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Sadeian Women: Erotic Violence in the Surrealist Spectacle

Catriona McAra

'Please be advised that I will vaccinate the world
with a desire for violent and perpetual astonishment'.
Dorothea Tanning 'Legend' (1949)¹



Figure 4.1 Dorothea Tanning, *Notes for an Apocalypse*, 1978. Oil on canvas, 50 x 62 in. Image courtesy of The Dorothea Tanning Foundation, New York.

In 1978 Dorothea Tanning painted *Notes for an Apocalypse*, a spectacular Dionysian canvas, representing both tragic tableau and magical rebirth. As this painterly visual narrative offers itself to the senses, the viewer is prompted to narrativise it or set the scene in response. A creased tablecloth crumples as a contorted, fleshy body materialises from beneath. She (for this curvaceous, blushing nude prompts us to read it as feminine) appears to hold a burning solar orb while a grotesque incubus squats at her feet. There is a convulsive, erotic violence suggested in this painting, a disruptive presence which, Tanning seems to indicate, underlies the grid-like order of reality. This chapter will consider the ways in which a violent erotic aesthetic in both text and image has been reclaimed by a distinctly feminist wing of artists and writers in the Surrealist and post-Surrealist pantheon, situated in rebellion against those normalising narratives of bourgeois masculinity to which many male Surrealist artists, writers and thinkers continue to adhere.

In *Notes for an Apocalypse*, Tanning is reminded of her strict Lutheran childhood Sundays when the pastor of her home-town of Galesburg, Illinois used to come to tea.² Her participation in the Surrealist movement in the 1940s and 50s would have taught her that the religious authority figure was one to transgress; think of the raped priest in Georges Bataille's novel *Histoire de l'Oeil (Story of the Eye)* (1928) or the Christ-like figure who emerges from the Sadeian castle after 120 days of bestial orgies and debauchery in Luis Buñuel's film *L'Age d'Or (The Golden Age)* (1930).³ Outside of the historical parameters of the Surrealist movement, *Notes for an Apocalypse* could be said to mark an interesting theoretical moment for the wider cultural scene, and to illustrate the emerging strategy of subversion from within.⁴ Although Tanning has staunchly denied her participation in feminism on numerous occasions, believing it divorced her from her male peers,⁵ such an overthrowing of domesticated reality and sobriety strikes one as a feminist move and inspires one to recontextualise her work with reference to the feminist politics of the period. Two years before the painting was made, Hélène Cixous published the English-language version of her feminist manifesto 'The Laugh of the Medusa' (1976) and three years previously Laura Mulvey published her psychoanalytically-inflected critique of the male gaze and narrative cinema (1975). Tanning's painting was also contemporaneous with Angela Carter's critique of the masculine bias of Surrealism. In Carter's essay 'The Alchemy of the Word' (1978), an otherwise eloquent micro-history of the movement, she acknowledged both her inspiration and her disappointment in the Surrealists. As she states, in a passage worth quoting at length:

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The surrealists were not good with women. That is why, although I thought they were wonderful, I had to give them up in the end. They were, with a few patronized exceptions, all men and told me that I was the source of all mystery, beauty, and otherness, because I was a woman – and I knew that was not true. I knew I wanted my fair share of the imagination too. Not an excessive amount mind; I wasn't greedy. Just an equal share in the right to vision. When I realized that surrealist art did not recognize I had my own rights to liberty and love as an autonomous being, not as a projected image, I got bored and wandered away.⁶

Carter's call for 'an equal share in the right to vision', and her need to be seen as more than Mulvey's glamorous 'projected image', seem reasonable enough but in order to achieve this, not only for Surrealist theory but for culture *en masse*, Carter did not '[wander] away'. Rather, she confronted them on their own ground; the critically violent aesthetics of the Sadeian pornographic imagination.

Erotic violence might initially strike one as an unlikely strategy for feminist liberation but by evoking Sade through Carter's analysis, this chapter aims to emphasise his revolutionary potential. In 1979, a year after Carter's critique of Surrealism, the London-based feminist publishing house Virago published both her critical study of pornographic literature, *The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History*, and her collection of re-visionary fairy tales, *The Bloody Chamber*. Since then, the two books have often been discussed in tandem: theory and practice. Sally Keenan argues that Carter's feminist study is politically 'ambivalen[t]' but acknowledges that it appeared during a 'transitional, watershed moment'⁷. Carter's interest in the eighteenth century pornographer and philosopher Donatien Alphonse François de Sade (also known as the Marquis de Sade, 1740–1814) enabled her to appropriate the darker side of the fairy tale genre. As she explains, Sade's pornography disenchanters or exposes the fairy tale's mythic qualities as suspect.⁸ His *Justine ou Les Malheurs de la Vertu* (*Justine or Misfortunes of Virtue*) (1791), which Carter labels 'Angel-Face on the Run', reads as a relentless fairy tale without resolution or happy ending. Here the lamb is wilfully led to the slaughter.⁹ Its sequel and antithesis, *Histoire de Juliette ou les Prospérités du vice* (*Story of Juliette or The Prosperities of Vice*) (1797), is also a 'black, inverted fairy tale'¹⁰; vice and virtue coupled with the fallen women, Justine and Juliette, being common aspects of the fairy tale genre. Sade's eighteenth-century amorality presents a complicated, unpredictable, double-edged sword that Carter brandishes for the cause of twentieth-century

feminism. She gallantly wrestles with Sade's particularly violent style of pornography and indicates how this might be marshalled for use in feminist identity politics. The resulting intertexts are conjured from a cutting and reassembling of their patriarchal source materials akin to the Surrealist parlour game of *cadavre exquis* (exquisite corpse) where body parts or snippets from conversations are pieced together to create one composite, often monstrous, whole. Here violence acts as metaphor, cutting between theory and practice, art and literature, in a Surrealistic juxtaposition of conflicting realities, reopening unfinished debates and interrogating a stagnant body politics.

