



## UvA-DARE (Digital Academic Repository)

### The elegant velvet glove: A textual and visual reading of the gothicised female form in Lawrence Durrell's 'The Alexandria quartet'

Kreuter, A.D.

**Publication date**  
2014

[Link to publication](#)

#### **Citation for published version (APA):**

Kreuter, A. D. (2014). *The elegant velvet glove: A textual and visual reading of the gothicised female form in Lawrence Durrell's 'The Alexandria quartet'*.

#### **General rights**

It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

#### **Disclaimer/Complaints regulations**

If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: <https://uba.uva.nl/en/contact>, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.

## Chapter 1: City, Landscape, Memory

### Introduction

A narrative is an account that, according to Bal, offers a subjectively focalised sequence of events that she terms the fabula and I shall interchangeably term the plot or story world (1994b: 100). Bal indicates that focalisation is an act of subjectivisation presented through agents that do the “seeing”, which she terms focalisers (100). I shall employ the term focaliser instead of focalising agent when discussing characters that are responsible for visualising events or happenings in the *Quartet*. According to Bal, a distinction between the focaliser and the narrator (the one who tells the story) is necessary because the narrator is able to “subsume and present the subjective view of another” (1994b: 101). This does not mean that a narrator cannot also be a focaliser. However, Bal’s distinction between the narrator and focaliser is of immense importance to my exploration of how Durrell’s narrators mediate and present the subjective focalisation of an event through other characters’ eyes. Durrell will take this further when the external narrator in *Mountolive*, employing free indirect discourse, presents the inner thoughts of a character along with impossible information. This results in what is possibly a strange or unnatural form of narration and focalisation. Therefore, the narrator and focaliser are integral to Durrell’s structural devices of memory, space-time and multiple perspectives.

In this first chapter, I aim to show how Durrell deploys Gothic motifs, through memory’s creative abilities, to establish the most forceful, alluring and monstrous female character in the novels - the city of Alexandria. I will examine how memory functions to establish the ambivalent, spectral and palimpsestuous nature of this city and the inhabitants who reside within its space. These memories form the subjective account of the story offered by the narrator, Darley, who is what Bal calls the “agent that sees”, or the focaliser (Bal 2001: 46). In the *Quartet*, Durrell presents the reader with events focalised from one or more character’s subjective point of view. These multiple focalisations interrogate the validity of memory’s conceptualisation of truth and reality. Focalisation, the narrative voice and memory are essential to the evocation of Alexandria. This city, I will suggest, is the space which projects the female characters like avatars, and onto whose surfaces the city

transposes motifs of its own gothicised nature. I will interpretatively access the feminised landscape of the city by deploying themes of the real/unreal heterotopia, the monstrous-feminine, the *femme fatale*, the phallic mother, the labyrinth and the Medusa. Alexandria is a space where past, present and future ghosts lurk and collide with the living in uncanny conjunctures. The repetitive nature of memory's return, which holds subjective snatches and perceptions of the past in a suspension of non-linear time, entraps these spectres. This circularity is central to the cycle of novels and is located in the omnipresent structuring space and place of the city and landscape that dominate and control Durrell's narrative.

The character Ludwig Pursewarden sees this space as filled with "volition, desire, will, cognition, passion, conation" (*Justine*: 123; henceforth J). For the narrator Darley the city possesses a "strange equivocal power" (J: 24) and the extent of misery that it inflicts on its human population, the "torn rags of flesh" (17), inspires "disgust and terror" (21). For Darley, the city could never be "mistaken for a happy place" (12), as "every summer kiss" has "the taste of quicklime" (12). Alexandria is at once a life-giver and a life-taker. Named after Alexander the Great, the city is the feminine version of this conqueror. Darley, too, chooses to feminise the city. Therefore, in general, I have chosen to use the personal pronoun 'she' when discussing the city in this chapter, instead of the standard, non-personal grammatical usage 'it'. Though this might seem to espouse the position that I will critique in this study, I consider it necessary to adopt the feminine pronoun to convey to the reader how strongly feminised Alexandria is within the context of Durrell's tetralogy. The city is an extremely powerful representation of the metaphorical traits associated with the *femme fatale*. She spins a web of deceit at the heart of the story world and, like Saturn, devours and maims her children. Durrell's characters wade through her past and present manipulated into actions of murder, deceit and sexual transgression.<sup>4</sup>

In this chapter, I examine the space of the city and how Durrell constructs it as a living entity replete with excess and transgression. I will take into consideration both the landscape and the cityscape in order to expose the ambivalent nature of Alexandria. In doing so, I will make manifest how the city is constructed as a textual and visual labyrinth where the past invades the present, thereby creating spectral layers resembling a palimpsest. Like the female characters examined in the chapters that follow, the city is a

---

<sup>4</sup> Alexander the Great founded the city in 331BC.

feminine object re-embodied through the narrative gaze of recalled memories. Given this, I take the opportunity to explore the textual visual construction of the city through the deployment of certain Gothic themes. These themes, I will indicate, not only construct the city's physical topography but, by extension, that of her female characters. Memories of the city and its characters found the narrative and its story world. However, memory is unreliable, so the story written might not be identical to the one that took place.

In the preface to the novel *Balthazar*, Durrell writes the novel is not a "sequel" but a "sibling" to *Justine* and, along with the final two books *Mountolive* and *Clea*, is based on the idea of the Einsteinian relativity proposition (*Balthazar*: 7; henceforth B). Therefore, this authorial explanation should be treated with care. Even the writer Richard Aldington, a friend of Durrell, said he was

not convinced by the Note at the beginning of *Balthazar* where Durrell invokes modern philosophy or science and likens his *Quartet* to what he calls "the relativity proposition". I realize, of course, that such analogies are useful to the artist as imaginary ... scaffolding for his building. (1964: 5)

Durrell's statement about the importance of his "relativity proposition" to time-space is misleading. Albert Einstein's *Theory of Relativity* posits that matter curves space. Simultaneously, space causes matter to move to a specific place, ensuring everything becomes relative to everything else. Whilst loosely based on Einstein's theory, Durrell's version of the concept of relativity is a structural contrivance that acts to fragment the characters' and readers' perceived continuity with 'reality'. To achieve this, Durrell proffers different, or multiple, perceptions of both events and place. In so doing, he questions the concept of a single correct reality so that truth becomes relative. To produce this effect Durrell, I hold, references the notion of memory advanced by French philosopher Henri Bergson in his book *Matter and Memory*. Arguing against Einstein's *Theory of Relativity*, Bergson indicated that Einstein wrongly considered time as a fourth dimension. Bergson suggested that by subordinating time to space, Einsteinian theory prioritises space at the expense of time. This, he posited, was a category mistake. Instead, Bergson proposed that time was different from space, but space could be reconceived as an extension of time.

In perceptual experience time and space are composite, as they represent a combination of objective spatiality subjectively presented in time (Clarke 2002: 168). People

experience space as discontinuous, where they experience time as continuous. Space appears to be a slowed-down extended version of the present. In contrast, time is continuous and multi-layered, so that different kinds of time can co-exist as real (169). This multi-layered time exists in the junction between present and past, where there are many pasts, which relate to many presents. Time's continuity (duration or *durée* in Bergson's terms) is therefore dependent on the duration of the past in the present held in the space of memory. In Bergson's theory, past and present are thus coterminous and their continuity of duration functions as memory. Durrell, I suggest, layers Einsteinian relativity over Bergsonian memory and continuous time, in order to structure the layers of the *Quartet* as a palimpsest. The authorial note seems an unnecessary and misleading interpolation that makes grandiose and excessive claims for the structure of a work of fiction, in a manner similar to the preface of a Gothic novel.<sup>5</sup>

I will show how the presentation of the narrator's memories undulates in a backwards-forwards-forwards-backwards movement that seems to link space and time. As Bal observes this movement of memory allows for a return to a time when the space being described was different (2001: 48). The preserved time in space constructs the cityscape, which the narrator sees as moving "not only backwards into our history, studded by the great names which mark every station of recorded time, but also back and forth in the living present, so to speak..."(B: 12). Time oscillates, blurring chronological linear distinctions. This blurring abolishes the distance separating time present and time past, creating a reversible continuity in the *Quartet*. Philosopher Gilles Deleuze, discussing memory in relation to the work of Marcel Proust, argues that time and memory seem to fold into one another and the past "does not represent something that has been, but simply something that is and that coexists with itself as present" (2000: 58). Deleuze goes on to say that in this type of Bergsonian time "the past and the present do not denote two successive moments, but two elements which co-exist: one is the present which does not cease to pass, the other is the past, which does not cease to be but through which the presents pass" (1988: 54). It thus becomes apparent that the coupling of past and present in the time and space of memory resembles what Melissa Clarke terms the "passing-present" (2002: 70).

---

<sup>5</sup> See Alia Al-Saji (2004); Justine Beplate (2005); Melissa Clarke (2002); Paul Davies (1995); Gilles Deleuze (1988); Martin Heidegger (1996) and David Scott (2006) for further discussions of Bergsonian memory, time and space.

Memory functions to bring the pasts of the *Quartet* into the passing-presents and past-presents of the characters and the reader. In so doing it actualises what philosopher Jacques Derrida, discussing the invasion of the spectres of the past that return to haunt the living, has called a hauntology, where: “to haunt does not mean to be present, and it is necessary to introduce haunting into the very construction of a concept. Of every concept beginning with the concepts of being and time” (1994: 161). Ghosts are vividly alive and at work in Durrell’s representation of the city and these traces of the past are what critic Julian Wolfreys calls “spectral through and through: they are marks of already retreating ghosts who disturb any certain perception we may think we have concerning the city’s identity” (1998: 204-5). Caught in layered traces, the mythical past infiltrates and haunts the city’s identity and, through the city, the identities of the characters. Here space and time work as a presence and an absence, so that, immaterial and ghostly, they function in a spatial relation that translates the city into a palimpsestic labyrinth of memory, space and time (Docker & Jaireth 2003: 4).<sup>6</sup>

However, the invasion of the past into the present is one of the main functions of memory. In this regard, David Punter indicates that the Gothic is a “mode of memory”, one that reveals the haunting at the centre of realism and the associated instability of individual identities (1980:409). To evoke the fugitive and chance-like nature of memory, and its destabilising effect on the characters’ search for alleged truth and identity, Durrell imbricates all possible forms of time. The absent past reconstructed in memory constantly and subtly transforms perceptions of the present. Writing on memory, James Olney indicates that there can be no perception that remains unaltered by memory, and memory is always transformed by other memories (1998: 339). In attempting to capture the palimpsestic waves of memory, the narrator Darley tries to understand and come to terms with the past by transcribing it.

To grasp the status of his words, we must realise that memory happens in the (Bergsonian) present. Bal suggests:

---

<sup>6</sup> On Derridean hauntology see Jodey Castricano (2001); Colin Davis (2005, 2007); Gayatri Spivak (1995) and Michael Sprinker (1999). For spectrality and the uncanny in the Gothic see Glennis Byron and David Punter (1999); Terry Castle (1995, 1988); Roger Luckhurst (2002); Nicholas Royle (2003) and María del Pilar Blanco and Esther Peeren (2013). For spectrality and the uncanny in landscape, see Michel de Certeau (1984); Jean-Michel Rabaté (1996); Anthony Vidler (1992); Julian Wolfreys (1998); Robert Mighall (1999; 2007) Alexandra Warwick (1999); Sarah Wasson (2010) and Lawrence Phillips & Anne Witchard (2010). On the return of the past, memory and the relation to the Derridean concept of the sign see Scott McQuire (1998). Also see Esther Peeren for an exploration of an alternate tradition of ghosts and their relationship with the living, in which she indicates that Freud’s theory of the uncanny and Derrida’s hauntology are insufficient models to think through the concept of this separate tradition of ghostliness (2010: 106-118).

“Memory” is an act of “vision” of the past; but as an act it is situated in the memory’s present. It is often a narrative act: loose elements come together and cohere into a story so that they can be remembered and eventually told. (1997a: 147)

The act of narrative is what Darley performs when he writes he is caught “suspended like a hair or a feather in the cloudy mixtures of memory” (J: 14). This image of floating in a colloidal solution ensures that the particles of memory swirl and telescope time and space together so nothing is truly linear. Yet, memory’s haphazard and unreliable linking of space and time is an act of visibility, one Bal refers to as a “mastering, looking from above, dividing up and controlling ... an approach to space that ignores time as well as the density of space’s lived-in quality” (2001: 48). Creating the images of the narrative, the unreliable spatiality of memory’s timelessness evokes and mirrors the spatial form of the city. Alexandria connects the multiplicity of episodic images that slide into one another and offer, according to Bal, a seemingly cohesive flow of events (46).

