'Between a flashing star and a gravestone' – sleepers, liminality and communal dreaming

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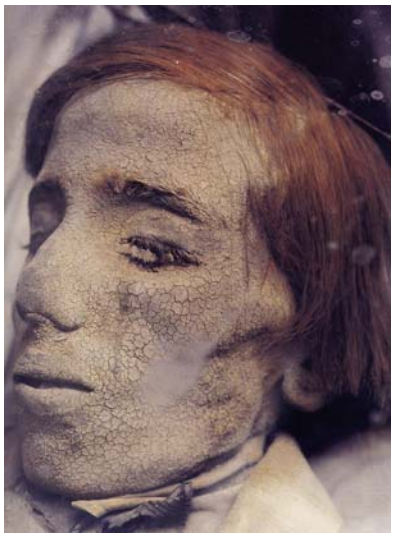

Walking through the catacombs of the Convento dei Cappuccini in Palermo, Sicily, the spectator is confronted by thousands of bodies in varying stages of decay. For several hundreds of years the monks had maintained a burial ground in the catacombs beneath the monastery. Later, in response to requests by rich laymen, the site became the final resting place of many others, some eight thousand in total. The bodies were preserved by various embalming techniques then placed in niches along the walls dressed in their best apparel. It was common practice for relatives to visit their dead loved ones and prepare themselves for their own future fate. Viewing this spectacle is an eerie experience which becomes intensified upon the sight of the body of two year old Rosalia Lombardo in the last chamber. Despite the cessation of the practice in 1881, the body of Rosalia Lombardo was placed in the catacombs in 1920 and she can be distinguished from the other bodies due to her disturbingly perfect preservation[1]. Mystery surrounds the conservation of her body, which was carried out by Professor Salafia at the request

[1] Robert Andrews and Jules Brown, *The Rough Guide to Sicily* (Rough Guides: London, 1999), p.86

of her parents when she died from a bronchial infection. Salafia is said to have invented a new recipe which took the form of a series of injections which he used for the first time on Rosalia, a recipe which he carefully guarded and eventually took with him to The United States where he continued his practice.[2] Eighty years later, Rosalia has become an intriguing tourist attraction mentioned in most guide books. She can be observed in a glass-fronted coffin, her body wrapped in a cloth, but her face with the eyes closed, surrounded by ringlets of golden hair tied with a yellow ribbon, appears as that of a peacefully sleeping child.

Viewing the body of Rosalia Lombardo is an uncanny experience, and one which provokes many associations. She could be seen to be endlessly occupying a liminal realm, a transitional state between this world and the next, between life and death, between awake and asleep. This position banishes her to a no-man's land, caught 'between a flashing star and a gravestone'.[3] We are reminded of fairy stories such as 'Sleeping Beauty' and 'Snow White', as well as tales of the perfectly preserved bodies of Catholic saints such as St. Cecelia, St. Catherine and St. Clare. The eighteenth century obsession in art and literature with the theme of 'death and the maiden' comes to mind

[2] Personal email to the author from the Biblioteca Centrale Regionale, Palermo, dated: 21:12:2000.
[3] Luce Irigaray, *The Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche* (Columbia University Press: New York, Oxford 1991), p. 59.

as does Madame Tussaud's 'Sleeping Comtesse' modelled on the body of the Comtesse du Barry who was executed during the French Revolution. The evocative figure of the 'sleeper' within western culture is almost invariably represented through a feminine body. I hope here to unravel the complex associations between femininity, passivity, liminiality, sexuality and death and attempt to reconfigure the sleeper in a more positive light. The collaboration between Tilda Swinton and Cornelia Parker in 'The Maybe' at the Serpentine Gallery, London in 1994 will serve as a contemporary model for exploring the potential of the sleeper as a vehicle for communal dreaming.

Gazes

To begin with, it is important to ask why is the figure of a dead or sleeping woman so ubiquitous within western culture and what kinds of desires does it fulfil? In *Speculum of the Other Woman,* Luce Irigaray uses Freud's psychoanalytic theory on femininity to reveal how female sexuality is perceived culturally as a mirror to its masculine counterpart – a reassuring, confirming reflection, which is nonetheless lacking, since there is nothing to be *seen* of the female genitalia. In her view, the male sex has taken upon itself the status of oneness offering a universalised perspective of identity symbolised by the privileged figure of the phallus. Crucial to this worldview is the emphasis on the faculty of sight. Martin Jay employs Norman Bryson's definition of 'the logic of the gaze' (as opposed to the glance) to suggest that it produces a visual take that is both eternalised and reduced to one point of view. Such a gaze is disembodied and linked to an abstract coldness creating an ever widening gap between spectator and the spectacle 'in the service of a reifying male look that turn(s) its targets into stone'.[4] Irigaray reads Freud's definition of 'womanhood' as 'A man minus the possibility of

[4] Martin Jay 'Scopic Regimes of Modernity' in *Vision and Visuality,* ed. Hal Foster (Bay Press: Seattle, 1988), pp 3-23 (p. 8)

(re)presenting oneself as a man = a normal woman'.[5] She sees this as the phallocentric desire for the same, which can only serve death: 'woman will assume the function of representing death (of sex/organ). Castration'. Under the patriarchal economy: '*Nothing to be seen is equivalent to having no thing. No being* and *no truth'*.[6] Likewise Elizabeth Bronfen believes that the female genitalia have come to serve as a privileged trope for lack, castration, division and therefore decay, disease and fatality.[7]

