish and progressive, he represents upward corporate mobility. While Western masculinity has continued to diversify into the twenty-first century, the ideal white male body in crisis has gained currency as a victimised underdog. Sally Robinson (2000) points to this masculine white male as a ‘seemingly disembodied liberal individual [who has become] the disenfranchised victim, pursued by those (feminists and multiculturalists) whose fantasized power makes ridiculous their own claims of victimization.’²⁸ Disembodiment here refers to the subject in his unchallenged hegemonic state. Embodiment takes place once the masculine subject is wounded and the body is activated to perform the appropriate response. While Robinson emphasises their continued material dominance in Western culture, white males have dislodged from their disembodied sense of “universality”. By joining ‘non-whiteness and femininity as social constructions,’ they have entered the “culture wars” in the guise of paleo- and neo-conservatives such as Pat Buchanan from the early 1990s onwards with the discursive strategies of the oppressed.

VI.1.4. Alt-Right Echoes of Masculinity

The culture wars provided an incubation space to racist, sexist and right-wing reactionaries in Europe and the US during the neoliberal-inspired economic boom of the late 90s and 00s until the global economic crash of 2008, when the apparent economic justification of neoliberal progressive values collapsed. A generation of educated yet unemployed young men suddenly had no means of achieving their aspirations of a traditional social space, from comfortable accommodation to a family. The rejection of the post-2008 political economy is evident through the emergence of online communities of alienated young men. These communities do not exist in

isolation, but are the target audience of a corporate class unwilling to shift from neoliberal policies as well as political conservatives and the cultural alt-right, for whom the only solution is 'the enlightened individual—protective of his culture and yearning to be free.'²⁹ This individual, according to Koulouris (2018) 'comes head to head with the dictates of liberal politics and liberal society: economic and cultural oppression [...] and the need to pay lip service to political correctness.'³⁰ Conservative corporate media, such as Rupert Murdoch's Fox News and *The Sun* provided the mainstream framing of progressive values as a threat throughout the neoliberal boom and after. This was mistakenly dismissed as a parodic and moronic spectacle by more centrist critical commentators.

Meanwhile, Reddit, 4Chan and the Anonymous movement provided frustrated young men with a space to express their anger in previously uninhibited ways, developing their transgressive culture in the process. The concurrent development of masculinist and anti-feminist subcultures 'typically concerned with the decline of Western masculinity,'³¹ contributed to the growing cultural moment, ultimately providing the aesthetic template to move the alt-right into the political and cultural mainstream. Its formation has led to a shift in the political outcomes of transgressive aesthetics, which have been appropriated for racist and misogynist ends. However, it is clear that the fading cultural echoes of idealised masculinity and the privileges of traditional manhood are still heard in these communities, where a sense of loss resonates. Significantly, Nagle notes that 'cultural touchstones [of the 4Chan and Reddit communities] included war-based video games and films like *Fight Club* and *The Matrix*.'³² The protagonists' responses to profound emasculation and the surrendering

of their identity to modernity in these works offer readers and audiences a discourse through which to share the anxieties of their generation.

VI.2.1. *Fight Club* and the Discourse of the Oppressed

Fight Club, David Fincher's 1999 film adaptation of Chuck Palahniuk's novel of the same name has—along with *The Matrix* (Watchowskis, 1999)—had a prominent influence over recent movements which reject feminist influence over Western culture. This is apparent from the first two rules of the original fifty 'Rules of the Internet' found on the 4chan forum known as *"/b/"*: 'You do not talk about /b/' and 'you do NOT talk about /b/,'³³ a tribute to the first two rules of fight club, both of which state 'You don't talk about fight club.'³⁴ The film is also the source of the term "snowflake", a derogatory term for those who are perceived as having failed to live up to masculine ideals and reject traditional gender roles. It is taken from a speech Tyler Durden gives to club members who have abandoned their jobs, homes and the society which seeks to crush their manly spirits: 'You are not a beautiful or unique snowflake.'³⁵ Fincher here captures *Fight Club*'s ripeness for a number of men's rights movements to adopt Durden's rallying cry in its rejection of both a feminised society and consumerist culture.

The term "snowflake" in Fincher's *Fight Club* implies an adherence to the consumer culture of the neoliberal individual. This culture, while denouncing the problematic consequences of classical male gender roles, still entitles the gender conformity of hyper-masculine and feminine heterosexuality. The hyper-masculine and postfeminist heroes of contemporary mainstream cinema³⁶ suggest that the privileging of nineteenth century gender roles persists in a form which maximises its appeal and

value in spite of its problematic status. In his analysis of the ideals to which the men of *Fight Club* must live up, Terry Lee (2002) suggests that...

...the masculinity that men enact has been developed and packaged by our culture, which insists that men *perform* it [...and] that certain behaviour is naturally masculine or not, and therefore abhorrent. They do their best to measure up.³⁷

In light of the closing gender gap in employment, the decline of the threat of major wars since the fall of the Soviet Union and with the rise of automation in traditionally male workplaces, the deployment of masculinity as a means of productivity is diminishing.³⁸ In the context of reduced access to economic success by means of male privilege alone, gendered ideals are perceived as embodying the apparatus of repression to which young men are subject. Within the online “manosphere” the figure of the “Chad” embodies the young, muscular and attractive ideal to which incels (the involuntarily celibate) and self-described beta males are genetically inferior. According to Nagle (2016), Chad represents a physically and sexually dominant figure with which the beta-world cannot compete. Chad, along with his female equivalent Stacy, represents mainstream “normie” culture—an economy in which they thrive and in which the genetically and economically inferior are made to struggle.³⁹ Along with the discourse of the oppressed male, the narrative space provided by *Fight Club* offers its characters a space in which they may performatively “measure up”.

VI.2.2. Jack and Tyler: One Person, Two Forms of Masculinity

Palahniuk’s novel tells the story of Jack the narrator’s founding of a club in which men can gather to brawl with each other and watch each other fight. This takes place in response to his sense of disillusionment and emasculation resulting from his consumerist lifestyle. He feels he has become—as the narrator of Fincher’s adaptation

describes— ‘a slave to the IKEA nesting instinct.’⁴⁰ Jack uses this term to express his failure to meet the expectations of gender society has placed upon him. His IKEA-idealised domesticity is the one conduit through which he can express his masculine gender role. His carefully furnished apartment is a domain over which he can assert control and maintain stability. The illusion of power offers an intoxicating immediate gratification to Jack’s generation: ‘the people I know who used to sit in the bathroom with pornography, now they sit in the bathroom with their IKEA furniture catalogue.’⁴¹ Indulging his nesting instinct offers Jack, according to Terry Lee (2002), a substitute for potentially destabilising or feminising human needs, such as ‘sexual desire and [...] emotional connections to human beings.’⁴² By contributing successfully to the consumer-led economy, through his commitment to work (as a claimant liability inspector for an insurance company to reduce the pay-outs they make) and meticulously furnishing his trendy apartment, Jack participates in a version of New Man masculinity which satisfies some of the roles of a wider cultural measure of masculinity, but not all. Henry Giroux (2000) defines Jack’s as a ‘domesticated masculinity – passive alienated and without ambition.’⁴³ For Jack, taking part in other versions of manhood and agency through visual media (sports on television, for example) has the effect of societal alienation and imprisonment.

The extent of Jack’s gender role strain⁴⁴ becomes apparent when, to alleviate his insomnia, he begins attending support groups for diseases he does not have. Support groups such as Remaining Men Together (for the survivors of testicular cancer) offer Jack a space in which to release his emotional energy by crying, to ‘relax and give up’⁴⁵ the stress of his working life. Crying in support groups props up his lifestyle until a

woman named Marla begins attending on false pretences for the same reasons, disrupting his fantasy and causing his emotional release to be blocked. His response to this is to blow his apartment up, begin his imagined relationship with Tyler Durden and find a new way to perform his masculinity and channel his emotional needs.

Upon realising his apartment has been blown up (by himself, as it turns out), Jack reaches out to his new friend Tyler for a place to stay. Tyler offers a complete alternative to Jack's lifestyle. He lives in a derelict house in a forgotten part of town and survives by selling soap made from the rendered fat left over from liposuction procedures and dumped with medical waste. Tyler's improvised manufacture represents, according to Giroux, the act of a subject who rejects the 'seductions of consumerism, while fetishising forms of production.'⁴⁶ He is Jack's antithesis, fearful of the threat femininity poses to his conception of what is truly valuable. In their first meeting in Fincher's version, he outlines what, to him, is worse than Jack losing all his possessions in the explosion: 'a woman could cut off your penis while you're sleeping and toss it out of a moving car.'⁴⁷ Lynn M. Ta (2006) points out the significance of the phallus to Tyler's sense of subjective masculinity, noting his splicing of film shots of penises into family films in his night job as a cinema projectionist, subliminally reasserting his patriarchal authority over the family unit. In choosing to follow Tyler, Jack has recognised the castration he must endure by taking part in the fragmented masculinity of the mainstream.

VI.2.3. Project Mayhem: Downsizing Phallocentrism

In their first encounter after the explosion, Tyler asks Jack for a favour: 'I want you to hit me as hard as you can.'⁴⁸ Thus begins a new form of social support for Jack. Rather

than the former approach to a stylised masculinity, with its constant need for emotional bailout, Jack embraces pain and physical contact with other men. He opts for a more literal version of Remaining Men Together. As the fight club grows and recruits new members from the professional and working classes, Tyler recognises 'a generation of men raised by women.'⁴⁹ Though Jack is lamenting the absence of a strong father-figure in his or Tyler's lives, he is projecting his dissatisfaction with this on a societal level onto his fellow young professionals. The lack of strong men, the rise of female power and the influence of feminism on society suggest the sanitised ideals of masculinity expected of him are due to feminist demands. The rise of corporate power since the wars in Europe and East Asia mean these paradigms are seemingly irrevocable, and it is up to the individual, in his insignificance and his difference, to face it—not from within the paradigm, but from without:

Maybe self-improvement isn't the answer.
Tyler never knew his father.
Maybe self-destruction is the answer.⁵⁰

Estrangement from a father-figure suggests a generational break from traditional masculinity has occurred and its social role has been forgotten. It is also clear to Jack that the feminisation and stylisation of his identity is a consolidation of this loss and that masculinity as an essential component of his identity is being erased. He finds freedom from this oppression in the destruction of this aspect of his own body as a commodity while re-appropriating it as a means of production. He asserts productive capabilities by producing the soap, manufacturing explosives and liberating young men from their oppression. In his creation of the new he is re-appropriating raw materials that come from the everyday world: discarded fat, lye and young men.

The therapeutic effect of the fight offers the participants a chance to repeatedly perform Tyler's version of ideal masculinity, while beating out of each other the appearances that were once regulated by and fitted seamlessly into the modern environment. He is becoming, in Bracha Ettinger's analysis, 'the psychoanalytic basis for understanding the genius-male-hero complex: born from no womb, the Artist-Genius is in fact the idea of a god transferred to man, now self-creating and holding the power of creation.'⁵¹ The repetitious nature of the fighting is indicative of the recurring nature of the need to access the role of "Artist-Genius" (see section II.1.2) and to encounter the Other. Jack demonstrates this best one night at fight club. Having suffered a relapse of insomnia, he tags 'a young boy with an angel's face'⁵² to fight. It is the young man's first night, so, according to the rules of fight club, he cannot decline the offer. Insomnia, for Jack, is the symptom of a compromised identity. Fighting offers the most complete masculine performance, combined with an emotional release, resulting in the *subjectivising* effects which come from a fortified sense of phallogentric heroic male identity: 'the insomnia was on again, and I was in a mood to destroy something beautiful.'⁵³ He is entering the process which typifies the most fundamental effect of fight club upon its members: fortifying his own sense of agency through the destruction of the Other.

Feeling himself to be amongst 'the crap and the slaves of history,' Jack wants to destroy 'everything beautiful [he'll] never have.'⁵⁴ In "Angel Face" he is presented with a young man fresh from the everyday world, an object of the beauty it prizes. To Jack, the boy enters fight club as an object (*objet petit a*) of the mainstream, the victim of its castrating effect on men, a representative of its threat and a projection of the strain

upon his own identity. To Ettinger,

...erecting [...] the *objet a* through castration entails a particular way of constructing a single passage to the Symbolic, whereby a subject emerges in place of the lacking feminine and/or maternal object.⁵⁵

Jack thus intends to reannoint himself as a subject within the phallic symbolic order by fixing upon Angel Face as an object and destroying him. In doing so he is committing the Freudian and Lacanian foreclosure of 'maternal gestation, begetting, birth-giving, and love in the service of father-son relations,'⁵⁶ invoking Jessica Elbert Mayock's (2013) exploration of the Medusa Complex (see section V.5.2) as the intertwined male fantasies of female castration and male parthenogenesis: male symbolism begetting male dominance. Doing so builds his own 'Genius-Hero myth on the sacrifice of the eliminated and evaporated archaic Woman-m/Other.'⁵⁷ The sacrifice of the Other is necessary for 'heroic male sexuality to become productive'⁵⁸ within the phallic paradigm, and when Jack beats and disfigures Angel Face, he inducts him into both fight club and a clearer phallocentric symbolic order; in this way he is begetting sons.

It subsequently becomes clear to Tyler that widening their sphere of influence through Project Mayhem is the next logical step. Project Mayhem is a secret global organisation with which Tyler aims to bring down the forces of capitalism through acts of vandalism and mass destruction. The goal, according to Jack, is 'to teach each man in the project that he [has] the power to control history.'⁵⁹ The plan is to break the civilisation they have turned their backs on down and live amongst the ruins in a kind of post-symbolic order in which the fakery of the corporate aesthetic is long gone, materials have value in and of themselves and are made by those who use them. Tyler is downsizing an idealised past as opposed to creating something new beyond the

phallogentric order he is insisting upon. He is attempting to locate the subject as a fundamental source of discourse, love and repression, something Ettinger associates with Freud's idea of the father as the first figure of identificatory love and Lacan's S1—the master signifier.