Residing at the heart of the narrator’s memories, the city is conceived of as a woman, who is at once mother and lover (Alexandre-Garner 1985: 228). In the *Quartet*, Darley’s love-hate relationship with the feminised city combines an Oedipal-like longing for absorption by and abject rejection of the mother. Personifying the evil monstrous-feminine who thrives on power, transgression, violence, perverse desires and death, Alexandria inculcates feelings of desire and repulsion. In this guise, Alexandria possesses what Richard Pine, in his study on Lawrence Durrell’s writing, terms a “cunning and a discrimination in its pleasures and disasters which equips it as both a sexual and an intellectual mistress” (1994: 170). In Durrell’s depiction, the city reveals itself a ruthless entity and Lionel Trilling writes that the city possesses “its own way and its own rights, its own life and its own secret will to which the life and the will of the individual are subordinate” (1964: 60). Pine observes about this city that it “remains the controlling myth, the sole reality” (1994: 203). Throughout the narrative of the *Quartet* Durrell permits the city to infiltrate and dominate the behaviour of the characters, binding them to her “politics of love, the intrigues of desire, good and evil, virtue and caprice, love and murder” (B: 19). The conflicted relationship the characters have with the city, Pine argues, permits the past to be permanently present in the events that shape their individual interactions (1994: 172).

In this chapter, I consider Alexandria to be the primal *femme fatale*, one who bends the characters to her will. They do her bidding and assume her amoral values; at the same instant, they map her streets and surrounds through the descriptions of her space. Stuck in the city's atmosphere and allure like flies in amber, they become projections of her moods and history. In turn, caught in the space-time of memory, the characters are subject to the constant haunting return of images of this city and her landscape. Durrell installs her as the originator of all the exotic, grotesque and excessive happenings, thereby establishing her as a Gothic site of the unreal and fantastical. Caught in this unreal/real mirror world of the city, the characters remain lethargically suspended until, finally able to break free; they flee her monstrous-feminine influence. The disturbing feminine cartography of the city in the *Quartet* will provide my entrance into an analysis of its representation in the space-time of memory.

### **The Cartographic Feminisation of Alexandria**

From his island retreat with only the sound of the sea and wind to accompany him, the narrator Darley continually returns to his memories of the city. In attempting to capture the waves of memory in his writing, Darley tries to reconstruct and make sense of his past. Memory becomes the space Darley inhabits. It flows to the time of only "one clock: the sea. Its dim momentum in the mind is the fugue upon which this writing is made" (J: 14). Time becomes a part of the cyclical nature of the waves of the sea, of the semiotic sound and movement of this conventionally feminised element. For Darley there is only the perception of a dim momentum; he is like a foetus inside the amniotic fluid of the womb. Hypnotic and mesmerising, the maternal element provides a stasis that slows memory's time. Enslaved in this space of re-imagining and recollection, Darley goes back

link by link along the iron chains of memory to the city which we inhabited so briefly together: the city which used us as its flora – precipitated in us conflicts which were hers and which we mistook for our own: beloved Alexandria. (J: 11)

The heavy iron chains and their links fetter him to his past life in the city. His emotional entrapment is elicited in the expression "beloved Alexandria". He considers her an exigent

but loved mistress, whose human occupants are brief blossoms in the games that she plays. Shackled to the city, memories of its landscape shape Darley's identity, his history and the enclosing spatial perception of his textual recreation of the past. His imagination maps the city and he becomes her subjective cartographer.

### **Fantastical space**

Central to Darley's memories of Alexandria are the colours and labyrinths, smells, cramped and open spaces, indifferences, *grotesqueries*, and the vividness of street life evocatively captured in the visuality of the narrative. Darley relies on the gaze of memory to encounter, read and map the city. This imaginary map allows Darley and the reader to explore the city without any danger of being absorbed into the chaos of its labyrinthine streets. Viewed through memory, the geographical reality of the city becomes unimportant: this Alexandria is a space of illusion and yet, at the same time, a real space perfectly ordered, except that it remains outside of time. Alexander Irvine, writing on urban fantasy, points out that a city is simultaneously the *genius loci* of past history and its landscape (2012: 201). It is this idea that also seems to determine the chimerical nature of Durrell's almost-real Alexandria. There is a real city and then there is what Pine calls "a series of mythological cities, receding into prehistory ... creating a temporal dimension ... an ever-receding vista of classical frames of reference" (1994: 190). In the front note to the opening novel *Justine*, Durrell writes, "only the city is real" (J: 7); then in the novel *Balthazar*, Durrell writes in the authorial note: "Nor could the city be less unreal" (B: 7). Finally, on the opening page of the same novel, he has Darley say "The city half imagined (yet wholly real)" (B: 11). The 'real' juxtaposed with the 'imaginary' or 'unreal', creates a city that paradoxically represents an irreducible space within a single space.

Durrell's creation of an imaginary yet apparently real cityscape constructs Alexandria as what philosopher Michel Foucault termed a heterotopia. Joshua Samuels argues that Foucault, in his article *Other Spaces*, contrasts the concept of Utopia, a reflection of an ideal world, with a heterotopia, a space of the carnival mirror where all is contorted, reflecting reality as an illusion or offering an alternate way of seeing things (2010: 65). I will not employ the term heterotopia in relation to an actual geographic city, or the real locales Foucault considered heterotopias, such as asylums, hospitals and ships. Rather, I will deploy

this term only to consider the representation of an imaginary spatial field the unreal/real city of the *Quartet*.<sup>7</sup>

Alun Saldanha, in his article *Heterotopia and Structuralism*, contends that Foucault's concept of the term heterotopia, as a space that is 'absolutely different' from all other spaces, posits a totality to social structures. Saldanha warns against "a kind of geographical structuralism, or even functionalism, dealing with the work parts do in sustaining the whole" (2008: 2084). However, contrary to Saldanha's strictures, this idea of metonymy at play is relevant to my study, because I am not dealing with the realities of functionalism or geographical structuralism. The notion of metonymy, where parts sustain the whole, feeds into the ambiguity and ambivalence of the space of Durrell's city and of the Gothic itself. Deleuze, in his book on Foucault, considers the heterotopia to be the haunting of an "inside which is merely the fold of the outside" (2006: 81). Peter Johnson remarks that Deleuze's suggestion relates to the theme of the "double" which is "an interiorization of the outside" (2006: 88). This seems to provide continuity with the theme of the double, which is prevalent in Durrell's tetralogy, as well as his conception of the space-time continuum. Discussing the nature of the heterotopia, Foucault links space to what he terms "slices of time". Foucault suggests that time in the heterotopia is held in suspension. This stasis ensures the destruction of linear time.

For the spatial dimension of a heterotopia, this temporality provides a break with traditional time. Simultaneously, Foucault indicates this space is the repository of memory. Durrell's notion of "sliding-panels", mentioned in the novel *Clea*, has similarities with Foucault's "slices of time" (*Clea*: 83; henceforth C) and with Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope. For Bakhtin the chronotope represented the "intrinsic interconnectedness of temporal and spatial relationships" (1981: 84). In a similar way to Durrell's author's note, Bakhtin goes on to reference Einstein's *Theory of Relativity* when he argues that the chronotope should be appreciated for "the fact that it expresses the inseparability of space and time" (2002: 15). Time in slices, sliding panels, or in the form of the chronotope works to undermine the Cartesian linearity of space in order to allow space and time to function more fluidly. Therefore, Durrell's employment of the folding together of the inside and

---

<sup>7</sup> I acknowledge this might be a dubious consideration of what the heterotopia is conceived to be by other critics in the fields of architecture, geography, urban studies and so on. See Alessandra Bonazzi (2002); Benjamin Genocchio (1995); Kevin Hetherington (1997); Henri Lefebvre (1996); Alun Saldanha (2008) and Edward Soja (1989).

outside of space and time in memory is, I argue, in accordance with the theories of the function of space-time of both Bakhtin's chronotope and Foucault's heterotopia. Memory-space in the tetralogy is, in principle, similar to the repository of memory of the heterotopia as well as Bergsonian memory. Durrell's use of the space-time-memory continuum, I contend, functions as a heterotopic mediating device unifying the temporal-spatial events that constitute the real/unreal nature of the city and the events of its past, present and future.<sup>8</sup>

### **Gothic Urban Jungle**

In the tetralogy, the space-time-memory movement that occurs between events of the past and those of the present represents a palimpsestuous writing of one state into and onto another. Pine observes that in the recurring events found across the four novels: "nothing is plausible except in terms of the exhumations of memory" (1994:175). Darley's exhumed memories of the city provide the readers with a visual map and they, too, feel that they are charting the streets of this city, like Darley's shadows. In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, French philosopher Michel de Certeau speculates on what it means to walk in the space of a city. He wonders what it would be like to be able to see the whole of the city from above, "looking down on, totalizing the most immoderate of human texts" (1984: 92). Here de Certeau refers to the cityscape of New York, which he considers as representing a "texturology", where a collision of extremes, an excess of ambition, degradation and brutal oppositions of races and styles occur (1984: 91). The city, whether New York or Alexandria, is a site of hybridity and excess, where different rules apply - an urban jungle.

The chaos and confinement of Alexandria's streets, the space of everyday life, is seen to be a "mauve jungle" (B: 128). Here the alleys through which the bodies throng are filled with light; in contrast to the "hinterland" where black, winding and decay-filled alleys with "smashed and tumbled masonry, of abandoned and disembowelled houses" are scarily present (B: 128; 131). The word "disembowelled" shocks the reader: the houses, like an animal or human, seem slaughtered as punishment; a destruction of the abode as a symbol

---

<sup>8</sup> Julia Kristeva in her book *Desire in Language* (1980) references Bakhtin's spatial trope (chronotope) in the chapters "Word, Dialogue and Novel" and "The Bounded Text" in relation to her concept of textuality. See also Esther Peeren's book *Intersubjectivities and Popular Culture - Bakhtin and Beyond* (2007) in which she explores Bakhtin's chronotope and its current relevance to the effects of identity and agency.

of domesticity and confinement. Nevertheless, the desuetude found in these dark sinister alleys adds to the labyrinthine and Gothic “texturology” of this city. Tony Tanner, writing about Venice, notes the “labyrinthine little streets ... a place of sensuality and secrecy, masks and masquerading; duplicity and desire; an always possibly treacherous beauty”, a description that is an equally apt portrait of Durrell’s Alexandria (1992: 5).

Yet the difference between these labyrinthine cities is that, where Venice is a place of silence, Alexandria contains a constant disorientating bustle. Here the riotous profusion of humanity allows the city to assume the aspects of Botting’s description of the Gothic labyrinth as excessive, irrational, deceptive, amoral and horrific (1996: 83). Isabelle Keller-Privat (2005), writing on the *Quartet*, mentions how the architecture of the city seems contaminated with maleficent shadows. She considers the city monstrous, exuding a sense of horror that slowly penetrates and absorbs both reader and narrator. Keller-Privat’s descriptions of this city emphasise the darker aspects at play in the text that envelop the space and embodiment of the city, ultimately staining both the characters and reader. Alexandria thus possesses a topography marked by an ancient past, which infiltrates the lives of her inhabitants with “the politics of love, the intrigues of desire, good and evil, virtue and caprice, love and murder mixed obscurely in the dark corners of Alexandria’s streets” (B: 19). However, memory’s mechanism transfigures Darley and the reader into aerial topographical voyeurs.

Aerial distance, according to De Certeau, seems to transform “the bewitching world” into “a text that lies before one’s eyes” (1984: 92). For Darley the text before his eyes is always written from memory, so “the taste of this writing should have taken something from its living subjects – their breath, skin, voices – weaving them into the supple tissues of human memory” (J: 15). Like a vampire, memory drains the essence of its living subjects transforming them into commodified textual objects. Yet, as a patchwork of human characteristics, they remain the offspring of the labyrinthine city. As Darley observes: “we are children of our landscape; it dictates behaviour and even thought in the measure to which we are responsive to it” (J: 36). As a maternal space, the city dictates and governs the actions and behaviour of the characters. The archetypal feminine figuration, the city represents both the known and the unknown Other. Not only is she the object of masculine

desire, she is also the locus of fear and horror. I shall explain the ambivalence aroused by the city with reference to psychoanalytic theorist Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection.

The abject, Kristeva argues, is a reaction to the limits or boundaries the subject encounters during separation from the mother. This separation is a recoil and horror against the imposed limits but, simultaneously, an anguished desire for re-fusion with the now prohibited maternal realm (1982: 1-4). The abject represents a disturbance of identity, the overflowing of boundaries, the space where the self dissolves into meaninglessness. Confronting the nausea of abjection, a subject can experience a sense of "*jouissance*", repugnance and fascination that vie with one another and keep the subject from returning to a semiotic loss of subjectivity (Kristeva 1982: 9). Simultaneously held in thrall to the city, Darley and the other male characters are, in equal measure, repulsed by its ancient exoticism, darkness and monstrosity. This fear and desire is imbricated, feminist geographer Catherine Nash suggests, with the lack and loss figured in masculine identity (1996: 155). Durrell scholar, Corinne Alexandre-Garner writes that Alexandria is:

Alternately virgin and whore, Alexandria is not however Babylon. Lascivious, admittedly, she is deflowered by the writer who metaphorically fecundates her, so that she carries within her all the fictional characters who live and die at her breast. (1985: 209, my translation)<sup>9</sup>

Darley's own reaction to this city is marked by an abject, dualistic response when he refers to her as "poetical mother-city exemplified in the names and faces which made up her history" (B: 37), but also terms her this "whore among cities" (19).