To reiterate, in *The Sadeian Woman* Carter demonstrates how feminine sexuality is bound up with certain historical, economic, and social truths by invoking the work of Sade in order to expose cultural myth-making as deeply suspect. Sade is Carter's revolutionary touchstone and Sadism, that individualistic brand of sexual violence that Sade lends his name to, plays an important role in Carter's third-wave feminist project. Echoing another French philosopher, Michel Foucault, Carter reminds us that Sadism should not be considered as a disease or sexual perversion but 'a cultural fact'¹¹. Lorna Sage and Aidan Day both suggest that Carter's feminist stance was influenced by the work of Foucault, especially in her famous claim that 'flesh comes to us out of history'¹². Carter's project thus appears to have been an appropriation of the masculine style of Sade and a re-appropriation of the traditionally feminine genre of the fairy tale for feminist uses. There is a gendered move from passive consumption to active reclamation. As Carter states: 'Sade remains a monstrous and daunting cultural edifice yet I would like to think that he put pornography in the service of women, or, perhaps, allowed it to be invaded by an ideology not inimical to women'¹³. I would add that Carter reciprocally put Sade at the service of feminism, and that practitioners like Tanning are themselves evocations of the liberating Sadeian woman that Carter discusses.

Whilst looking towards the monumental 'cultural edifice' of Sade for guidance, Carter also appears to have looked back to the fairy tales and visual narratives of those female Surrealist practitioners from the previous generation, who would go on to outlive her: Leonora Carrington (1917–2011) and Dorothea Tanning (1910–2012). In their early short stories, such as Carrington's 'The Debutante' (1937–38) and Tanning's 'Blind Date' (1943), it is curious that both appear to share a series of eroticised violent motifs which, in retrospect, appear to have been appropriated and exaggerated for feminist ends. Moreover, in their respective novels, Carrington's *The Hearing Trumpet* (1976) and Tanning's *Abyss* (1949/77),

later republished by Virago under the title *Chasm: A Weekend* (2004), the imagery of spectacular violence reoccurs. Tanning's novel has been interestingly described by Gaby Wood as 'a magical Sadean nursery rhyme', and by Jane Kramer as 'high-goth S&M fantasy'¹⁴ – descriptions which could also be applied to the work of Carter. The preoccupation with erotic violence is echoed in Carrington and Tanning's respective bodies of visual work, yet it is surprising to find that their works have rarely been put into direct dialogue, and frustrating that any extant discussion tends to merge their works solely on account of their shared gender, to the detriment of their preoccupation with Surrealism. Indeed, they tend to be positioned as united in their mutual engagement with women's 'problems' as muses or objects of the male gaze embroiled in a daily struggle to balance their creative needs with the domestic demands imposed on them by patriarchy.¹⁵ Instead I propose that Carter's discussion of the spectacle of Sadeian violence offers a valuable theoretical tool for bridging the gap between Carrington and Tanning.

While sadomasochism has often been presented as an amalgamation of sexual perversions since Sigmund Freud, Gilles Deleuze differentiates sadism from masochism, not only in terms of activity and passivity but distinct in their historical moments of emergence (the late-eighteenth and mid-nineteenth century respectively) and in their relative proximity to aesthetics:

Comparing the work of Masoch with that of Sade, one is struck by the impossibility of any encounter between a sadist and a masochist. Their milieus, their rituals are entirely different; there is nothing complementary about their demands. Sade's inspiration is first of all mechanistic and instrumentalist. Masoch's is profoundly culturalist and aesthetic. It is when the senses take works of art for their objects that they become masochistic for the first time.¹⁶

In Sade's novels, the male character whips the female while in Masoch's novel, *Venus in Furs* (1870), it is a female dominatrix who whips the male protagonist, yet surprisingly it is the Sadeian model which triumphs as the more useful literary discourse for feminist purposes. Though sadomasochism may harbour an ambivalent relationship with feminism, in order to avoid objectification, the feminist must opt for 'the hammer not the anvil'¹⁷, and choose sadism over masochism paradoxically in order to avoid becoming objectified.

Furthermore, the 'instrumental' or 'mechanistic' principles of sadism resonate with the aestheticisation of sexual violence and desire-driven

