

Chapter 16

Arkham's Sirens

Analyzing the Roles of the Body and the Transcendental Subject in Arkham's Villainesses and Antiheroines

Marco Favaro

Cartesian and Western religious and philosophical traditions distinguish the body from the mind, viewing the former as a prison or a burden. The mind (spirit, soul, rationality) is identified as good, while the body is devalued and associated with evil.¹ Some philosophers restored the body's value: humans are not imprisoned spirits, but they are their bodies. Husserl, for example, claims that human beings are not an immaterial substance in a *Körper*, a physical body, but Leib, a living body that solves within itself the two Cartesian *res*.² Although the Cartesian legacy survives in the Existentialism in the distinction between In-itself (the passive Being) and For-itself (the human, transcendental freedom), the second does not use the object-body as the *res cogitans* did: "the very nature of the For-itself demands that it be body."³ Nevertheless, the body plays an ambivalent role, suspended between *Körper*'s passivity and Leib's transcendence.

The chapter's focus on Arkham's female characters is not random. Leder notices that "women have consistently been associated with the bodily sphere. They have been linked with nature, sexuality, and the passions, whereas men have been identified with the rational mind. This equation implicitly legitimizes structures of domination."⁴ By associating human categories like "lunatics," "savages," or women with the immanence of the body and nature, their transcendentalism is denied, and, simultaneously, men's control and domination over them is justified. Simone De Beauvoir describes