Using the pronoun her and the nouns mother and whore, Darley maps the city as a space both repugnant and fascinating, one causing an "overflow into disgust and terror" (J: 21). Alexandria is an eroticised cartography that is representative of Darley's own desires and fantasies. Fashioned into a dangerous labyrinth by these desires and fantasies, the city becomes a space of uncanny terror and perverse delight.

---

<sup>9</sup> Tour à tour vierge et putain, Alexandrie n'est pourtant pas Babylone. Lascive certes, elle est deflorée par l'écrivain qui la féconde métaphoriquement et ce qu'elle porte en elle ce sont tous les personnages de la fiction qui s'animent et meurent en son sein

## Monstrous Labyrinth

Sustained in memory, the terror of the city's possibly labyrinthine monstrousness is visible when Darley describes her just as she:

unwrinkles like an old tortoise and peers about it. For a moment it relinquishes the torn rags of the flesh, while from some hidden alley by the slaughter-house, above the moans and screams of the cattle, comes the nasal chipping of a Damascus love-song; shrill quarter-notes, like the sinus being ground to powder. (J: 17)

Embodied in the sphinx-like guise of the *femme fatale*, the city has torn the flesh of her inhabitants. She appears much in the guise of Francisco Goya's painting, *Saturn devouring his Son* (1820-1824).



Figure 1 Francisco Goya: *Saturn devouring his Son*

Goya's painting is gothically horrific. Holding the headless and almost armless figure in his hands, the monstrous primitive figure seems about to take another bite from the gory cadaver and remove the last morsel of the raised left arm. The cadaver's physical shape could be either male or female, but its sex remains hidden.

The figure of Saturn fills the enclosing frame of the painting's dark background; a huge, terrifying bestial creature. Art critic Robert Hughes calls this figure "goggle-eyed and gaping, tormented by his lust for human meat, for an unthinkable incest" (2003: 383). He goes on to question why this painting appals the reader and concludes that it might be that "the old

perceive(s) the new as a deadly threat” and this is “worth murdering for” (383). Durrell seems to have inverted the figure of Saturn, making the city more like Medea, the goddess who slaughtered her children. Medea’s act was an equally transgressive and violently “incestuous” one that resulted in an appalled repulsion: women are not supposed to kill their progeny; they are supposed to be stereotypically maternal and nurturing creatures.

Now bleary, slow and sated, aged like a tortoise and myopic, the city momentarily “relinquishes the torn rags of the flesh” in a cessation of her murderous destruction. She stares indifferently at those who are both her sustenance and subjected lovers, and seems to ponder the lives she continually balances between love and death. A powerfully aggressive creature, the city munches and engulfs, seduces and ejects; and poses a threat to the integrity of the subject. However, she also promises hedonistic pleasure through an inundation of the senses. Darley’s evocation of the city’s feminine otherness is, as Jack Stewart indicates, one replete with “bestial images merged in slime that connote an Orientalist image of Alexandria as the locus of primitive sensuality ... The city also appears flowerlike, glamorous, volatile, dangerous ... and rooted in an ambiguous matrix of creation and destruction” (Stewart 2008: 169). Darley’s response to the cityscape is that of a naïve Occidental male, his thoughts imbued with preconceived colonialist ideas of Alexandria and the feminised Orient. Edward Said, in his seminal work, *Orientalism*, argues that the Orient has always been viewed by the Occidental male as a highly sexualised region suggesting “not only fecundity but sexual promise (and threat), uniting sensuality, unlimited desire, deep generative energies” (1979: 188).<sup>10</sup>

It is never possible to completely represent the ambiguous nature of the city in words. This ensures that Darley can only provide a representation of the city that epitomises what Said terms “a congeries of characteristics, that seem to have its origin in a quotation, or a fragment of a text, or a citation from someone’s work ... or some bit of previous imagining, or an amalgam of all these” (1979: 177). Filled with ghostly intertextual and historical referents that create a complex palimpsestic interweaving, Durrell’s Alexandria is an unreal heterotopic and prismatic space. Said indicates that this muddling of characteristics from other people’s apparent writing or straight imagining of the Orient is typical of Orientalist writing. Indeed Durrell’s purpose, I aver, is to present Alexandria as an entirely exotic and

---

<sup>10</sup> For a similar view of the Imperialist approach to the Orient as feminine, see Kabbani Rana (2008)

kaleidoscopic space, which, in the words of Victor Sage, could represent a “provocative crossing point of Orientalist discourses with the Gothic ... these contradictions also feed into the image of the labyrinth” (2006: 53). For Darley, cartographical mapping has become a strategy of defence against the ravenous maw of this monstrous-feminine city. Constructing the city as abject and monstrous is, as Susanne Becker writes, “one of the strongest connecting forces within the web of Gothic writing” (1999: 57).<sup>11</sup>

Safe on his island, distanced from the city through space and time, Darley is able to “see at last that none of us is properly to be judged for what happened in the past. It is the city which should be judged though we, its children, must pay the price” (J: 11). Disavowing responsibility for the events of the past, Darley foists the blame onto the city for all the dark, nasty and illicit happenings. The city becomes the “controlling myth, the sole reality: everything else is diminished by it, lived by it” (Pine 1994: 203). Yet, Darley still regards himself as one of her “children” who is paying the price exacted by Alexandria. However, the city is no longer a real place; she is only an uncanny dissolving labyrinth of memories. A space of capricious, unstable ambivalence, the city is simultaneously a virgin and an Oriental *femme fatale* of pleasure, death and destruction. The city’s topographical space is visualised through the gaze of Darley’s memory that imaginatively maps the streets and landscape. In the next section, I examine how memory, recollections and immersion in the city blend with visual remembrances of the landscape. The landscape descriptions, I will argue, are a further construct Durrell employs to create the illusion of a real city that remains unreal. Durrell renders his landscape descriptions in vivid colour and detail to create an atmosphere of uncanny beauty and mystery. This is not the urban uncanny that Christophe Lindner describes in his *London Undead* (2009), but a deserted landscape made uncanny through its repellent yet alluring beauty. The land and the city remain ambivalent fantasies charged with strange and shadowy phantoms of the past.

### **The Magnetic Visual Panorama**

In *Invisible Cities*, Italian author Italo Calvino describes the manner in which male dreamers experience an identical dream of a woman “running at night through an unknown city; she

---

<sup>11</sup> The turtle as an aquatic creature came to be associated in Egypt with the Underworld. It was linked to Set, the god of deserts, darkness and chaos and by association, the tortoise too came to symbolise the darkness of evil.

was seen from behind, with long hair, and she was naked” (1997: 39). Unable to pursue her or find her, they attempt to enclose this invisible woman by arranging “spaces and walls differently from the dream, so she would be unable to escape again” (39). In similar fashion, Durrell has chosen to gender the city, landscape and spaces in his tetralogy as female. Durrell’s city, with its spaces and landscapes, is not enclosed; rather she encloses the characters who inhabit her. The narrator Darley is, in the same manner as Calvino’s dreamers, only able to appreciate the loved one once she is absent. The loved one is the city of Alexandria, a space that will become for Durrell’s characters, like Calvino’s, “this ugly city, this trap” (1997: 39). Durrell’s city is a topographical trap, one founded on a mosaic of memories inscribed by the uncanny hauntings of the past. A real but fantastical space, Alexandria and her landscape are horrifying and fascinating.

### **Prismatic Landscape Tones**

The descriptions of Alexandria’s surrounding landscape might seem to lie outside the focus of the gothicisation of the female form. However, the beauty of this feminised landscape in its silence and desertion seems to exude an atmosphere of overpowering emptiness. Vast space in a landscape, and the awe and terror it possesses, can be associated with the concept of the sublime. I suggest the sublime provides a means of accessing and uncovering the uncanny features in Durrell’s landscape descriptions. One of the first theorists of the sublime in the modern age was the philosopher Edmund Burke in his *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Idea of the Sublime* (1757).

For Burke the sublime was characterised by a feeling of awe and terror. According to Botting, objects that caused this response were vast, magnificent and obscure (1996: 39). For Burke, sublimity was an excess that the rational mind could not encompass, leaving the individual faced by thoughts of its own death. This excess represented a reaction that aimed to retain or preserve the self and which simultaneously contained delight and horror along with tranquillity and terror (Botting 1996: 39). Durrell’s landscape descriptions do not conform to traditional enclosed horror-filled spaces, but these visualisations remain marked by traces of the Gothic sublime in their coruscating, jewel-like tones and sense of excess. The vast open space of the desert associated with Egypt and Alexandria terrifies, but also attracts and seduces. Susanne Becker indicates that the Burkean sublime represents the

external male world where a testing of self occurs (1999: 8). The landscape and the cityscape in the *Quartet* are the testing ground for obtaining selfhood for Durrell's characters Darley, Mountolive and Pursewarden.

In *Justine*, Darley visually evokes and reads the city and landscape through images made up of colour tones:

Long sequences of tempera. Light filtered through the essence of lemons. An air full of brick-dust – sweet smelling brick-dust and the odour of hot pavements slaked with water. Light damp clouds, earth-bound, yet seldom bringing rain. Upon this squirt dust-red, dust-green, chalk-mauve and watered crimson-lake. In summer the sea-damp lightly varnished the air. Everything lay under a coat of gum. (J: 12)

In this passage, the writer sees the landscape through the eyes of a painter, drawing on an exotic and erotic historical iconology of landscape, where visual pleasure imparts an imaginative geography that is familiar to the reader. Capturing Alexandria's beauty from an artistic distance, the elevated gaze allows the landscape to be composed in adherence to the convention of the picturesque. Nash has suggested that the convention of the picturesque in landscape represents a spatial ordering combined with an imaginary viewing that allows the image of the landscape to assume the materiality of a female body (1996: 160). The metaphor of the landscape as a female body emulates the stereotypical association of nature and femininity.

Durrell captures the female nature of the landscape through his use of colours, overlaying the golden light and mauve-green shadow with red-brown, the colour of blood. Durrell mixes and matches his words to stimulate the visual sense and evokes the landscape using contrasts, tone and nuance (Stewart 2008: 137). Virginia Woolf writes about the painterly quality of literature:

It is a very complex business, the mixing and marrying of words that goes on, probably unconsciously, in the poet's mind to feed the reader's eye. All great writers are great colourists, just as they are musicians into the bargain; they always contrive to make their scenes glow and darken and change to the eye. (1950: 182)

Lawrence Durrell the poet, I suggest, uses this mixing and marrying of textual words and colours in a metaphoric process that produces inter-sensory imagery in a form of literary synaesthesia. Combining both the visual and the transfer of the seen onto the canvas of the page, Durrell conceives the movement of the brush and the brilliance of light and colour to make “imprints left of the memory” (Alexandre-Garner 2012: 64).

The play of light and dark, of shape and tactility evokes the richness and allure of the cityscape. Durrell scholar Murielle Philippe has noted:

The “*landscape-tones*” are not composed of dust red and green and chalk mauve, but of red and green dust and mauve chalk. The colour is not a referential element, a detail that one could identify through mimetic transparency; it is a patch which does not really represent anything to speak of and reflects the paintings opaqueness in the trickles of pigment onto the canvas – “Upon this squirt dust-red, dust-green.” [...] Writing becomes representation, a representation which has no aim, nothing to tell or to describe or to depict but pure representation, which makes descriptive accidents happen in a moment of disfigurement. It is here that Durrell’s pictorial writing occurs, through the maximal intrusion of the pictorial at the heart of the verbal. The writing of the “*landscape-tones*” is not a writing that tells or describes, but a writing that provokes the shattering of representation. (2002: 212-213, my translation)<sup>12</sup>

I concur with Philippe’s proposition concerning Durrell’s “pictorial writing” where he uses patches of opaque textual pigment to interrogate both writing and representation. But Philippe’s further argument concerning Durrell’s use of “dust-red, dust-green and chalk-mauve” with adjectives placed in a disjoint manner after the noun, thus causing a dislocation which destroys the unification of painting and writing is less self-evident. Philippe indicates that these *landscape-tones* are not referential details that contain mimetic transparency but, instead, function as hyphenated patches. A patch, according to

---

<sup>12</sup> Les “*landscape-tones*” ne se composent pas de poussière verte et rouge et de craie mauve mais de rouge et vert poussière, de mauve craie. La couleur n’est pas un élément référentiel, un *détail* que l’on pourrait identifier par transparence mimétique; c’est un *pan*, qui ne représente rien à proprement parler et renvoie à l’opacité de la peinture, aux dégoulinures du pigment sur la toile – “Upon this squirt dust-red, dust-green...”. [...] L’écrire se fait peindre; un peindre qui ne vise ni à raconter ni même à décrire ou à dépeindre mais un peindre pur, qui fait advenir l’accident de la description dans un moment de défiguration. C’est là qu’advient l’écriture picturale de Durrell, par l’intrusion maximale du pictural au sein du verbal. L’écriture des “*landscape-tones*” n’est pas une écriture qui raconte ou décrit, mais une écriture qui provoque l’éclatement de la représentation.

art historian Georges Didi-Huberman, is 'that part of a painting which ostensibly interrupts, here or there, the continuity of the representational system of the picture' (1989: 164). Didi-Huberman differentiated between the detail and the patch. He indicated that a detail could be removed from the whole without the transparency and referentiality of the mimetic sign being disturbed. The patch, on the other hand, is non-referential and, unlike the detail, which tends to provide "stability and closure", the patch is "semiotically labile and open" (Didi-Huberman 2005: 268-269). According to Sabine Doran, the patch is a floating signifier that disturbs or destabilises the picture (2013: 107), what Didi-Huberman more forcefully called a "detonation or an intrusion" (1989: 164-165).

