

THE MOTIF OF MUTILATION OF
CHARACTER AND SETTING IN
THE ALEXANDRIA QUARTET

AMANI TAWFIK
UNIVERSITY OF ALEXANDRIA*

Lawrence Durrell makes extensive use of the motif of mutilation in *The Alexandria Quartet*. Taken at face value, the number of cases of disfigurement destroys the verisimilitude of the work. For, apart from a large number of minor characters who suffer from physical deformity or handicap, three of the main female characters in the *Quartet* have different types of mutilation: Justine suffers from a stroke which leaves her with a drooping eyelid; smallpox destroys the good looks of Leila Hosnani; and Clea loses her hand in a diving accident. Male characters in the *Quartet* are similarly mutilated. All three Hosnani men are a case in point: Falhaus is paralysed; his son Narouz is born with a harelip; and his other son Nessim loses a finger and an eye in a bad air raid.

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The recurrence of the cases of mutilation cannot be taken as coincidental, especially when similar disfigurement characterises the topography of Alexandria in the *Quartet*. The city is geographically divided into two contrasting areas. On the one hand there is the luxurious dwelling area of the Cosmopolitan population, with the Cecil Hotel, Pastroudi's, the summer residence of the British ambassador, and the magnificent houses of the rich social elite as its most prominent features. On the other hand there is the squalid and foreboding Arab quarter, lurking as a wild beast in the slums behind the fashionable streets, and visited by only the most adventurous and curious of Europeans. This quarter is populated by the poverty stricken, superstitious and ignorant Moslem population who are not just socially but also racially identified from other Alexandrians, whether foreigners or the local intellectual circle of Copts and Jews who are described as 'the brains of Egypt'(M108). The Arab area of the city, with its leprosy, prostitution and witchcraft represents a cancerous tumour in the physiognomy of Alexandria, which is at first under control then gradually grows out of safe bounds.

The mutilation of both setting and character in the *Quartet* should be read as purely symbolic. The disfigurement of the city symbolises the cultural deterioration which according to Durrell prevailed with the

decline of British colonial presence in Egypt after the 1936 Treaty. The expanding Arab quarter is a side effect of the weakening foothold of the British in a city which was always considered an 'extension' (Saad-El-Din & Cromer 192) of Europe across the Mediterranean. In the same manner, character disfigurement in the *Quartet* is a symbolic projection of the consequences of the tension between the declining forces of colonialism, which to the author's mind represented enlightenment and civilisation, and the emerging Arab nationalism, which in contrast he considered philistine and barbaric.

The *Quartet* is therefore an essentially political, colonial work. The deterioration of British power in Egypt from 1936 onwards must have been of great significance to Durrell who was stationed in Egypt as 'an information officer for the British government' (Moore, Introduction xii), and whose function it was to serve British interests in Egypt. Durrell's politics were highly colonial; he described himself as 'a typical colonial at heart' (Moore 156). The *Quartet* itself could have been written as part of British propaganda against the independence of the colonies. Even though towards the end of the *Quartet* Durrell seems to acquiesce to the doom of the British in Egypt, his acceptance of the new Arab nation is a sad one. His frustration is clear in the sympathy with which he treats such characters

as grandfather Maskelyne who represents the climax of British colonialism in their victory in 1882 in El Tal El Kabeer, and his grandson, the war office employee with whose death the tradition of the British empire comes to a close.¹ Egypt is at the end of the *Quartet* handed over to a new conqueror, and nothing can be done about it. Durrell uses the motif of mutilation of character and of setting to express his frustration at the political, cultural and social changes that were taking place in the country at the time.