VI.2.4. Transgression as Misogyny

Jack's initial decision to engage with Angel Face is—before objectification—a recognition of his beauty and his otherness. The very act of making these disappear is, according to Ettinger, to be 'absorbed in [...] metramorphosis.'⁶⁰ This means that the process of eliminating the Other is in itself part of the matrixial encounter. The Other, to Ettinger, has one foot in the phallic paradigm through the passageway that is opened up by the encounter. Angel Face as Other is linked to Jack's symbolic through Jack's engagement with him—he is the vision of Eurydice. Jack's beating of Angel Face, as transgression, is the weaving of a web of connections with the borderspace. Jack believes this is a kind of beauty he will never have—an intangible one rather than the hollow materialist beauty fight club typically rejects. By entering into the performance of the uninhibited subject in the fight, Jack destroys Angel Face as a signifier of beauty on his symbolic terms. However, the intangible traces of otherness he recognises exist within the encounter itself and the transgression of the beating as opposed to any tangible form of relation to the Other. The gap that will persist between him and the beauty of the Other is wide to the point that it is fetishised, consolidating his own sense of control in relation to it.

If we take the violence of *Fight Club* as representative of a virtual enactment of the struggle 'to destroy harmful gender-role paradigms to make room for healthier

masculinities'⁶¹, as Lee suggests, then it is not surprising that with hindsight we see that it has been primarily used as the cultural source of antisocial misogyny. Tyler's transgression in *Fight Club* is a well-organised means of reducing the power of neoliberal corporations, which are so heavily invested in the stylisation of consumer culture. However, it is also a somewhat nihilistic thought experiment in the face of human progress and the automation of labour. It disregards the fact that women retain their economic rights and many men retain the right to be "unmasculine". Tyler and Jack's lack of interest in female characters suggests they do not appreciate many of the underlying causes of their masculine crisis. The symbolic violence enacted upon themselves and others within the book is being demonstrated by those who take the lessons of *Fight Club* as a guide to social engagement as transgression for its own sake, in an attempt to restore the sovereign subject by reuniting it with the masculine gender role. Doing so is at the cost and sacrifice of the feminine Other. *Fight Club* and its film adaptation adopt the transgressive elements of anti-capitalist counterculture, and these motifs have, in their turn, been taken on by anti-feminists in the same spirit of counterculture. Angela Nagle (2017) suggests that this is a clear indicator that "edginess", as a tool to bring about cultural change, has run its course and that 'it may be time to lay the very recent and very modern aesthetic values of counterculture and the entire paradigm to rest and create something new.'⁶² The flaw of transgression which the discourse of the online "manosphere" reveals is its malleability and propensity for reviving long-standing hegemonies.

Fight Club's rhetorical tone is adopted by the Men Going Their Own Way⁶³ movement and the manosphere, who attack the women and the IKEA-nesting "cucks" who

encroach on their discursive space with a counterforce of transgression, pornography and depictions of violence. Their misogynist focus indicates that these movements do not incorporate all of the traditional signifiers of masculinity, such as homophobia, physical strength and economic productivity. Instead, according to Debbie Ging, the 'culture is generally accepting of homosexuality, as it is of any sexual expressions that are perceived to be transgressive' and, despite this, 'these men are no less invested in achieving hegemony over women than their jock predecessors.'⁶⁴ The "beta" self-identification of these online groups tallies with Jack's own disenchantment with women in *Fight Club*. His and Tyler's subversion of contemporary feminism and the women in the book are an ideal device for crafting one's own anti-feminist mythology. This coalition of transgression forms a new hegemonic identity, a subjective sovereignty with a sense of domain over women as othered objects.

VI.3.1. *Crash* and the Abject

The problem belying the assertion of sovereignty is that it is in itself a process of stylisation. Employing transgression to achieve a hegemonic position produces a vapid aestheticised product. The close of *Fight Club* offers hope that with Tyler's death, Jack may go forth hand in hand with Marla to rebuild society. This rallying cry to destroy capitalist paradigms was, to those who took it to heart, more misogynistic than either *Fight Club* or its 1999 adaptation would suggest. With the destruction of corporate power at hand, the book and film claim to have completed the destruction of consumerist culture. What is left for Jack and Marla—victims of the previous economic and gender paradigms—is the opportunity to rebuild society and identity from nothing. The manosphere has already moved to advance towards such a scenario through regression. Romanticising Victorian gender roles, redefining libertinage⁶⁵ and

the misogynistic elimination of female agency remains high on the list of priorities in these primitive “red-pilled” societies. So far, this experiment has shown little promise other than to perpetuate the continued suppression of women’s rights around the world and to ignore and exacerbate the impending global ecological crisis; the need for control has become ever-more death-driven. J.G. Ballard conducts a similar narrative investigation in his 1973 novel *Crash*. Ballard describes the novel as an ‘extreme metaphor for an extreme situation, a kit of desperate measures only for use in an extreme crisis.’⁶⁶ The thesis put forth by the novel is a prophecy which explores how society recasts itself when it is allowed a new set of rules centred upon the marriage of sex and technology.

Crash focuses on the (fictional) James Ballard’s introduction to the erotic possibilities of the car-crash after he is badly injured in a crash. He joins a community for whom the car-crash is an erotic event. They stage crashes and copulate in the breakers’ yards with the enthusiasm of any keen amateur. They are led by the enigmatic Dr Robert Vaughan, a man obsessed with the eroticism of the car crash and intent on achieving his own erotic masterpiece in a crash which results in the death of the screen actress Elizabeth Taylor. Ballard and his cohorts are attracted to and awed by Vaughan’s sense of purpose, and they are nurtured by taking part in his artistic journey. *Crash* is a pornography which fuses the commercial aesthetics of the motor car with those of eroticism. Vaughan—the father-figure of the movement—towers over the narrative and provides a patriarch to those who take on its patriarchal system of signs. However, Vaughan’s position as the godhead of this system is partly ironic. To his followers, he is a masculine superman, the absurd leader of a kingdom for which there is no territory,

only a map.

Vaughan's control over the movement is symbolised by the way he distributes his semen across the technologies surrounding the car-crash—the inspirations for his orgasms. His own obsession with and worship of Vaughan's semen allows it to dominate Ballard's physical and mental landscapes. Semen takes on a divine significance in *Crash*. To Ballard, it is an underlying rationale to the beauty of the world: 'As I looked at the evening sky it seemed as if Vaughan's semen bathed the entire landscape.'⁶⁷ Furthermore, semen seems to be endowed with baptismal qualities. As Ballard and his wife Catherine visit the car in which Vaughan has been killed, as though blessing a pilgrim's shrine, he marks with his own semen 'the oily instrument panels and binnacles [...] the crushed controls and instrument dials, defining for the last time the contours of Vaughan's presence on the seats.'⁶⁸ Such veneration confirms Vaughan as an omnipotent presence in the stylistic structure of the new erotic formula to which Ballard adheres. He has made the car crash fetish the central focus of a self-sustaining subculture among Ballard's new set of friends. Furthermore, he has defined among them the perfect car-crash—typified by the ideal collision with Elizabeth Taylor he eventually attempts—as a reason for existing. His influence is summed up as Ballard and Catherine step back to observe their newly anointed semen-stained wreck. Ballard describes: 'these faint points of liquid glisten in the darkness, the first constellation in the new zodiac of our minds [...] Already I knew that I was designing the elements of my own car-crash.'⁶⁹ In the immediate aftermath of his death, Vaughan's legacy remains intact. In the copious distribution of his semen, he has left the physical and imaginary trace of himself in the characters' own personal

landscapes. It is not simply the memory of Vaughan his friends are left with, but that of his phallic desire. They are left to navigate a mental space which has been propped up by phallocentrism and the ubiquity of male semen.

VI.3.2. Blinded by Transgression: Looking beyond the Phallocentric Field

According to Terry Harpold (1997), along with excrement and menstrual blood, 'seminal fluid belongs among the privileged forms of the abject.'⁷⁰ The abject, which is associated with rejection, describes a 'debasing state [...] without pride or dignity.'⁷¹ The human sense of the abject is, according to Julia Kristeva, associated with the bodily functions and fluids considered taboo in social exchanges, which, in their discharge, fuel one's sense of being Other.⁷² Semen is not usually included when mentioning abject substances such as menstrual fluid and excrement. Neither does the image of semen dominate any aspect of culture, except for the pornographic film, in which "the money shot" is the conventional (literal) climax of the narrative. It is otherwise unshowable in any serious way in a mainstream feature film, with the exception of the sacred distance allowed by comedy.⁷³ The money shot constitutes the moment of ejaculation, usually upon the face, breast or other fetishised body part of the partner. The appearance of semen in the money shot is, according to Linda Williams, 'the quantifiable, material "truth"'⁷⁴ of male pleasure in the pornographic film. To achieve the money shot, the performers must reject their own tactile pleasure in favour of a visual one instead. However, Williams writes that the spectacle is not for the woman to see, given that she must often close her eyes to protect them, or the male ejaculates onto her buttocks or her back. The visual pleasure is thus primarily the man's, he being able to see the ejaculation in most instances, while the role of the woman in visual terms is, in this moment of truth, an abject one. The money shot is

just one moment in which semen symbolises phallic dominance in the face of feminine passivity. However, in its spent form, it quickly takes on its own abjection.

Harpold suggests that this is central to the abjection of seminal fluid, suggesting of the money shot: 'what is missing is the disorder of pleasure's aftermath, the sticky mess it leaves behind.'⁷⁵ Though he constructs a world dominated by masculine desire in *Crash*, J.G. Ballard (the author) undermines this by exposing the futility of masculine desire. Masculine dominance in the novel is underlined its explorations of new sex acts which involve repeatedly finding new vents in the female body for a male organ to penetrate. Such 'abstract vents' include 'troughs of reddened skin hollowed out in the forms of buckles and clasps.'⁷⁶ The marks run along Gabrielle's deformed legs—a 'depraved orifice' and a template of a new genital organ—remind Ballard (the character) of his own crash wounds. In his sexual encounter with Gabrielle, the way Vaughan has taught Ballard to make love and the fate of his semen indicates the crisis both men's masculinities face within their new sexual framework:

My first orgasm, within the deep wound on her thigh, jolted my semen along this channel, irrigating its corrugated ditch. Holding the semen in her hand, she wiped it against the silver controls of the clutch treadle.⁷⁷

The excess semen dribbles out, leaving its stain, what Harpold describes as 'a material sign of male [...] resignation to the essential deviance of desire and the impossibility of absolute, efficient satisfaction.'⁷⁸ Ballard's sex with Gabrielle is merely their shared ascription to an idea of desire. He makes little communication with her, but reverts to Vaughan's teaching, fantasising about the ideal car crash involving the famous and the beautiful. Their transgression is a move towards what Vaughan wants to lead them to, but aside from the fantasies he has shared with Ballard, he has no clear idea of what it

is. This can be aligned with Lacan's (1960) account of 'the violent illumination, the glow of beauty [which] coincides with the moment of transgression,' by which...

...a certain relationship to a beyond of the central field is established for us [which] is also that which prevents us from seeing its true nature [...] which dazzles us and separates us from its true function.⁷⁹

There is a similarity between the "central field" and Gayle Rubin's (1984) conception of 'the charmed circle vs. the outer limits' of normative sexual practices, by which car-crash sexuality is undoubtedly on the outer margins. Lisa Downing (2017)—citing Rubin—recognises autoerotic death by asphyxiation in this zone, and suggests that it fortifies 'the cultural fantasy of non-reproductive sex as socially dangerous, as spelling the decline of morality and the death of the natural order, that Rubin identifies...'⁸⁰

Ballard's experimentation moves him towards the outer limits and Vaughan's fate, which—in terms of subjectivity—is a failed project in which the motivating desire can never be fulfilled due to the unknowability of its object.

VI.3.3. Beyond Surfaces: Wounds as Access to the Borderspace

However, the distinctions between Ballard and Vaughan suggest Ballard—the reader's conduit into Vaughan's world—has not committed himself to his friend's ideals.

Vaughan's body is a site of excess spent fluid; his clothes stain with a combination of engine fluids, semen, sweat and blood as the narrative progresses. He is the object of Ballard's obsession; Ballard enters their homoerotic bond, but does so with uncertainty. He recognises an attraction to Vaughan in a stylistic sense, but is unwilling to surrender his subjectivity in order to yield to it. In his fantasies of sex with Vaughan, he is the active partner, doing the penetrating, and, indeed, when he finally does have sex with Vaughan, it is Ballard who is doing the penetrating. He is driven towards sex

with Vaughan through his relationship with Catherine, listing the elements which constitute the Vaughan of his imagination:

...the horn of his half-erect penis pressing against the lower rim through the damp crotch of his trousers; the minute nodes of dirt he picked from his sharp nose [...] the ulcer on his left index finger [...] his broken thumbnail scratching at the semen stains in the seat between us.⁸¹

The eroticised image of Vaughan Ballard conjures up for Catherine here is one which objectifies the points at which Vaughan intersects with abjection. Ballard himself retains the voyeur's subjectivity, not surrendering the heteronormative invulnerability which centres upon his marriage to Catherine. Although he performs oral sex on Vaughan, it is Ballard who is the active participant, obsessing over the former's scarred body: 'I moved my mouth across the scars on his lips, feeling with my tongue for those familiar elements of long-vanished dashboards and windshields.'⁸² The scar, according to Kristeva, can take the place 'of a revealed yet invisible abjection.'⁸³ Ballard continually returns to indicators of the abject in Vaughan, approximating them with femininity. To Ballard, he resembles a 'deranged drag queen' revealing her 'leaking scars'⁸⁴. Ballard's fetishisation of Vaughan's abjection reveals an understanding of the transgression he underwent to receive his scars, as well as a gendered disconnection from Vaughan's point of view.