narratives in Surrealism. Sade is considered to be an important Surrealist precursor and hero of their literary and philosophical pantheon. He invades Surrealist art and writing, and looms large in their theoretical thought. André Breton and Georges Bataille both evoke Sade in their distinct theorisations of Surrealism. In the first 'Manifesto of Surrealism' (1924), Breton admiringly states: 'Sade is Surrealist in Sadism'¹⁸. Following this, Bataille wrote one of several essays critiquing Breton's poetic idealisation of Sade entitled 'The Use Value of D.A.F. de Sade (An Open Letter to my Current Comrades)' where he called for the 'sub' to trump the 'sur' of sur-realism. This included the recognition of the base realism of the Sadeian message rather than its poetic abstraction to which Breton subscribed.¹⁹ Sade's presence can also be felt in much of the related Surrealist visual culture of the period such as the *Marseille Card Deck* (1940/43) and Man Ray's *Imaginary Portrait* (1938) where Sade is imaged as one of his stone fortresses found in novels like *Justine*. Representations of Sadeian violence in Surrealism offer an expansive topography, already well mapped by Alyce Mahon, Natalya Lusty, and Jonathan P. Eburne.²⁰ Elsewhere, Mahon has convincingly discussed Sade's status as a proto-Surrealist icon highlighting the Surrealists' appropriation of him as 'delicious terror'²¹, an oxymoron that characterises the dialectical relationship one might have with Sade. Although Carrington was hesitant to admit the pervasive influence of Sade, and Tanning was suspicious of feminism as a political movement, I would argue that they share a distinctive form of Sadeian feminism that confidently appropriates masculine modes of pornographic violence.

Tanning is explicit about her familiarity with Sade, who appears in many of her works in a variety of guises including *Le Petit Marquis* (*The Little Marquis*) (1947) which depicts a bewigged child-like prince with a whip in hand.²² Carrington, meanwhile, did not directly state Sade as an influence, though a dialogue is easier to trace between Carter and Carrington, who have previously been linked by Marina Warner and Susan Rubin Suleiman.²³ Carrington has read Carter, and Carter had certainly read Carrington as demonstrated by her inclusion of the short story 'The Debutante' in her edited compilation *Wayward Girls and Wicked Women* (1986). The work of all three is characterised for being knowingly subversive, deliberately provocative and playful, even bawdy at times. For instance, Tanning created a costume inspired by O, the protagonist of Pauline Réage's explicitly pornographic novel *Story of O* (1954), for a fancy dress party.²⁴ When asked by Carlo McCormick about the 'brooding violence' in her work, she indicated that it came from reading a wide range of literature.²⁵ When asked a similar question by

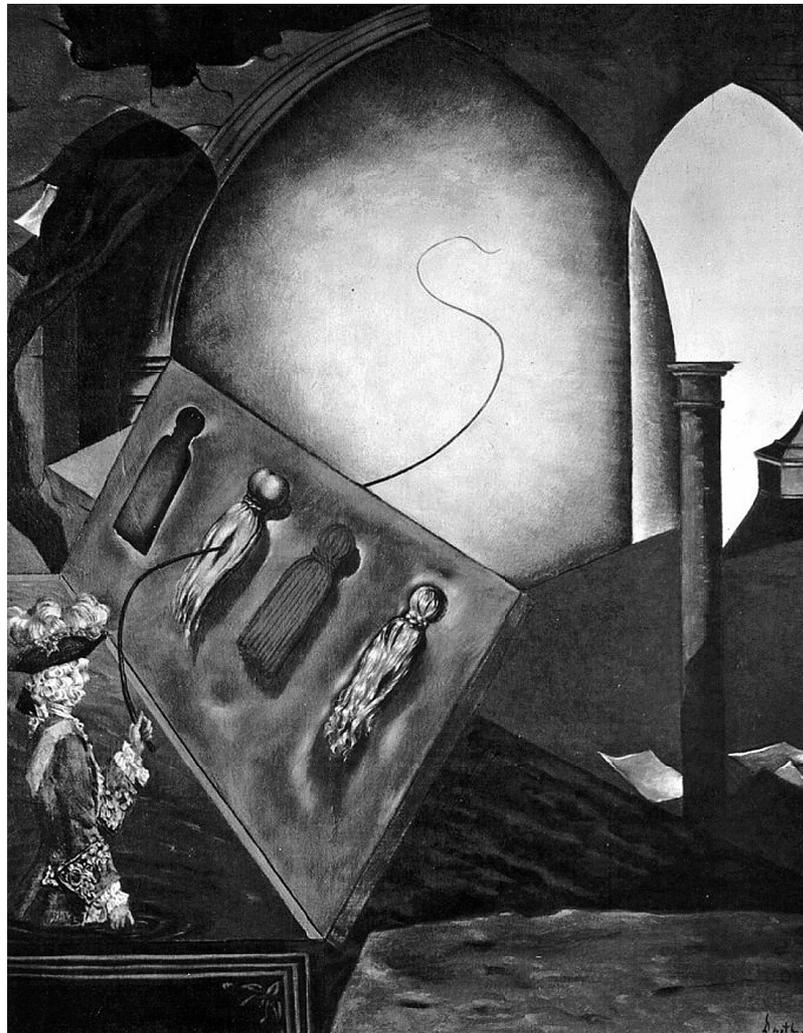


Figure 4.2 Dorothea Tanning, *Le Petit Marquis (The Little Marquis)*, 1947. Oil on canvas, 20 x 24 in. Stolen from car in Elk City, Oklahoma, December 1947. Image courtesy of The Dorothea Tanning Foundation, New York.