As far as the mutilation of setting is concerned, Alexandria is frequently described in the *Quartet* as a place that had lost its glory. In the opening page of *Justine*, Durrell describes his once 'beloved Alexandria' as 'dust-tormented' and comments 'flies and beggars own it today.' (J. 11) He clearly depreciates the effect of Islam as an alternative for Western civilisation in Alexandria, which in consequence became a sad place: 'The symbolic lovers of the free Hellenic world are replaced by something different, something subtly androgynous, inverted upon itself.' (J. 12). The Orient, according to Durrell, cannot understand the Western culture of the city. Unlike the rest of Egypt, dominated by what he describes as a bleak faith 'which renounced worldly pleasure',

... Alexandria was still Europe - the capital of Asiatic Europe, if such a thing could exist. It could never be like Cairo where [one's] whole life had an Egyptian cast, where [one] spoke ample Arabic; here French, Italian and Greek dominated the scene. The ambience, the social manner, everything was different, was cast in a European mould...(M 147)

This Western quality was quickly disappearing. To Durrell's mind Alexandria, by its geographic and cultural proximity to Europe, should have been spared the cultural decline that accompanied the growth of Arab power. In the wake of the Second World War, however, the city was showing signs of cultural submission. Durrell describes the situation in *Justine* in words that are pregnant with racial connotations:

This city has been built like a dyke to hold back the flood of African darkness; but the soft-footed blacks have already started leaking into the European quarters. (J 58)

In *Clea*, Darley, with some distaste, finds Moslems after the war in possession of the city, which has in consequence become mediocre:

And here, strolling in the foreground ... with The insolence of full possession came plum-blue Ethiopians in snowy turbans, bronze Sudanese with puffy charcoal lips, pewter skinned Lebanese and Bedouin with kestrels, woven like brilliant threads upon the profiles of monotonous blackness of

the veiled women, the dark Moslem dream of the hidden Paradise, which may only be glimpsed through the key-hole of the human eye. (C 28)

In the same novel, he anticipates that Alexandria will fall again into 'centuries of dust and silence which Amr had imposed upon it' (C 29) In this respect, he agrees with E.M. Forster who believed that Islam had swept Alexandria 'physically and spiritually into the sea'. (Forster 69) Durrell makes the same point in his introduction to Forster's guide book of the city. 'With the arrival of Amr and his Arab cavalry', he wrote, 'the famous resplendent city dived into oblivion.'² He anticipated the same sort of decadence occurring again after the Second World War with the decline of Western authority and the growth of Arab influence in Egypt. Alexandria, according to Durrell, has become 'a moribund and spiritless backwater ... some great public urinal'(C' 88). The sad extinction of its Greek civilisation is symbolically personified in the figure of the 'old Greek cobbler who had been caught in a bombardment and mutilated' (C' 205), and again in the corpses of the Greek sailors whom Clea discovers at the bottom of the sea.

The Arab town in the *Quartet* is a symbolic symptom of the cultural malaise that Durrell believed would in time infect the rest of the city. His description of the Arab quarter stresses the filth, decrepitude and disease which appear so bizarre and shocking to

Europeans and which Durrell feared would soon become characteristic of the whole of Alexandria:

Streets that run back from the docks with tattered rotten supercargo of houses, breathing into each other's mouths, keeling over. Shuttered balconies swarming with rats, and old women whose hair is full of the blood of ticks. Peeling walls leaning drunkenly to east and west of their true centre of gravity. The black ribbon of flies attaching itself to lips and eyes of the children - the moist beads of summer flies everywhere; ... The smell of the sweat-lathered Berberinis, like that of some decomposing stair-carpet. And then the street noises: shriek and clang of the water-bearing Saidi, dashing his metal cups together as an advertisement, the unheeded shrieks which pierced the hubbub from time to time, as of some small delicately-organised animal being disembowelled. The sores like ponds - the incubation of a human misery of such proportions that one is aghast, and all one's feelings overflow into disgust and terror. (J 21)

Durrell uses similar images of putrefaction in his description of incidents and places in the Arab town where character and setting are portrayed as being equally mutilated. The children's brothel, for instance, is more than once described as a dark, foetid, rat infested hole; the little girls who work there seemed 'as if they had been half-eaten by the rats' (J 44). In the Mulid parades mutilation is boastfully displayed by dwarves and such freaks as Zubeida the bearded woman, five-legged

calves and two-bearded goats. Other participants inflict wounds upon themselves such as the old boy whose act it was to drive a dagger through both cheeks.³ Another sort of mutilation occurs in the circumcision booths where poor Moslem boys are circumcised for free in celebration of the Mulid. Mr. Ennayet Allah, whose name ironically means the care of God, is the quack who performs the ritual. In his booth he hangs 'lurid cartoons of the ceremony, painted and framed'; above the entrance to the booth he suspends 'a great glass jar cloying with leeches'; and more threateningly 'his two assistants stood at attention behind the ancient brass-bound shoe black's chairs with their razors at the alert'. (*B* 132) Durrell's description of the religious sacrifice of animals is even more portentous, and deserves to be quoted at length:

The camels of Narouz were being cut up for the feast. Poor things, they knelt there peacefully with their forelegs folded under them like cats while a horde of men attacked them with axes in the moonlight ... The animals made no move to avoid the blows, uttered no cries as they were dismembered ... Whole members were being hacked off as painlessly, it seemed, as when a tree is pruned. The children were dancing about in the moonlight picking up the fragments and running off with them into the lighted town, great gobbets of bloody meat. The camels stared hard at the moon and said nothing. Off came the legs, out came the entrails; lastly the heads would topple under the axe like statuary and lie there in

the sand with open eyes. The men doing the
axeing were shouting and bantering as
they worked. (*M* 121-2)

The motif of a helpless animal being hacked and disembowelled by a vulgar cold-blooded mob recurs in the *Quartet* to symbolise what Durrell felt was the disfigurement of an ancient civilisation by philistine and boorish Arabs. In *Justine* Durrell describes a sacrificial beast as a 'small delicately-organised animal'. (*J* 21) In the passage quoted above the camels are stoically patient and supernaturally silent. In contrast the Arab mob, children and adults alike, is noisy in festivity, and greedy for the meat of the sacrificed animal. The description of the toppling head of the camel recalls the incident of the decapitated body of the Swedish diplomat's wife which is discovered on the Matrouh road. The head is eventually found as it topples down from the apron of one of the Bedouin women, who were all the time denying any knowledge of the murder. Arabs in the *Quartet* are therefore seen as morally depraved barbarians, capable not only of disfiguring the city and committing atrocious murder, but also of destroying a whole civilisation.

Major characters in the *Quartet* who by their wealth, intellect or Western origin inhabit the elegant quarter of the city also suffer from mutilation as a result of the changing political and social scenes in

Alexandria in the forties. The growth of Moslem power at the time not only threatened the interests of the foreign community who were now at the mercy of an inimical Arab government, but also the interests of Copts who felt they were losing the political and social distinctions they had enjoyed for long. In the *Quartet* the Hosnanis are representatives of the Copts of Egypt. Falthaus and his two sons Narouz and Nessim feel deprived of their rights as the only true 'descendants of the Pharaohs, children of Ra, offspring of St. Mark.' (M p.125) Durrell uses the motif of mutilation to describe their predicament. Deformity in their case symbolises their loss of power

Falhaus Hosnani is rich and intelligent but frustrated by his paralysis, which illustrates his feelings as an oppressed Copt. He clearly blames his frustration on the British, who used the politics of divide to conquer between Moslem and Copt in order to maintain their supremacy in a country where they were no longer welcome. He tells the future British ambassador:

There were never any differences between us and the Moslems in Egypt before they came. The British have taught the Moslems to hate the Copts and discriminate against them ... When the British took control of Egypt the Copts occupied a number of the highest positions in the State. In less than a quarter of a century

almost all the Coptic Heads of Departments had disappeared. (M 41-3)

Falthaus's helplessness and loss of control are not only symbolised by his physical handicap, but also by his cuckolding. He tolerates his wife's love affair with the British Mountolive so as not to risk losing her altogether. His social and physical impotence affect him psychologically; he has emotional fits and frequently contemplates suicide.