Vaughan's attempt to fuse his sexuality with automobile aesthetics takes the guise of attempting the perfect murder, but everything about the way he styles his world leaves traces of abjection. His exploration of trauma resembles Lacan's account of the dazzling light on the margins of the "central field". This is the territory he probes, and beyond the light, in the Lacanian perspective, lies death. His rehearsals—and the accumulation of injuries they entail—for his final crash seem to open up to Ballard and

the others a connection to the true nature of his transgression. Vaughan's scars are his record and marks of the borders between surface and depth, what Mark Seltzer (1997) describes as the 'the switch point, or crash point, between inside and outside [where] the shock of contact between bodies and machines is also the traumatic reversal between private fantasy and the public sphere.'⁸⁵ Through his wounds, Vaughan's followers can recognise connections between the fantasy and reality of otherness. They are bodily indications of the true effect of what Ballard the author claims to be cautioning against in the introduction to the French edition of the book: 'that brutal, erotic and overlit realm that beckons more and more persuasively on the margins of the technological landscape.'⁸⁶ Ballard recognises the perpetuation of the myth of progress as normality in the vision of a technological utopia offered by visual culture. Claudia Springer (2001) links this to the author's preoccupation with the opposition between surface and depth within the novel. She notes 'the sterility of the omnipresent technology responsible for redefining the human psyche,' and suggests the novel 'demonstrates that the post-human logic of techno-embodiment leads inevitably to death.'⁸⁷ Springer recognises the anti-humanist vein which runs throughout the entire body of Ballard's work. Yet Vaughan, as well as submersing himself in visual culture, is trying to make sense of it in relation to his desires, using it to access a new perception of the transgressive. His post-humanism does not suffer illusions about the imminence of death, rather he desires the uncertain sensations at the edges of life. He tries to eroticise people by inflicting violence and death upon them and also surrenders himself to the state of abjection he idealises for his victims. In death, he reveals the impotence of the phallic systems of signs he has embraced, created and left behind.

VI.3.4. Following Vaughan and the Fear of Masculine Failure

At his friend's death, Ballard takes on the job of producing the perfect car-crash, saying 'already I knew I was designing the elements of my own car-crash.'⁸⁸ Having been introduced to Vaughan as a car-crash victim, and thus the object of desire through Vaughan's camera lens, Ballard has become the dominant participant in the relationship. This occurs partly by means of Vaughan's lack of interest in anything but the subject matter of his obsessions and partly through Ballard's refusal to enter into this obsession in the same way, approaching the phenomenon primarily as an observer. Ballard is not committed to the perversion in the same way; the risk it presents to his subjectivity is big. Downing (2017) outlines the potential cost when she describes the shame which surrounds the relatives of those who die of auto asphyxiation practices, of the normalising power held by society's discourses surrounding sex, that 'those who die in this way are deemed to have *failed* at sex, at successful sexual subjectivity, and, ultimately, at life.'⁸⁹ The chances of the act adding to societal perceptions of one's masculine identity are, according to Downing, slim.⁹⁰ Vaughan's position in relation to a central field of normativity is clear to Ballard, as is where his own attraction to Vaughan lies: 'not so much in the complex of familiar anatomical triggers [...] but in the stylisation of posture achieved between Vaughan and the car.'⁹¹ Vaughan's artistic project involves casting himself into his own tableau of destruction. This process of aestheticisation is flawed, as his botched attempt to murder Elizabeth Taylor demonstrates. However, Ballard does not recognise this as a failure, because he no longer recognises Vaughan as the artist. Vaughan is an object of Ballard's imagination.

For Vaughan, this de-subjectification has been an accidental consequence of his

aesthetic experimentation. He has become the victim of the phallic paradigm he is attempting to transcend. Vaughan pressures Ballard—a TV producer—to arrange a meeting with Elizabeth Taylor. He has concluded from his survey statistics that Taylor is central to the automotive sexual fantasies of those he has tested. However, Ballard dismisses the likelihood of his creating the ideal Taylor-centred sexual scenario and quickly resumes his gaze towards Vaughan within the aesthetic parameters set out by the latter:

I visualised [...] sections of radiator grilles and instrument panels coalescing around Vaughan and myself, embracing us as I pulled the belt from its buckle as I eased down his jeans, celebrating in the penetration of his rectum [...] a marriage of my penis with all the possibilities of a benevolent technology.⁹²

Ballard's ideal of car-crash sexuality centres around Vaughan rather than Elizabeth Taylor. The fantasy of their union is a sanitised one in which Ballard is allowed to penetrate and assert his dominance over Vaughan. Shortly after this fantasy, Ballard takes Vaughan in his arms and examines the scars that cover his chest, 'templates of a caress'⁹³ of a long-past car-crash, a 'revealed yet invisible abjection.'⁹⁴ He does this while 'controlling the phlegm in [his] throat.'⁹⁵ Suppressing any hint of his own abjection within this context. The police soon interrupt their privacy, and Ballard turns away to hide his guilt, believing they have come to question him over his attraction to Vaughan. Ballard demonstrates a determination to participate in Vaughan's project only as an observer throughout *Crash*, never quite risking the shame that would place him, too, beyond the margins of the central field.

As Catherine and Ballard anoint Vaughan's death-car, it seems as though they are willing to further immerse themselves in Vaughan's way of life. He presses Catherine's fingers 'against the muscles of [his] stomach wall'⁹⁶ as he begins to fantasise about the

elements of his own car crash. His stomach is scarred around the navel, so it appears inviting Catherine to touch it is significant to his conception of its potential as a site of impalement, as well as a site of desire to obsess over like he obsessed over Vaughan's. To Ballard, Vaughan's stomach was a fretwork of scars 'waiting for [his] fingers, the templates of a caress imprinted years earlier.'⁹⁷ By recognising the scarring as more than simply a surface feature, he can connect it to the role of his own marginality and abjection in following Vaughan. He sees Dr Helen Remington and Gabrielle together, paying their last respects to Vaughan's mangled car and is glad Remington is 'becoming ever more perverse, finding her happiness in Gabrielle's scars and injuries.'⁹⁸ His gladness comes from a reconciliation with his own increasing perversity and a suggestion that the blinding light of transgression as surface appears to be dimming. According to Kristeva:

The body must bear no trace of its debt to nature: it must be clean and proper to be fully symbolic. In order to confirm that, it should endure no gash other than that of circumcision [...] Any other mark would be a sign of belonging to the impure, the non-separate, the non-symbolic, the non-holy...⁹⁹

Ballard's attraction to Vaughan's abjection is distinct from his willingness to embody it. He has objectified and othered his friend and it remains to be seen if he is willing to make the descent from a position of solipsistic subjectivity (sharing the author's name suggests complete control over the narrative perspective). The close of the novel suggests he is setting himself up to follow Vaughan's path more faithfully.

VI.3.5. Choosing Otherness

Up until the final moments spent with their friend's car in the breakers' yard, Ballard and Catherine's objectification of Vaughan and life in Vaughan's world had been the key to reading a map with which to explore their own heterosexuality. This amounts to

a process of othering and fetishising, the fuel driving their sexual passion, which had stalled before Ballard's accident. In effect, Vaughan saves their marriage and preserves their sexual status quo. Having forsaken everything Vaughan seeks to achieve through his marginality, Ballard and Catherine have the opportunity to make amends after his death. Like Jack and Marla at the end of *Fight Club*, they have the choice to start anew. They have the option of continuing to appropriate Vaughan's sexuality, or to emulate his descent into an obsession with self-styled murder of the self and the other. The fact that it is a viable option and—as the novel suggests—the preferable one, indicates the urgent need to escape their contemporary heteronormativity, particularly a relationship in which Vaughan does not figure. Importantly, they do not consider it the preferable option until after Vaughan has gone, which indicates that the marriage of their privileged sexual position with an outlet for their perverse fantasies offered a power they were unwilling to relinquish. Their normative panic is revealed once the fantasies of an objectified Vaughan have faded; they are left to face each other and their dormant disillusionment.

If it is escape from the normative through his self-destruction Ballard seeks, then he shares with *Fight Club's* Jack the idea that rendering his body abject is part of what Melissa Iocco describes as an attempt 'to reclaim a fantasy of a pure, original and pre-capitalist masculinity.'¹⁰⁰ In terms of abjection, "pre-symbolic" or, as Kristeva puts it, "non-symbolic" are appropriate in describing this primal and intangible state. Bracha Ettinger offers the term "subsymbolic" and suggests the need to strip away the symbols of one's identity. Ballard's masculinity, within the framework of heteronormativity, is his identity to break down. Doing so through the act of

surrendering subjectivity in the field of the normative does not necessarily mean surrendering a subjectivity outside of the phallocentric field. Ballard's objectification of Vaughan has had little effect on Vaughan's outlook and the subjectivity he retains to imagine, produce and live within the imaginative space of his art.

Vaughan's project has changed the lives and outlooks of the novel's remaining characters. Gabrielle and Dr Helen Remington are also to be found with Catherine and Ballard at the end of the novel in the police impound. As they all seem to move farther along the path of perversity, Ballard's perception of the women with whom he is closest is suffused with understanding. He recognises in himself the risk to masculinity, loss of subjectivity and pain he must accept to follow through on his plans to be like Vaughan. In Freudian terms, he must eschew his fear of castration. Such an encounter can be interpreted in Ettinger's terms as providing...

...meaning to internal and external realities related to non-Oedipal sexual difference viewed through the prism of the feminine *beyond-the-phallus*.¹⁰¹

By moving beyond the phallic in his perception of himself and others, he opens himself up to the symbolic depths of his wounds as a shared experience with the others, rather than a fetishisation of their disfigurement and proximity to death and the abject. This, according to Ettinger, 'engenders shared traces, traumas, pictograms and fantasies in *several* partners conjointly but differently...'¹⁰² Ballard, at this moment with the three women, is closest to achieving this link to the borderspace, to *metramorphosis*, the action of making that connection. This action involves existing on a threshold as and with partial subjects and partial Others. In its ideal form, this process reconnects to the Symbolic—or the central (phallocentric) field—without the weight of masculine castration anxieties, transforming one's perception of and need for the subject as the

fundamental signifier of discourse. Ettinger states that by looking at this scenario from a phallic point of view, 'the matrixial co-emerging subjects can be seen [...] as "whole" subjects or as each other's object,'¹⁰³ and Ballard is left with the choice between this—the phallic path—and the borderspace, in which they might all enter into a matrixial encounter. Vaughan's achievement is recognising the illusion of surfaces, recognising that the aesthetic possibilities of his own acts yield nothing but the repetition and death that is bound to pornography, and that to keep developing in spite of this requires engagement with the harsh reality of his body becoming a part of the otherness that has been blinding them with its beauty.

VI.3.6. Representing the Subsymbolic

Vaughan's world is thus, ultimately, a visual and non-verbal creation, manifesting itself in the fused landscape of the automobile and mass media (the quintessence of the concept of the "Ballardian"). Ballard's articulation of this world is at odds with reproducing it through the controlling nature of narrative speech, just as Ettinger, according to Griselda Pollock, 'had to find ways to articulate the matrixial in language, where the matrixial dimension appears as paradox.'¹⁰⁴ However, J.G. Ballard (the author) has adapted the narrative to represent the subsymbolic, particularly when we take Pollock's analysis of Ettinger's ekphrastic process into account:

Yet we can bend the phallicism of language through play and neologism, through paradox, irony, and [...] through blasphemy, in order to spread a net wide enough to catch the play of this subsymbolic dimension, which, thus theorised, becomes speakable and communicable as an idea.¹⁰⁵

Ballard anointing Vaughan's death car in semen captures the blasphemous spirit of *Crash* and draws attention to the origins of the ekphrastic dimension of the work.

Ballard, at the time of writing was obsessed with the phenomenon of the car crash and

its connection with sex. In 1970, he staged an exhibition at the New Arts Laboratory entitled *Crashed Cars*, in which three crashed cars were displayed in the gallery and a topless girl interviewed attendees for closed circuit TV. Its effect upon those attending was immediate and extreme: 'wine was poured over the crashed cars, glasses were broken, the topless girl was nearly raped in the back seat by some self-aggrandising character.'¹⁰⁶ Ballard staged the exhibition to test his suspicions about the place of the automobile in the human psyche and it convinced him to write *Crash*. To Ballard, the car provides a "non-holy" space in which to profane, and the ekphrasis of this element of his artwork is clear in the novel. As with the borderspace, it is a laboratory in which to explore new sensations, new perspectives on subjectivity.

Through Vaughan as artist, we can recognise much of what Ballard the author is trying to achieve. The characters of *Crash* must negotiate a visual culture dominated by the constant threat of nuclear war 'in an overlit realm ruled by advertising and pseudo-events, science and pornography.'¹⁰⁷ What he calls the 'death of affect'¹⁰⁸ is the anaesthetising effect the image has on the realities behind it. Their car-crash experiences jolt Ballard and his friends out of their stupor. As a photographer following this, Vaughan occupies the role of voyeur and objectifier. However, his work reveals the nature of his desire which the survivors are left to navigate after his death. Aidan Day (2000) suggests Vaughan's photography, 'in thrall to the artifice of the image,'¹⁰⁹ functions to construct a tableau of artificiality with which he can surround himself, asserting a kind of mastery over his own visual narrative. This is only partly the story. Vaughan's photography—a vast catalogue of images of death, mutilation and sex within the context of the car-crash—also provides visual guide to perversion, a means

of recontextualising the body within the visual landscape. Before he meets James Ballard, Vaughan has been photographing him from the moments immediately following his car-crash onwards, including his sexual encounters in the car. Ballard recounts Vaughan showing him the photos he secretly took of Ballard having sex with his secretary Renata in his car:

He pointed to the chromium window-sill and its junction with the over-stretched strap of the young woman's brassiere. By some freak of photography these two formed a sling of metal and nylon from which the distorted nipple seemed to extrude itself into my mouth [...] He turned through the photographs, now and then tilting the album to emphasise and unusual camera angle for me.¹¹⁰

By collaging images of the human form and erotic scenarios with technological imagery, Vaughan is dissociating them from their typical visual appeal and the pleasures the looker derives from them. The figures are objectified, but re-contextualised within the visual landscape. Jeanette Baxter (2008) notes that Vaughan interrupts this landscape of sexualised objectification 'through techniques of rotation and close-up [...] to produce a thoroughly defamiliarised image of the human body' that is 'neither fetishistic nor pornographic.'¹¹¹ Vaughan is instead creating a visual guide to revising one's perceptions of the body. James Ballard takes these on board, allowing 'new and heterogenous forms of experience and subjectivity to emerge.'¹¹² Real-life fashion photographer Helmut Newton achieves a similar effect in his artistic output, which comprises of eroticism with sadomasochistic subtexts and an interest in the unnatural contortions the body must make to achieve a visual erotic charge. To achieve this, Mark Fisher (2004) notes that Newton intentionally treated women like objects to the extent that 'his logic is pursued to such a point of perversity that it would be churlish or gauche to impose obsolete moralisms onto his work.'¹¹³ Fisher

then aligns Newton with *Crash*, suggesting that they go through a similar process of evacuating the 'organic body of the libido only to distribute it across the surrounding spaces,'¹¹⁴ the accoutrements within the image become eroticised instead. Vaughan demands of the others what Ballard the author demands of the readers: to reconfigure our perceptions of reality in an attempt to see past the disturbing and dehumanising visual tableau, which leaves us emotionally numb to the violence inherent to history and ourselves.