Philippe has discussed the metaphorical violence that Durrell's hyphenated adjective-noun colours bring to the scene described. I am concerned, though, that she seems to have overlooked the interplay between the idea of the patch and the detail of colour in Durrell's textual description. In her exploration of the colour yellow in Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*, Bal indicates that because the use of colour is textual, the concept of the patch might be considered useful. She goes on to add that this use lies not in opposing the patch to the detail, but, instead, seeing the patch as a mode of detailing (1997b: 84). The colours that Durrell is using are not detached pieces or fragments, so in line with Bal's argument, I would consider them insertions. Blocks of colour, the hyphenated adjective-nouns metaphorically combine to evoke the body of the city and her landscape. Durrell constantly uses variations of these colours in his descriptions of the landscape and characters. They are both significant and mobile in his writing. This mobility is more a process of becoming, so the concept of the patch becomes what Bal refers to as "like an ideal detail" (1997b: 84).

Though Durrell's "*landscape-tones*" might seem to tear open both the representation (image) and the text, I contend they shatter neither the unification of writing nor of visual representation. Instead, these blocks of textual colour appear to mirror the multiple perspectives associated with Cubist art. The hyphenated noun-adjective works not only to provide contrasting light and dark tones, but the hyphen adds a duality to the colours that gives depth and makes the colours appear to be in flux. Clive Scott points out that, in order to function in literature, colour has to be hyperbolised and given help from other areas (1991: 222). In Durrell's case, the conjoining of nouns and adjectives offers dynamism and

hyperbolic brilliance to the daubs of colour. The noun becomes multiform and opens the colours to a metamorphosis and a prismatic multiplicity. This linguistic technique lends animation and sensory sensation to Durrell's landscape descriptions. The vibration of the colours provides a slippage that feeds into the ambivalent visuality of memory. There is a further sense of hiatus in this use of the hyphen, which inserts space-time into the memory of the colours. Steiner mentioned this mosaic style in connection with Durrell's writing. Pine refers to this style as Durrell's "imagistic" writing, which provides the city and landscape with an intense focus, but with the "utmost economy" and detail (1994: 173).

Durrell's patches can be seen to conjure a semiotic *jouissance* that attempts to transgress and make fluid the boundaries between the visual and textual, but not to shatter, with its harsh connotations of splintering, either representation or textuality as Philippe argues. Yet, these sharp, abrupt brush strokes, the applications of colours by the artist's memory, do show that there is a visual violence hidden at the core of these metaphoric patches. This provides them with the ability to be what Bal refers to as "active or performative signifiers, rather than referents 'put down in writing'" (1997b: 84). These active shards of colour are fast drying on the memory, but possess the temporality of long duration, as revealed through the word "tempera". This is a painting process involving the use of dry colour pigments, such as the chalk-mauve or dust-red. These dry pigments are mixed with a glutinous binder, such as egg yolk, and a liquid (water, wine or vinegar). Applied in thin layers, the colours are pastel in shade, but dry quickly. However, when varnished by "sea damp" like "gum", the colours are enhanced and retain their resonance rarely changing over time. Durrell offsets the bright colour patches of the description with a lemony light made gentle and hazy by dust, as though the finger of memory has blurred the scene. Durrell evocatively links metaphors of the natural world, such as "light filtered through the essence of lemons", with those of painting techniques like "tempera". The living city becomes present in the sensory evocation of smells, light, sound and the haptic and Durrell establishes a relation between art, natural forms and the spatial perspective of a sensual and Orientalist vision of the city and its landscape.<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> For a different interpretation regarding the word *tempera* in this passage from the *Quartet*, see Corinne Alexandre-Garner and Isabelle Keller-Privat (2012).

## Spatialised Colours

Durrell moves from the visualisation of the city into his beautiful descriptions of the surrounding landscape. At the close of *Justine* Durrell introduces the idea of “workpoints”, short paragraphs, or one-line sentences, in which ideas, brief character delineations, aphorisms, colours and images are recorded in a fragmentary written process, much like the jotting down of ideas in a writer’s or painter’s journal:

Landscape-tones: steep skylines, low cloud, pearl ground with shadows in oyster and violet. Accidie. On the lake gunmetal and lemon. Summer: sand lilac sky. Autumn: swollen bruise greys. Winter: freezing white sand, clear skies, magnificent starscapes (J: 216).

These brief and abrupt splotches paint the seasons of the city and are extended into the poetic tones of landscape that open *Balthazar*. These establish a spatial-memory linkage between the books, as well as ensuring that the city and its landscape remain the ascendant presences dominating *Balthazar*. The description in the workpoints from *Justine* of “steep skylines, pearl ground with shadows in oyster and violet, on the lake gunmetal and lemon” is stronger and more vivid in *Balthazar*:

Landscape-tones: brown to bronze, steep skyline, low cloud, pearl ground with shadowed oyster and violet reflections. The lion-dust of desert: prophets’ tombs turned to zinc and copper at sunset on the ancient lake. Its huge sand-faults like watermarks from the air; green and citron giving to gunmetal, to a single plum-dark sail, moist, palpitant: sticky-winged nymph. (B: 11)

Some of the colour splashes from *Justine* return and seem to palimpsestically haunt and shadow the colours in *Balthazar*. Here the city is reborn in its portrayal from a perspective that is visually and evocatively different. There is an aura of excess and opulence about these colour descriptors, a hint of the Oriental and the fantastical associated with the world of faery.

The “steep skylines” in the passage quoted from *Justine* become singular (steep skyline) in the passage from *Balthazar*. This provides the image with a sharp, horizontal plane that offers an aerial and atmospheric perspective. Durrell contrasts this horizontality with the

round shapes of the “low cloud”, blurring the straight and the curved lines. Durrell's choosing a steep skyline could imply a pale blue with intense desert light, setting up a chromatic perspective between the light and the darker tones of the “pearl ground with shadows in oyster and violet”. These strong darker colours offset the horizon, ensuring a colour perspective that provides a sharp tonal depth to the landscape in *Balthazar*. To achieve this textually, Durrell employs an adjectival phrase instead of a prepositional one, where the adjectives strengthen the coloured forms. The phrase “On the lake gunmetal and lemon”, from the *Justine* workpoints is prepositional and, though appearing to contain movement, the colour patches seem more static than the phrase in *Balthazar* “green and citron giving to gunmetal”.

Durrell proceeds to blur the colour patches in *Balthazar* so that they blend from green to citron into gunmetal. The word “giving” provides movement to the colours, a progressive form indicating time as present and continuous. Alliteratively linking “giving” to “gunmetal” adds a poetic lilt to the movement. The verb contained in the phrase “prophets’ tombs turned to zinc and copper at sunset on the ancient lake” is a past participle, indicating past historical time. Durrell scholar Jack Stewart indicates: “The prepositional shifters (to, with, at, on, from, under) articulate a moving viewpoint, drawing the eye into the text” (2008: 157). The drawing of the eye into the text mirrors the drawing of the eye into a painting, the scopis drive of the gaze objectifying the work of art and, in this instance, the landscape. The use of the gradating devices of alliteration and assonance in “brown to bronze”, like a rising musical note, adds to the movement of the passage. Durrell’s use of tenses establishes this movement, which results in the flowing together of time past and time present and continuous.

Placed in the foreground of this colourful spatiality, and central to the image, is the sacred lake, Mareotis, on the shores of which stands Alexandria. The dying light installs a moiré of changing colours in the midst of which floats “a single plum-dark sail, moist, palpitant: sticky-winged nymph”. This sail, along with the tombs, brings human life and activity, as well as human demise, into the landscape. Apparently deserted space, this landscape assumes both the stasis and the movement of a painting. In particular, this movement is located in the sail, the only vertical in a picture of soft, curved and horizontal shapes, which recalls the masculine vertical bar Klimt inserted into his paintings. The word

“palpitant” provides a fluttering, pulsating movement that refers back to the sail, but also forward to the image of the “sticky-winged nymph” the central textual and visual metaphor. Meaning to tremble or beat, palpitant gives the impression of throbbing new life; something born from the sticky moisture of the lake, like a dragonfly or naiad. In the backward and forward movement of the sail lies a resemblance to the fluttering and vibration of just opened wings still sticky after leaving the chrysalis. Memory flutters backwards and forwards like the sail on the lake, or the wings of the nymph, staying time in the sticky suspension of Darley’s transcribed remembrance of this landscape.<sup>14</sup>

Urban theorist Christoph Lindner has pointed out that images of deserted urban cityscapes are a prominent feature of the urban uncanny (2009: 92). The landscape Durrell describes is equally uncanny in its deserted state, contiguous, as it is, with the cityscape. Lindner, discussing the concept of the undead city, mentions Freud’s statement about how people experience the uncanny as “death and dead bodies, to the return of the dead, and to spirits and ghosts” (Freud cited in Lindner 2009: 94). Imbued with the dead and the return of the dead spirits of the past, Durrell’s landscape can be related to what theorists Catherine Spooner and Emma McEvoy term a Gothic geography, where past history returns and is in turn spatialised (2007: 51). Whilst the fantasy of the landscape seemingly represents an escape from the teeming streets and bustle of the city, in Durrell’s work it remains a vast and uncanny space filled with past ghosts.

In this uncanny landscape, the season of spring, with its gentle new growth and love, does not exist:

Ah! there is no spring in the Delta, no sense of refreshment and renewal in things. One is plunged out of winter into: wax effigy of a summer too hot to breathe. But here, at least, in Alexandria, the sea-breaths save us from the tideless weight of summer nothingness. (B: 11)

This “wax effigy” is an encaustic that makes the stifling appearance of the city resemble either a lustrous enamel, or a death mask. The words “no spring in the Delta” is perhaps a

---

<sup>14</sup> Lynne Oliva in an article on the erotic nature of art has noted that the small black rectangle that Klimt used in the works from his golden period such as *Danae* (1907), *The Kiss* (1907-8) and the *Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer* (1907) represented a symbol of the male principle or phallus. The oval and circular shapes in the same paintings stand for the female principle suggestive of the womb, vagina or ovaries (2010: 253)

negative intertextual reference to the opening lines of Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* and T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, which both mention the April rain associated with spring.

Caught in the emptiness and suspension of time contained in the words "summer nothingness", Alexandria is pictured as heavy and listless. The cityscape is entirely still and empty and only "save us" indicates a vague and hidden human presence. Even the "sea-breaths", though they imply motion and life, seem to be almost inaudible and ineffectual. Deserted, this cityscape feels, as Lindner has written about deserted city spaces, deeply unreal, immobilised and uncanny (2009: 92). Alexandria is a claustrophobic space slowly and subtly personified; bathed in heat, she gives off "metallic flavours of exhaustion" (J: 34). The city and the landscape are confined within what Bal has called the parameters of the gaze, which manipulatively spatialises memory (1997a: 148). The confines of Durrell's text have reified and condemned topographical space into assuming attributes of stultifying claustrophobia and entropy.

### **Space of Stillness and Memory**

Shimmering languorously, a decadent, enclosed and empty ambience exudes from Alexandria. This image of the city, with her sinister, stifling stillness, recalls the deserted piazzas with their colonnaded architecture, which feature so prominently in the works of the artist Giorgio de Chirico. In *The Enigma of the Hour* (1912), the enigmatic nature of the three shrouded figures enhances the sense of ominous stillness. The clock in the painting will always reflect the hour of 14:55 and linear time remains forever stilled. The frozen figures and the tomb-like fountain are a promise and anticipation of a future that will never arrive.