Narouz Hosnani inherits from his father the same sense of injustice and deep-seated anger at his powerlessness. His Coptic ancestry and his close attachment to the land make him an incarnation of 'the true Egypt underlying the fly-tormented airless towns'. (M 118)⁴ His harelip, however, debars him from public life, and he is forced to live constantly at home in Karm Abu Girg where he manages the family estate and acts as a personal slave to his father. His physical deformity, symbolising his creed, incapacitates him from leading a full life. This leaves a blemish on his psyche: he is inordinately violent and, because of his little education, he seeks power in resorting to black magic and the hallucinations of the three-breasted seer Taor and the Magzoub. Narouz is also a passionate preacher, and this becomes a means of unleashing his sexual and emotional frustration. For, Narouz's deformity affects his love life as well, and Clea is simply

disgusted at his passion for her. Not only is Narouz victimised at birth by his deformity, which symbolises a faith to which the British have become hostile, but also in the end by the corrupt Memlik Pasha who sacrifices him in order to spare his more lucrative brother. In this respect Narouz is symbolically identified with the quiet and patient sacrificial camels of the Mulid celebration. Like them, on the morning of his murder he runs to his horse 'noiselessly', and rides out to the fields 'slowly'. Under the tree where he is treacherously attacked he sits 'as immobile as an equestrian statue ... his arm carved in the position of a fisherman about to make a long cast. So he waited, smiling. His patience was endless.'*(M 305)*⁵ The slaughter of the camels and the murder of Narouz are also similar in that they both cause a metaphoric disfigurement of the land. In the case of the former, 'a huge soft carpet of black blood spread into the dunes ... and the barefoot boys carried the print of it back with them into the township.'*(M 122)* Similarly, after the murder of Narouz Darley feels the 'the whole countryside of Egypt shares in [the] melancholy feeling of having been abandoned, allowed to run to seed, to bake and crack and moulder under the brazen sun.'*(C 41)*

Narouz's brother, Nessim, is the one who makes it into the world by his good looks, social grace, and education. However,

he still feels debarred from a full life by the British conspiracy to curtail the power of the Copts. At the beginning of his career he wants to become a diplomat but is unable to. He becomes obsessed with the belief that the Copts of Egypt have become a secret society, living 'from prayer to prayer and from bribe to bribe' (*M* 109). He is convinced that his people, like all other foreign minorities in Egypt, have little chance in a country that is becoming predominantly Moslem. Just like other foreign minorities, Copts too have become 'dispossessed foreigners':

We, the foreign communities, with all we have built up, are being gradually engulfed by the Arab tide, the Moslem tide. Some of us are trying to work against it; Armenians, Copts, Jews, and Greeks here in Egypt, ... to defend ourselves, defend our lives, defend the right to belong here only ... (*M* 199-200)

He makes it his duty to try and regain for the Copts of Egypt their rightful place on their own land. In order to effect this he joins a Coptic-Jewish alliance that aims at destroying British influence in the Middle East by creating an independent Jewish state in Palestine. 'If only the Jews can win their freedom', he believes, 'we can all be at ease. It is the only hope for us'. (*M* 199) He marries the Jewish Justine in order to win the confidence of his Jewish allies, and becomes a cuckold,⁶ like his father, for espionage purposes. The conspiracy fails, however, and

Nessim and his wife are found out by the British and the Egyptians. During the war Nessim is employed as an ambulance driver, and loses an eye and a finger in an air raid. This disfigurement signifies his loss of power: Nessim loses his social status, he is forced to become a recluse, and his wife, who was solely attracted to him by his social eminence and promising political influence, now taunts him for his irrelevance.

In the case of female characters in the *Quartet*, mutilation is used as a symbol of their sense of identity crisis, which was another of the side effects of the end of British colonialism in Egypt. The educated and foreign women of Alexandria were threatened by the changes that were happening in the city at the time: Fear, insecurity dominate them. They have the illusion of foundering in the ocean of blackness all around. (J 57-58) Their intellect now became a hindrance, making them misfits in a philistine society. In *Justine* Durrell suggests that

To be happy one would have to be a Moslem, an Egyptian woman - absorbent, soft, lax, overblown; ... Their feelings are buried in the pre-conscious ... For centuries now they have been shut in a stall with the oxen, masked, circumcised. Fed in darkness on jams and scented fats they have become tuns of pleasure, rolling on paper-white, blue-veined legs. (J 58)

The three female characters here examined are all cases of intellectual women who are closely related to Alexandria. With the cultural deterioration of the city, Justine and Leila become soulless, pathetic women, while Clea has to undergo many changes in order to be able to survive. The degeneracy of the first two characters and the alteration of the last are symbolised by physical disfigurement.