The nightmare visions of *Crash* are found in the everyday human landscapes of the cities, the airports and the motorways. Vaughan and his fellow deviants have merely been jolted out of the anhedonia required to engage with the contradiction of a received morality bound up in the endless flow of images depicting technological progress and human atrocity. Ballard's dystopian representation of this visual field captures the absurd consequences when its internal logic is followed to the end. The aesthetic equation of technology, the human body and violent death produces incoherent solutions within the phallogentric visual field, and to transcend it, the characters must sacrifice their place within society by following Vaughan's perverted course. For James Ballard, this means sacrificing his privileged position as a masculine subject and a successful (i.e. normative) sexual subject. Presumably, once beyond the confines of the status quo, Ballard will not be alone amongst the ranks of the perverted.

¹ Simon Sellars & Dan O'Hara ed., *Extreme Metaphors: Selected Interviews with J.G. Ballard 1967-2008* (London: Fourth Estate, 2012), p. 317.

² See: Ging (2017), Johnson (2018), Lawson (2017).

³ Angela Nagle, *Kill All Normies: Online Culture Wars from 4chan and Tumblr to Trump and the Alt-Right*

(London: Zero Books, 2017).

⁴ Gray, Phillip W., "'The Fire Rises': Identity, the Alt-Right and Intersectionality", *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 23, no. 2 (2018), p. 152.

⁵ *Ibid*, p. 152-153.

⁶ Anonymous, "Full Text of 'Rules of the Internet'", Internet Archive, uploaded 19/2/2009, <https://archive.org/stream/RulesOfTheInternet/RulesOfTheInternet..txt>., retrieved: 9/1/2019.

⁷ *Kill All Normies*, p. 108.

⁸ The narrator is unnamed in the novel, but has subsequently come to be referred to as Jack by those involved in the film adaptation and Palahniuk himself when publicising *Fight Club 2* (2015). See <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/jan/27/chuck-palahniuk-fight-club-sequel-graphic-novel>.

⁹ David Fincher dir., *Fight Club* (United States, Germany: 20th Century Fox, 1999).

¹⁰ *Kill All Normies*, p. 114.

¹¹ Sally Ledger, "Wilde Women and The Yellow Book: The Sexual Politics of Aestheticism and Decadence", *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920*, 50, No. 1 (1/2017), pp. 5-26, p. 23.

¹² Henry James, "The Death of the Lion", *The Yellow Book, An Illustrated Quarterly. Vol. 1*, April 1894, Henry Harland, <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/41875>, retrieved: 29/1/2018.

¹³ Arthur Waugh, "Reticence", *The Yellow Book*, retrieved: 29/1/2018.

¹⁴ Angus MacLaren, *The Trials of Masculinity: Policing Sexual Boundaries, 1870-1930* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), p. 190.

¹⁵ James Eli Adams, *Dandies and Desert Saints: Modernity and the Memory Crisis: Styles of Victorian Manhood* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1995), p. 7.

¹⁶ Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, (New York: The Free Press, 1996), p. 128.

¹⁷ James Eli Adams, *A New Companion to Victorian Literature and Culture*, Herbert F. Tucker ed. (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), p. 135.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 135.

¹⁹ By which a link 'is consistently made between the psychological experience of males and the male body that is presumed to be the origin of those experiences' (Bereska, 2003, p. 1).

²⁰ Bereska, Tami M., "The Changing Boys' World in the 20th Century; Reality and 'Fiction'", *The Journal of Men's Studies*, 11, no. 2 (2003), p. 162.

²¹ Robert J. Zeglin, "Portrayals of Masculinity in 'Guy Movies': Exploring Viewer-Character Dissonance", *The Journal of Men's Studies*, 24, no. 1 (2016), pp. 46-47.

²² Peter Lehman, *Running Scared: Masculinity and the Representation of the Male Body* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2007), p. 181.

²³ Laura Mulvey, (1975), p. 12.

²⁴ Bruce Balmuth dir., *Hard to Kill* (USA: Warner Bros., 1990).

²⁵ Yvonne Tasker, "Dumb Movies for Dumb People: Masculinity, the Body, and the Voice in Contemporary Action Cinema", in *Screening the Male: Exploring Masculinities in Hollywood Cinema*, eds. Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark. (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 241.

²⁶ *Ibid*, p. 241.

²⁷ *Ibid* p. 242.

²⁸ Sally Robinson, *Marked Men: White Masculinity in Crisis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), p. 57.

²⁹ Theodore Koulouris, "Online misogyny and the alternative right: debating the undebatable", *Feminist Media Studies*, 18, no. 4 (2018), pp. 750–761, p. 755. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2018.1447428>

³⁰ *Ibid*, p. 755.

³¹ *Kill All Normies*, p. 18.

³² *Kill All Normies*, p. 14.

³³ "Full Text of 'Rules of the Internet'", Internet Archive, <https://archive.org/stream/RulesOfTheInternet/RulesOfTheInternet..txt>, retrieved: 5/1/2019.

³⁴ Chuck Palahniuk, *Fight Club* (London: Vintage, 1996), p. 96.

³⁵ David Fincher dir., *Fight Club* (USA: 20th Century Fox, 1999).

³⁶ The Marvel and *Transformers* franchises offer modern takes on *femmes fatale* tropes as well as depictions of female action heroes who are empowered, capable and sexualised. For more on postfeminist heroines, see Ging (2007).

³⁷ Terry Lee, "Virtual Violence in *Fight Club*: this is what the Transformation of the Masculine Ego *Feels Like*", *Journal of American Comparative Literatures*, 25, no. 3 (2002), p. 418.

³⁸ See: M.R. Filteau, "A Localized Masculine Crisis: Local Men's Subordination within the Marcellus Shale Region's Masculine Structure", *Rural Sociology*, 80, No. 4 (2015) p. 431-455. DOI:10.1111/ruso.12072; Esteban Ortiz-Ospina and Max Roser, "Economic Inequality by Gender", *Our World in Data* (March 2018), <https://ourworldindata.org/economic-inequality-by-gender>, retrieved: 5/4/2019.

³⁹ Angela Nagle, "The New Man of 4chan", *The Baffler*, No. 30 (Spring 2016). <https://thebaffler.com/salvos/new-man-4chan-nagle>, retrieved: 5/4/2019.

⁴⁰ *Fight Club* (1999).

⁴¹ *Fight Club* (1996), p. 28.

⁴² Lee, p. 418.

⁴³ Henry A. Giroux, "Brutalised Bodies and Emasculated Politics", *Third Text*, 2000, 14, No. 53 (2000), pp. 32-41, p. 33. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09528820108576880>

⁴⁴ Doyle (1983) and Pleck (1995) describe gender role strain as the psychological toll upon Western males resulting from the failure to live up to societal gender-specific behavioural expectations due to the contradictory behaviours existing within the one social role.

⁴⁵ *Fight Club* (1996), p. 18.

⁴⁶ Giroux (2000), p. 33.

⁴⁷ *Fight Club* (1999).

⁴⁸ *Fight Club* (1996), p. 52.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p. 50.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, p. 49.

⁵¹ *The Matrixial Borderspace*, p. 175.

⁵² *Fight Club* (1996), p. 122.

⁵³ *Ibid*, p. 122.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p. 123.

⁵⁵ *The Matrixial Borderspace*, p. 175.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p. 175.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p. 175.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p. 175.

⁵⁹ *Fight Club* (1996), p. 122.

⁶⁰ *The Matrixial Borderspace*, p. 175.

⁶¹ Lee (2002), p. 422.

⁶² *Kill All Normies*, p. 116.

⁶³ 'A straight male separatist group whose members have chosen [...] to avoid romantic relationships with women in protest against a culture destroyed by feminism...' *Ibid*, p. 94.

⁶⁴ Debbie Ging, "Alphas, Betas, and Incels: Theorizing the Masculinities of the Manosphere", *Men and Masculinities*, May 2017, pp. 14-15.

⁶⁵ Nagle (2017, p. 64-65) describes factions of the alt-right and alt-lite who are cultural products of the sexual revolutions of the 1960s. Milo Yiannopolis and 4chan users have used the iconography of gay sadomasochism and gay, straight and transgender pornography in their performances and online posts, reflecting a wider rejection of traditional conservatism and anti-pornographic feminism, thus positioning themselves as the protectors of libertine transgression.

⁶⁶ J.G. Ballard, 1995 Introduction to *Crash* (London: Fourth Estate, 1973), p. ii.

⁶⁷ J.G. Ballard, *Crash*, p. 157.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, p. 184.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p. 185.

⁷⁰ Terry Harpold, "Dry Leatherette: Cronenberg's *Crash*", *Postmodern Culture* 7, No. 3 (1997).

⁷¹ Oxford English Dictionary: <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/abject>, retrieved: 23/1/2018.

⁷² One must withstand and thrust these fluids aside in order to live: 'such wastes drop so that I might live, until, from loss to loss, nothing remains in me and my entire body falls beyond the limit [...] There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being.' Eventually, in death, 'it is no longer I who expel, "I" is expelled.' *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, p. 3-4.

⁷³ Films such as *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Sex* But Were Afraid to Ask* (Woody Allen, 1972) *Monty Python's The Meaning of Life* (Terry Jones, 1983) and *There's Something about Mary* (Peter & Bobby Farrelly, 1998) are illustrative of the comedic possibilities of sperm. See also Stewart Lee, *How I Escaped My Certain Fate: The Lives and Deaths of a Stand Up Comedian* (2010) on the role of the sacred comedic space afforded to the clown figure in which to explore the taboo.

⁷⁴ Linda Williams, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the "Frenzy of the Visible"* (Berkely: University of

California Press, 1989), p. 101.

⁷⁵ Harpold (1997).

⁷⁶ *Crash*, p. 146.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, p. 148.

⁷⁸ Harpold (1997).

⁷⁹ Jacques Lacan, *Seminar VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959-1960*, text established by Jacques-Alain Miller (1982), trans. Dennis Porter (New York: Norton, 1992), p. 281.

⁸⁰ Lisa Downing, "Dying for Sex: Cultural and Forensic Narratives of Autoerotic Death", *New Formations*, 89-90 (2017), pp. 137-152, p. 142.

⁸¹ *Crash*, p. 93-94.

⁸² *Ibid*, p. 165.

⁸³ *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, p. 84.

⁸⁴ *Crash*, p. 166.

⁸⁵ Mark Seltzer (1997), pp. 15-16.

⁸⁶ J.G. Ballard, "Introduction to the [1974] French Edition of *Crash*", <http://imagesoferoticism.com/jg-ballard-introduction-to-crash-1974/>, retrieved: 14/12/2018.

⁸⁷ Claudia Springer, "The Seduction of the Surface: From Alice to Crash" *Feminist Media Studies*, 1, No. 2 (2001), 197–213, p. 206. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14680770120062132>

⁸⁸ *Crash*, p. 185.

⁸⁹ Downing (2017), p. 143.

⁹⁰ Writing about instances of public figures dying of autoerotic asphyxiation, Downing concludes that 'the celebrity is retroactively constructed in light of their death [...] as shamed and unmanly ([Stephen] Milligan), as thrill-seeking ([Michael] Hutchence), or as just plain strange ([David] Carradine)' (p. 143).

⁹¹ *Crash*, p. 94.

⁹² *Ibid*, p. 120.

⁹³ *Ibid*, p. 121.

⁹⁴ *The Powers of Horror*, p. 84.

⁹⁵ *Crash*, p. 121.

⁹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 185.

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 121.

⁹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 184.

⁹⁹ *The Powers of Horror*, p. 102.

¹⁰⁰ Melissa Iocco, "Addicted to Affliction: Masculinity and Perversity in *Crash* and *Fight Club*", *Gothic Studies*, 9, No. 1 (2007), p. 49.

¹⁰¹ *The Matrixial Borderspace*, p. 65.

¹⁰² *Ibid*, p. 65.

¹⁰³ *Ibid*, p. 65.

¹⁰⁴ Griselda Pollock, Introduction to *The Matrixial Borderspace*, p. 20-21.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*, p. 21.

¹⁰⁶ *Extreme Metaphors*, p. 40.

¹⁰⁷ "Introduction" (1995) to *Crash*, p. i.

¹⁰⁸ J.G. Ballard, "Introduction to the [1974] French Edition of *Crash*", <http://imagesoferoticism.com/jg-ballard-introduction-to-crash-1974/>, retrieved: 14/12/2018.

¹⁰⁹ Aidan Day, "Ballard and Baudrillard: Close Reading *Crash*", *English: Journal of the English Association*, 49, no. 195 (2000), p. 281. DOI: <https://doi-org.dcu.idm.oclc.org/10.1093/english/49.195.277>

¹¹⁰ *Crash*, p. 81.

¹¹¹ Jeanette Baxter, "Radical Surrealism: Rereading Photography and History in J.G. Ballard's *Crash*", *Textual practice*, 2, no. 3 (2008), p. 516.

¹¹² *Ibid*, p. 516.

¹¹³ Mark Fisher, "The Art of Parties", from *k-punk* blog, posted 8/2/2004, <https://k-punk.org/the-art-of-parties/>, retrieved: 14/12/2018.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*.

Chapter VII

Transforming the Imagination

VII.1. The Fabric of the Other: Revisiting *Gone Girl* and “A Jury of Her Peers”

The world of J.G. Ballard’s *Crash*, for all its coldness, is—like Chuck Palahniuk’s in *Fight Club*—modernity as it is experienced. These are environments in which those who refuse to conform to or don’t understand moral and sexual mores are ostracised.