Like Sleeping Beauty, who slept in a catatonic state for a hundred years, or Snow White, whose ostensibly dead body was displayed in a glass coffin on top of a hill in the Grimms Brothers' famous fairytale, the displayed body of Rosalia Lombardo seems to confirm the power of the masculine gaze, which corresponds to a shift away from maternal touch to a distant, reifying gaze; an act of seeing which implies possession of the observed object. The passive female body fulfils the ideal of femininity within patriarchy, as Hélène Cixous confirms:

> Man's dream: I love her - absent, hence desirable, a dependent nonentity, hence adorable. Because she isn't there where she is. As long as she isn't where she is. How he looks at her then! When her eyes are closed, when he completely understands her, when he catches on and she is no more than this shape made for him: a body caught in his gaze.[8]

The painting *Sleeping Venus* c.1505 which hangs in Gemaldegalerie, Dresden, is attributed to Giorgione,[9] who with this image introduced into western painting the female nude in reclining pose as a compositional theme which was repeatedly used in

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[5] Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman* (Cornell University Press: Ithaca and New York, 1974) p.27.
[6] ibid p.48.
[7] Elizabeth Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body: death, femininity and the aesthetic* (Manchester University Press: Mancheater, 1992) p.11.
[8] Hélène Cixous, *The Newly Born Woman* Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément (University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, 1986) p.67.
[9] There is some dispute as to whether Titian may have painted the Sleeping Venus. See Ludwig Baldass, *Giorgione* (Thames and Hudson: London, 1965) p.50 and pp.162-164.

subsequent works by Titian and Bellini among others. Giorgione's painting is particularly distinctive because the Venus figure is also asleep. This can be seen in comparison to Titian's *Venus of Urbino* c.1538, which uses an almost identical composition except that the awake Venus stares back at the viewer. *Sleeping Venus* is doubly coded with passivity in terms of the patriarchal gaze, for not only is she reclining and naked, she is also unaware that she is being watched. She appears dead to the world, encouraging a voyeuristic consuming gaze with no fear that she will look back. In fact, the viewer cannot be sure that she is actually alive, reinforcing the patriarchal proximity between death (or catatonic states which resemble death) and femininity. For Cixous, the patriarchal gaze loves passive feminine bodies because they suggest that men, rather than women have reproductive power, can bring forth life:

> Beauties slept in their woods, waiting for princes to come and wake them up. In their beds, in their glass coffins, in their childhood forests like dead women. Beautiful, but passive; hence desirable: all mystery emanates from them. It is men who like to play dolls. As we have known since Pygmalion.[10]

Marina Warner in her book *From the Beast to the Blonde* relates an early version of the Sleeping Beauty story recorded by Giambattista Basile called *Sole, Luna e Talia.* In this story, the hero is already married to someone else when he comes across the sleeping Talia whilst out hunting. She has pricked her finger on a sliver of flax and fallen into a coma. When she will not wake up, he 'plucked from her the fruits of love'. In the process he fathers the twins, Sole and Luna.[11] This slippage along the line from gaze to touch to rape of the passive feminine body is echoed in Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa or, The History of a Young Lady* (1748) in which Lovelace, unable to seduce the puritanical

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[10] Cixous, *The Newly Born Woman* p.66.

[11] Marina Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde: On fairytales and their tellers* (Chatto and Windus: London, 1994) p.220. See also Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (Penguin Books: London, 1976) pp.227-230. In this version, Talia remains sleeping all through the process of giving birth. The two babies nurse from her breast until one of them takes into its mouth by accident the finger with the sliver of flax and sucks it out, upon which Talia awakens.

Clarissa, first drugs and then rapes her. These stories serve to reconfirm the violating connotations of the patriarchal gaze from the outset. Of Sleeping Beauty myths, Cixous says:

> One cannot say…"it's just a story." It's a tale still true today. Most women who have awakened remember having slept, *having been put to sleep.*
> *Once upon a time…once…and once again.*[12]

With a passive feminine body, man does not have to enter into an inter-subjective relationship which maintains respect for sexual difference:

> She sleeps, she is intact, eternal, absolutely powerless. He has no doubt that she has been waiting for him forever.
> The secret of her beauty, kept for him: she has the perfection of something finished. Or not begun. However, she is breathing. Just enough life - and not too much. Then he will kiss her. So that when she opens her eyes she will see only *him*; him in place of everything, all him
> -This dream is so satisfying! Whose is it? What desire gets something out of it?[13]

Cixous points out that stories such as Sleeping Beauty always end when the maiden wakes up: 'He leans over her…Cut. The tale is finished. Curtain'. If the tale continued, there would be two subjects, although 'You never know with women'.[14] According to Cixous, the story which follows is sociocultural: they have lots of children, she spends all her time pregnant or in labour until he no longer sees her as a woman anymore.

As Elizabeth Bronfen has illustrated, the penchant for the image of the passive horizontal feminine body reached its peak in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, where images of dead women became so prolific that our over-familiarity with them has lead to a blindness to the cultural and social implications of these images for women.[15] A culture which appoints death to the feminine necessarily sees survival as masculine. The horror of seeing a dead corpse leads to a moment of power and triumph, the satisfaction

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[12] Cixous, *The Newly Born Woman* p.66.
[13] ibid p.66.
[14] ibid p.66
[15] Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body* p.3.

of the survivor who has eluded death. As in the case of Rosalia Lombardo, her body is passive, fallen and horizontal, while the survivor is erect, superior and active. As a dead corpse, with her eyes closed, Rosalia does not look, she is looked at, and from a safe distance. The viewer is presented with the death of the Other, which is pleasing because the immortality of the survivor is confirmed. The spectator is forced to acknowledge a basic fact of life, that there is death, but can take satisfaction in seeing it happen to someone else.

