



The flâneuse and the City as uncanny home in Lawrence Durrell's *The Alexandria quartet*

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The concept of the home is not something that can be readily associated with Lawrence Durrell's *The Alexandria quartet*. Generally, the word home is defined as a place where one lives, a house or dwelling. The idea of home is associated with the architectural construct of the house, as both a place and a space. With this in mind, I approach the conceptualisation of the house as representative of safety and happy remembrance from a somewhat different premise, exploring Durrell's representation of Alexandria as an enclosing womb-like home that voraciously consumes her inhabitants. Although Durrell's Alexandria has been considered by scholars from many angles, I propose my position represents a rather different approach to the manner in which the city has previously been examined. Durrell's city, as uncanny home, will be shown to create her residents as fragments of her own consciousness, and this is particularly true of the character Justine. The narrator Darley's memories of Justine moving through the streets of the city evoke her in the guise of a flâneuse and this flânerie, I go on to suggest, establishes a symbiosis between herself and the city, setting up an interplay through which Justine becomes the proxy for the city as unhomely home.

Die flâneuse en die stad as geheimsinnige tuiste in *The Alexandria quartet* deur Lawrence Durrell. Die begrip tuiste is nie iets wat geredelik met *The Alexandria quartet* deur Lawrence Durrell vereenselwig kan word nie. Gewoonlik word die woord tuiste gedefinieer as 'n plek waar 'n mens bly, 'n huis of 'n woning. Die idee van tuiste word vereenselwig met die boukundige konstruksie van die huis, as sowel 'n plek as 'n ruimte. Gedagtig hieraan benader ek die konseptualisering van die huis as verteenwoordigend van veiligheid en geluk vanuit 'n ietwat ander hoek. Ek ondersoek Durrell se uitbeelding van Alexandria as 'n inperkende soort baarmoeder van 'n tuiste wat haar bewoners met groot gulsigheid verorber. Hoewel akademiese Durrell se Alexandria reeds uit talle hoeke benader het, voer ek aan dat my posisie 'n nuwe blik werp op die uitbeelding van die stad. Ek sal aantoon dat Durrell se stad as geheimsinnige tuiste haar inwoners tot stand bring as brokstukke van haar eie bewussyn. Dit is veral merkbaar in die geval van die karakter Justine. Die herinneringe wat die verteller Darley het van hoe Justine deur die stad beweeg roep haar op in die gedaante van 'n flâneuse. Ek argumenteer verder dat hierdie flânerie 'n simbiose tussen haar en die stad tot stand bring. Dit skep dan 'n wisselwerking waardeur Justine die gevolmagtigde word van die stad as geheimsinnige tuiste.

Introduction

In *The poetics of space*, Gaston Bachelard (1994:5) argues that the house is the experienced space through which we encounter and live all space so that 'all really inhabited space bears the essence of the notion of home'. Although it might be true that the house as home resides in our socially constructed remembrance, Henri Lefebvre (1991:120) writes that 'this memory ... has an obsessive quality: it persists in art, poetry, drama and philosophy'. This obsessive quality of remembrance, associated with the interior spaces of houses, is apparent in Marcel Proust's novel cycle, *A la recherche du temps perdu*, but not in Lawrence Durrell's *The Alexandria quartet*, where home takes on far darker attributes. Much research has been focused on the etymology of the word 'home' as well as whether home represents a place, space, feeling or state of being (Bachelard 1994; Elkins 2002; Mallett 2004; Massey 1994; Rybczynski 1986; Vidler 1992). Generally, the word home is defined as a place where one lives, a habitat or dwelling and is associated with the architectural construct of the house as both place and space. In this article, I approach the conceptualisation of home from a different premise, exploring how Durrell embodies the city of Alexandria as a voracious, womb-like space that consumes her inhabitants.¹ Throughout Durrell's tetralogy the

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1. Precedents for Durrell's womb or tomb symbolism are located in such early works as the short story 'Down the River Styx' ([1937–1938] 1988) in an air-conditioned canoe' which appeared in *The Booster* magazine in December 1937 – January 1938. The womb/tomb is further explored in *The black book* [1938] 1977; *Cefalú or The dark labyrinth* [1947] 1987 and continued into *The Alexandria quartet* (1957–1961).