Deviation from the gender-specific profile makes monsters and risks the subject-object relationship that reifies the murderer as artist. The representation of women who kill is a prime example of how this is all managed. Instead of affording women such as Salome and *Gone Girl*’s Amy Dunne the victory of self-protection and self-creation, narratives contrive to punish them and confine them to discursive objectification and othering.

Having survived his wife’s attempt to frame him for murder, Nick Dunne concludes Amy is a ‘petty, selfish, manipulative, disciplined psycho bitch—’¹ Amy recognises this label for what it is. It is a dismissal of her as a subject, a medicalising term inextricably linked to dehumanised monsters of the twentieth century: ‘It’d be easy for him to write me off that way [...] to be able to dismiss me so simply.’² Alfred Hitchcock’s deranged transvestite killer Norman Bates in *Psycho* (1960) serves as a model for one who is classified as a monster due to their non-normative behaviours. A “psycho bitch” serves as a female variation on the theme. Amy’s only solace is that, in Nick’s phallogentric estimation of her, she is highly capable. Amy recognises her value in this sense. What she has achieved as Nick’s physical ideal has been to push him towards his own heteronormative masculine ideal: “‘We’re all bitches in the end, aren’t we, Nick?”

Dumb bitch, psycho bitch [...] I'm the bitch who makes you better [...] I'm the bitch who makes you a man.'"³ Amy has embraced the feminine lack at the heart of the "bitch" label and utilises it—along with her use of the womb and its attendant imagery—to impose herself on Nick's world and to exercise control there. "Psycho bitch" is the manifestation of the foreclosure of an invisible subjectivity unilluminated within the sphere of phallocentrism. She is keeping one foot firmly rooted in the apparent emptiness of feminine symbolism while retaining her footing within her heteronormative sphere. In her return to heteronormative life, Amy seems to thrive in part thanks to her reappropriation of Nick's othering language. Instead of taking "psycho bitch" as a form of dismissal, she uses it to define her opposition to "cool girl" and a symbol of the power it affords her over Nick's life. In her final move against Nick by getting pregnant, Amy reveals the impotence of his language. As he is about to show her *Psycho Bitch*, a tell-all memoir of his life with Amy, Amy's own revelation leaves Nick to quietly delete his record of events.

By keeping the channel open to Ettinger's "expanse of the maternal" (see section V.5), Amy manages not just to retain her matrixial subjectivity, but to maintain a measure of control over the lives of those who maintain the heteronormative status quo.

The same is true of Mrs Hale and Mrs Peters in Susan Glaspell's "A Jury of Her Peers" (1917). However, they also recognise that Mrs Wright has had any control wrenched from her by her husband and the law. Noticing the incomplete cleaning of the kitchen table, Mrs Hale interprets a moment of rupture in Mrs Wright's life in which murder was the outcome. She then calls out the accused's powerlessness at the hands of the male authorities' interpretation of the scene: "it seems kind of sneaking: locking her

up in town and coming out here to get her own house to turn against her!”⁴ As the men search around upstairs, fruitlessly seeking evidence against Mrs Wright, their wives are able to build a clear impression of the household from a perspective the men do not have. Mrs Hale turns to the stove:

... “a bad stove is a bad stove. How’d you like to cook on this?” [...] She opened the oven door and started to express her opinion of the oven; but she was swept into her own thoughts, thinking of what it would mean, year after year, to have that stove to wrestle with.⁵

Mrs Peters’s response startles Mrs Hale: ““A person gets discouraged—and loses heart.””⁶ In this moment, it is clear to Mrs Hale that she and Mrs Peters are privy to Mrs Wright’s experience: ‘That look of seeing into things, of seeing through a thing into something else, was in the eyes of the sheriff’s wife now.’⁷ They are at this point complicit in a knowledge unavailable to the men. They find a quilt Mrs Wright had been preparing to piece together when the men come in, amused by their interest in such a feminine triviality. When they come across a patch which—compared to the even sewing of the others—betrays the stitcher’s severe distress, their eyes meet: ‘something flashed to life, passed between them.’⁸ Mrs Hale proceeds to unravel the thread from the patch. They decide to destroy the evidence the men would not have found in the first place and would not have known what it meant had they noticed it. Their analysis reveals a shared language between the three women; female labour here forms a dialect within a wider system of feminine signs.

Domestic textile handicrafts have, since the work of Rozsika Parker (*The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine*, 1984) and Griselda Pollock (*Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology*, with Rozsika Parker, 1981) been recognised as central to feminist art practices. Parker, focusing particularly on textiles, notes the

potential for fabric to associate 'directly with female sexuality, the unconscious and the body.'⁹ The feminist art movement of the 1970s utilised traditionally female crafts, using fabric and thread to produce "fine art" in a subversive nod to the supposed inferiority of feminine "crafts" to masculine "arts". This work emerged in a context in which 'art made with paint and art made with thread [were] intrinsically unequal.'¹⁰

According to Parker,

Embroidery has been the means of educating women into the feminine ideal [...] Limited to practising art with needle and thread, women have nevertheless sewn a subversive stitch, managing to make meanings of their own in the very medium intended to foster polite self-effacement.¹¹

In Mrs Wright's case, the communication of her distress reveals the women's fluency in the medium, and their complicity reveals its potential for subversion under the noses of the men's investigation. The emergence of embroidery as a subversive movement within the world of fine art suggests that the traditionally feminine crafts—which provide a space in which those who practice them with access to a medium of experience not accessible to all—are a way of connecting the feminine experience to the more hegemonic masculine one in a manner which is both communicative and disruptive. Women such as Mrs Hale and Mrs Peters have the opportunity to communicate their interpretation of the murder, but choose not to. Instead, they offer symbolic disruption, exercising a shared solidarity with Mrs Wright, reaffirming their own subversive subjectivity. This speaks to Parker's conception of embroidery as a line of 'matrilineal transmission'¹² affording women the opportunity to simultaneously take up a proper place within patriarchal hierarchy as well as to acquire a knowledge set of a system of signifiers between women. The dual approach to the craft is illustrative of Ettinger's description of the relationship between the subject and the fantasy of the

Other (*objet petit a*) in which the Other is a fabric,

...an undifferentiated textile where what would later become the subject is intermingled with the Other. The future subject is immersed, to begin with, inside the Other in fusion.¹³

Here, the reality of the body is intermingled with the fantasy of it, two sides of the Other, each seen from a different experience. Ettinger then outlines an incision made in the fabric, a cut in which a phallic interpretation is bestowed upon the flat surface. This is where the Other is enveloped by the gaze, the *objet a* is activated and the real aspect of the fabric splits from the fantasy and is represented as lack, becoming 'opaque, with no significating value.'¹⁴ Here, then, is a space in which non-phallic exchanges are possible, an interpretive blind-spot from the phallic perspective, where Mrs Wright, Hale and Peters co-exist in a subdivision of their lived experience. The traces of Mrs Wright's pain are communicated at this frequency and enter the world of the men via Mrs Peters' and Mrs Hale's quiet resolution and obstinacy in the face of their husbands' authority.

In *Gone Girl*, Amy has access to the same subdivision of experience as the women in Glaspell's story. She recognises her identification as a "psycho bitch" from Nick's perspective as a misplaced description of her as *objet petit a*—once desired, now a fantasy of evil. She instead blindsides him by manipulating his desire to beget a son. Fully aware of his investment in such powerful signifiers, Amy is able to maintain a buffer around the non-phallic space in which her subjectivity is preserved and out of sight. In this pocket of existence, encompassing the "expanse of the maternal", a subjectivity is allowed to reside. Ettinger describes this subjectivity as 'what would later become a subject'¹⁵ to denote its ethereal potential as something that might 1)

finally express the fantasy of the Other as a reality and bring it forth into representation and 2) that which is taken hold of by phallic symbolism in order to engage with phallogocentric systems of reality as the *objet a*.

VII.2. Dorian Gray: In the Borderspace between Symbolic Orders

Dorian Gray experiences the power of this space, too. It vibrates and throbs within him 'to curious pulses'¹⁶ as Lord Henry Wotton speaks about the secret passions and desires Dorian had not known he had. In their objectification of Dorian, the aesthetic suiters Wotton and Basil Hallward provoke his self-consciousness, turning his attention upon himself as *objet a*, the aspect of him which is for them a fantasy. Dorian, as a male subject, resonates with the objectification, but does not understand why. Wotton observes that it has quickened Dorian's 'appreciation of the personal appearance of other people,'¹⁷ suggesting he is sensitive to the power of the fantasy of the Other because he is operating at that frequency himself. He may not understand it, but in his commitment to vanity, Dorian must confront himself as an object, too, and the feminising and othering effects that come with it.

The most immediate and perplexing representation of his secret passions takes the form of Dorian's portrait. Initially, the painting undergoes a small change: 'the expression looked different. One would have said that there was a touch of cruelty in the mouth.'¹⁸ Dorian looks at his own face in the mirror and it is clear that 'no line like that [has] warped his red lips.'¹⁹ In the mirror, it is clear that his face retains the fantasy imbued upon him by the gazes of his friends and that it has now departed the painting. Dorian's otherness has split; his body retains the sheen of fantasy—the *objet a* held in place upon it—forever to be objectified. The painting, on the other hand, has

become a representation of the subjectivity of the Other: the reality of that which is enacted by the corporeal body in spite of the fantasy which is projected upon it. Here, the effeminacy, the wickedness towards others, the potential of homosexuality—Dorian’s “gross indecency”—finds its visual form. In previous manifestations of the Paranoid Gothic, such as Shelley’s *Frankenstein* and Stevenson’s *Mr Hyde*, the real aspect of the Other is embodied by an overwhelmingly powerful monster the sight of which is fleeting and usually fatal. Wilde, however, isolates this, forcing both Dorian and the reader to confront it at length whenever he feels compelled to analyse his effect upon it. Its initial change is enough to reveal he is not really the embodiment of the phallic feminine ideal. The image has “warped”, suggesting the original painted image is completely twisted out of its ideal shape. It warps under the ‘burden of his shame: [...] eternal youth, infinite passion, pleasures subtle and secret, wild joys and wilder sins.’²⁰ As an eroticised image, his body displays the potential for the transgression he lives out. However, he is saved the shame of the actions, and the painting offers him scientific detail on the visual effects of such sins on the body in the contemporary imaginary of such things. The image inspires in Dorian a ‘sickened horror,’²¹ while Basil’s response to seeing the portrait after the wear-and-tear of twenty years of wild joys is of complete moral condemnation, reckoning it to be proof of the rumours about him and more. In his analysis of the formation of the chemicals on the canvas, Basil infers that...

...through some strange quickening of inner life the leprosy of sin were slowly eating the thing away. The rotting of a corpse in a watery grave was not so fearful.²²

Again, the activation of some mysterious “inner life” is invoked, just as Dorian has felt

its throbs and pulses and Wotton observes the quickening of his appreciation for the beauty of others. However, the visual manifestation of this unknown frequency is horrific. Wilde invokes an image more fearful than a rotting corpse, a kind of living decay. The cursed paintings in Lewin's 1945 and Parker's 2009 film adaptations both display rotted faces, swollen with pustules and open sores. Both, too, are injected with life, through Lewin's use of colour for shots of the painting to Parker's use of visual effects to make it move before the audience's eyes (see section IV.6.1). Key to each is their physical representation of the abject. After Dorian has murdered Basil, 'a loathsome red dew' glistens on one of the hands 'as though the canvas had sweated blood.'²³ The painted Dorian takes on the abject fluids his body refuses.

Julia Kristeva distinguishes the fluids to which the body lays waste as what 'what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death [...] at the border of [one's] condition as a living being.'²⁴ The corpse, on the other hand, is a direct signifier of death; it falls beyond the borders of the living. It is...

...utmost abjection [...] it is death infecting life [...] Imaginary uncanniness and real threat, it beckons to us and ends up engulfing us.²⁵

A rotting corpse is not so fearful for Basil because the abjection and fear it embodies is fixed—a threat waiting at the borders of life. It seeps into life through abject fluids which form the borders of life, from which the body maintains a distance. The 'strange quickening of inner life' within the painting suggests its depiction of Dorian inspires more than just an abject response. The resonance he feels with that is still associated with secret passions, desires and the shame associated with them. There is an element of the Uncanny associated with this in the way the passion which inspired his painting arises again. However, rather than an evocation of an otherness he has suppressed,

Basil sees the visual effects of Dorian's secret life as an immense moral caution which Dorian can correct, beginning with a prayer of repentance. This attempt to wash away the sins of his past are anathema to Dorian, who, prompted by the painting, kills his friend. Dorian is secretly proud of the physical marks of abjection, protective of his passage across the border of signification to which they are the signposts.

In periods, Wilde's Dorian displays an affection and fascination for his monstrous double when he sits before it:

...sometimes loathing it and himself, but filled, at other times, with that pride of individualism that is half the fascination of sin, and smiling with secret pleasure at the misshapen shadow that had to bear the burden that should have been his own.²⁶

In these moments, beaten down by the guilt imposed by the signifiers of phallic law, Dorian overlays the horror of his picture with a more forgiving interpretation than the outlook of his society and his language strictly allows. In these moments, the abjected figure, stripped of its phallic idealism and made to be a monster, is held by the gaze so long that Dorian adjusts to the horror and reappropriates the symbolism of what he sees. In his prolonged encounters with the portrait, Dorian and his Other sit on two sides of 'a frontier between pure and impure,'²⁷ as Ettinger describes the separation between subject and object within the phallic paradigm. In this relation, the outward appearance of one who is good,²⁸ who adheres to the social conventions underlined by the phallic paradigm, faces the 'rejected and repulsive'²⁹ Other; a tightly regulated patriarchal social system of morals and taboos, according to Ettinger, depends upon the frontier between them. Dorian, in his 'secret pleasure', recognises the ongoing symbolic dialogue happening between subject and object in his having chosen to live in breach of the frontier. This is presented as perversion within the phallic paradigm,

and Dorian's picture represents 'a collapse of the difference between desire, phantasy, and event'³⁰—a meshing of the ideal and the thing itself, in an echo of the fabric of the Other, where 'what would later become the subject is intermingled with the Other'³¹ as fantasy after the phallic cut has occurred. The painting is the resulting lack onto which the monster is projected.