The patriarchal death drives

In order to understand why the passive, fallen body of Rosalia Lombardo would afford a certain ambivalent pleasure to the viewer, it is necessary to examine Freud's understanding of the death drives which are introduced in 'Civilisation and its Discontents' and developed in 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle'.[16] In 'Civilisation and its Discontents', Freud defines a world in which a ceaseless battle is being fought between Eros (the life forces) and Thanatos (the death forces) – a world which is dominated by pain, unhappiness and repression. Margaret Whitford has defined the death drives as both 'what breaks things into fragments and what prevents fragmentation'.[17] Death is the end, the obliteration of the ego and in this way it fragments, but in a society such as the one which Freud describes where pain and misery are the norm, death can also be viewed as a return to wholeness, the complete symbiosis of the womb, zero tension, or the ultimate pleasure of which Freud speaks in 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle'.[18] Whitford argues that the sexual drives which are often set in opposition to the death drives in the sense that they are life-giving and life-preserving, can also be seen as a

[16] Sigmund Freud, *The Freud Reader,* ed. Peter Gay (Vintage: London, 1995), pp.722-773 and pp.594-628.
[17] Margaret Whitford, 'Irigaray, Utopia and the Death Drives' in *'Engaging With Irigaray',* eds. Carolyn Burke, Naomi Schor and Margaret Whitford (Columbia University Press: New York, 1994) pp.379-400 (p.390)

form of division in that they break up stasis and unbind wholeness.

For Irigaray, women are caught up in the conflict between Eros and Thanatos because the sign 'woman' is positioned outside the patriarchal social contract, but as the excluded reference point, this 'woman' operates as the basis and condition of the death drives:

> *the death drives can be worked out only by man*, never, under any circumstances, by woman. She merely "services" the work of the death instincts. Of man.[19]

Under the western patriarchal economy, developed from platonic idealism and Christian ideology, only the eternal and the everlasting are valued and life is often seen as an unfortunate detour on the way to the permanence of death. Woman, as the Other holding up a secure, reflective mirror to man also becomes the site where anxiety about death can be deposited, she becomes like an abyssal tomb. However, this anxiety is never completely overcome; where death is concerned, there is always excess, something which cannot be grasped.

The embalmed corpse of Rosalia Lombardo supports the patriarchal death drives in a number of ways. She operates as a persistent reminder of death's constant presence in life. As an embalmed corpse which has remained preserved from normal bodily decay, she also supports the patriarchal obsession with the eternal, the unchanging. She can be seen as an abyssal tomb where the spectator can project his / her fears about death. As a memorial, the embalmed corpse of Rosalia Lombardo in fact is hardly concerned with her life or death at all. As Bronfen has pointed out, we are culturally blind to the ubiquity of feminine death in representations because it is so excessively obvious and

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[18] Freud, *The Freud Reader* p.612.
[19] Irigaray, *Speculum* p.53.

therefore escapes analysis.[20] As with the example of Rosalia Lombardo, it is clear that negotiations about death take place *over* the dead feminine body. In a representation of the dead feminine body, culture can simultaneously repress and articulate unconscious anxiety about death. Bronfen focuses on the way in which the dead feminine body becomes a trope for something else in western culture and the violence towards the feminine principle that this unleashes.

The fetishistic auto-icon

Observing the corpse of Rosalia Lombardo raises unsettling questions. As Bronfen points out, the embalmed body disrupts the clear distinctions between the body and sign.[21] A purely aesthetic rendition of a body, as in the many examples of depictions of Christ's body in religious art, though similar to and re-animating the real, original body also emphasises and acknowledges the difference between the two. The preserved body, however, operates as a fetishistic auto-icon, a representation of an object by the object itself, coming dangerously close, from the Catholic perspective, to certain forms of pagan and primitive 'idolatry', from which the church was so keen to distance itself.

The term 'fetish' is an entirely European construct,[22] coming from the Portuguese word *fetico* meaning a 'charm'[23] and was used by fifteenth and sixteenth century Dutch, French and Portuguese explorers and traders to describe objects imbued with occult power on Africa's Guinea coast. Most authors of that period agreed that the practice of fetishism was 'abominable to civilised taste and reason'.[24] Enlightenment philosophers,

[20] Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body* p.3.
[21] Bronfen, ibid p.107.
[22] Wyatt Macgaffey in Anthony Shelton, 'The Chameleon Body, Power, Mutilation and Sexuality' in *Fetishism, Visualising Power and Desire* (The South Bank Centre and The Royal Pavilion, Art Gallery and Museums: Brighton, 1995), p.11-51 (p.11)
[23] Shelton, ibid p.12.
[24] ibid p.12.

social theorists and Catholic missionaries saw fetishistic practices as representing the most primitive stage of religious practice. More recently, it has been reluctantly acknowledged that similar objects and customs exist in supposedly 'civilised' countries and can be located within European Catholic traditions and religious practices.

Rosalia's body serves a very particular function within Christianity which again violently displaces her body with a sign. Since the Middle Ages, and particularly during the baroque period, the dead female body came to represent a *momento mori* within Christianity, a reminder of death's constant presence in life. The popular literary theme of 'death and the maiden' isolated the beautiful female body in full bloom as the symbol of the ephemeral nature of life and the need for every good Christian to place the eternal preservation of their soul above the earthly pleasures offered during life. The conjunction of femininity with death in the *vanitas* tradition is intended as a warning against any vain belief in the importance of the human body, but it does this precisely by emphasising the body in a manner which could be considered fetishistic. The Sicilian Catholic practice of visiting one's dead embalmed relatives encourages the viewing of their bodies as *momento mori* - a constant reminder of impending death and the need to prepare for it. However, the fetishised embalmed feminine corpse of Rosalia Lombardo can be seen to operate on many duplicitous levels which simultaneously confirm and undermine the phallocentric logic.