Alain Jouffroy, Tanning stated that her use of violence was in rebellion against those civilising forces that obscure the unruly, carnal desires of the human-animal.²⁶ By twisting agency and through burlesquing the very narrative of the master/slave dialectic that patriarchy relies upon,

they bend culture to their own will. In this scenario, the Medusa of Cixous not only howls with laughter but gobbles up Freud's petrified male protagonist as she throws herself into the text.²⁷ Indeed it is useful to draw upon Cixous' notion of *écriture féminine* when making a case for those artists and writers who may not be traditionally understood as feminist. By exploring the ways in which they re-vision Sade's violent aesthetic we can discern new forms of feminist critique. In the following quotation, Cixous critiques psychoanalysis as a 'convenient', phallogentric myth:

Too bad for them if they fall apart upon discovering that women aren't men, or that the mother doesn't have one. But isn't this fear convenient for them? Wouldn't the worst be, isn't the worst in truth that women aren't castrated, that they only have to stop listening to the Sirens (for the Sirens were men) for history to change its meaning? 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.²⁸

By unravelling the Freudian narratives of fetishism and erectile petrification and therefore exposing the violence of female castration as a patriarchal ruse, Cixous rewrites the punch line and 'speaks' the female in bodily terms – a strategy which is mirrored by the characters inscribed by Carrington and Tanning. Castration anxiety, as one of the favourite fairy tales of psychoanalysis, is similarly critiqued by Carter:

The whippings, the beatings, the gougings, the stabbings of erotic violence reawaken the memory of the social fiction of the female wound, the bleeding scar left by her castration, which is a psychic fiction as deeply at the heart of Western culture as the myth of Oedipus, to which it is related in the complex dialectic of imagination and reality that produces culture. Female castration is an imaginary fact that pervades the whole of men's attitude towards women and our attitudes to ourselves. ...²⁹

By appointing Sade to trump Freud, Carter illuminates and demythologises presumed social codes and the unconscious narratives that structure attitudes towards gender. Sadeian violence is thus used as a metaphor to challenge these otherwise entrenched beliefs. Carter goes on to claim that such violence is censored from art but not from reality, boundaries that are arguably transgressed by the female writers and artists under discussion. They often go further in their imaging of the

moment of violent confrontation, and offer violent alternatives to the foregrounding of masculine tropes in psychoanalysis.

Carrington and Tanning's Surrealist stories often consist of plots which are driven by curiosity towards violence: in Tanning's *Abyss/Chasm*, the violence escalates towards an orgasmic climax as the majority of characters meet their gruesome ends. Meanwhile in Carrington's novel *The Hearing Trumpet*, the old ladies of the nursing home take their vengeance by poisoning their superiors in an unexpected plot twist which involves an apocalyptic rewriting of the quest for the Holy Grail from a feminist perspective. In Lusty's analysis of Carrington's early fairy tale 'The Debutante', she discusses how female violence manifests itself in response to the political climate. The adolescent body of the unruly debutante, or *femme-enfant*, becomes a metaphor for the instability of class and gender politics on the eve of World War II.³⁰ The upper classes are falling apart along with their social rituals and the New Woman is asserting her role in society. Jonathan P. Eburne has pointed out that all of Carrington's short stories 'end abruptly and inconclusively', and as such, they offer anxious premonitions of the coming war. This paranoid recurrence of images is read in terms of a narrative descent.³¹ In her fairy tale 'The House of Fear' (1937), for example, the narrative trails off at the end and we are only able to learn from Max Ernst's accompanying collage illustration that this abruptness is because the protagonist has collapsed after the one-eyed centaur, Fear, has noticed her. Though Ernst's corresponding illustration contributes an image of the tale's ending which is left ambiguous by the actual text, it is not a literal depiction of the textual image but rather a visual interpretation of inconclusive descent. Eburne argues that the abrupt truncation of the narrative *prevents* the reader from fully engaging with Carrington's 'disenchantment'.³² The reader does not know whether damage has been inflicted, thereby this creates a sense of anti-climax or anti-spectacle. The author keeps the ending to herself thus frustrating the voyeuristic reader's desire for closure. This is true too of Tanning's first literary offerings 'Blind Date' and 'Abyss', which play even more explicitly on a disembodied, or incomplete, gaze. In 'Blind Date', 'empty socket[s]' are recurrent motifs, and the scene is more tactile than visual. Tanning offers us an encounter which is literally a blind date and the protagonist goes on to stab her partner in order to retrieve her runaway sewing machine – itself a potentially violent readymade or Surrealist object.

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Both Carrington and Tanning demonstrate their awareness of the violent, Sadistic tastes of the Surrealist group, and exhibit their ability

to re-appropriate such tastes for their own purposes. Such themes are reflected in their sumptuous bodies of work, which establishes inter-medial continuity with their written work. In their early paintings, Carrington and Tanning share a commitment to Surrealist visual narratives but it is in their respective disenchantment with Surrealism and subsequent development from under its influence that the violent spectacles of their stories are made manifest. Both dispense with the traditional linear perspective that is undoubtedly a product of the Western male gaze. Carrington's painting is less explicitly violent than Tanning's tumultuous canvases. Carrington's painting has a latent mythological violence while Tanning's painting becomes more abstract, tactile, and more physically involved on a larger scale. By the 1960s amorphous, fleshy feminine bodies invade her canvases and are sewn up as soft sculptural installations. The navel becomes a particular preoccupation that reappears as the focal point in several works. As Mieke Bal and Luce Irigaray have both pointed out, the navel is the true 'wound', rerouted



Figure 4.3 Dorothea Tanning, *Pelote d'épingles pouvant servir de fétiche* (*Pincushion to Serve as a Fetish*), 1965. Cloth sculpture: black velvet, white paint, gun pellets, and plastic with pins, 15 3/4 x 17 15/16 x 15 3/4 in. Tate Collection, London. Image courtesy of The Dorothea Tanning Foundation, New York.