Dorian's moments of pleasure before his portrait represent 'an openness to [the] resignification and recontextualization'³² of the image of his otherness. However, the problem he is unable to solve is the invention of 'another process of meaning donation/revelation/production.'³³ Dorian and the painting's fixed opposition, along with his non-normative transgressions, mean he can continue to knit together a matrixial field between himself as subject and as object/Other, fuelling the phallic indecipherability of his Other on canvas. These encounters with the painting betray a pride that some of his pleasure 'will never yield to phallic recognition.'³⁴ Basil insists his ideal had 'nothing evil in it, nothing shameful' and rejects Dorian's view that 'each of us has heaven and hell in him.'³⁵ This amounts to a rejection of Dorian's otherness and the potential for living a non-normative life, of yielding to unlawful desires; Dorian—on behalf of his Other—murders Basil in self-defence.

In Will Self's 2002 *Imitation*, the figure of otherness in Dorian's portrait appears, by the end of the novel, to be in the advanced stages of an AIDS infection, left to linger amongst the living by enchantment rather than any drug treatment. However, when Dorian comes to appraise the marks upon his visual Other, he is surprised by how good he looks after fifteen years of serious illness:

The new treatment was working for him, and if his skin was yellowed and

smudged, it was at least unscarred. His wary eyes and mean lips betrayed the truth about the things he had done in order to survive, but weren't these things anyone would do if they absolutely had to?³⁶

This is a rather conciliatory tone to strike for one who is struggling with the guilt of immorality in outwardly moralistic years of progress. The body of his portrait struggles under the weight of disease, but Dorian recognises it as a survivor in spite of the consequences of his actions over the years. In the *Imitation's* epilogue, the portrait is afforded a voice to speak to the alternate Dorian, a successful gay neoliberal subject. It is unsparing in its criticism of Dorian's hypocrisy in rejecting the unpalatable aspects of British homosexual life in the 1980s, when they are integral to the queer identity. By creating a version of Dorian who has made his decisions in deference to phallogentric law and order, Self allows us to see both sides of the coin of how we enact and respond to transgression and how this is fashioned socially. The voice inside the alternate "good" Dorian reminds him that, in spite of his societal acceptance, he cannot ignore his inherent otherness. "Good" Dorian hints at knowing this to be the case, that 'this is distinctly *unheimlich*.'³⁷ Here, he is associating the voice with the Uncanny, which is eventually found to be emanating from the version of his story that is bound up in his enchanted portrait. He evokes the Uncanny as the emergence of the repressed Other and Ettinger's description of the painting as the place where 'something of the psychic gaze is always contained [...] waiting to affect us.'³⁸ "Good" Dorian has committed himself to objectification as a gay man in the portrait, and he retains this connection to himself as a feminised and othered object, in his interactions with it. Both versions of Dorian revolve as subjects around their object selves, one from a place of fear, the other from a place of fatigued understanding and admiration. Both are in dialogue with their Other. The "real" Dorian engages in a life of the non-

normative and comes to accept his diseased appearance to phallogentric society. The “good” Dorian rejects his own non-normativity in favour of the sanitisation of homosexuality in the public eye. The portrait, retaining its otherness, is that onto which he can project his fears, and it appears to both as the same diseased monster.

In the epilogue, Self indicates that the apparent liberalisation of opinion on homosexual culture is built on the shaky ground of consumerist ideals, appearance and corporate success. “Good” Dorian plans to digitise *Cathode Narcissus* online and incorporate it into his fashion and media organisation in an echo of John Berger’s writing about the use of traditional oil painting composition by corporate publicity. To Berger, ‘Publicity is, in essence, nostalgic. It has to sell the past to the future. It cannot itself supply the standards of its own claims [...] It would lack both confidence and credibility if it used a strictly contemporary language.’³⁹ Dorian intends to use the painting as a figure of the ideal, a figure of envy. He aims for his portrait (in its original state) to be synonymous with ‘male beauty at the end of the twentieth century [...] and a new pride in homosexual identity – not a pride based on militant identification with an underclass, or a persecuted ethnic minority.’⁴⁰ He reappropriates his image as something to be envied, an image of the homosexual ideal that can never be achieved. This depends on evocations of traditional visual language, imposing the standard of what is desirable.

The dissemination of his portrait into the world of advertising and pop videos comes with the cost of his own visual objectification and the objectification of the homosexual identity. This throws the actions of the “real”—the “wicked”—Dorian into relief. He murders Basil in his own defence as an agent of otherness, in defence of

himself as a survivor of HIV and a victim of the prejudices of a wider society for whom he is equated with death (see section IV.4). He may only be able to read the portrait from the phallic perspective, but, in his secret pride, he knows the experiences which have altered it have wrought some form of value. Through the act of murder, a line can be drawn from Dorian Gray to Amy Dunne to Minnie Wright, all of whom straddle a space between two forms of representation, all of whom are corralled into the form through which moral control is exerted most strenuously. Each undertakes a murder in response to the implacable threat posed by male heteronormative dominated systems of power and signification in spite of its ultimate domination over them.

The commonalities outlined above serve as both an introduction and a conclusion to what has occupied much of this thesis: that a discourse prevails over queer people and women that does not serve to represent the totality of their experience—a discourse which diminishes and demonises these people in order to consolidate a sense of dominance in those who employ it, rather than accept any form of failure. An ekphrastic analysis of art- (and craft-) work in works such as Wilde and Self's *Dorian* and Glaspell's "A Jury of Her Peers" suggests that such a work can provide a channel through which to communicate a different point of view. It is also apparent that Ettinger's focus on visual art as a vital medium through which to open such a channel is warranted. However, *Dorian* and "A Jury of Her Peers" both capture the limitations of the transfer of a vital non-normative representation into normative phallic fields of representation. As Glaspell's story suggests, the visual may be as far as such representations can go. In *Dorian Gray*, his portrait only bears traces of the non-normative, visible to others only as monstrosity. Brian Glavey (2016) describes this

kind of visual representation as 'disclosing a self and closing it off in the same gesture.'⁴¹ Glavey, writes that queer ekphrasis is ephemeral—to convert a non-normative desire or pleasure into a linguistic medium is to introduce it to a symbolic order where it is policed by the very discourse that is employed. The secret messages of Dorian's portrait and Minnie Wright's quilt are 'visible and yet outside of discourse.'⁴² Characters capable of reading such material display a responsibility to each other and to themselves: to act in righteous self-defence despite its apparent futility.

VII.3. Reorientating the Imagination

Freddie Montgomery is working to solve the same problem from the other side of the fabric. He cannot help but envelop the Other in the gaze, always enacting the phallic cut, however he wields his words. He accepts that his own perspective—that of the (anti-) heroic subject—is inadequate and dangerous. He understands, too, that there is more to femininity than he attributes to it. His 'failure of imagination' refers to his discursive inflexibility and its tendency towards fetishisation for art's sake as a defining feature of his subjectivity. This amounts to a dismissal of others, particularly women, which eventually results in his killing of a woman. The murder of Josie Bell is committed as a part of the chain of events surrounding his theft of a painting; he kills as an emotional response to suit the aesthetics of his circumstances. Therefore, he finds himself a direct descendant of De Quincey's artist-murderer, part of the same 'luxuriant family tree [as] Dostoevsky's Underground Man [...] Camus's Meursault [and] Wilde's Dorian Gray.'⁴³ In his self-regard, he knows his lineage, he knows that he has done wrong and that murder is only half of the story. Central to his misogyny, according to Banville (1997), is the 'real scandal at the heart' of the book, which

implicates the reader in the crime: 'the border between art and life has become blurred.'⁴⁴ Banville is here referring to the role of the phallic gaze in the individual's construction of reality (discussed in section III.2.2).

As Chapter III discusses, Freddie stumbles upon a pathway to the representation of the "real" aspect of the Other—and the self—by inserting himself into a tableau: *Le monde d'or*. Within the narrative of this visual space, he happens to hear the voice of the beautiful woman at its heart. In this moment, the world is infused with colour and becomes real to him. Employing an ekphrastic voice and having realised his mistake was one of his imagination, he knows he has overlooked the "real" aspect of the Other in favour of the fantasy and declares he is now 'living for two.'⁴⁵ 'Pregnant with his own incipient humanity,'⁴⁶ Freddie seeks to deploy his imagination in a new way. When he hears Flora speak, he has hit upon the perception of the Other he seeks, but he cannot fathom how to attune this moment of epiphany to his discursive frequency. It may be that such connections can never be sustained, but a matrixial analysis of the texts does reveal common ground between Mrs Wright and Dorian Gray's non-discursive communication strategies and Freddie's openness to receiving them.

Bracha Ettinger seeks to take part in the transformation of painting from a medium which is 'oversaturated with maleness'⁴⁷ and masculinised systems of representation, towards the feminisation of the subject and unearthing the empathetic pathways between subjects. Like Banville's Freddie, she recognises the urgency of humanising the subject:

My process, pregnant with affects, brings about a crisis of the flat surface and suggests non-perspective depth. By weaving a space of passage, its symbolic domain opens, and its "phallic" appropriation becomes impossible.⁴⁸

Similarly pregnant, they both approach their burgeoning humanity from opposite sides of the fabric, Ettinger doing the weaving, Freddie open to its possibilities, neither knowing the exact and fixable approximation of ‘the uncanny compassion beyond figuration.’⁴⁹ Both know that painting—‘as materialized consciousness’⁵⁰—is a manifestation of collective imagination by which they have the best chance to construct a vision of the Other as human, animal reality.

According to Ettinger: ‘The artistic has a potential for humanizing because only there aesthetics breeds ethics.’⁵¹ Banville agrees: ‘It is not the God of Moses, that merciless slaughterer, but the god in our own heads that injuncts us: it is the imagination that commands.’⁵² Both, in their own way, have committed to the transformation of the space from where our moral imperatives are issued.

¹ *Gone Girl*, p. 439.

² *Ibid*, p. 439.

³ *Ibid*, p. 440.

⁴ *Her America: “A Jury of Her Peers” and Other Stories*, p. 92.

⁵ *Ibid*, p. 92.

⁶ *Ibid*, p. 92.

⁷ *Ibid*, p. 92-93.

⁸ *Ibid*, p. 93.

⁹ Rozsika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine* (1984; repr. New York, 2010), p. xviii.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 5.

¹¹ Rozsika Parker, “Foreword”, *The Subversive Stitch*, exh. cat., ed. Pennina Barnett (Manchester, 1988) pp.5-6, p.5, quoted by Anna Souter in “Louise Bourgeois: Subversive Stitching”, *Roman Road Journal*, posted 1/6/2018, <https://romanroadjournal.com/louise-bourgeois-subversive-stitching/#>, retrieved: 2/6/2019.

¹² Julia Bryan-Wilson, *Fray* (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 2017), p. 9.

¹³ Bracha L. Ettinger, “Wit(h)nessing Trauma and the Matrixial Gaze: From Phantasm to Trauma, from Phallic Structure to Matrixial Sphere”, *Parallax*, 7, No. 4 (2001), p. 91.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 92.

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- ¹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 91.
- ¹⁶ *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, p. 24.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 80.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 98.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 99.
- ²⁰ *Ibid*, p. 115.
- ²¹ *Ibid*, p. 105.
- ²² *Ibid*, p. 172.
- ²³ *Ibid*, p. 189.
- ²⁴ *The Powers of Horror*, p. 3.
- ²⁵ *Ibid*, p. 4.
- ²⁶ *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, p. 154.
- ²⁷ *The Matrixial Borderspace*, p. 109.
- ²⁸ ‘Sin is a thing that writes itself across a man’s face [...] But you, Dorian, with your pure, bright, innocent face, and your marvellous untroubled youth—I can’t believe anything against you.’ *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, p. 163-164.
- ²⁹ *The Matrixial Borderspace*, p. 109.
- ³⁰ *Ibid*, p. 109.
- ³¹ Ettinger (2001), p. 91.
- ³² Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, quoted in *The Matrixial Borderspace*, p.110.
- ³³ *Ibid*, p. 110.
- ³⁴ *Ibid*, p. 110.
- ³⁵ *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, p. 171.
- ³⁶ *Dorian: An Imitation*, p. 252.
- ³⁷ *Ibid*, p. 268.
- ³⁸ *The Matrixial Borderspace*, p. 134.
- ³⁹ *Ways of Seeing*, p. 139.
- ⁴⁰ *Dorian: An Imitation*, p. 270.
- ⁴¹ *The Wallflower Avant-Garde*, p. 111.
- ⁴² *Ibid*, p. 36.
- ⁴³ John Banville, *Possessed of a Past: A John Banville Reader*, Ed. Raymond Bell (London: Picador, 2012), p. 351.
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p. 355.
- ⁴⁵ *The Book of Evidence*, p. 220.
- ⁴⁶ *Possessed of a Past*, p. 358.
- ⁴⁷ Anna Godfrey Larmon, “Interviews: Bracha L. Ettinger”, *Artforum* (July 2018), <https://www.artforum.com/interviews/bracha-l-ettinger-discusses-her-life-and-work-75919>, retrieved: 22/5/2019.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Possessed of a Past*, p. 358.

VIII.

Conclusion

VIII.1. Reviewing the Corpus

The corpus selected in this thesis has looked towards some of the more influential texts of the late-nineteenth and late-twentieth centuries—both times of burgeoning Western decadence and impending societal and economic collapse. A pattern of preoccupation emerges within these two periods which reveals a deep-seated discomfort with the invisible principles which underlie the cultural representation of violence. Texts dealing with periods of *fin de siècle* come at moments in which social orders are on the verge of collapse in the face of renewal offered by a new century. Moving into the twenty-first century, it is clear that another paradigm shift is possible, though texts such as *Gone Girl* suggest the rigid social mores which govern women's lives are almost impossible to dismantle. This is where older texts such as *Crash*, *The Book of Evidence* and *Ghosts* can offer a new interpretation of the systems which govern the subject's sense of possession over the image and the Other. Together, the texts suggest that any form of real renewal must be a collaborative project which utilises new theoretical concepts of the gaze. This renewal—founded upon the aesthetics of transgression—could transcend the phallic and offer passages for the would-be artist-hero into non-phallic aesthetic spaces through the media of art and ekphrasis. However—as discussed in Chapter III—the very concept of a gendered subject as artmaker will need to be broken down to achieve any such progress.