Observing the perfectly preserved body of Rosalia Lombardo prompts feelings of uncanny anxiety in most viewers. Freud saw the uncanny (unheimlich) as something which arouses dread and horror, but in the particular sense that it brought to light something that ought to have remained secret and hidden,[25] something that was once

[25] Sigmund Freud, *Writings on Art and Literature* (Stanford University Press: Stanford, California, 1997), pp.193-233 (p.200)

familiar and homely, which has become uncanny through evolutionary progress ('unheimlich' literally translated means 'unhomely'). Freud saw the double as a frequent provocation of uncanny feeling. The double was originally an insurance against the destruction of the ego, an 'energetic denial of the power of death'.[26] Freud believed that this was what led the Ancient Egyptians to adopt the practice of embalming their dead. However, in modern societies, where the ego is more sharply separated from the external world, the double looses its reassuring quality, and becomes a source of terror. An 'uncanny harbinger of death'.[27]

Rosalia's embalmed body can be seen as a classic example of uncanny experience. She is an auto-icon, a representation which consists of the thing itself. She represents an extreme case of doubling because the auto-icon is both no longer what it was and not something else. Like the Egyptian mummies, on one level she permits denial of the power of death to obliterate the ego and the body. Bronfen argues that Lovelace's fantasy of stealing and embalming Clarissa's corpse after her death arises from a desire to 'demonstrate his unlimited right to possess her'. Desire in this context can be linked back to the privileging of the usurping power of the masculine gaze, which commands possession over the surveyed feminine body. His justification: 'Whose was she living? – Whose is she dead but mine?'[28] clearly demonstrates this. For Freud, all fetishised objects are a substitute for the mother's penis that the little boy once believed in, and refuses to accept is absent.[29] He does not want to accept that the mother is 'castrated' because this suggests that he himself can be castrated. The fetish then 'remains a token

[26] Otto Rank in Freud, ibid p.210.
[27] Freud, ibid p.211.
[28] Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body* p.?
[29] Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud Vol XXI,* pp.152-153 (pp.152-153)

of triumph over the threat of castration and a protection against it',[30] allowing the fantasy of a stabilised relationship between the desiring subject and the thing desired. The preservation of Rosalia's body in this context can be read as a fetishistic safeguard against castration and a reinforcement of the patriarchal desire to privilege all things eternal against that which is ephemeral and subject to decay. Viewed as a fetish, the auto-icon can be seen as a strategy to occult death through a 'duplicitous blindness that allows the fetishist to hesitate between acknowledging that a body is 'inadequate' and denying, disavowing or negating this 'inadequacy' in order to experience pleasure'.[31] What is preserved in the fetish is something which the fetishist should have given up or knows is lost. The auto-iconic preservation of Rosalia Lombardo produces a situation of eternally controlled deferral of her death, which also defers the threat of castration which her death prompts. What is preserved therefore is not Rosalia, but desire itself.

Bronfen argues that the Freudian obsession with castration anxiety masks a more deep-rooted and universal anxiety about death.[32] For Freud, the fetish is a strategy to deal with loss through denial and in this sense he links it to melancholia, which he saw as failed mourning, an inability to accept the death of the desired object by provoking its perpetual articulation. Freud uses Hoffmann's story 'The Sand-Man' to illustrate how anxiety about losing one's eyes is yet another trope for the fear of castration.[33] The fetish can be seen as an embodiment of the desire to deny that something is absent from sight. As such, it returns again to the trope of the 'absent' female genitalia and the fear of nothing to be seen. According to Bronfen, triumph over this anxiety is always connected with making things present to sight. The 'stiff' insensible and impenetrable

[30] ibid p.154.
[31] Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body* p.96.
[32] ibid p.35.
[33] Freud, *Writings on Art and Literature* pp.206-208.

presence of the (feminine) corpse operates as a substitute for the phallus and the gazed at, untouchable feminine body loses its quality of being another (dangerous) sex and 'phallic idealisation places itself on a pedestal'.[34] In this way, Rosalia's corpse could be understood as a trope for the phallus itself. However, Freud argues that as a token of triumph over the threat of death and castration, the fetish contains a superlative moment, in that the 'horror of castration has set up a memorial to itself in the creation of this substitute',[35] which turns into an acknowledgement of the inadequacy of the substitute. In this sense, the dead feminine body is seen as 'castrated', and threatens the spectator with castration for if the body of the 'other' can die (be castrated), then so can the survivor be castrated (or die). The uncanny anxiety that this duplicity creates in the presence of Rosalia Lombardo's displayed body begins to destabilise the triumph over death that the survivor's position seemed to previously occupy. This paradoxical oscillation between two extreme positions begins to characterise all methods of viewing Rosalia's body and points to a need to examine the realm of liminality which she occupies.