Justine is 'a true child of Alexandria; which is neither Greek, Syrian nor Egyptian, but a hybrid : a joint' (*J* p.24) Her cosmopolitan character symbolises the multiracial, multinational aspect of Alexandria, which Durrell sums up as: 'Five races, five languages, a dozen creeds' (*J* 11-12) This multiplicity is attractive to visitors of the city like Darley. However, it has the drawback of depriving both the city and Justine of individuality. They are alike 'in that they both have a strong flavour without having any real character.'*(J* p.139) As a result Justine is involved in a process of looking for an identity, a quest which is symbolised by her search for a lost daughter. Significantly, her search ends in the children's brothel, a prominent part of the Arab town, where her daughter dies of meningitis. Justine finally finds an identity, but it is one that is as hateful to Darley as the children's brothel is.

At the end of the War, Justine is put under house arrest in punishment for her involvement in the Jewish conspiracy. In her enforced exile, she suffers from a stroke which leaves her with a drooping eyelid. When Darley meets her again in the last volume after a long absence, she has lost her charm and her pride. Just as Alexandria has become more of an Arab city, Justine has become more of an Arab woman, and Darley is disgusted at the change that has come over her:

... I awoke to find her standing beside the bed naked, with her hands joined in supplication like an Arab mendicant, like some beggar woman of the streets. 'I ask nothing of you' she said, 'nothing at all but to lie in your arms for the comfort of it ... A few strokes and endearments, that is all I beg of you.' (C 53)

Justine reminds Darley of an Arab because of her begging, which is always linked in the minds of foreigners with the Arab quarter where mutilated beggars display their deformity in order to earn the charity of passersby, and where little girls who work in the brothel beg for the attention of rich foreigners. Justine is also like an Arab in her strong smell. For, before Darley arrives she accidentally spills a bottle of perfume, and the scent revolts Darley. Once again a link is established between the new Justine and the Arab element in the city, as one of the dominant features of the Arab quarter for

Darley is the way it smells. In *Clea* he walks idly in the slums to 'drink in (forever: keepsakes of the Arab town) the smell of crushed chrysanthemums, ordure, scents, strawberries, human sweat and roasting pigeons.' (C 225) In the same novel he describes the smell 'from the burning refuse heaps' of the Arab quarter as a mixture of the smell of richly spiced 'cooking meat and whiffs of baking bread from the bakeries'.(C 69)⁷ Justine, therefore, repels Durrell after her mutilation because of her intellectual and physical decadence. She loses her earlier cosmopolitan appeal just as the city does, and becomes a typical Arab.

Unlike Justine, the identity of Leila Hosnani is well-established when she first appears in the *Quartet*. She is an Egyptian Copt, the representative of the *Genus Pharaonicus*, 'the true descendants of the ancients, the true marrow of Egypt' (M 41). As a young girl she is full of hopes and dreams. Intelligent and well-read, she speaks four languages apart from Arabic, which Durrell, a typical colonial, considers an insufficient source of education: 'for nobody can think or feel only in the dimensionless obsolescence of Arabic.'(M 24-5) Leila dreams of travelling abroad to escape 'the narrow confines of Egyptian society' (M 24) symbolised by the typically Arab black veil. In her natural milieu, she suffers from an 'anaemia' of culture, (Morcos 344) and needs to find for

herself a richer and freer environment where she can become the 'new Egyptian woman'(Fraser 158),-educated, liberal-minded and free. Her dreams, however, are soon frustrated by her conventional parents, who more than anything want to see her married to a rich gentleman. She is forced to give up her ambitions and is cornered in an unhappy marriage, living as a recluse in Karm Abu Girg with a bad-tempered invalid husband; 'her life must belong to Egypt'(M 24). The frustration of Leila's aspirations thus symbolically illustrates the evaporation of the colonial dream of Alexandria as an enlightened Western city.