Figure 4.4 Dorothea Tanning, *Woman Fleeing Fear Itself*, 1980. Oil on canvas, 25 1/2 x 18 in. Private Collection, California. Image courtesy of The Dorothea Tanning Foundation, New York.

from the Derridian emphasis on the hymen, as maternal scar or trace of former attachment to the body of the mother.³³ Tanning's figures speak the Cixousian feminine or Sadeian woman through their exhibition of spasms of violent ecstasy or, as Soo Y Kang has convincingly argued,³⁴ *jouissance* in paintings such as *Notes for an Apocalypse* or *Woman Fleeing Fear Itself* (1980), and cloth sculptures including *Pincushion to Serve as a Fetish* (1965). The poetic titles of such works are as suggestive as the bodies depicted, and deliberately combine Freudian terms with a violent aesthetic.

If one returns to Carrington's and Tanning's earlier Surrealist self-portraits, one may note that they are remarkably alike, both in terms of their composition – namely the proximity between figure and fantasy creature, and in terms of their dual relationships with literary fiction by both artists as writers. Although the art and the literature can be read independently, they offer us a deeper understanding of the relationship between eroticism and violence when placed alongside one another. For instance, Tanning's portrait *Birthday* (1942) was reproduced alongside her fairy tale 'Blind Date' in *VVV* magazine (1943) not as an illustration but as an intermedial reflection, while Carrington's motif of the hyena makes a double appearance, both in her visual narrative, *Self-Portrait: Inn of the Dawn Horse* (1937), and in her fairy tale 'The Debutante'. The association of the child-woman with a carnivorous animal in the work of all three writers is striking. Though there is a wealth of scholarly readings of Surrealist depictions of women and animals, with particular attention paid to their erotic or bestial undertones, there is little emphasis on the violent or carnivorous aspects of this relationship.³⁵ The joint motif of girl and animal can be observed in Carter's rewritings of 'Little Red Riding Hood' and the wolf in the 'Company of Wolves' (1979/1984), as well as the hyena and little girl protagonist in Carrington's 'The Debutante', and the character Destina and her not-so imaginary friend the lion in Tanning's *Chasm*. Both Tanning's and Carrington's stories harbour the conspicuous image of unfortunate older female characters having their faces mauled by these carnivorous creatures, prompted or at least condoned by the little girls. In Carrington's 'The Debutante' it is the maid who suffers this fate:

"Ring for your maid and when she comes in we'll pounce upon her and tear off her face. I'll wear her face tonight instead of mine"

"It's not practical" I said. She'll probably die if she hasn't got a face..."

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"I'm hungry enough to eat her" the hyena replied.³⁶



Figure 4.5 Leonora Carrington, *Self-Portrait: Inn of the Dawn Horse*, 1937. Oil on canvas, 25 5/8 x 32 in. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. The Pierre and Maria-Gaetana Matisse Collection, 2002 (2002.456.1) © 2012. Image copyright by The Metropolitan Museum of Art/Art Resource/Scala, Florence © Photo SCALA, Florence. © ARS, NY and DACS, London 2012.

This motif of facelessness is reflected in Tanning's *Chasm*, when the vain adult female character Nadine falls prey to the lion who tears off her face: '[the lion] bent down, raised his paw and began to tear at the face [...] the body of Nadine lay as it had fallen [...] but there was no longer a face...'³⁷ Both conjure violent spectacles which cut into the core of reality, creating a sur-reality out of textual shock and rupture. They echo chapters from Bataille's *Histoire de l'Oeil*, 'Lewd Animals' and 'Granero's eye', where Simone's 'violent desire'³⁸ prompts her to demand the testicles of the bull, who will mangle the 'Prince Charming'³⁹ matador, Granero, by tearing out one of his eyes. In the first 'Manifesto of Surrealism', Breton captures this slicing action with the phrase: '[t]here is a man cut in two by the window'⁴⁰. Following the inherent violence of Max Ernst's cut-and-paste collages found in

works such as *La Femme 100 têtes* (*The Hundred Headless Woman*) (1929), Carrington and Tanning appear to go even further than their male peers, violently slashing through prescribed fairy tale constructions of femininity by using magical, ravenous animals as their trusty familiars or daemons to bite into, or disenchant, reality.⁴¹

The idea of defacing the stereotypically feminine through violent means is reflected in the ruined beauty of Ghislaine in Carter's novel *Shadow Dance* (1966),⁴² and later in her fairy tale, 'The Bloody Chamber', in which the heroine is almost decapitated by her Bluebeard-type husband. In all three examples, violence enables a temporary resolution or reconciliation; Carrington's debutante is spared her obligatory appearance at the coming out ball, Tanning's Destina is reunited with her great grandmother, the mysterious Baroness, and Carter's protagonist is saved from execution by her intuitive mother who rides in to save her daughter at the last moment before decapitation. The coupling of defacing and self-portraiture finds parallels in the recurrent Surrealist trope of faceless mannequins and dolls as uncanny avatars. In Tanning's and Carrington's examples the whole face is ripped off as a subversive metaphor for feminist rebellion that returns and disrupts the male gaze by depicting the obscene side of patriarchal discourse. Later, in Carrington's fairy tale 'White Rabbits' (1941) the magical rabbits are viciously carnivorous while their owners have magical skin described as 'leprosy'. The story ends with the female monster's finger breaking off, which seems to push castration anxiety to its limit via parody. All of these tales can be read as feminist in terms of their Sadeian interrogation and re-visioning of the masculine narrative of the castration complex.⁴³ The Freudian fear of castration as represented by the phallus is reversed, subverted and thus undone by recoding it as feminine. The sadistic act of defacing and/or devouring the 'other' is committed by an animal, as a kind of bestial alter-ego for the young female character. It is impossible to overlook these motifs as deeply erotic due to the connotations of 'eating face' or, more crudely, 'eating pussy'.