city is gendered as feminine, therefore, in this article I have chosen to employ the personal pronoun 'she' when discussing the city instead of the standard, impersonal grammatical usage 'it'. I do this in order to convey how strongly feminised Alexandria is, in Durrell's tetralogy, and how her powerful and malevolent subjectivity enables this narrative. Because of these qualities the narrator, Darley, perceives the city as an abject and monstrous entity. A significant body of research has explored the representation of Alexandria in Durrell's *Quartet*, but I would suggest that my examination of the city as an uncanny and monstrous home offers an unusual reading of Durrell's portrayal of the city (Alexandre-Garner 1985, Gifford 2012; Keller-Privat 2005; Stewart 2008; Zahlan 1980). My discussion briefly explores how the city's metaphoric space appears to exemplify Freud's *Unheimliche* as well as the uncanny house discussed by the architectural critic Anthony Vidler (1992) in his book *The Architectural Uncanny*. I go on to explicate how the uncanny nature of Durrell's city as home can be associated with Julie Kristeva's theory of abjection. It is the city's abject and non-human sentience that I argue creates her inhabitants as fragments of her own consciousness embodied by the character Justine. Durrell's narrator Darley's obsessive remembrance of Justine walking through the city's streets appears to construct her in the guise of a *flâneuse*, or female stroller. I touch on critical discussions concerning the figure of the male *flâneur*, as well as arguments put forward for or against the conception of the *flâneuse* and I suggest that Justine's *flânerie* establishes a narrative symbiosis between her and the city. This mutual dependency ensures that Justine acts as the proxy for the city's abject and malevolent agency, as the unhomey home of Durrell's tetralogy.

City as unhomey home

It is Durrell's narrator Darley, who evokes the city of Alexandria through his nostalgic remembrance of her imaginary space-place. I have chosen to employ the term 'space-place' as representative of the city's rather uncanny and fluid nature, which continually oscillates between being both space and place at the same time. Writing about the city of the imagination, Natalie Collie indicates that it always 'exists somewhere between the real of the concrete space and the subjective realm of our conception and experience of that space' (2011:425). Durrell establishes Alexandria as a real city, but simultaneously as an unreal, ephemeral, and uncanny space-place. This ability to morph between states, I consider to be facilitated by the city being an imaginative creation conjured up through Darley's memories of his time spent in Alexandria. Darley describes the city as a space-place filled with 'volition, desire, will, cognition, passion, conation' (Durrell 1957:123). Darley regards the city as possessing a 'strange equivocal power' (Durrell 1957:24) and the extent of misery that it inflicts on its human population, the 'torn rags of flesh' (Durrell 1957:17), inspires 'disgust and terror' in him (Durrell 1957:21). For Darley, the city can never be 'mistaken for a happy place', as 'every summer kiss' has 'the taste of quicklime' (Durrell 1957:12). Portrayed as an uncanny and abject space-place, Darley shows Alexandria

to be a life-giver and a life taker. However, in Darley's recollection, she is representative of a sense of belonging and home.

Thus, the city is representative of what Sigmund Freud, in his 1919 essay entitled *The uncanny*, discusses as the *Unheimliche* or uncanny, which is the obverse of the homely, cozy, familiar and secure or *heimlich* (2005). This inversion results in the familiar being rendered uneasy, unfamiliar and filled with anxiety and dread. Anthony Vidler notes that for Freud this 'unhomeliness' exhibits the 'fundamental propensity of the familiar to turn on its owners' (1992:7). The malignancy of a familiar and secure space-place turning on its inhabitants I regard as being central to my analysis of the nature of Durrell's city of Alexandria. This city represents both the known and the unknown and its depiction evokes the thrill, horror and terror of the uncanny. For Mladen Dolar the uncanny blurs the border between the interior and exterior, making them coincide. He indicates that the uncanny is both an intimate kernel and a foreign body (2001:6). I suggest that Dolar's argument establishes a link between the uncanny and Julie Kristeva's theory of abjection. Discussing the nature of the abject in her work *Powers of horror*, Kristeva indicates that the abject acts as a barrier in opposition to the 'I', but is not recognised as an object, rather it is regarded as a thing (1982:1–2). This thing is perceived as loathsome and the 'I' attempts to expel it from itself: 'I expel *myself*, I spit *myself* out, I abject *myself*' within the same motion through which 'I' claim to establish '*myself*' (Kristeva 1982:3; emphasis in text). This ambivalence between the expulsion of self and the creation of self is central to abjection, where the subject attempts to maintain a defined identity, and violently denies anything that threatens it, notably the foreign kernel that Dolar associates with the uncanny.