Leila is in a state of cultural and social deprivation when Mountolive appears on the scene and quickly becomes her lover. To her he represents English culture, sophistication, and enlightenment. Just as in the case of Justine and Darley, Leila and Mountolive separate for a long while, and do not meet again until much change has come over Leila. At the same time that Alexandria is disfigured by the encroaching Arab civilisation, Leila gets the smallpox and her face is badly disfigured. As a result, she covers her face at all times with a black veil, thus becoming a typical Arab woman. When finally she agrees to meet her old lover again, it is only to beg him to overlook Nessim's arms smuggling to Palestine. Mountolive is shocked at her change of looks and

personality. Leila has lost her pride, and just as in the case of Darley and Justine, Mountolive is disgusted at her begging:

She cried aloud: 'I implore you to help' and suddenly, to his intense humiliation, began to moan and rock like an Arab, pleading with him ... Then she showed some disposition to go down on her knees in the cab and kiss his feet. By this time Mountolive was trembling with anger and surprise and disgust. (M 283)

Mountolive is also disgusted at Leila's smell: 'orange water, mint, Eau de Cologne, and sesame; she smelt like some old Arab lady.' (M 280)⁸ Leaving her, he suddenly finds that

the whole of Alexandria, had become distasteful, burdensome, wearisome to his spirit ... In a sense she had been Egypt, his own private Egypt of the mind; and now this old image had been husked, stripped bare. (M 284)

He wanders in disguise into the Arab quarter and walks into the children's brothel to be attacked by the depraved supplicating children prostitutes. His meeting with the much changed Leila and his experience in the brothel end his attachment to Egypt. He decides to leave the country:

He would waste no more time upon this Egypt of deceptions and squalor ... He did not even think of Leila now ... he looked back once, with a skudder of disgust, at

the pearly mirage of minarets rising from
the smoke of the lake ...(*M* 295)

The mention of the minarets suggests the Moslem element that was gradually enveloping the country and which colonials such as Mountolive and Darley find distasteful. The Arab character of the city, for a long while confined to its quarter, has now become characteristic of the whole of Alexandria, which becomes a place that is very similar to the children's brothel: 'a huge orphanage' where 'everyone [is] grabbing at the last chance of life.' (*C* 88)

Clea too is identified with Alexandria. Returning to the city after a long absence, she is the first person Darley wants to find just as he wants to rediscover Alexandria:

... in the desultory brilliant life of the
open street it was hard not to feel like
an ancient inhabitant of the city, returning
from the other side of the grave to visit it.
Where would I find Clea? (*C* 65)

An old inhabitant of the city herself, Clea is the friend and confidante of many of the major characters in the *Quartet*, but she hardly has a substantial private life. Her lack of individuality explains her inability to form lasting love relationships. Even when she and Darley fall in love he writes telling her 'I enjoyed you better as a thought than as a person alive.' (*C* 237) Her lack of a clear-cut

personality is also the reason why she is good at personifying others; she can bring her friend Scobie back to life by imitating his voice and mannerisms. As an artist her weak identity is apparent in her frequent change of style and in her limited creative ability; she is occupied mainly with such uncreative work as the painting of death masks and the modelling of substitute organs. Clea's want of individualism affects her character as well, making her temperamental and contradictory. Her tenderness to most of her friends is counterbalanced by her rude rejection of Narouz as a lover. Her merry laugh which so much attracts Darley is offset by her moroseness, listlessness and spiritual distress, all of which are the outcome of her struggle with an identity crisis.

The last volume of the *Quartet* follows Clea's search for an identity both as a woman and as an artist, a quest which symbolises the groping of Alexandria for a national definition after the collapse of British power. Clea discards one by one the many selves she comes across, until in the end she discovers she has to be born anew. She rejects Narouz as a lover, discovers she is not fulfilled in her lesbian relationship with Justine, is anxious to be rid of her virginity which she thinks hampers her artistic ability, faces the trauma of an abortion, and finally has to come very close to death before she learns that she must let go of the past in order to find a future. In a

diving accident a misfired harpoon nails Clea's hand to a wreck which rests near the bodies of Greek sailors at the bottom of the sea. In order to save Clea's life, Darley has to hack at her hand. As Clea comes back from the dead she believes she is a better woman and a more talented artist, even though she loses her painter's hand, at the bottom of the sea. The same applies to the city with which Clea is identified. Alexandria too comes close to extinction with the Second World War, and is reborn after it as a new nation; Darley comments: 'a whole new geography of Alexandria was born through Clea.'(C 198) In this process of rebirth a significant part of the history of the city, its glorious Western past, has to be buried at the bottom of the sea, where the dead Greeks lie and where Clea loses her hand. The attempt of some Alexandrians to cling to the past is futile. This idea is symbolically implied in Clea's ironic attachment to the corpses of the Greek sailors; at first she swims close to them, gives them nicknames and makes up stories about them, then eventually she almost drowns by getting nailed down to the bottom with them. To Durrell's mind, the changes that were taking place in Alexandria were inevitable, but they were also a sad sign of cultural and moral degeneracy.