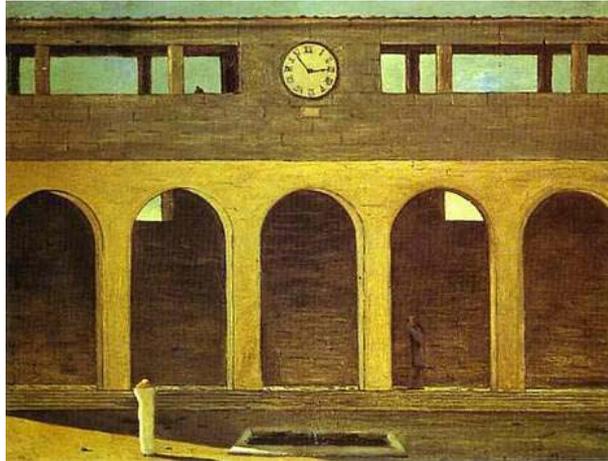


Figure 2 Giorgio de Chirico: *The Enigma of the Hour*

In his paintings, de Chirico fills his piazzas with light and deep shadows from which emanates an ominous sense of fatidic and oppressive silence caught in the louring green tonalities. These tonalities add depth and perspective to the flattened sharp angles of the piazzas, buildings and shadows. Art theorist Ian Walker, examining Surrealism's relation to the city, indicates that

de Chirico's city was not only a space to put next to the actual city, but also one to place – palimpsest like – over it, so that the actual city and the imagined city were fused. Reality was infiltrated by the dream, the present infiltrated by the past. (2002: 37)

The theatrical prop-like nature of de Chirico's piazza paintings represents a world of eerie stasis enveloped in enigmatic imaginary space that mirrors the portrayal of Alexandria in Durrell's text. Durrell, like de Chirico, uses the spatial architecture of the cityscape, constructed through Darley's memories, to evade chronological, linear time. Instead, in *Balthazar*, as in the work of de Chirico, time is arrested in the present of infinite space, allowing Durrell to fix the visual essence of the cityscape. Artist and writer create an "unreal" city held in memory and imagination. This imaginary city proceeds to map itself like a palimpsest over the geography of the 'real' city. The works of both painter and writer exhibit a menacing tension held in the cityscape, which exudes a latent mood of forbidden, erotic desire. The fact that Walker also refers to the concept of the "palimpsest" points to

the similarity between the visual work of de Chirico and the textual visuality of Durrell's novel.<sup>15</sup>

The architectural space of Durrell's cityscape is full of memories of time past caught in random snatches of places, which are enumerated in the same style as the workpoints and landscape-tones. They lead the reader, like a flâneur, on a disjointed encounter with places in the real city:

Rua Piroua, Rue de France, the Terbana Mosque (cupboard smelling of apples), Rue Sidi Abou El Abbas (water-ices and coffee), Anfouchi, Ras El Tin (Cape of Figs), Ikingi Mariut (gathering wild flowers together convinced she cannot love me), equestrian statue of Mohammed Ali in the square... The tombs at Kom El Shugafa, darkness and damp soil both terrified by the darkness ... Rue Fuad as the old Canopic Way, once rue Rosette (J: 194).

Memory's logic of association and visual fixing links this jumbled list of place-names together. In a similar fashion to the dabs and swatches of colour in the previous descriptions of landscape, the place-names, which resemble Cubist blocks, build the cityscape. This multi-perspectival modification of the cityscape focuses on the obvious elements of the disruption of conventions, the destabilisation of perspective, the loss of the discrete or integral subject and the idea of alteration and change. By linking spatial geometry and altering shapes and events within the space of the city, Durrell's conceptualisation of a space-time continuum endeavours to provide multiple and subjective positions. Durrell's visual ideas seem to represent features that act to gothicise the embodiment of Alexandria by disturbing how the reader perceives the topography of the city and its landscape. Alexandre-Garner points out that, in the *Quartet*, "streets and squares only exist inasmuch as they are linked to the regretted past... the reader wanders in vain when trying to rebuild Darley's city" (2012: 72). Cubist paintings, such as the de Chirico piazza discussed above, possess a sense of stasis, of time that is frozen. Suspending visualisation of the city and landscape in the memory of Darley, Durrell emulates what Mulvey, adopting a concept of André Bazin, terms 'embalming time' (2006b: 56). The embalming time of this space is the perfect description for a cityscape with a history buried deep in time, but which

---

<sup>15</sup> The "Unreal City", in T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (first published in 1922), is a Modernist fragmentation of the cityscape in Cubist style that questions a single perspective. Eliot's slices of life in the city are caught in and out of time as the city becomes abstract. However, where Eliot's city appears sterile, Durrell's is sensuously alive in its multi-perspective patterning.

simultaneously remains imbricated in the recurrent, uncanny urban motifs of emptiness and ghostliness.

Contrarily, Durrell constructs this city as a spatialised object of visual desire, a feminised, grotesque and alien space filled with scurrying life. This space entraps her inhabitants like captive prey:

The city, inhabited by these memories of mine, moves not only backwards into our history, studded by the great names which mark every station of recorded time, but also back and forth in the living present, so to speak – among its contemporary faiths and races: the hundred little spheres which religion or lore creates and which cohere softly together like cells to form the great sprawling jellyfish which is Alexandria today. (B: 127)

The long, almost serpentine construction of the quoted sentence enforces the feeling of something amorphous and suffocating that threatens death and the end of subjectivity. This imparts a plasma-like nature to the city, whose fluidity is emphasised by the phrase “great, sprawling jellyfish”. The words “great” and “sprawling” offer space and size to the image, while “jellyfish” intimates that the city is a spineless and viscid thing. The scientific name for jellyfish is *Medusozoa*, because of its resemblance to the snake-headed gorgon Medusa. Figuratively, the city is associated with the myth of Medusa, the chthonic monster whose gaze turned anyone who looked upon her to stone.

Medusa is terrifying, a mask which arouses castration anxiety and the loss of masculine identity. The embodied space of Alexandria resembles what Kelly Hurley, in her work on the Gothic body, has termed “Thing-ness” (1996: 42). Thing-ness is a state that holds the threat of the loss of self-identity and the fear of castration anxiety and can be closely associated with the Medusa. An alien form, the gelatinous ambience of the city seems to make all boundaries amorphous, and to do away with any form of linearity. Durrell’s playful construction of the viscid nature of the city partakes of what Nataly Tcherepashenets refers to as an eclectic locus of otherness, an alternate order that possesses an absence of a centre

(2008: 82-83). In this locus Durrell's characters, both masculine and feminine, move as parts of the matrix-like body of the city itself.<sup>16</sup>

Through the visual gaze of memory, Darley maps the alien space of the city of Alexandria. Filled with brilliant colours and prismatic reflections that rise up in memory, Alexandria is "luminous and trembling as if painted on dusty silk" (B: 13). The evanescent nature of this image reveals the city to be simultaneously visible and invisible before it melts "slowly into the horizon mist" (14). An illusion contained within memory, the city is an imaginary, dream-like image that remains elusive. In *Balthazar*, the city is a *Fata Morgana*: "always there, as it always will be, hanging in the mind like a mirage which travellers so often see" (B: 13). The idea of the "mirage" is crucial, because it reveals the instability of the city and her landscape. The *Fata Morgana* will play an important a role in the novel *Mountolive*, when the protagonist, David Mountolive, experiences the landscape of Egypt for the first time.

### **Heterotopic Illusion**

In *Mountolive*, the visualisation of the city and its landscape actualises them as colourful, sentient entities. The presence of the city and landscape is pivotal to the reconstructed memories of David Mountolive's experiences in Egypt as an aspiring, young diplomat. These remembrances, presented through the voice of an external narrator, are a textual retelling that structures both the plot and Mountolive's own search for identity. The novel appears to employ the cohesive and logical plot schema of conventional realist fiction and its rhetoric. Predating the narratives of *Justine* and *Balthazar*, the act of memory in this novel continues to affirm the multiple modes Durrell is employing to establish the function of time. In his book *A key to Modern British poetry*, Durrell indicates time should be considered "an always present, yet always recurring thing" (1970: 31). Accordingly, time in *Mountolive* is experienced as a constant flux and reflux and, according to Durrell, "if there is any movement at all it is circular, cyclic, and significant only because it is repeated" (31). I have indicated that memory does not function in a serial manner; rather it is employed to bring the past into the present in 'slices of time' or 'sliding panels'.

---

<sup>16</sup> See Freud's posthumously published work *Medusa's Head* (1964). For a feminist reinterpretation, see Hélène Cixous's *The Laugh of the Medusa* (1976).

Splicing time-space and memories together, like a film, the narrative appears to provide the events with a sense of cohesion and logic. Yet, as in some films, an uncanny haunting of the characters and the narrative structure occurs, indicating the instability of a reality based on memory. Memories in Durrell's novel are never fixed; they are images constructed by human desires, where reality, time and subject become re-inscriptions of history. Victor Burgin, in his work *The Remembered Film*, has drawn attention to the idea of superimposition and the palimpsestuous nature of time, space and image occurring in memories of film: "... each scene is now the satellite of the other. Each echoes the other, increasingly merges with the other, and I experience a kind of fascinated incomprehension before the hybrid object they have become" (2004: 59). This palimpsestuous hybridity is visible in Durrell's flux of space-time, reality and subjectivity in *Mountolive*, which predates *Justine* and *Balthazar* in plot and will lead into the future-past present tense of the novel *Clea*.

This complicated and multi-layered structure creates haunting echoes and superimpositions of ideas and characters, which flow out from the landscape and the city. The haunting and constant recurrence of time and history is a central aspect of the Gothic. In this regard, Wolfreys writes that it promises a "certain return, a cyclical reversion" (2000: xiv). I hold that this cyclical return and layering is a strategy Durrell deploys to expose the different facets of the characters' experiences of the landscape and city. His use of shifting perspectives appears to establish what Jacques Derrida, in *Living On*, calls a "relationship of cryptic haunting from mark to mark" (2004: 108). In a 2005 interview, Derrida said "in a certain way every trace is spectral" (2001: 44). Spectral traces are a metaphor in Durrell's tetralogy for the attempt to recover a past that, while lost, is constantly repeating itself. The agency of this spectral haunting is the powerful locus of the real/unreal city of Alexandria, her landscape and the female characters who are reflected images of this place and space.

The feminised cartography of the Egyptian landscape embodies David Mountolive's fantasy of the Orient. His recollections are a perpetuation of the work and dreams of other Western writers, artists and colonial conquerors. These fantasy constructions of landscape, people and place fashioned the Orient into a metaphoric representative of all the lesser qualities associated with otherness. Julia Wright has indicated that these representations

labelled the Orient as monstrously feminine, destructive, violent with voracious appetites, enchanting but dangerously beautiful, sexual, perverse, weak, passive, barbaric and so forth (2001: 269). These characteristics, and their exploration in the narrative of *Mountolive*, fulfil the role of what is termed the Oriental Gothic: a fantasy of the east, complete with its eroticised beauty that will haunt Mountolive, repeatedly invading his passing present. His first meeting with the landscape establishes the illusion of Egypt he will carry with him until his return there as Ambassador.

### **Fish Hunt and Heterotopia**

On his first encounter with the landscape, Mountolive colours his surroundings with the traditional perceptions of his Occidental imperialist predecessors. He brings to the landscape the cultural authority of this past which Nash points out is an authority that validates the white, upper-middle class male explorer, writer, artist and diplomat (1996: 151). Their gaze and representation of the landscape have provided Mountolive a way to organise his own social responses to both the people he encounters and the landscape itself. The external narrator shares or reproduces the perspective of the protagonist and primary focaliser David Mountolive, whose imagination is replete with images of the Orient of the crusades and ideas from the original Oriental Gothic tale *Vathek* by William Beckford. This tale, spuriously claiming to be based on truth, inculcated the romantic Western obsession with a feminised, evil and paganistic Orient. This is an Orient that offers exotic possibilities because it appears supine and open for conquering and civilising. Mountolive and the narratorial voice superimpose their dissociated Western gaze over the Hosnani family, who host Mountolive as he learns Arabic. This family, likened to “colonials” (M: 20) is, by implication, considered by Mountolive not quite his equals in his role as representative of the Colonial government. The Hosnani brothers take Mountolive on a fishing expedition during the course of which he first encounters the beauty of the landscape.

The sun is setting when Mountolive finds himself seated in a boat on a lake on the Hosnani estate. The description of the water and landscape initially seems to be an account given by the voice of an external narrator:

The Egyptian night fell – the sudden reduction of all objects to bas-reliefs upon a screen of gold and violet. The land had become dense as tapestry in the lilac afterglow, quivering here and there with water-mirages from the rising damps, expanding and contracting horizons, until one thought of the world as being mirrored in a soap-bubble trembling on the edge of disappearance ... The spokes of darkness which reached out to them only outlined the shapes of the reed-fringed islands, which punctuated the water like great pin-cushions, like paws, like hassocks ... With the land and the water liquefying at this rate he kept having the illusion that they were travelling across the sky rather than across the alluvial waters of Mareotis. (M: 11 - 12)

In the middle of the passage, there is a startling intrusion of another consciousness with the use of the word “one”. The reader and the external narrator instantly enter into the focalised stream of consciousness of Mountolive’s experience of the ‘now’, which is really in the ‘then’. The nominative use of the indefinite pronoun “one” is unnatural in the passage. Used in this context, it represents the singular pronoun of what is termed the majestic plural (we are not amused). There is, therefore, an implied ‘we’, which includes the reader within the experience and the depicted scene. The use of this tiny pronoun seems rather affected and acts as a class signifier. It de-emphasises or distances the protagonist from an expression of feeling or emotional interaction with the described situation. In Mountolive’s case, it represents a diplomat’s formal English usage, but is an unnatural and playful device. Durrell is, it seems, ironically exposing the pompousness that will characterise Mountolive’s interaction with other characters throughout the novel, and in his brief appearances in *Balthazar* and *Clea*.

The external narrator cannot share Mountolive’s thoughts and experiences, but only watches silently from an outside position experiencing what this character sees, hears, smells and feels. Durrell’s employment of the unnatural movement between external narrator and Mountolive’s internal thought process is, I contend, a disruption of the conventional presentation of a single consistent subject in the context of a narrative. It playfully destabilises the narrative form through the employment of strange narratological devices. Time and space are fluid, moving backwards and forwards in order to add immediacy to the scene within the context of presented memory. The feeling of being in the

consciousness of the character and his seemingly present experience pulls the reader into the visualisation of the scene. The water, sky and land are visualised as absolute and sensuous presences that dominate the solitary consciousness experiencing it. The dash in the first sentence of the quote separates the phrase “the Egyptian night fell” from what follows. A backdrop seems to have fallen down upon a stage. Visibility declines into vagueness with the fading of the light on the screen of the horizon. Mountolive now sees objects in bas-relief and the background smudges into a *sfumato* effect.