Liminality and the feminine

The term liminal derives from the latin *limen* meaning threshold. The liminal realm is a transitional one, a passageway between two distinct states. At the beginning of the twentieth century, anthropologist Arnold van Gennep developed from his observations of cultural ceremonies of renewal a theory which he expounded in *The Rites of Passage.*[36] He came to believe that every community develops rituals in order to deal with the uncertainty of threshold experiences by binding them symbolically. Van Gennep defined

[34] Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body* p.99.
[35] Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud Vol XX* p.154.
[36] Arnold Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (The University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1960)

three stages to any ritual: separation rites (preliminal), transition rites (liminal) and rites of incorporation (post-liminal).[37] He believed that these three stages applied to all rites of passage including birth, puberty, marriage, pregnancy and death, but greater emphasis may be placed on one of the three realms depending on the particular circumstances. In the case of funeral rites, he suggests that the transitional rites (liminal) can have a 'duration and complexity sometimes so great that they must be granted a sort of autonomy'.[38] Fundamental to the funerary rite, however, is the need to incorporate the deceased securely into the world of the dead. This was of vital importance because the liminal stage is believed to be unclean and to contaminate those who come into contact with it. Liminality carries with it codings of formlessness, timelessness and disorder. Those existing in the liminal realm are regarded with ambivalence by the rest of the community and according to Mary Douglas may be temporarily outcast:

> Danger lies in transitional states, simply because transition is neither one state nor the next, it is indefinable. The person who must pass from one to another is himself in danger and emanates danger to others.[39]

Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood has noted a gendered binary opposition underlying and articulating death rituals in early Greece.[40] The feminine is associated with disorder, pollution, nature, separation and death, while the male counterpart symbolises order, purity, culture, integration and life. In this context, mourning is culturally seen as feminine while burial is masculine. This binary opposition is supported by contemporary western culture as many European cultures assign to women the role of washing and dressing the corpse, leaving men to deal with the more public aspects of the funeral.

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[37] ibid p.11.
[38] ibid p.146.
[39] Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (Routledge and Kegan Paul: London and Henley, 1966), p.96.
[40] Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood, 'To Die and Enter the House of Hades: Homer, Before and After', pp.26-28 in *Mirrors of Mortality: Studies in the Social History of Death* ed. Joachim Whaley (Europa Publications Ltd: London, 1981), pp.15-39.

Anthropologist Maurice Bloch has observed that in many cultures, women are allocated a central role in death rituals, which he perceives as an opportunity to act out victory over the physical, biological nature of man. He observes that death rituals are often so elaborate that it seems as if the negative aspect of life is more specifically and concretely represented than the positive life-affirming rituals. The reason for this, he argues, is that in order to vanquish the world of sorrow, death and division and establish decisive victory, the 'enemy must be first set up in order to be knocked down'.[41] He notes that the opposition between fertility and (female) sexuality is evident in many death rituals: 'Again and again women are *given* death while the social order is reaffirmed elsewhere'[42] for 'ancestral fertility is a mystical process symbolised by the tomb and the (male) bones'.[43] In this context, Rosalia can be seen to support the patriarchal opposition between female sexuality and fertility. The enemy (death and sexuality) has been set up by the constant presence of her female body, and it is vanquished by the triumph over decomposition, which her perfect preservation eludes. She can be seen as a symbol of (male) fertility associated with the permanence of bones.

However, there is a flip side to this association. A distinction is made by the anthropologist Robert Hertz[44] between a first and second burial in death rituals. The first burial is represented by the physical death of the individual, followed by a liminal period where the soul is believed to hover over the body and mourning takes place, followed by the second burial which takes place at the interment or cremation of the corpse and the establishment of a memorial which re-stabilises social order and places the deceased firmly on the side of the dead and re-confirms the life of the surviving community. The

[41] Maurice Bloch, 'Death, Women and Power' *Death and The Regeneration of Life* (Cambridge university Press: Cambridge, 1982) p.218.
[42] ibid p.226.
[43] Bloch and Parry, *Death and The Regeneration of Life* p.21.

liminal realm is a threat to the community because it carries with it the feminine encodings of instability, pollution, decay, the unknown and unclassifiable. It is crucial within the patriarchal economy that the second burial takes place so that regeneration can occur with the termination of the state of liminality. In the case of Rosalia Lombardo, the liminal phase has been suspended indefinitely and as such she symbolises a threat to the stability of that community and by extension to all western communities. Second burial has not taken place therefore her body continues to be associated with decay, danger, contamination and disruption. These two conflicting ways of looking at her displayed body creates an ambivalent tension which is not easily resolved. It is easy to feel in her presence that she might at any time open her eyes and look back. In her book *The Absent One*, Susan Letzer Cole states that funerary ritual 'enacts the desire to reanimate the dead in a more or less controlled way in order to prevent the reanimation of the dead in an uncontrolled way'.[45] She sees death rituals as being marked by ambivalence towards the dead beloved, which expresses itself in the 'paradox of *embodied absence*'[46] arising from the desire and the fear of the reanimation of the corpse:

> What we fear in particular – the revenant, the ghost returning to haunt us – is also what we desire – the extending of life beyond the moment of death.[47]

Rosalia's embalmed cadaver can be seen to articulate this ambivalence, in a way which is controlled but also anxious. Her body presents an invitation to the spectator to simultaneously enter into the liminal realm with her, to share in her death, but also to divorce him / herself from the danger that this poses to the living.

The cultural implications of the occupation of the liminal realm by the body of Rosalia

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[44] ibid pp.3-5.
[45] Susan Letzler Cole, *The Absent One* (The Pennsylvania State University Press: University Park and London, 1985), p.10.
[46] ibid p.9.