To sum up, the motif of mutilation of character and setting in *The Alexandria Quartet* is used to express Durrell's frustration

as a 'typical colonial'⁹ at the political, cultural and social changes that were happening in Alexandria after the Second World War. The *Quartet* is a political work; a requiem for the end of an empire.¹⁰ Durrell deplores the effects of the decline of Western presence in Alexandria. The Arabs who take hold of Egypt after the War are, according to Durrell, ignorant, superstitious and unenlightened. The consequences of the political change of hands in Alexandria is symbolically illustrated in the *Quartet* in the topographic disfigurement of the city as it is exemplified in the Arab quarter, so, too, the symptoms of the social unbalance, loss of power and of identity of the educated and foreign minorities in Alexandria are illustrated in Durrell's use of the motif of character mutilation. At the end of the *Quartet*, Durrell is forced to come to terms with the new Egyptian identity. His friends and acquaintances, whether foreigners or of the local elite, are dispossessed by Alexandria. In the process of conversion into an Arab culture, many of the characters in the *Quartet*, as well as Alexandria itself, are distorted. Others die tragically, and a few, Darley included, depart sadly. At the end of *Clea* Darley writes:

I doubt if I could return again to Alexandria.
I feel it fade inside me, in my thoughts,
like some valedictory mirage - like the sad
history of some great queen whose fortunes
have foundered among the ruins of armies and
the sands of time!(C 240)

- ¹ I am indebted to Roger Bowen for his colonial interpretation of the *Quartet* in his "Closing The Toy Box": Orientalism and Empire in *The Alexandria Quartet*" (See Bibliography), especially his view of the Maskelynes as representatives of the colonial tradition, and his concluding statement about the *Quartet* as an 'epitaph for a lost world'. Cf Bowen, p.17.
- ² Lawrence Durrell, Introduction to E.M. Forster, *Alexandria: A History and a Guide*. 1982. Quoted by Saad-El-Din & Cromer, p. 194. See Bibliography.
- ³ Ironically, these acts are no less violent than the deeds of elegant Alexandrians in the Carnival which takes place in the Cosmopolitan part of town. On that occasion, recounted only once in the course of the *Quartet* to serve plot rather than symbolic purposes, Toto de Brunel is murdered by driving a hat pin through his skull. If the Mulid celebrations are bizarre and fearful to Darley and other foreigners in the *Quartet*, the disguised figures who participate in the Carnival 'startle the white-robed Egyptians and fill them with alarm.' (B 160) Durrell, however, does not draw a comparison, nor does he ponder on the Carnival as a symptom of a parallel cultural malaise that the foreign elite of the city suffer from.
- ⁴ Cf Bynum, p. 84.
- ⁵ Bynum identifies Narouz with the camels because of his harelip, which he associates with the ceremonial dismemberment that precedes the initiation of a shaman. He refers to the scene of the slaughter as a symbolic reenactment of the ritual. He does not give a political reading of the connection. Cf Bynum, p. 87.
- ⁶ Weigel briefly refers to the idea of cuckoldry in relation to Nessim only in the summary he gives of the Darley-Justine affair, and describes it as 'both fantastic and calculated'(Weigel 60). See

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See above, p. 4 'the smell of sweat-lathered Berberinis', (J 21)

⁸ Read makes a connection between the reunion of the two pairs of lovers without, however, relating the change in the characters of Justine and Leila to the change in the setting. To him recurrence in this respect is a structural device used for 'emphasis'. CF Read, pp. 395 and 398.

⁹ See above p.2.

¹⁰ See note, no. 1.

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