The colours are richly mellow shades of gold, violet and lilac, which situate the reader visually within the artist’s mental picture of the landscape. Woven from lilac threads of light, the landscape appears to be a decorative tapestry that, flat and dimensionless, symbolically represents Mountolive’s need to mythologise. This landscape partakes of the presence of thing-like attributes latent in the vegetal reed islands. Mountolive sees them like “pincushions, like paws, like hassocks”, transforming them into both human and animal objects. The pincushion evokes an image of a sharp, spiny sea urchin metaphorically associated with the feminine. However, there is a sense of violence in the image, because phallic pins are pushed into the feminine cushion. The image of the pincushion becomes polyvalent. Pins can hold together either fabric or pages that need sewing. The textual and feminine pursuit of sewing seems associated with the use of reeds for papermaking that is synonymous with Egypt and papyrus.

A further association of the feminine and the islands occurs in the use of “hassock”, a hard cushion used for kneeling on in church. These were footstools covered in tapestry, also called ottomans. A symbolic association between the religious footstools of Christianity and the Orient is established. However, “hassock” contains an alternative meaning: a tuft of rank grass or a tussock. Rankness and thing-like hybridity seem inextricably bound to the landscape. Mountolive’s choice of words reveals his unconscious perception of the Orient as a place of rankness and luxuriance. The feminine nature of this landscape conforms to the mode of the Oriental Gothic with its intangible deceitfulness exemplified in the instability of the delusive water mirages or *Fata Morgana*

The term *Fata Morgana* comes from the Italian word for fairy and is associated with the witch Morgan le Fay, who lured sailors to their death by means of these unreal fairy castles. Arising from the water like ghosts, they quiver on the horizon. Durrell uses the synonyms

“quivering” and “trembling” in the passage. These present participles impart a shivering, shimmering movement to the description. However, the connotations of fear and anxiety contained in these words add an uncanny *frisson* of mystery to the surrounding water landscape. Through the veil of the water-mirages, the horizon pulsates deceptively, distorting perspective. This distortion builds a luminescent fairy world “mirrored in a soap-bubble trembling on the edge of disappearance”. Caught inside this spectacular and transient image resides a hint of the magically unreal nature of the waterscape.

Durrell devises a visually idealised world in order to reveal the blindness inherent in Mountolive’s response to the landscape. A need to live in his illusion of the spellbinding beauty of the Oriental other ensures that he ignores the darker, treacherous shadows of the land and waterscape. Instead, he visualises a fairy-tale Utopia caught in the mirror of the water and the trembling “soap-bubble”. For Foucault the mirror represents a site that is simultaneously a Utopia and a heterotopia (1986: 24). A Utopia is an imaginary place of perfection and idealisation, a place of projected spatial desire, apparent in Mountolive’s fascination with the world he sees in the water-mirages. However, this strange space of the soap bubble is also the ‘other space’, a heterotopia. The spaces of a heterotopia continually shift positions and meanings and act as the inverse mirror-doubles of a Utopia. I contend that the world held in the mirror of the mirage is a fantastical illusion of land and waterscape as a space that is at once real and unreal, utopic and heterotopic. The ambivalence of this space resides in the liminal boundary associated with the Kristevan notion of abjection. There is both the desire to enter the Utopia and the repulsion and fear of it as a devouring, alternate space of non-existence. The landscape’s ambivalent space is replicated in the capricious illusion of its construction in memory.<sup>17</sup>

The reader and Mountolive seem trapped in this capricious world of memory. I would argue that the mirror of the water is representative of what Michael Riffaterre refers to as the “transparency of memory’s palimpsest” (1977: 166). In mediating Mountolive’s memories, the hidden narratorial voice ensures a subjective perspective on Egypt is suggested. This viewpoint adds a further facet, one evoking Oriental mystique, to the

---

<sup>17</sup> Though I have indicated that I choose to associate the liminal and liminality with Kristeva’s theory of abjection, I felt that perhaps a slightly more detailed explanation of the notion of the liminal needed to be provided. According to Kristeva, abjection is “above all ambiguity” (1982: 9). I regard the liminal and abjection as the same space of ambiguity that represents flux, disruption, a space where Symbolic control is threatened by the semiotic drives that strive to break down identity, order and stability. The liminal is the margin or boundary, a place that is a non-place where the subject is both visible and invisible. In my study, concepts like the heterotopia, the spectral, the Gothic, the mirror, space will be seen to partake of the ambiguity of abjection and the liminal.

previous subjective constructions of Alexandria's landscape found in the novels *Justine* and *Balthazar*. Slowly, dusk removes all depth from the visual picture of Mountolive's surroundings, silhouetting figures and objects. The horizon rapidly shape-shifts into an uncanny optical inversion of the sky and landscape: "With the land and the water liquefying at this rate he kept having the illusion that they were travelling across the sky rather than across the alluvial waters of Mareotis" (M: 12). Mountolive is a victim of the disorientation and deliquescence of spatial perspective. The waterscape acts as a mirror for the text and, based on this metaphoric instability, Durrell constructs an unreal dream world, which attempts to transcend representation and perception.

The unreal dream world is again present on the day Narouz Hosnani dies. This death happens in the early morning when "marsh mist full of evanescent shapes and contours" covers the landscape (M: 304). Haunting spectres, which dissolve around and back into the surroundings, distort the perspective of the landscape. An unearthly image filled with an aura of menace, but also with sunlight:

The whole surface of the lake was rising into the sky like the floor of a theatre, pouring upwards with the mist; here and there reality was withered by mirages, landscapes hanging in the sky upside down or else four or five superimposed on each other with the effect of a multiple exposure. (M: 306)

This description is a counterpart to Mountolive's own description of the lake during the fish hunt. However, Narouz beholds a lake whose surface seems to ascend slowly in a Gothic "ghost glide". The lake is no longer coloured like a tapestry, nor is it beautiful and frivolous like a soap bubble. What Narouz sees is mirages that wither reality. An impression of dissolution and decay attaches itself to the landscape and a metamorphosis takes place from the Utopic fantasy Mountolive experienced, into an inverted dystopic nightmare. The waterscape disrupts visual stability so surroundings blur and mutate. The superimposed images held in the body of the mirages possess an immobility often associated with a photograph.<sup>18</sup>

The photographic effect of the "landscapes hanging in the sky upside down or else four or five superimposed on each other with the effect of a multiple exposure" unveils the

---

<sup>18</sup> The Corsican Effect or "ghost glide" was a trap used in Victorian theatre that allowed for the apparition of a ghost to rise through the floor. It was devised to stage Dion Boucicault's adaptation of Alexandre Dumas's *Les Frères Corse* or *The Corsican Brothers* and the well-known Ghost Melody accompanied the disgorging of the ghost. See Michael R Booth (1991).

landscape as held in a moment, one that is flattened and prismatic. The photograph-like images repeat one another but, as film theorist Christian Metz writes, “[P]hotography’s deeply rooted kinship with death has been noted by many different authors, including Dubois, who speaks of photography as a ‘thanatography’, and ... Roland Barthes whose *Camera Lucida* bears witness to this relationship” (1985: 83). The visualisation of the mirages and their reflections possesses an uncanny strangeness, a disturbing unfamiliarity and calmness. Multiple exposures seem to fix the landscape in a decaying stillness dominated by the spectre of death – a textual-visual “thanatography”. The beauty of the landscape with its eerie and tense premonitions of evil is focalised entirely from the perspective of Narouz. His fatal wounding remains an ellipsis in the text and the reader only re-encounters him through the eyes of Nessim as he lies near death, spread out on the landscape. This hazy and nightmarish landscape has betrayed Narouz and remains indifferent to his death. The warmth and splendour of the dawn and the sunset have faded, “dying into amethyst and nacre” (M: 301). The caliginosity of violet-purple, the colour of mourning and death threatens the iridescent opulence of the sky. The decadent aesthetic qualities of the words employed to describe the landscape envision it as fascinating and seductive, yet, synchronously, horrific and excessive.

Mountolive and Narouz’s interaction with the landscape represents an inverted doubling; Narouz’s experience acts as the obverse of Mountolive’s. For Mountolive the experience of the waterscape is a bewitching experience. For Narouz it represents only a sinister betrayal in which the polychromatic and changeable illusion is death-driven. In this terrain, Narouz’s death reveals what Foucault has called the alterities of life and death, with the resultant transgression of the boundaries between these two states (2004: 63). In Durrell’s story world, this overstepping of the boundary between life and death is a descent into abjection and dissolution. In contrast to the destructive waterscape Narouz confronts, Mountolive experiences a fantastical and eroticised space of the exotic and idyllic: “‘Egypt’, he said to himself as one might repeat the name of a woman. ‘Egypt’” (M: 12). This Egypt has destroyed and betrayed Narouz and will in the future betray Mountolive. Leaving the sensual landscape of Alexandria, we meet Mountolive in another city, this time London. This juxtaposition of cities allows Durrell to contrast Mountolive’s experience of the Orient and his interaction with the realm of Imperialism.

## Imperial Gothic Fog

*Mountolive* is the only novel of the tetralogy that explores another city and landscape – namely London. The external narrator’s gaze is central to the description of Mountolive’s relationship with London. Located in the space of memory, which unfolds in the textual visuality of representation, the re-imagining of the situation occurs using the past tense and the third person singular. This use of tense and pronoun is suggestive of an ostensibly objective depiction of Mountolive’s character. Employing what narratologist Monika Fludernik refers to as a “typically ‘authorial’ style of superior knowledge”, Durrell’s external narrator remains outside the situation described (2001: 627). Mountolive’s returns to this city take on the “tremulous eagerness of a lover” (M: 85). As feminised spaces, the city and landscape indifferently and passively allow Mountolive to be their “lover”. Feminist theorist Sue Best suggests the metropolis is the safe and familial terrain of home and motherland, with all the sexual pleasures and comforts this feminised space seems to offer (1995: 183). For Mountolive, his return to London contains the frisson of the urban as loving, comforting and erotically desired home.

The presentation of London and its landscape is internally focalised through Mountolive’s gaze and experience. The narratorial voice accesses this experience when it slides into Mountolive’s stream of inner thoughts. The narrative becomes strange and uncanny when Durrell allows Mountolive, in a letter written to Leila about his meeting with Pursewarden, to present the latter’s voice and inner thoughts with almost perfect photographic recall. Fludernik has noted, in relation to narratives such as this, that they remain limited to “the transfer of knowledge available to the main protagonist” (2001: 630). As a result, Mountolive’s totalising recall of all that was said calls into question the reliability of this narrative, making all the memories that Mountolive transcribes in the letter, and regaled by the external narrator, entirely suspect. There is an obvious gap between what the external narrator really has access to, and what Mountolive, as focalisor, is privy to. I allege this gap is in accord with Bundgaard’s assertion that this type of access to the plot represents a strange extension of what the narrator’s usually truncated access to the story world should be (2011: 89; 97).

Focalisation mainly occurs through the objectifying gaze of Mountolive. Invisible, the external narrator and the reader become disembodied voyeurs of London’s feminised

landscape. The London landscape is disturbing because of its apparent emptiness. The descriptions of “thin black drizzle” (M: 85), covering “soot encrusted cornices” (85) where the air is filled with “the haunting conspiratorial voice of river traffic behind the veils of mist - they were both a reassurance and a threat” (85), establish an apprehensive atmosphere. This is an urban fantasy whose elements belong solely to the lover Mountolive and the voice of the river. An eerie and gloomy solitariness permeates Durrell’s description of London, where dusk, mist and looming bleakness predominate. The only human presence is Mountolive’s, and his thoughts of the city bubble up against the backdrop of urban noise. This noise is epitomised by the resonant sound of Occidental linear time that booming dominates the London dusk: “Big Ben struck its foundering plunging note. Lamps had begun to throw out their lines of prismatic light” (M: 86). The sound neatly divides the surrounding world and life into measured sections, in the manner of Virginia Woolf’s description of Big Ben in *Mrs Dalloway* (1925). In Woolf’s novel, a single day is measured out to the sounds of this clock. Even though the vibrations of the sound in Woolf’s description are circular and float into the stream of consciousness of her characters, yet these sounds remain the linear measurement of a day and its passing.

In Durrell’s description, linearity is in the lines of light. However, this linearity is shattered by the light’s refraction into multiple, prismatic strands. This visualisation calls ocular perception into question. This prismatic light works to enhance the uncanny ambience of the scene caught in the vague uncertainty of the strange misty atmosphere. Durrell’s description is strongly Modernist in approach as it attempts to visualise the strangeness of artificial light and how it acts to alter our perception of passing time. Durrell’s textual visual image of this prismatic light is epitomised by *Street Lamp* (1909) a painting by the Italian Futurist Giacomo Balla:



Figure 3 Giacomo Balla: *Street Lamp*

In Umberto Boccioni's "The Manifesto of Futurist Painters" (1910), Balla writes on the destruction of space in painting and observes "Space no longer exists: the street pavement, soaked by rain beneath the glare of electric lamps, becomes immensely deep" (1973: 28). This disappearance of space impacts on time and the two blend together, according to the Bergsonian conception of duration. Balla drives the space-time in this painting through the dynamic energy contained in the prismatic array of vivid primary reds, blues and greens accompanied by the bright and dominating cadmium yellow of the lamplight, with its interspersed flecks of white, so the space is alive with the movement of tiny streaks of lightning. The almost plasmatic field encompassing this lamp is continuous with the surrounding space and its past and future trajectories, where the duration of space-time is an active participant (Kern 2003: 164).