Additional violent sexual metaphors can be found elsewhere in the texts. In Carrington's 'The Oval Lady' (1937–38), the *femme-enfant's* rocking horse, Tartar, is burnt by her father as punishment for her transformation into a horse during a childish game of make-believe. Here Sadeian violence intrudes the nursery space, and there is an Oedipal power struggle between the patriarch and the little girl who has turned herself into an animal. The recurrence of Marquis or Bluebeard-type characters is also striking; at its most obvious in Carter's rewriting of Perrault's fairy tale (1697) as 'The Bloody Chamber' where the male ogre

is tellingly called the Marquis, and treats his latest wife like a trapped animal being prepared for consumption:

He stripped me gourmand that he was, as if he were stripping the leaves off an artichoke....He in his London tailoring; she bare as a lamb chop. Most pornographic of all confrontations. And so my purchaser unwrapped his bargain....And I began to shudder like a racehorse before the race.⁴⁴

The distinction between flesh and meat is simultaneously explored in the final chapter of Carter's *Sadeian Woman*, entitled 'Speculative Finale: The Function of Flesh'. She speaks of this split in epistemophilic terms: 'carnal knowledge is the infernal knowledge of the flesh as meat'⁴⁵. Again this theme is echoed in Carrington's fairy tale 'White Rabbits' where the main character purchases a hunk of meat so that she might be invited inside her neighbour's house. The meat is then devoured by her neighbour's carnivorous rabbits. The ambiguous terrain of flesh and meat as spectacle recurs in Carrington's contemporaneous painting *The Meal of Lord Candlestick* (1938) where a group of kelpies or other horse-like creatures are depicted at a table surrounded by a luxurious banquet of flowers, children and other small creatures. Through the simple act of turning her herbivores into carnivores, the monstrousness of their actions is amplified. Such behaviour is simultaneously eroticised through the bestial status of these animals as alter egos for the artist/writer herself. The penetrative aspect of edibility and slaughter is articulated by the narratologist Mieke Bal who points out, with reference to Rembrandt's painting *Slaughtered Ox* (1655), that: 'Opening bodies is... the very project of painting', again dissecting the intertext that is the exquisite corpse.⁴⁶ Tanning's aforementioned fleshy paintings similarly interrogate as well as celebrate this spectacle of erotic violence. Such 'painterly' interrogation reaches its climax in Tanning's novel *Chasm* in which each character is endowed with his or her own fetish and violent narrative. This is seen, for instance, when Destina shows Albert her memory box full of bits of animal carcasses: "She had... shown him her violence."⁴⁷ Freud argues that the fetish is symbolic evidence of the fear of castration, or violence against the male body, and again we find Tanning turning this on its head. In *Chasm* there is an especially violent scene in which the governess Nelly takes revenge on her employer Raoul in graphic, spectacular terms. Here the *male* character undergoes the transition from active subject to passive object as he is sadistically stabbed by his formerly subservient employee. The scene begins as a



Figure 4.6 Leonora Carrington, *The Meal of Lord Candlestick*, 1938. Oil on canvas, Collection André-François Petit, Paris. © ARS, NY and DACS, London 2012.

sadomasochistic role-play, with Nelly tying Raoul to the bed, 'a familiar routine', before it takes a gruesome turn:

She studied the mucid cavern of his mouth as it opened to swallow the world, this purple grotto emitting sound. And the hole in his belly – it was only a navel but it too was whispering....] Longing for quiet, she drew out from her skirts the ice pick, and grasping it with both hands brought it down at the centre of his big neck, and as soon pulled it out, releasing a tiny jet like a toy fountain. The face on the pillow contorted, a gagged cry, more like a growl, held the open mouth while a violent reflexive spasm nearly tore him from his bonds.... Carried far away now, Nelly raised the instrument again. More fountains, more spurts... bubbled up as she plunged her weapon again and again into the waxy flesh, in the chest, the stomach, the eye, the mouth, even a thigh when it flexed. Nelly was by this point thoroughly disgusted – she had not imagined provoking such hideous sounds.⁴⁸

This scene verges on a renegotiation of the spectacle, not just for its multi-sensory textures but because it reverses the traditional phallic/uterine, active/passive roles usually ascribed to masculine and feminine. During the attack the abuser becomes the abused and is disembodied from life to corpse, from object to abject as we find a role reversal of the traditional rape scene. Raoul's abuse of Nelly is avenged as she 'penetrates' him in the only logical way possible. It is highly reminiscent of the former wives' remains in Carter's *The Bloody Chamber* and of Sade's numerous torture scenes. Once again, this constitutes an adult version of a child's game that offers an intertextual critique of patriarchal norms.