Lombardo are highly problematic, ambivalent and paradoxical. Irigaray believes that this ambivalence arises because the death drives of the patriarchy are only calculated to serve the needs of one sex: 'Our tradition has not taught (women) to take responsibility for and watch over their own death'.[48] It is therefore necessary for women to have access to their own death drives and for these to be bound by a specific and appropriate symbolic order. Until this is achieved, the feminine principle will remain in the liminal realm, excluded from 'becoming':

> I am lifeless but deprived of yet living my death. Indefinitely in death. A mourning veil into which you endlessly transfigure me so as to make yourself immortal. Dwelling in death without ever dying, I keep for you the dream – of being able to overcome your body.[49]

In an attempt to understand the unsatisfactory paradox of the cultural implications of Rosalia's embalmed body, it may be helpful to re-examine the Greek myth of Demeter and Persephone. Irigaray states that myths are not transhistorical or univocal, rather they express history 'as one of the principal expressions of what orders society at any given time'.[50] In her opinion therefore, myths can be analysed 'with a mind to change the social order'.[51] The following example is an illustration of how a myth might be reworked, or recovered in order to serve different purposes.

Persephone's original name is Kore, the daughter of the corn goddess, Demeter. In the classical Greek version of the story, she is abducted by Hades, the god of the underworld whilst gathering flowers in a meadow. She is heard to cry 'A rape! A rape!' before being carried away in Hades' black chariot. Demeter in her grief forbids the earth to yield life, swearing that all will remain barren until Kore is returned. Zeus agrees that Kore may be returned on the condition that she has not tasted the food of the dead, but

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[47] ibid p.9.
[48] Luce Irigaray, 'The Limits of Transference' in *The Irigaray Reader* ed. Margaret Whitford (Blackwell: Oxford UK and Cambridge USA ,1991), pp105-117 (p.114)
[49] Irigaray, *Marine Lover* p.28.
[50] Luce Irigaray, *Je, Tu, Nous* (Routledge: London and New York, 1993), p.24.

Kore has eaten seven seeds from a pomegranate and is consequently forced to spend three months of the year with Hades as Persephone, Queen of the Underworld and the remaining nine months with Demeter.[52] Irigaray sees Persephone as an archetypal figure of a woman trapped by the patriarchal dichotomy of life and death, caught 'between a flashing star and a gravestone':[53]

> As a piece of property, Persephone belongs to the men. But the division of the patrimony has resulted in private fiefdoms that divide the brothers, separate them, and destroy common interests. Death and life have become their respective lots. Irreconcilably, the distance cannot be overcome.[54]

Caught in this liminal existence, Irigaray perceives that 'Kore is arrested in her becoming'.[55] In order to act as an intermediary between the chasm which the patriarchy has created between the on high and the low, life and death and heaven and hell, Persephone cannot pursue her own sexually determined role and function. She experiences 'the two veils, the two blinds, the two edges, the two cracks in the invisible' she is caught up with 'to-ing and fro-ing between the (female) one and the other. Crossing ceaselessly, aimlessly back through the frontiers of those abysses. From below and from on high'.[56] The relationship between Demeter and Persephone, which could have established a female genealogy is interrupted by the patriarchal economy. Charlene Spretnak's book *Lost Goddesses of Early Greece* attempts to piece together from scraps of literary and archaeological evidence earlier versions of the classic Greek myths concerning the key Goddess figures who have been trivialised, degraded and adapted by the patriarchy to serve its own purposes. Her research has led her to believe that prior to the Olympian version, there was no mention of a rape in the myth of Demeter and Persephone. Persephone recognises that Demeter's role is to preserve life

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[51] Irigaray, in Margaret Whitford, *Engaging With Irigaray* p.388.
[52] Robert Graves, *Greek Myths* (Cassell: London, 1955), p.35-36.
[53] Irigaray, *Marine Lover* p.59.
[54] ibid p.112.
[55] ibid p.114.
[56] ibid p.115.

and growth, but realises that there is no goddess to take care of the dead. She adopts this as her own role and *voluntarily* enters the underworld and *voluntarily* returns, in order to initiate the dead into their new realm: 'The dead need us, Mother. I will go to them'.[57] In this version of the story, the underworld is not seen as something to be feared: 'She was startled by the chill as She descended, but She was not afraid'.[58] In contrast to this, under the patriarchal system, the feminised liminal realm is a space to be negotiated, conquered and returned from in triumph:

> Those wanderers in deep waters sometimes get closer to their destinations than voyagers who leave port better prepared. Prows slicing through the water, masts crowding the sky, sails cunningly set, a firm hand on the helm, (they) go straight to the shore. Such proud vessels keep their heading. And how they resist the sea! And always find the way home. And never go to sea again.[59]

The Maybe was initiated when Tilda Swinton approached Cornelia Parker, suggesting that her sleeping body could be employed as part of an art exhibition. Swinton initially wanted to dress as Snow White, but through the process of developing the project, it was decided that she would wear everyday clothing. Cornelia Parker selected a number of objects from London museums which were displayed in The Serpentine in glass cases which matched Swinton's. These included Freud's pillow and blanket from his couch, which were displayed in a body sized case, suggesting that someone had recently arisen from them. Other objects included Charles Babbage's preserved brain, a cheque signed by Virginia Woolf, (displayed next to Charles Dickens's quill which he used to write *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*), Napoleon's rosary, Mrs. Simpson's ice-skate and a piece of cloth from the cape that Edith Carvel was wearing when she was executed. Swinton's sleeping body was displayed in the central gallery. The only other object in the same room and the only one which had not belonged to someone famous,

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[57] Charlene Spretnak, *Lost Goddesses of Early Greece* (Beacon Press: Boston, 1984), p.113.
[58] Ibid p.114.
[59] Irigaray, *Marine Lover* p.49.

was a piece of board with scratch marks all over it which had been made by a cat called Sadie over a number of years prior to its death in 1990.[60]