Another commonality of the majority of the chosen texts is their preoccupation with visual arts and culture and the significance of the act of looking. John Banville's novels'

obsession with the connection between the perception of art and the perception of reality puts aestheticised murder into a moral framework. Applying the aesthetics of the male gaze to the world around us is often a misogynistic act (most eloquently discussed by Berger [1972]) and potentially dangerous. Reading the novels' ekphrases with Ettinger's theories provides a solid analytical approach to take forward into analyses of ekphrasis and gazing in the works of Oscar Wilde in the following chapters and—ultimately—in the final effort to glean the indication of a coherent method of subverting misogynistic visual cultures in Chapters VI and VII. By analysing—in non-phallic terms—the relations between murderous subjects and their victims and murderous Others and those who seek to punish them, the phallic function of ekphrasis is better understood. However, Ettinger's theory is not written as an analysis of existing theories of ekphrasis, and further comparative studies are required in this regard. Going forward, applying the matrixial to works such as Brian Glavey's on queer ekphrasis (2016) could offer a robust ekphrastic methodology to take into critical analysis.

In order to get a clear view of visual culture beyond its place within the literary text, analysing the filmic adaptations of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in Chapter IV provides an entry into the depiction of the Other in visual media. This allows us factor in both the moral restrictions imposed on representing homosexuality and the development of which behaviours are considered acceptable to show to mass audiences. The inability of cinema to explicitly represent homosexuality or its significance as a monstrous act to the story is indicative of the dominance of the discursive disconnection between the mainstream normative film industry and non-normative realities. As the discussion

returns to the literary in Will Self's adaptation, it is clear from the "good" Dorian's lifestyle and demise that a gap exists between culturally acceptable depictions of homosexuality and its reality.

Chapters V and VI follow the intertextual approach of Chapter IV, further incorporating poetry and online content, adding Duffy's "Salome" and the rise of online transgressive aesthetics to the discussion. *Fight Club* and *Crash* have been studied together in the past, focusing on the relationship between perversity and masculinity (Iocco, 2007). The analysis of the texts here, from a matrixial and ekphrastic perspective, provides an aesthetic framework which helps to understand the aesthetic reasoning behind the characters' transgressions and the intolerability of their heteronormative conditions, contributing to a critical context surrounding new misogynistic cultures.

The theme of an interwoven representation of the Other in Chapter VII suggests that exploring a mix of contrasting and complementing representations is vital in piecing together a stronger method of engendering empathy for non-masculine and non-normative subjects. Weaving an analysis between texts across the earlier chapters of the thesis provides an apt summation of the possibilities and potential for imaginative change in the representation of the artist-killer.

This study has looked at a broad selection of writers, texts and films in order to access a wide view of how those on the margins are represented and how they are treated by those who dominate culture. Though the study has been wide, it has also consisted of mainly Western anglophone texts, and further comparative readings of ekphrasis and matrixial theory can be borne out in relation to Eastern texts and philosophies, as well as materialist marxist readings of the economic underpinnings of aestheticising and

fetishising the Other in the works of John Berger and Slavoj Žižek. Nevertheless, focusing on generative texts such as *Dorian Gray* and *Salome* has allowed for the development of an understanding of how literature can influence how identities are defined and renewed, for better and worse.

For this study, texts focusing on serial hero-artist-murderer archetypes, such as Thomas Harris's Hannibal series, were not chosen because many of their more prominent themes strayed into those covered by Lisa Downing's *The Subject of Murder* (2013) and Joel Black's *The Aesthetics of Murder* (1990) and would have required of this thesis a more intensive investigation of the Romantic sublime. Patricia Highsmith's *Ripley* novels are another obvious omission, particularly in relation to the Ripley character's role as Patricia Highsmith's own dark Other.¹ There is much to be written about Ripley as one who lives in the borderspaces of behavioural and gendered expectations.

Other analyses, for which I hope this thesis provides some fundamental critical signposts, includes the late-twentieth century filmic preoccupation with transvestite killers (*Psycho*, 1960; *Dressed to Kill*, 1980; and *Silence of the Lambs*, 1991). The softened approach to the transvestite Other in Pablo Almodóvar's *The Skin I Live In* (2011) offers a modern gothic lens through which to make out a matrixial analysis.² The methodology within this thesis can also be applied to the generation of online content, particularly in the study of the appropriation of transgressive aesthetics in online (mainly) right-wing meme-creation as outlined in the work of Angela Nagle (2017).

VIII.2. A Methodology for Clearing an Alternative Symbolic Path

From the outset, this thesis sought to refine an analysis of aestheticised murder in such a way that primed texts for a kind of non-phallic critique centring on Bracha Ettinger's aesthetic and critical approach. What has been achieved by this, I feel, is that matrixial-style reflection offers a way of subverting the binary charge inherent to all cultural production (by way of its entering into a phallogentric marketplace) through its revelations of the passages between subjects and objects, missed encounters and experiences of otherness which form a great part of the processes of transgression and art-making. By exposing an invisible co-existing framework to the visible phallic one in murder encounters, we are made aware of the fragility of the murderer's subjectivity and—within this dynamic—their unlikely need for co-subjectivity with their victims which has been inspired by a non-Oedipal beyond-the-phallus matrixial sublimation. This suggests ulterior motives on the part of the artist-murderer for which fear or admiration is less appropriate a response than pity.

Though critique of the texts has centred on Ettinger, its place within the methodology has been to direct the analysis of ekphrasis. When looking at Banville's work in Chapter III, it was imperative, firstly, to direct the existing ekphrastic analyses undertaken by McMinn (1991) and Müller (2004) onto a discussion on the specific role of ekphrasis in the representation of violence. Their focus on the novels' preoccupation with representing the feminine is central to understanding subject-object relations in representations of violence. However, this has tended to veer towards the fixation in ekphrastic studies between image and word. Stephen Cheeke (2009) asks why this is so and looks towards the difference between word and image, subject and object as being the generator of the ekphrasis, of the deep feeling inspired by the artwork.

Glavey (2016) suggests something similar in the generative properties of ekphrasis as a queer art, where the exchange between word and image offers a queer aesthetic which facilitates ‘creativity, cooperation, and surprise [that] might be conjured within the cramped constraints of a repressive and often surprising social world.’³ Ettinger’s psychoanalytic approach was employed as an interpretive key to expanding on why Freddie Montgomery is compelled to live through art, to possess the image, to kill for it. Understanding Freddie’s relations to art and the feminine as attempts to open a pathway to the Other puts his failure in this endeavour into perspective. His apparent breakthroughs are near-misses he decries as failures, but when we consider this in light of Glavey’s thoughts on queer ekphrasis and the discursive impossibility of reproducing the Other, these near-misses are the best he can hope for. His frequent experiences of the Uncanny in his attempts suggests that approaching his attempts as relations with a borderspace is a particularly instructive approach to the study of ekphrasis. It suggests that his attempts at representing the humanity of the Other repositions ekphrasis as a form of discourse that is open to the perceptions of sound and texture—representations which the gaze does not obsess over within phallogentric systems of thought and desire.

While Chapter III covered an ethical meta-analysis of the De Quinceyan murderer seeking to understand and reconcile himself with his victim, Chapter IV covers a murderous subject whose sexuality associates him with otherness. Dorian Gray’s phallic subjectivity is compromised by his objectification in the eyes of his friends. This position is intertwined with his being the subject of ekphrasis rather than the producer of ekphrasis. The change in position is startling. Rather than taking the licence of a self-

appointed artist-hero, like Freddie, or engage in unchecked Sadeian libertinage, as one who has licence to dispense with morality, Dorian is controlled and constrained by his own visual depiction. By engaging in behaviours which must remain unspoken, *Dorian Gray* offers the chance to explore the relationship between sexual subtexts and the non-normative subject. The notion of Dorian's being perceived by himself and others throughout the narrative as a work of art allowed the advance of the comparative approach that began in Chapter III. Dorian is by the nature of his situation in constant dialogue with his Other, and here again we see that the inadequacy of language is intertwined with censorious social mores in the foreclosure of the Other.

Chapter IV offers a fluid intertextual analysis of the subtext in Wilde's novels and its adaptations, inflected with a matrixial analysis of otherness in the subtext. Further research is merited on this topic in terms of fusing the analysis of Dorian's relationship with the non-phallic from a matrixial perspective—which was the focus here—with Brian Glavey's work on queer ekphrasis. The aim of the chapter was to glean the significance of the nature of subtext to the production of monstrous subjects, particularly in relation to the depiction of gay men. As Chapter VII explores, Dorian's otherness when expressed as ekphrasis—with its inherent failure in mind—is something which offers to open up a liminal space in which Dorian's image on canvas is formed. Glavey notes that the transformation of the picture arises as 'a reaction to homophobia,' and as 'a product of the homophobic public imagination [...] taken up and transfigured.'⁴ Dorian is in a liminal position, neither clearly masculine nor feminine, subject nor Other. He is also in a position to disrupt the boundaries between these concepts. The Dorian of Will Self's epilogue to *Dorian: An Imitation*, is one such

figure, aware of the possibilities of this position, who—as Glavey puts it—challenges the ‘naturalness’⁵ of a post-liberation/feminism gender binary. Going forward, aligning this analysis with queer ekphrasis theory and further explorations of non-phallic artistic representations offers a new pathway for researchers.

Chapter V sought to widen the scope of the study, looking at another dominant non-normative killer in the popular imagination. The *femme fatale* is a widely accepted trope, particularly in cinema, which numerous studies connect with a long-standing dismissal of women who have access to power and agency in spite of systematic male domination. Studying the *femme fatale* in a contemporary context in combination with psychoanalytic feminist theory has allowed 1) for a straight-forward intertextual analysis of women who kill, and 2) for a deeper understanding of the *femme fatale* as a liminal subject, operating within phallic and non-phallic gender paradigms. Introducing the concept of the matrixial to the study of post-feminist *femmes fatales* offers a clear insight into and critique of the failures of neoliberal feminism, as well as an understanding of how the *femme fatale* responds to these failures. By understanding the *femme fatale* as a figure of misogynistic representation as well as feminist resistance, it becomes clearer what agents such as Amy Dunne and Salome must do in order to achieve survival and engender more nuanced responses to women who are resistant to systemic misogyny.

The analytic approach provided here can offer signposts to new studies of the quickly-evolving trope of the *femme fatale* in the twenty-first century. The still-emerging genre of “neoliberal noir” suggests post-feminist misogynies continue to ferment within the trope of the *femme fatale* in Mike Nicol’s post-South African apartheid “Revenge”

trilogy (2008-2011) and Steig Larsson's "Millennium" trilogy (2005-2007). Such examples suggest that writers—despite consciously creating female characters who are empowered and serve as agents against misogyny—use femininity as a blank canvas on which to emblazon fetishistic notions of infantilised female agency.

While Chapter V suggests women within post-feminism are still under siege from a prevailing masculinism, Chapter VI investigates the extent to which that masculinism still prevails. Exploring the effects of modernity on the traditional concept of masculinity has offered insight into the strain masculine subjects are under to retain a sense of dominance as well as identity. Its move into a "discourse of the oppressed" suggests a fragmentation of the identity has taken place and that a yearning is felt for a return to the total subjectivity of a Romantic hero. *Fight Club* and *Crash* both illustrate that the masculine subject, as a "new man", suffers a gender role strain in which male privilege is retained despite the novels' characters being unable to achieve traditional ideals of masculinity. The constraint and the effort to break free of it is reminiscent of the plight of the *femme fatale* within the heteronormative dynamic. The protagonists of both novels seek escape through transgression. This study has explored their transgressions as attempts to break free of subjectivity as they understand it, which is in fact the phallocentric system of signs into which they were born. Jack/Tyler Durden and James Ballard have, through transgression, sought the non-phallic—the "subsymbolic"—through violence. Here, a light can be shone on a path between the depiction of violence and murder, from representations of violent sexualities to representations of attempts to engage with the Other and share an experience outside the constraints of normativity. By imagining a condition for living

outside of the sexual and moral status quo, they reject the determinism of gender and aesthetics and find a new way of engaging with the part-subjects which surround them.

In a world of global media in which the primacy of masculinity is constantly being asserted and rebuked, a theory for the development of a contemporary meaning for masculinity can offer a new way of seeing for those looking to its traditional ideals. A reassessment of Jack/Tyler's quest for manhood is particularly apt, given *Fight Club's* status within "red-pilled" discourse. There is much promise in taking this critical approach to the analysis and production of violent and transgressive artworks. It may even offer residual insight for those who—in an echo of the misogynist libertines and artist-murderers of the past—have adopted transgressive aesthetics in order to consolidate their subjectivity. It reveals both the subjectivity and the otherness they seek to achieve.

Central to renewing our interpretation of phallogentric violence is the need to constantly renew our understanding of the Other, of that which is fetishised and reviled. We must repeatedly accept that it consists of an indecipherable apparent symbolic absence. This is the ideal to which we must strive. It is only by knowing our participation in the making of the Other and by continuing to reimagine those around us as subjects and ourselves as Other, that we may be fit to walk into the prevailing winds of misogyny.

¹ Joan Schenkar is keen to downplay Highsmith's identification with Ripley, but their commonalities and Highsmith's obvious affinity is clear and adds another dimension to the theme of duality throughout the series. See: Joan Schenkar, *The Talented Miss Highsmith: The Secret Life and Serious Art of Patricia Highsmith* (New York: St Martin's Press, 2009).

² See Michael Monaghan, "The Rise and Fall of the Transgender Movie Killer", *Cult*, No. 8 (February 2017), pp. 52-55.

³ *The Wallflower Avant-Garde*, p. 8.

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 36-37.

⁵ *Ibid*, p. 112.

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Appendix A: Poetry

“The Sphinx” by Oscar Wilde

(To Marcel Schwob in friendship and in admiration)

In a dim corner of my room for longer than
my fancy thinks
A beautiful and silent Sphinx has watched me
through the shifting gloom.

Inviolat and immobile she does not rise she
does not stir
For silver moons are naught to her and naught
to her the suns that reel.