A similar duration of space and time is located in Durrell's description of the London landscape lit by the street lamp and filled with the resonance of the masculine voice of Big Ben. This loud voice is countered by the haunting polyphonic musicality of the "conspiratorial voice of river traffic behind the veils of mist - they were both a reassurance and a threat" (M: 85). The river, like all watery environments in the *Quartet*, is a feminine voice veiled in the obscuring mist. This voice raises a sense of semiotic ambivalence that disconcerts Mountolive, who feels both reassured and threatened. The ghostly voice of the river belongs to the landscape that holds Mountolive in thrall like a lover. Alluring and dangerous, the male focalisor constructs the geography of this urban landscape into a

monstrous-feminine Otherness. Mountolive will leave the dangerous presences of London's menacing geography and attempt to return to his fantasy of Egypt and Alexandria.

### **Alexandria Revisited**

On his return to Egypt, Mountolive attempts to regain the city and landscape of his memories. However, he perceives and presents Alexandria differently and, in doing so, he superimposes this new and subjective version of Alexandria over his previous memories. Mountolive re-enters Alexandria on the wave of a storm and the reader is caught inside his inner experience and visualisation of the city. The narrative is buffeted between the past tense and the conditional present-progressive with its promise of a coming event. Through this maelstrom the "pearly city" (M: 277) is glimpsed and her surfaces negotiated:

through the dark cloud mat, its minarets poked up against the cloud bars of an early sunset; linen soaked in blood ... Presently the sea wind would rise ... the winter sky would resume its light ... It was the ancient city again; he felt its pervading melancholy under the rain ... The brilliant unfamiliar lighting of the thunder-storm re-created it, giving it a spectral story-book air – broken pavements made of tinfoil, snail-shells, cracked horn, mica, earth-brick buildings ... The desuetude of an ancient city. (277)

This is one of the most extended evocations of Alexandria in *Mountolive*. Voyeuristically gazing on the beauty of the city with her minarets, Mountolive sees her steeped in blood. However, this is not just any blood, being qualified as "linen soaked in blood", thereby evoking an image of menstruation that unites the city with the female body of abjection, repulsion and death. Surveying the urban landscape, Mountolive finds it to be dark, melancholy, spectral, a place of decay, of crushed and broken objects. Seen as a space made up of ancient neglected ruins and filled with gimcrack reflections, Alexandria's embodied space is depicted as a facade of pearly beauty, a "glittering artefact", that Mountolive considers a form of spectacle; it is a nightmare confection of fakery. Offset against this ancient, decrepit and debris-filled space, Mountolive's magical Oriental memory of the city and landscape is mythologically located in the figure of his ex-lover Leila Hosnani, the mother of Nessim and Narouz:

she represented something like a second, almost mythical image of the reality which he was experiencing day by day. He was like a man seeking to marry the twin images in a camera periscope in order to lay his lens in true focus ... unable either to confirm his own memories of this magical landscape, or fully assess his newest impressions of it. (M: 148-149)

Mountolive conflates Leila and the landscape in his memories. These projected memories have established an illusion of a reality he recollects as “magical”, one caught in the fairy-tale castles and soap bubble of the lake. The vision of Leila, as the personification of Egypt, is a construction of the myth of the East: a space of exoticism, opulence and make-believe belonging to the tales of *A Thousand and One Nights*. Using the “camera periscope”, Mountolive objectifies his memories of the landscape. This “camera periscope” recalls the *camera obscura*, a periscope of mirrors and lenses that threw images onto a reflective screen (Burton & Fraser 2006: 145). According to art historian Jonathan Crary, the *camera obscura* acted in the same manner as the human eye, by creating the idea of an objective, truthful representation of reality (2009: 213).

The mirror and the space between the lenses, I would suggest, act as a heterotopic space. Here representation and inversion occur deceiving the eye. The image is a spatial doubling, which Stephen Read indicates, “defines who we are in relation to a vision ... simultaneously objective and subjective, of the world and our projections onto the world” (2006: 8). The heterotopia of the “camera-periscope” creates multiple and shifting meanings that can never ultimately be fixed. The objective truth of the *camera obscura*, and by implication the camera-periscope, corresponds with the narratorial voice, which might provide a ‘truthful’ and distanced narrative. However, I prefer to consider Durrell’s metaphorical use of the *camera obscura* and the periscope as recalling the optical instruments found in Marcel Proust’s *À la recherche du temps perdu*. In her study of Proust’s employment of these instruments, Bal refers to this as the “technology that enables one to see better by seeing larger” (1997b: 70). David Mountolive, as subject, attempts to bring the image of his memories of Egypt and Leila into focus, in order, through enlargement, to gain clarity. The metaphoric use of a combined optical instrument, a periscope to provide depth of field and a camera to affix the image in stillness, is a striking metaphor. A blown-up image, Bal observes, contains time within a single representation, simultaneously

encompassing past, present and future in the longed-for hope of permanence (1997b: 69). Space and vision are doubled when Mountolive seeks “to marry the twin images” of the spatial geography of the two feminine bodies in a strangely hermetic fashion. The doubling of the feminine bodies mirrors the double nature of the optical instrument with its function as part-periscope and part-camera. Not only does it enlarge, but also takes photographs.

Roland Barthes refers to a photograph as representing the passing of time from past to future, and terms this movement the “imperious sign of my future death” (1993: 97). The visual prosthesis of the camera aids in isolating objects, much as Mountolive’s gaze tries to place Leila and the landscape into relief against his memories. This fixing strives to determine their truth and relevance to Mountolive’s present perceptions and experiences. The photographic device becomes a method to represent the invasion of time past into Mountolive’s present, with the promise of time future in what Barthes, in relation to the photograph, has noted is a state of “*This will be and this has been*” (96). The imaginary of what has been and the possibility of what will be reside in the hope that Mountolive invests in his spectral figuration of Leila in her role as the personification of the magical landscape of his memories.

Memory’s projected illusion proves to be a mirage and, like the deceptive *Fata Morgana*, it betrays Mountolive. Mountolive’s final meeting with Leila occurs in an old-fashioned gharry with the driver a mere silhouette in the bluish light of dusk that makes things vague and shadowy. In the shadowy light, Mountolive sees a “plump and square-faced Egyptian woman of uncertain years, with a severely pock-marked face and eyes drawn grotesquely out of true by the antimony pencil” (M: 281). This image shatters Mountolive’s memories of a “brilliant, resourceful and elegant” Leila (280); all he can now see is “a pitiable grotesque” and a “clumsy cartoon creature” (281). Re-envisioned as a monster, Mountolive recoils from Leila in abject disgust. He now realises that Leila represented “his own private Egypt of the mind” (284). Leila has metamorphosed into the alternate hideous face of Egypt, a “betraying landscape” on which he will “waste no more time” (295). Alexandria has itself altered “become distasteful, burdensome, wearisome to his spirit” (284), a part of an “Egypt of deceptions and squalor ... which turned emotions and memories to dust, which beggared friendship and destroyed love” (295). The shattering of his memories causes Mountolive to vanquish Leila, Alexandria and Egypt from his life. These

previously eroticised, delightful female forms he now rejects as hags. Mountolive's subjective perception of them reveals the possibility of an alternate, less palatable, reality. His moral outrage at his apparent betrayal is both funny and pathetic. The reader now perceives Mountolive as a self-deluding, bombastic man. His resemblance to Darley, and in some manner to Pursewarden, establishes a doubling of shared masculine traits. All these male characters appear to gender the landscape as feminine and metaphorically paint it with Gothic motifs. Objectified as a visual Other the landscape, like the city's urban alien space, represents a locus of male fear and desire. Because the female characters are avatars or extensions of this city, the surface bodily formation they undergo partakes of the visual elements of this urban space. Darley's re-invention of this city in memory informs the narrative of the last novel *Clea*, providing an alternate perspective on the exotic space of Alexandria and her landscape.

### **Memory and Return**

Lying in solitude on a rock next to the sea on his Greek retreat, where only calm idleness prevails, Darley eats an orange that stirs his memories of Alexandria. He indicates that the memories "draw me back inexorably to the one city which for me always hovered between illusion and reality, between substance and the poetic images which its very name aroused in me" (C: 9). The word "inexorably" shows the relentless nature of the city's magnetic field that tries to return "one of her children" into her ambit. For Darley, she remains a world in flux. This urban space vacillates between real/unreal or fantastical representing what Botting indicates are the traits of the Gothic landscape: "neither good nor evil but both at the same time" (1996: 9). The cityscape remains a place where, in Botting's words, "relations between real and fantastic, sacred and profane, supernatural and natural, past and present, civilized and barbaric ... remain crucial to the Gothic dynamic of limit and transgression" (9). Illusion and reality, Darley realises, are only held in the space of his "memory" and even this has been "falsified by the desires and intuitions only as yet half-realized on paper. Alexandria, the capital of memory!" (C: 9). The idea of the half-realised text, motivated by desire and based on the non-rationality of intuition, is indicative of the imaginative and deceptive nature of memory and of the city.

I have demonstrated that throughout Durrell's tetralogy memory conjures the urban fantasy of Alexandria. This city lurks continually on the periphery of Darley's thoughts and expectations, as she lies in a "ponderous azure dream ... basking like some old reptile in the bronze Pharaonic light of the great lake" (C: 12). The beauty of this dream world is in the clear blue and glittering light of azure. Nevertheless, stemming as it does from lapis lazuli, a pigment whose compositional elements are lime and soda, there is a tinge of death and dissolution to the image. The movement of the bronze and azure light contrasts with the sense of bulky slowness, tedium, pomposity and deliberateness associated with the word "ponderous". The city becomes "like some old reptile", and is again the unwieldy tortoise of Darley's previous comparison. Superimposed on the present, repetitions of the past create a palimpsest of references that merge into one another to evoke the hybrid being of the city.

Hauntings of the ancient past return in the use of the word "Pharaonic" with its connotation of tyranny. The city is a tyrannical taskmistress who constantly occupies Darley's thoughts and memories in an attempt to lure him back to her. Bathed in the bronze light reflected off the maternal waters of the great lake, Durrell infuses a photographic stillness into this visualisation of the city. Like an old print, the city's image is the sepia colour of memory. This colour, prepared from the secretion of the cuttlefish, returns the city to her tentacled role of slimy, grasping Thing-ness. An abject space, the city becomes a horror of non-human dissolution, decay and death. There is beauty in this death as Darley, seeing Alexandria, says: "I had no idea ... that the city could be so beautiful in the mere Saturnalia of a war. It has begun to swell up, to expand like some mystical rose of the darkness" (C: 21).

The city seems to have swollen like the bud of a rose slowly unfurling, and has taken on attributes of the mystic rose of Dante, Blake, Yeats, T.S. Eliot and many other poetic and literary narratives. The secretive folds of the petals make the rose the multifoliate symbol of love, beauty and feminine sexuality, along with vanity, opulence and the ephemeral. The rose is also a symbol of the occult quest of the Rosicrucians and Theosophists. Imaged in the guise of a mystical rose, the city again assumes the metaphorical qualities of the female form, but the city is a rose of darkness with all its attached terrors and black magic. In opposing the city, symbolised by the rose, with the excess of the Saturnalia as symbolic of war, Durrell constructs a Gothic landscape as the incarnation of wild desire and the death-

drive. The word Saturnalia applied to a city experiencing war is a very strange comparison. The Saturnalia was an ancient Roman festival where unrestrained licence and revelry occurred all accompanied by merriment. War appears trivialised by the use of the word “mere”, but, at the same time, it has a transgressive madness that adds to the city’s allure.<sup>19</sup>

The spectacle of the city at war, it is the desert campaign of the Second World War, is theatrical. Darley acknowledges the pictures of Alexandria he has kept in his memory do not resemble the city he now encounters: “each new approach is different. Each time we deceive ourselves that it will be the same. The Alexandria I now saw, the first vision of it from the sea, was something I could not have imagined” (C: 20). Darley is now aware that memories are deceptive and misleading. The city he sees is a new vision and both like and unlike the city of memory. Alexandria appears unreal, a vision that is enhanced by the dawn: “the first overflow of citron and rose which would set the dead waters of Mareotis a-glitter ... backed by the paper-thin mirages of the city, whose fig-shaped minarets changed colour with every lift of the sun” (24). In this description, the colour citron recurs from previous depictions of the lake and acts in contrast to the rose-like, pink-red of sunrise. Against this horizontal landscape rise the phallic verticals of the minarets described as fig-shaped and previously “like stalks of giant fennel” (B: 128). Darley’s gaze moves from the profound gloom of the lake to the airy vegetal architecture of the minarets, which like a prism keep changing colour with the angle of the sun’s rays. The city becomes a mirage, a paper-thin illusion, written and imagined into existence by Darley. The mirage tainted by the deadness of the gloomy waters of the lake, like those of the tarn in Poe’s *The Fall of the House of Usher*, slowly contaminates the landscape with a seeping horror. The city in all its prismatic early morning energy represents a menacing force inflected with the sombre hues of the lake.