Swinton and Parker collaborated over the display of the objects, placing objects together which would provoke a previously unconsidered connection. For example, Wesley's spurs were placed next to one of Queen Victoria's stockings which had a neatly darned hole in the heel, suggesting that the hole might have been made by the spur. The objects chosen would have been insignificant were it not for their association with a particular person and the narrative which accompanied them. In this sense they could be seen as relics, as Guy Brett has pointed out:

> If the relics were ordinary objects which became special by association, Tilda Swinton was someone special who became ordinary, dressed in her everyday clothes, at her most private and vulnerable moment: An Everywoman, or the State of Sleep.[61]

The Maybe attracted an extraordinary amount of media attention. Initial responses to the project preceding the opening and for the first few days were of anger and indignation. Brian Sewell dismissed it as 'A feeble and utterly self-indulgent performance by two inadequately educated women…showing it in an art gallery does not make it art'.[62] There was considerable anxiety at The Serpentine that Swinton, lying in the glass case was vulnerable to physical attack by members of the public. However, after the first few

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[60] Details from a telephone conversation with Cornelia Parker. Other objects included: The last watercolour palette used by Turner before he died, the hats worn by Stanley and Livingstone when they first met, a letter from Magritte to John Byrne, the final handwritten draft of Wilfred Owen's poem 'Strange Meeting', a set of vandalised bookcovers of Joe Orton's plays (the perpetrator, Kenneth Hallaway went to jail for this crime), Arthur Aspey's suit, Kitchener's glove, and The Protein Man's sandwich board (The Protein Man used to walk up and down the streets of London preaching about the evils of protein), Faraday's spark aparatus, a fragment of the plane in which Lindbergh crossed the Atlantic in 1927, Florence Nightingale's empty slate, Lee Miller's camera, the memoirs of a late hangman. (See also Art Monthly no.190, October 1995 pp.25-26)

[61] Guy Brett, 'The Maybe' in *Avoided Object* (Chapter: Cardiff, 1996) pp.11-20 (p.14).

[62] Brian Sewell in Juliette Garside and Peter Ross, 'After six years…Swinton climbs back into her box' The Sunday Herald, www.sundayherald.com/17125. Accessed on 18:04:02

days, responses to the work swayed towards a more considered and contemplative approach:

> 'It makes you consider our own value and existence', said Anna Fichas from London. 'It makes you wonder whether we are more animated than the objects'.[63]

Swinton wanted to repeat the performance in different scenarios and in 1996 collaborated with Pierre et Gilles in reproducing *The Maybe* in a gardening museum in Rome. This time she dressed as Snow White. She was also invited to recreate the piece in Red Square in Moscow, but eventually declined because she realised that she was pregnant with twins and felt that the project was too risky. The idea of her displayed body in Red Square in the vicinity of Lenin's embalmed body makes the comparison of her displayed body with that of Rosalia Lombardo even more appropriate, as does her statement:

> It's a piece that I will make until I'm 100…I'll make it until I am dead and then that can be the last stage. I can decompose.[64]

The handwritten draft of Wilfred Owen's poem 'Strange Meeting' further reinforces the connection between sleep and death in *The Maybe*. The poem refers to the meeting of two dead soldiers who fought against each other in the First World War, who in their journey in the underworld encounter 'encumbered sleepers'.[65]

Within the historical and mythical context of dead or passive feminine bodies, it seems curious that Tilda Swinton (in collaboration with Cornelia Parker) would choose to actively perform this position. It would seem to re-confirm myths of feminine passivity in a patriarchal culture which presents woman as Other, as lack, as not all; a site where masculine fantasies of subjective wholeness can be realised at the expense of feminine subjectivity. However, the display of Tilda Swinton's body differs from classic images of

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[63] Brett, *Avoided Object* p.15.
[64] Tilda Swinton in Garside and Ross, www.sundayherald.com/17125

feminine passivity in two crucial ways. Firstly, she is fully clothed in unremarkable everyday attire. Secondly, she is not exactly an image, since she is living and breathing in real time simultaneously with the viewer. If she is a representation at all, she is an auto-icon, a representation which consists of the thing itself, and which disrupts the stabilizing effect of images. Peggy Phelan suggests that since performance is a form of representation which does not result in reproduction, it could provide a model for an alternative representational economy, 'one in which the reproduction of the Other *as* the Same is not assured'.[66] In this sense, I will argue that Tilda Swinton remains 'unmarked', hovering in an uncanny liminal realm. Asleep, she exceeds her own representation in that she is both here and always already elsewhere; absent in her presence. Her performance prompts a different sort of gaze which is closer to wonder and enchantment than reification and possession.

In her essay 'Waxworks and Wonderlands',[67] Marina Warner discusses the waxwork model on display in Madame Tussaud's of Comtesse du Barry, the mistress of Louis XV, which is the oldest surviving waxwork in the museum modelled by Philippe Curtius, Madame Tussaud's uncle and teacher c.1765. 'Sleeping Beauty', as she is now named, is displayed lying on a couch. According to Warner, Tussaud's inheritance when she left France for England in 1802 included three Sleeping Beauties, all modelled from the bodies of victims of the French Revolution. As Warner points out:

> Their relaxed, even languorous sleep - representing a wishful fiction about death - would lead to the familiar Victorian aesthetic confusion of erotic femininity and narcotic catalepsy.[68]

However, Warner elaborates a different reading of the Sleeping Beauty, which focuses

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[65] Wilfred Owen, *The Poems of Wilfred Owen* (Chatto and Windus: London, 1966) p.116.
[66] Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: the politics of performance* (Routledge: London and New York, 1993) p.3.
[67] Marina Warner, 'Waxworks and Wonderlands' in *Visual Display: Culture Beyond Appearances* eds. Lynne Cooke and Peter Wollen (Bay Press: Seattle, 1995) pp.179-201.