The tension between sharp weaponry and its puncturing psychological affect on the victim's body had already occurred earlier in Tanning's 'Blind Date' in a passage in which the protagonist sadistically attacks the figure she encounters, presumably her date, with a 'beautiful shining implement' reducing him to 'human wreckage' whilst searching for her 'run-away sewing machine' which she finds inside his aquarium-like belly.⁴⁹ Here the protagonist is further described as the 'daughter of the definitive hypodermic'. Both this scene in 'Blind Date' and the hacking of Raoul's body in *Chasm*, chime with Carter's discussion of pornographic flesh as meat. The narrative veers toward its inevitable climax with Albert being devoured by the vagina-like desert chasm after a physical fight with his fiancée Nadine. Again there is a reversal of the traditional masculine and feminine roles as the *male* figure is impaled on the walls of this vagina-like form:

The stump has ripped through his abdomen and impaled him, deep under the cage of his ribs. From the wound his blood pours, soaking down through clothes and boots, and a tight coil of intestine, darkly glistening, bulges from behind his torn shirt....He was aware of the mutilation of his body as one contemplates the piece of porcelain that cannot be mended, wistfully and regrettably, yet with recognition of complete catastrophe. He felt the stealthy slipping away of his entrails, the busy flowing of his blood...⁵⁰

This violent end to Albert Exodus, which follows his sighting of the little girl glowing like white phosphorous across the canyon, echoes the image of Justin's death from Sade's *Misfortunes of Virtue*: 'It is as the lightning whose beguiling flashes lend momentary beauty to the air before hurling headlong into death's chasm the unhappy man who is dazzled by its brilliance'⁵¹. Again there is continuity between Sadeian and Surrealist

examples, especially in terms of the gendered associations of lightning with the feminine and falling with the masculine; violent weather and landscapes are used to augment the eroticisation of the broken body. It is difficult to contain this type of transgressive material which by its very nature deliberately avoids being pinned down, systematised or theoretically compartmentalised. *The Sadeian Woman* is an ambiguous text, and Sade's women, the 'sexual terrorist' Juliette and the repressed maiden or 'blonde clown' Justin, serve as unlikely role models for Carter's analysis. However, a deeper message can be gleaned from reading *The Sadeian Woman* with reference to the visual and textual material of Surrealist practice. Like Sadism, Carter recognises that violence and pornography are cultural facts. There is no point in denying them, so a creative 'participation' and cultural engagement is required. All three writers, Carter, Carrington and Tanning, use recurrent themes of devouring, decapitation and defacement into their Surrealist work that is often graphically violent. I would argue that all three can therefore be said to appropriate Sade as a philosopher with a feminist edge. These Sadeian women thus stand for the renegotiation of feminism in Surrealism by drawing on and re-visioning its violent aesthetic inherited from Sade. As Carter prophesises, they 'fuck their way into history and, in doing so, change it'⁵². Through reconciling text and image, real and sur-real, literal and metaphorical, through the evocation of violence, the Sadeian woman becomes critically self-conscious and moves off the page or canvas into the perpetual struggle and reality of body politics.

Notes

Grateful thanks to Pamela S. Johnson at The Dorothea Tanning Foundation, New York.

1. Dorothea Tanning. 'Legend,' *Max Ernst: 30 Years of His Work, A Survey*, ex. cat. (Beverly Hills: The Copley Galleries, 1949), p. 16.
2. Tanning suggests this herself in *Birthday and Beyond* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2000), cited in *Dorothea Tanning: Painter, Sculptor, Writer*: <http://www.dorotheatanning.org/life-and-work/view-work/work-101/>. Accessed 9/02/2012.
3. Amy Lyford has also drawn links between Tanning's practice and this particular scene, 'Refashioning Surrealism: The Early Art of Dorothea Tanning', in *Beyond the Esplanade: Paintings, Drawings, Prints from 1940 to 1965* (San Francisco: Frey Norris Gallery, 2009), p. 7.
4. Susan Rubin Suleiman's *Subversive Intent: Gender, Politics and the Avant-Garde* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1990) eloquently paves the way for this argument.
5. Tanning cited in Whitney Chadwick, *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1985), p. 12, see also pp. 14–16. See also Jane