Into the excess of this beautiful but strangely threatening landscape, Darley arrives again in Alexandria. Here he encounters a “newly acquired city” (C: 25):

The fruit-stalls with their brilliant stock made doubly brilliant by being displayed upon brighter papers; the warm gold of oranges lying on brilliant

---

<sup>19</sup> The use of the rose seems to refer to the use of rose imagery in the work of T.S. Eliot and Guillaume Apollinaire. In Eliot, the rose is a symbol of human or divine love, an echo of Dante, which mostly remains unattainable. In Apollinaire, the multifoliate rose is a metaphor for the thinking mind. There is also the aspect of the Goddess Isis’s symbolic association with the rose. See Genevieve Foster (1945); Nancy Hargrove (1997) and Bruce Morrissette (1953).

slips of magenta and crimson-lake. The smoky glitter of the coppersmiths' caves ... pottery and blue jade beads against the Evil Eye. All this given a sharp prismatic brilliance by the crowds milling back and forth ... And here strolling in the foreground of the painting with the insolence of full possession, came the plum-blue Ethiopians in snowy turbans, bronze Sudanese with puffy charcoal lips, pewter-skinned Lebanese and Bedouin with the profiles of kestrels, woven like brilliant threads upon the monotonous blackness of the veiled women. The whole toybox of Egyptian life was still there, every figure in place ... untouched, it seemed, by time or by war. (C: 28)

The riotous excess of this description is truly Gothic in style, resembling the stereotypical, colonialist representation of the East in books, paintings and other artefacts. The use of the word "brilliance" and "brilliant" to describe this street scene adds to the hyperbolic fantasy world Durrell is allowing Darley to describe. The cityscape becomes a place of sumptuous sensuality and the juxtaposed vivid colours seem chosen from a colour-wheel for dramatic effect. This is truly overworked and baroque writing, but it is alluring in the instantaneous and lively image it evokes for the reader who feels present with Darley in this street. The painting entitled *Orange Market at Bildah* (1898) by Belgian artist Henri Jacques Edouard Evenepoel evokes the visual impressions of Durrell's description.

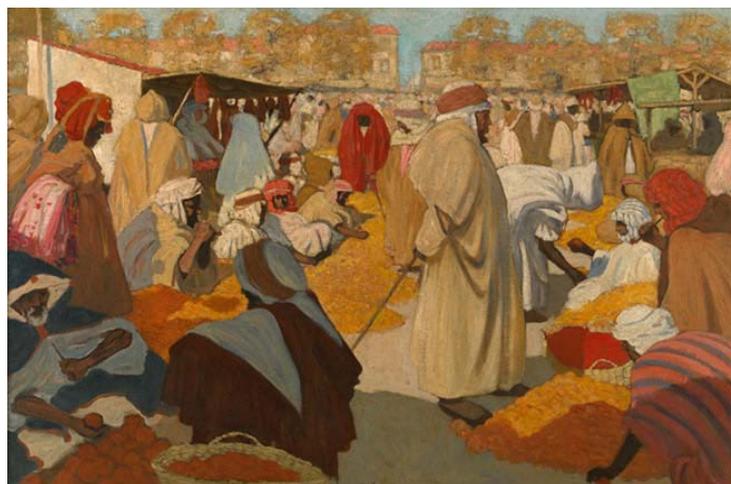


Figure 4 Henri Jacques Edouard Evenepoel: *Orange Market in Bildah*

Done in Algeria, the scene in Evenepoel's painting and the colours used seem to echo Durrell's textual visual description of Egypt. The stark bright sunlight of the painting adds to the purity of form and the exciting and vibrant colours. Oranges with their bright yellow-

orange colours abound in heaps dispersed in flattened forms all through the painting. This orange is made more vivid through its contrast with the reds, greens, blacks, whites and shades of desert brown that fill the scene.

The human figures of the crowd are flattened forms of chromatic colour. The woman to the left of the painting, with her red headdress and her black veil, and the one in the centre of the painting, veiled in red with a black opening where her face should be, are eerie figures of chromatic light and dark colours. The oranges and the occasional red patches of colour offset the male figures in their white keffiyeh and ochre, fawn and white djellaba. The regal male figure, who is foregrounded, seems armless and handleless, leaning on what might be a thin sword. He seems to be in deep contemplation of the world that surrounds him. The two men at the bottom left of the painting in the shade appear to be negotiating the price of the oranges, with one holding an orange and a pipe. All seems so tranquil that the brilliant colours visually explode out of the frame. Yet the forms remain flattened and the bright chromatic palette seems to pre-date the rise of Fauvism. Evenepoel seems to free colour from its previous restraints and simultaneously distances himself from the tradition of Orientalism.

Like Evenepoel's concentration on oranges, the theme of the orange and its colour is central to Durrell's description. In Durrell's description, the bold glowing orange colour is enhanced by Durrell's setting it against the different primary reds. These colours should clash but, instead, are striking patches of light and, in Durrell's over-employed word, "brilliance." Adding to the light are the coppersmiths' wares, which glitter in the chiaroscuro of their Aladdin-like "caves"; the whole scene burnished by the glow emanating from the oranges. The earthy colours of magenta, red and orange are offset by the blue of beads and pottery that are swatches the colour of water or the sky. Darley transfers the exoticism of the landscape colours to the crowd in the street who seem to mutate into the separate rays of light from a prism. The depiction of the crowd becomes one of pure Orientalism, a sensuous excessive banquet of stereotyped otherness of "plum-blue Ethiopians in snowy turbans, bronze Sudanese with puffy charcoal lips, pewter-skinned Lebanese and Bedouin with the profiles of kestrels, woven like brilliant threads upon the monotonous blackness of the veiled women" (C: 28). This is a visual textual representation from an Orientalist painting of a bazaar. Woven into the human tapestry are many races, skin tones and facial

characteristics. These daubs of colour, shapes and textures fill the space of memory, which seems steeped in the exotic atmosphere of the city.

Yet, though Durrell describes human bodies, as in Evenepoel's painting, they remain flat areas of colour in the landscape rather than real people. Durrell paints a florid fantasy of the Orient, where all is metaphorically ornate and saturated in pigment and light. The foregrounded colours "plum-blue", "snowy", "bronze", "charcoal" and "pewter" provide both movement and light to Darley's focalisation of the scene. Appended to human forms, these signifiers are indicators of otherness and difference, a wild transgressive carnival of exaggerated Oriental Gothic features. These bright human forms are all masculine; the women remain doom-coloured in their "monotonous blackness" and their hidden visages. The female form holds the promise of something horrific hiding behind their veiling blackness. Avatars of the monstrous-feminine city, these women represent the shadows of the bright splashes of colour. Darley's voyeuristic focalisation of this street scene objectifies the city's landscape in an act aimed to reinforce its perception as a feminised topography. Darley seems to be looking in order to occupy and penetrate what he sees; undressing the landscape in order to reveal her forbidden secrets, sensual excesses, sounds and textures for the pleasure of the viewer or reader. His gaze is an act of re-possession and one of eroticised exploitation, but it remains, nevertheless, a reflection of imperial discourse, a discourse that continually sought to establish the East as sexualised, barbaric other. Darley further belittles Egypt by calling it a "toybox" and the city and its human forms rigidify into a pageant of toy props: a doll's house with tin-men, puppets and golliwogs. The city is a make-believe stage on which Darley can arrange and control scenes to suit his own perceptions and retain a distanced superior Occidental self.

On his final exit from the stage of Alexandria, Darley provides the reader with a last image of the city's skyline at twilight:

The whole quarter lay drowsing in the umbrageous violet of approaching nightfall. A sky of palpitating *velours* which was cut into by the stark flare of a thousand electric light bulbs ... that night, like a velvet rind. Only the lighted tips of the minarets rose above it on their slender invisible stalks – appeared hanging suspended in the sky; trembling slightly with the haze as if about to expand their hoods like cobras. Drifting idly down these remembered streets

once more I drank in (forever: keepsakes of the Arab town) the smell of crushed chrysanthemums, ordure, scents, strawberries, human sweat and roasting pigeons. (C: 225)

This is a vision of the Arab quarter, a dream picture drawn by an outsider who can float into and out of this world at will, because he remains merely an unengaged voyeur who can leave this space. In this description, Darley embodies the city's landscape through taste, touch, sound, smell and sight. The flare of created light and the stalk tips of the minarets in a highly eroticised and sexualised image penetrate the magical beauty of the shaded violet velveteen skin of sky. The cityscape seems empty of human life, a space caught only through the eye of Darley's memory. His portrayal of the empty streets of the slum town show it filled with an atmosphere of calm. There are only slight hints of uncanny and surreal images of danger. Darley's pleasure in being able to consume the city in solitude is palpable. The words "palpitant" and "trembling" indicate the gentle breathing of the recumbent, drowsing form of the city at twilight. She seems passively inert and non-threatening in a state of suspended animation waiting for her lover.

Even in her drowsing state, an element of danger is ever present caught in the image of the minarets that appear to tremble "slightly with the haze as if about to expand their hoods like cobras". This dozing creature holds the potential to deal a swift, deadly and penetrating strike. Darley gently drifts down the coiling labyrinth of the streets, drinking it all up, taking in what he pleases through his senses, whilst peeling images and memories away from the city. The smell of the city's body is a compound of many scents, "crushed chrysanthemums", dung, sweat, strawberries and roasted pigeons. Images of life and death mingle in an exotic concoction that is both alluring and abject. These are the new images of an unreal city Darley has absorbed and re-offers to the reader in the form of a picturesque evocation of the Orient. The image of the city has altered at every contact, becoming a collection of images that geographer Steve Pile says can be "produced as different forms ... as a situation – or scenes of situations – in which desire can be dramatised" (2003: 81-82). Alexandria is dramatised as a place of desire and excess caught in the baroque memories Durrell allows Darley to transcribe. Brought to life in Darley's fictionalised text, the city and her landscape are both desirable and monstrous gothicised entities. Darley's return to the

Greek island will sever his relationship with the monstrous figure of the real/unreal city of his memories - Alexandria.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explored how Durrell, through the viewpoints of Darley and Mountolive, has established Alexandria and its surrounding terrain as the archetypal representative of the abject monstrous-feminine. I have argued that abjection and the monstrous-feminine are major features belonging to the Gothic mode that I regard as intrinsic to Durrell's tetralogy. Darley's gaze and painterly depictions are fantastically alluring but, simultaneously, represent the feminised landscape of Alexandria as abject excess. Darley's return to Alexandria, though recreating and altering his memories, has not established a 'real' version of the city, but retained a different version of an 'unreal' and mirage-like cityscape. In creating the city as both unreal and real, Durrell creates a heterotopic space à la Foucault.

This space of mirrors, of reality and non-reality, functions on similar time principles to those of Durrell's own word-time-space continuum. Darley pictures this urban fantasy world from the position of the silent observer and unnoticed walker of the streets. Darley's city is located in the memories of his own mindscape, much in the manner Marco Polo imagines and represents the cities in Calvino's novel *Invisible Cities*. Voyeuristically mapping the city reveals Darley's eroticised desire, Oriental attitude and deeply felt dislike, terror and hatred of a space he genders feminine. He evokes her as a nightmare place of viscid Thing-ness, which consumes her inhabitants with predatory voraciousness. The *femme fatale* nature of the city sets her up as the dominant Gothic body in the tetralogy. She is the powerful and excessive unreal/real mirage central to memory's subjective reconstruction of events.

As events in any narrative are always presented from a certain perspective, it is important to establish how this is achieved in Durrell's tetralogy. In my next chapter on narrative voice and focalisation, I will define how these devices function to structure the *Quartet*. Focalisation and narrative voice, I will suggest, are essential to the representation and construction of the female characters. I consider that the narrative voices and focalisers are male or adopt a masculine position. Consequently, it is this subjective masculine

perspective that constructs the representation and the reader's knowledge of all the female characters. Narration and focalisation shape the events of the story in the novels. By carefully exploring how the narrative voice and focalisation function, I will show how Durrell's development of the female characters is reliant on the visual projection of masculine desires, fantasies, fears and symbolic discourse. I will go on to show how focalisation and the focalisor are primary agents of 'the gaze' in the novels and how this gaze establishes the dramatic visual scenes of the novels, whilst, at the same time, structuring the plot and demanding the reader's complicity. In addition, I will examine how Durrell's employment of memory as a structuring device calls into question the trustworthiness and reliability of all narrative voices and focalisors in the novels. By questioning the reliability of the narrators and focalisors, Durrell exposes the subjective and slippery nature of the concepts of truth and reality. Space-time-memory, the unreliable narrative voice and the delusive nature of truth and reality are concerns that have always been central to the Gothic. Accordingly, in the next chapter, I aim to enlarge my exploration of how Gothic elements and conventions are integral, not only to the narrative structure, but to the embodiment of the female characters by the narrators and focalisors in the *Quartet*.