on her as 'a dreamer and vehicle for communal dreams, aroused and shared in public, and...as a site of and stimulus for wonder'.[69] It is in this context that a similar reading of Tilda Swinton's sleeping body can be presented. The waxwork of the Comtesse du Barry has an electrical device inside her chest which simulates breathing. Warner places emphasis, not on the arrival of a Prince to reanimate and take possession of her, but on the investment of the image of a dreaming woman with hope. The viewer, in this reading, would therefore not wish to possess her but to identify with her. In Warner's reading (and the same can be applied to Tilda Swinton), the waxwork acts as an anti *memento mori*, depicting sleep as a refuge from death.[70] Cixous suggests that the sleeper is a figure of potential, the one who dreams the world into being:

> To this immense, deep desire…she succumbs, she sleeps…She slept, she dreamed…The beautiful dream! And how can it be told? That the marvellous monster of universal life was swallowed up inside her; that from now on life, death, everything was held within her entrails, and at the price of such painful labor, she had conceived Nature.[71]

This account reconnects the sleeping woman with early creation myths which describe the universe being born from the womb of the mother goddess. In support of this reading, a comparison can be drawn between the sleeping body of Tilda Swinton and the tiny sculpture found in a recess of the neolithic temple of Hal Taxien, Malta. The beautifully modelled clay figure is thought to depict a sleeping priestess or goddess[72] lying on a bed or table structure (c.3800-3600 B.C.E). The figure is clothed and at ease, in a closed pose lying on her side. Her arms, thighs and breasts would be described as obese by modern standards and she does not conform to contemporary ideas of feminine beauty, yet she is elegant and graceful at the same time. Very little is known about the practices and beliefs of neolithic people, but it is generally accepted that

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[68] Ibid p.185.
[69] ibid p.180.
[70] ibid p.198.
[71] Cixous, *The Newly Born Woman* p.4.

women were held in high regard, probably because of their reproductive powers. Anne Baring and Jules Cashford suggest three different interpretations of the figure:

> Is she a goddess dreaming the world into being, or a priestess undergoing a rite of incubation, or a pregnant woman receiving the spirit of her child into her care?[73]

It is possible to speculate endlessly about the intentions behind this sculpture, however, the poise and self-containment of the figure do not encourage the modern sleeping beauty interpretation of a passive woman awaiting possession by her prince, the only person who can reanimate her. The figure seems closer to Marina Warner's proposal of a vehicle for communal dreams. This interpretation would be confirmed by the fact that the neolithic temples of Malta and Gozo are constructed in the shape of a female body and anyone entering the temple does so through her womb, suggesting that rebirth, regeneration and renewal were all connected to feminine power. This 'occupation' of the feminine body for communal dreams is significantly different from the patriarchal desire to possess the passive feminine body, which is a form of violation rather than respect.

For Bruno Bettelheim, the Sleeping Beauty story pays attention to the periods of long quiet concentration which is necessary before major changes in life. He sees puberty as a time when young people of both sexes become sleepy and withdraw into themselves. In this context, myths like Sleeping Beauty encourage adolescents not to worry about this period of lassitude. While they may appear outwardly passive, in fact the internal mental activity which is taking place is of such importance that there is no energy remaining to direct outwards. Bettelheim sees this process as part of 'becoming oneself'[74] and part of the development of both sexes. Periods of activity and passivity

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[72] Anne Baring and Jules Cashford, *The Myth of The Goddess: Evolution of an Image* (Arkana Penguin Books: London, 1993) p.103.
[73] ibid p.103.
[74] Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: the meaning and importance of fairytales* (Penguin Books: London, 1976) p.226

are necessary for becoming and 'a long period of quiescence, of contemplation, of concentration on the self, can and often does lead to the highest achievement'.[75]

In this context, Tilda Swinton's displayed sleeping body could be read as a modern symbol of potentiality and hope for renewal which is lying dormant until the time is right for rebirth. Outward passivity may indicate powerful inward activity. This reading of the work is encouraged by the title *The Maybe* which implies possibilities, not certainties. It points to potential without fixing this. It suggests a becoming without predicting the outcome, pointing instead to multiple possibilities. It invites viewers, both male and female to enter the liminal realm, to see Tilda Swinton (as in Warner's reading of Sleeping Beauty) as a 'vehicle for communal dreams'.[76] As Irigaray says, anyone entering this realm:

> risks coming upon a great silence and an abyssal forgetfulness. Risks entering that sleep and that dream which weave the fabric of the world, its cycles, and revolutions. Risks moving forward lucidly, blindly, in search of something he left on the far side of any boundary.[77]

Whilst all becomings are risky and uncertain, these risks are worth taking because refusing to become is equal to death (of the subject).

While aesthetically similar, Tilda Swinton's body in *The Maybe* operates in a more hopeful way than that of Rosalia Lombardo, because she is both alive and actively occupying her position by choice. Rosalia's body, like Clarissa's, can be seen in conjunction with a whole host of dead feminine bodies which disrupt patriarchal laws by provoking uncanny anxiety, but which also surrender their own becoming in the process. Tilda Swinton's body, when read in relation to Marina Warner's proposal that the

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[75] ibid p.226
[76] Warner, *Visual Display* p.180.
[77] Irigaray, *Marine Lover* p.60.

sleeping feminine body could operate as a vehicle for communal dreams, both allows for her own becoming and acts as a stimulus for becoming for the viewer, provoking a gaze which is not possessive, but closer to wonder and enchantment.