- Kramer, 'Self Inventions: Dorothea Tanning, Painter Turned Poet', in *The New Yorker* (3 May 2004), p. 42.
6. Angela Carter, 'The Alchemy of the Word' in *Expletives Deleted: Selected Writings* (London: Vintage, 1992), p. 73.
 7. Sally Keenan. 'Angela Carter's *The Sadeian Woman*: Feminism as Treason', in *The Infernal Desires of Angela Carter: Fiction, Femininity, Feminism*, Ed. Joseph Bristow and Trev Lynn Broughton (London: Longman, 1997), p. 132, 134.
 8. Angela Carter, *The Sadeian Woman* (London: Virago, 1979), p. 28.
 9. *Ibid.*, pp. 43–44.
 10. *Ibid.*, p. 44, 91.
 11. *Ibid.*, p. 36.
 12. *Ibid.*, p. 11. See also Lorna Sage. *Flesh and the Mirror: Essays on the Art of Angela Carter* (London: Virago, 1994), p. 14 and Aidan Day. *Angela Carter: The Rational Glass* (Manchester University Press, 1998), p. 11.
 13. Carter, *The Sadeian Woman*, p. 42.
 14. Kramer, p. 44, Chadwick, p. 188, Gaby Wood, 'I've Always Been Perverse', in *The Observer* (15 August 2004), p. 7.
 15. Suleiman has creatively re-negotiated this problem for Carter and her contemporaries' generation in terms of a critical "double allegiance" to their predecessors in 'Dialogue and Double-Allegiance: Some Contemporary Women Artists and the Historical Avant-Garde', in *Mirror Images: Women, Surrealism and Self-Reproduction*, Whitney Chadwick (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998), pp. 128–155. See also Natalya Lusty. *Surrealism, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), p. 47.
 16. Gilles Deleuze. 'From Sacher-Masoch to Masochism', Trans. Christian Kerslak, *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities* 9/1 (April 2004), 126. The term 'masochism' is borrowed from Leopold von Sacher-Masoch's *Venus in Furs* (1870).
 17. Leopold von Sacher-Masoch. *Venus in Furs*, Trans. Joachim Neugroschel (London: Penguin, 2000), p. 9.
 18. André Breton. 'Manifesto of Surrealism' in *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, Trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Michigan: Ann Arbor, 1972), pp. 26–7.
 19. Georges Bataille. 'The Use Value of D.A.F. de Sade (An Open Letter to my Current Comrades)' in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings 1927–1939*, Trans. Allan Stoekl (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), pp. 91–102.
 20. Alyce Mahon. *Surrealism and the Politics of Eros 1938–1968* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2005); Natalya Lusty. *Surrealism, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007); Jonathan P. Eburne. *Surrealism and the Art of Crime* (Cornell University Press, 2008), p. 50.
 21. Mahon. 'Delicious Terror,' unpublished research paper (2009). See her forthcoming book *The Sadeian Imagination: Image, Text and Terror* (Princeton University Press).
 22. Tanning, Dorothea. *Between Lives: An Artist and Her World* (New York: Norton, 2001), p. 78, 189. That same year Tanning also contributed a lithograph to accompany the catalogue for *Le surréalisme en 1947; exposition internationale du surréalisme* on a page that was titled 'Sade, ou L'Insurrection Permanente.' The lithograph depicts a keyhole metamorphosing into a female body much like the locks of hair in *Le Petit Marquis*.

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23. Marina Warner. 'Leonora Carrington's Spirit Bestiary; Or the Art of Playing Make-Believe', *Leonora Carrington*, ex. cat. Ed. Andrea Schlieker (London: Serpentine Gallery, 1991), p. 12. See also Suleiman. 'The Bird Superior Meets the Bride of the Wind: Leonora Carrington and Max Ernst' in *Significant Others: Creativity and Intimate Partnership*, Ed. Whitney Chadwick and Isabelle de Courtivron (London: Thames and Hudson, 1993), p. 101; Suleiman, *Subversive Intent*, p. 169 and Chadwick, p. 117.
24. Tanning, *Between Lives*, p. 299.
25. Tanning interviewed by Carlo McCormick in *BOMB magazine*, No.33 (Autumn 1990).
26. Tanning interviewed by Alain Jouffroy. 'Interview with Dorothea Tanning', in *Dorothea Tanning*, ex. cat., (Stockholm: Malmö Konsthall, 1993), p. 57.
27. Hélène Cixous. 'The Laugh of the Medusa' in *Signs 1*, (1976): pp. 875–93. See also Sigmund Freud. 'Medusa's Head', in *Writings on Art and Literature: Sigmund Freud*, Ed. Neil Hertz (California: Stanford University Press, 1997), pp. 264–265.
28. Cixous, p. 885, see also p. 883, and Soo Y. Kang. 'Tanning's Pictograph: Repossessing Woman's Fantasy', in *Aurora, The Journal of the History of Art*, 3 (2002), 89–104.
29. Carter, *The Sadeian Woman*, p. 26.
30. Lusty, pp. 20–21.
31. Jonathan P. Eburne. *Surrealism and the Art of Crime* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2008), p. 219.
32. Eburne, p. 228.
33. Luce Irigaray, 'The Bodily Encounter with the Mother', in *The Irigaray Reader*, Ed. Margaret Whitford (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1991), pp. 39–42; Mieke Bal, *Reading 'Rembrandt': Beyond the Word-Image Opposition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 21–23.
34. Kang, p. 103.
35. See Georgina M.M. Colvile, 'Women Artists, Surrealism and Animal Representation', in *Angels of Anarchy: Women Artists and Surrealism*, ex. cat. Ed. Patricia Allmer (Manchester: Manchester City Art Gallery, 2009), p. 68. See also Marina Warner, 'Spirit Bestiary or the Art of Playing Make-Believe', pp. 11–23.
36. Carrington, 'The Debutante', p. 47.
37. Tanning, *Chasm A Weekend* (London: Virago, 2004), p. 139.
38. Bataille, *Histoire de l'Œil*, p. 47.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 49.
40. Breton, 'Manifesto of Surrealism', p. 21.
41. Lusty argues this for Carrington but here we might add Tanning and Sade into this formula, p. 21.
42. 'The scar was like a big, red crack across ice', Carter, *Shadow Dance* (London: Virago, 1995), p. 10. Grateful thanks to Felicity Gee for reminding me of this passage.
43. Lusty, pp. 19–45.
44. Carter, 'The Bloody Chamber', p. 11.
45. Carter, *The Sadeian Woman*, p. 165.
46. Bal, *Reading 'Rembrandt'*, p. 361.
47. Tanning, *Chasm*, p. 88.

48. *Ibid.*, pp. 110–111.
49. Tanning, 'Blind Date', in *VVV*, No. 2–3 (March 1943), p. 104.
50. Tanning, *Chasm*, p. 133.
51. D. A. F. de Sade, 'The Misfortunes of Virtue', in *The Misfortunes of Virtue and Other Early Tales*, Trans. David Coward (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 147.
52. Carter, *The Sadeian Woman*, p. 31.