Red follows grey across the air, the waves of
moonlight ebb and flow
But with the Dawn she does not go and in the
night-time she is there.

Dawn follows Dawn and Nights grow old and
all the while this curious cat
Lies couching on the Chinese mat with eyes of
satin rimmed with gold.

Upon the mat she lies and leers and on the
tawny throat of her
Flutters the soft and silky fur or ripples to her
pointed ears.

Come forth, my lovely seneschal! so somnolent,
so statuesque!
Come forth you exquisite grotesque! half woman
and half animal!

Come forth my lovely languorous Sphinx! and
put your head upon my knee!
And let me stroke your throat and see your
body spotted like the Lynx!

And let me touch those curving claws of yellow
ivory and grasp
The tail that like a monstrous Asp coils round
your heavy velvet paws!

A thousand weary centuries are thine
while I have hardly seen
Some twenty summers cast their green for
Autumn's gaudy liveries.

But you can read the Hieroglyphs on the
great sandstone obelisks,
And you have talked with Basilisks, and you
have looked on Hippogriffs.

O tell me, were you standing by when Isis to
Osiris knelt?
And did you watch the Egyptian melt her union
for Antony

And drink the jewel-drunken wine and bend
her head in mimic awe
To see the huge proconsul draw the salted tunny
from the brine?

And did you mark the Cyprian kiss white Adon
on his catafalque?
And did you follow Amenalk, the God of
Heliopolis?

And did you talk with Thoth, and did you hear
the moon-horned Io weep?
And know the painted kings who sleep beneath
the wedge-shaped Pyramid?

Lift up your large black satin eyes which are
like cushions where one sinks!
Fawn at my feet, fantastic Sphinx! and sing me all your memories!

Sing to me of the Jewish maid who wandered
with the Holy Child,
And how you led them through the wild, and
how they slept beneath your shade.

Sing to me of that odorous green eve when
crouching by the marge
You heard from Adrian's gilded barge the
laughter of Antinous

And lapped the stream and fed your drouth and
watched with hot and hungry stare

The ivory body of that rare young slave with
his pomegranate mouth!

Sing to me of the Labyrinth in which the two-
formed bull was stalled!
Sing to me of the night you crawled across the
temple's granite plinth

When through the purple corridors the screaming
scarlet Ibis flew
In terror, and a horrid dew dripped from the
moaning Mandragores,

And the great torpid crocodile within the tank
shed slimy tears,
And tare the jewels from his ears and staggered
back into the Nile,

And the priests cursed you with shrill psalms as
in your claws you seized their snake
And crept away with it to slake your passion by
the shuddering palms.

Who were your lovers? who were they
who wrestled for you in the dust?
Which was the vessel of your Lust? What
Leman had you, every day?

Did giant Lizards come and crouch before you
on the reedy banks?
Did Gryphons with great metal flanks leap on
you in your trampled couch?

Did monstrous hippopotami come sidling toward
you in the mist?
Did gilt-scaled dragons writhe and twist with
passion as you passed them by?

And from the brick-built Lycian tomb what
horrible Chimera came
With fearful heads and fearful flame to breed
new wonders from your womb?

Or had you shameful secret quests and did
you harry to your home
Some Nereid coiled in amber foam with curious
rock crystal breasts?

Or did you treading through the froth call to
the brown Sidonian
For tidings of Leviathan, Leviathan or
Behemoth?

Or did you when the sun was set climb up the
cactus-covered slope
To meet your swarthy Ethiop whose body was
of polished jet?

Or did you while the earthen skiffs dropped
down the grey Nilotic flats
At twilight and the flickering bats flew round
the temple's triple glyphs

Steal to the border of the bar and swim across
the silent lake
And slink into the vault and make the Pyramid
your lupanar

Till from each black sarcophagus rose up the
painted swathed dead?
Or did you lure unto your bed the ivory-horned
Tragelaphos?

Or did you love the god of flies who plagued
the Hebrews and was splashed
With wine unto the waist? or Pasht, who had
green beryls for her eyes?

Or that young god, the Tyrian, who was more
amorous than the dove
Of Ashtaroth? or did you love the god of the
Assyrian

Whose wings, like strange transparent talc, rose
high above his hawk-faced head,
Painted with silver and with red and ribbed with
rods of Oreichalch?

Or did huge Apis from his car leap down and
lay before your feet
Big blossoms of the honey-sweet and honey-
coloured nenuphar?

How subtle-secret is your smile! Did you
love none then? Nay, I know

Great Ammon was your bedfellow! He lay with
you beside the Nile!

The river-horses in the slime trumpeted when
they saw him come
Odorous with Syrian galbanum and smeared with
spikenard and with thyme.

He came along the river bank like some tall
galley argent-sailed,
He strode across the waters, mailed in beauty,
and the waters sank.

He strode across the desert sand: he reached
the valley where you lay:
He waited till the dawn of day: then touched
your black breasts with his hand.

You kissed his mouth with mouths of flame:
you made the horned god your own:
You stood behind him on his throne: you called
him by his secret name.

You whispered monstrous oracles into the
caverns of his ears:
With blood of goats and blood of steers you
taught him monstrous miracles.

White Ammon was your bedfellow! Your
chamber was the steaming Nile!
And with your curved archaic smile you watched
his passion come and go.

With Syrian oils his brows were bright:
and wide-spread as a tent at noon
His marble limbs made pale the moon and lent
the day a larger light.

His long hair was nine cubits' span and coloured
like that yellow gem
Which hidden in their garment's hem the
merchants bring from Kurdistan.

His face was as the must that lies upon a vat of
new-made wine:
The seas could not insapphirine the perfect azure
of his eyes.

His thick soft throat was white as milk and
threaded with thin veins of blue:
And curious pearls like frozen dew were
broidered on his flowing silk.

On pearl and porphyry pedestalled he was
too bright to look upon:
For on his ivory breast there shone the wondrous
ocean-emerald,

That mystic moonlit jewel which some diver of
the Colchian caves
Had found beneath the blackening waves and
carried to the Colchian witch.

Before his gilded galiot ran naked vine-wreathed
corybants,
And lines of swaying elephants knelt down to
draw his chariot,

And lines of swarthy Nubians bare up his litter
as he rode
Down the great granite-paven road between the
nodding peacock-fans.

The merchants brought him steatite from Sidon
in their painted ships:
The meanest cup that touched his lips was
fashioned from a chrysolite.

The merchants brought him cedar chests of rich
apparel bound with cords:
His train was borne by Memphian lords: young
kings were glad to be his guests.

Ten hundred shaven priests did bow to Ammon's
altar day and night,
Ten hundred lamps did wave their light through
Ammon's carven house--and now

Foul snake and speckled adder with their young
ones crawl from stone to stone
For ruined is the house and prone the great
rose-marble monolith!

Wild ass or trotting jackal comes and couches
in the mouldering gates:

Wild satyrs call unto their mates across the
fallen fluted drums.

And on the summit of the pile the blue-faced
ape of Horus sits
And gibbers while the fig-tree splits the pillars
of the peristyle

The god is scattered here and there: deep
hidden in the windy sand
I saw his giant granite hand still clenched in
impotent despair.

And many a wandering caravan of stately
negroes silken-shawled,
Crossing the desert, halts appalled before the
neck that none can span.

And many a bearded Bedouin draws back his
yellow-striped burnous
To gaze upon the Titan thews of him who was
thy paladin.

Go, seek his fragments on the moor and
wash them in the evening dew,
And from their pieces make anew thy mutilated
paramour!

Go, seek them where they lie alone and from
their broken pieces make
Thy bruised bedfellow! And wake mad passions
in the senseless stone!

Charm his dull ear with Syrian hymns! he loved
your body! oh, be kind,
Pour spikenard on his hair, and wind soft rolls
of linen round his limbs!

Wind round his head the figured coins! stain
with red fruits those pallid lips!
Weave purple for his shrunken hips! and purple
for his barren loins!

Away to Egypt! Have no fear. Only one
God has ever died.
Only one God has let His side be wounded by a
soldier's spear.

But these, thy lovers, are not dead. Still by the
hundred-cubit gate
Dog-faced Anubis sits in state with lotus-lilies
for thy head.

Still from his chair of porphyry gaunt Memnon
strains his lidless eyes
Across the empty land, and cries each yellow
morning unto thee.

And Nilus with his broken horn lies in his black
and oozy bed
And till thy coming will not spread his waters on
the withering corn.

Your lovers are not dead, I know. They will
rise up and hear your voice
And clash their cymbals and rejoice and run to
kiss your mouth! And so,

Set wings upon your argosies! Set horses to
your ebon car!
Back to your Nile! Or if you are grown sick of
dead divinities

Follow some roving lion's spoor across the copper-
coloured plain,
Reach out and hale him by the mane and bid
him be your paramour!

Couch by his side upon the grass and set your
white teeth in his throat
And when you hear his dying note lash your
long flanks of polished brass

And take a tiger for your mate, whose amber
sides are flecked with black,
And ride upon his gilded back in triumph
through the Theban gate,

And toy with him in amorous jests, and when
he turns, and snarls, and gnaws,
O smite him with your jasper claws! and bruise
him with your agate breasts!

Why are you tarrying? Get hence! I
weary of your sullen ways,

I weary of your steadfast gaze, your somnolent
magnificence.

Your horrible and heavy breath makes the light
flicker in the lamp,
And on my brow I feel the damp and dreadful
dews of night and death.

Your eyes are like fantastic moons that shiver
in some stagnant lake,
Your tongue is like a scarlet snake that dances
to fantastic tunes,

Your pulse makes poisonous melodies, and your
black throat is like the hole
Left by some torch or burning coal on Saracenic
tapestries.

Away! The sulphur-coloured stars are hurrying
through the Western gate!
Away! Or it may be too late to climb their silent
silver cars!

See, the dawn shivers round the grey gilt-dialled
towers, and the rain
Streams down each diamonded pane and blurs
with tears the wannish day.

What snake-tressed fury fresh from Hell, with
uncouth gestures and unclean,
Stole from the poppy-drowsy queen and led you
to a student's cell?

What songless tongueless ghost of sin crept
through the curtains of the night,
And saw my taper burning bright, and knocked,
and bade you enter in?

Are there not others more accursed, whiter with
leprosy than I?
Are Abana and Pharpar dry that you come here
to slake your thirst?

Get hence, you loathsome mystery! Hideous
animal, get hence!
You wake in me each bestial sense, you make me
what I would not be.

You make my creed a barren sham, you wake
foul dreams of sensual life,
And Atys with his blood-stained knife were
better than the thing I am.

False Sphinx! False Sphinx! By reedy Styx
old Charon, leaning on his oar,
Waits for my coin. Go thou before, and leave
me to my crucifix,

Whose pallid burden, sick with pain, watches
the world with wearied eyes,
And weeps for every soul that dies, and weeps
for every soul in vain.

1894, *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, J.B. Foreman Ed. (London: Collins, 1986), pp. 833-842.

“Medusa” by Carol Ann Duffy

A suspicion, a doubt, a jealousy
grew in my mind,
which turned the hairs on my head to filthy snakes
as though my thoughts
hissed and spat on my scalp.

My bride’s breath soured, stank
in the grey bags of my lungs.
I’m foul mouthed now, foul tongued,
yellow fanged.
There are bullet tears in my eyes.
Are you terrified?

Be terrified.
It’s you I love,
perfect man, Greek God, my own;
but I know you’ll go, betray me, stray
from home.
So better be for me if you were stone.

I glanced at a buzzing bee,
a dull grey pebble fell
to the ground.
I glanced at a singing bird,
a handful of dusty gravel
spattered down.

I looked at a ginger cat,
a housebrick
shattered a bowl of milk.
I looked at a snuffling pig,
a boulder rolled
in a heap of shit.

I stared in the mirror.
Love gone bad
showed me a Gorgon.
I stared at a dragon.
Fire spewed
from the mouth of a mountain.

And here you come
with a shield for a heart
and a sword for a tongue
and your girls, your girls.

Wasn't I beautiful
Wasn't I fragrant and young?

Look at me now.

The World's Wife (London: Picador, 1999), p. 40-42.

“Salome” by Carol Ann Duffy

I’d done it before (and doubtless I’ll do it again, sooner or later)
woke up with a head on the pillow beside me
– whose? –
what did it matter?

Good-looking, of course, dark hair, rather matted;
the reddish beard several shades lighter;
with very deep lines around the eyes,
from pain, I’d guess, maybe laughter;
and a beautiful crimson mouth that obviously knew
how to flatter...
which I kissed...
Colder than pewter.
Strange. What was his name? Peter?

Simon? Andrew? John? I knew I’d feel better
for tea, dry toast, no butter,
so rang for the maid.
And, indeed, her innocent clatter
of cups and plates,
her clearing of clutter,
her regional patter,
were just what I needed –
hungover and wrecked as I was from a night on the batter.

Never again!
I needed to clean up my act,
get fitter,
cut out the booze and the fags and the sex.
Yes. And as for the latter,
it was time to turf out the blighter,
the beater or biter,
who’d come like a lamb to the slaughter
to Salome’s bed.

In the mirror, I saw my eyes glitter.
I flung back the sticky red sheets,
and there, like I said – and ain’t life a bitch –
was his head on a platter.

The World’s Wife (London: Picador, 1999), pp. 56-58.

Appendix B: Artworks



Jean Watteau, *Pilgrimage to Cythera* (1718-1719), retrieved from Wikiart, <https://www.wikiart.org/en/antoine-watteau/embarkation-for-cythere>, 3/9/2019.



Aubrey Beardsley, *The Climax* (1893),
retrieved from Victoria and Albert Museum: Search the Collections
(<http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O1319381/the-climax-print-beardsley-aubrey-vincent/>),
1/7/2019.



Aubrey Beardsley, *The Dancer's Reward* (1894),
retrieved from Victoria and Albert Museum: Search the Collections
(<https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O1045835/the-dancers-reward-print-beardsley-aubrey-vincent/>), 1/7/2019.



Édouard Toudouze, *Salome Triumphant* (1886), retrieved from <https://ajcarlisle.wordpress.com/tag/19th-century-male-fantasies-misogyny/>, 6/6/2017.