Like the uncanny, the abject is terrifying and repulsive, but simultaneously fascinating and intriguing. Barbara Creed has argued that the abject has been deployed in hegemonical cultures to separate 'the human from the non-human and the *fully* constituted subject from the *partially* formed subject' (1986:45; emphasis in text). This binary opposition between human and non-human is what Kelly Hurley has termed the 'abhuman'. Hurley defines the abhuman subject as one that is a 'not-quite-human subject, characterized by its morphic variability, continually in danger of becoming not-itself, becoming other' (1996:3–4). I proffer that Hurley's conceptualisation of the abhuman is extremely pertinent to Durrell's portrayal of the city. Alexandria represents an incredibly powerful female subjectivity, a space-place characterised by a confusion of borders and an abject, non-human otherness.² My contention is that this 'not-quite-human' and indifferent subject governs the actions and behaviour of her inhabitants and as Darley suggests they become mere 'children of our landscape; it dictates behaviour and even thought in the measure to which we are responsive to it' (Durrell 1957:36). Darley's statement envisages the city

² See Stefan Herbrechter's (1998) *Lawrence Durrell, Postmodernism and the ethics of alterity* for a discussion of the abject in Durrell's writing.



as a maternal landscape whose space-place envelops her residents so that the city acts as a symbolic architectonic dwelling.

The city Darley describes is more than just a physical entity, it represents a collage of memories and desires through which the meaning and importance of the concept of home is subtly and scarily overturned. Jeff Malpas (2012:15) has noted that where memory is tied to the subjective interior of human existence, place and space can be considered to represent the exterior. Darley's obsessive remembrance of the city, along with the uncannily fluid nature of her space-place, I contend, results in a blurring between what is interior and what is exterior. This is apparent when Darley notes how he returns:

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. (Durrell 1957:11)

This constant visual-textual construction of the remembered city reveals Darley's deep emotional entrapment, beautifully elicited in the expression 'beloved Alexandria'. Shackled to the city, memories of her topography shape Darley's subjectivity, history and perception of his past. His imagination maps the city as a maternal space-place whose residents he describes as mere flora symbiotically fused with the city, or as he says 'part of city' (Durrell 1957:13). Laura Colombino (2012) in her article on the work of J.G. Ballard talks about the concept of the house as skin; for my purposes, this could be amended to the city as skin, where Alexandria can be seen to assume the role of an uncanny and abject womb-like home. In her article, Colombino discusses how Ballard in his story 'The thousand dreams of Stellavista' melds the architectural space of the dwelling with social consciousness to 'produce a single psychophysical membrane around the subject' (2012:26). In this manner, the house represents merely an extension of the inhabitants who occupy it. Whilst Ballard's house, as skin, might appear to be a more literal conceptualisation, Samuel Francis (2011), like Colombino, argues for the psychological attributes of the house in 'The thousand dreams of Stellavista'. Francis (2011:38) states that the house is a 'psychotropic conceit' whose space-place retains the violent emotions of its previous inhabitants. These emotions are the ghosts that imbue that skin of the house and which finally result in 'a recapitulation of the cataclysmic trauma in the house's synthetic memory' (Francis 2011:38). Ballard's construction of this house is complex and thought provoking, providing the house with a psychopathic personality absorbed from the humans who occupied its skin. The absorption of the human emotions grants the house a very similar agency to Durrell's city as an unhomely home. However, although Durrell's construction of the city is similar to Ballard's conception of the house, my contention is that Durrell takes the idea a step further by showing that the inhabitants who occupy the architectural space-place of the living city are fused with her body. Alexandria represents the all-encompassing body of the mother as home, where her 'children' are merely elements of herself. This allows the city the freedom to consume

her inhabitants whilst, simultaneously, producing them as elements of her own consciousness. Metaphorically this figuration of the city accords with what Creed (1986:62-63) considers the negative or archaic mother, who is both a procreative principle as well as a cannibalistic and voracious womb-maw that eats its children.

Consequently, Durrell seems to establish Alexandria as a space-place of negative pro-creative drives, this is particularly visible when Darley describes her as 'she':

[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. (Durrell 1957:17)

In this visualisation, the city is likened to an old reptile, an 'it', where previously Darley referred to her as 'she'. This change in the use of the pronoun allows Darley to objectify and distance himself from the unpleasant association between the 'torn rags of flesh' and 'the slaughterhouse'. The sentence 'For a moment it relinquishes the torn rags of the flesh' is slightly ambiguous and open to interpretation. In line with my argument, I would like, debatably, to suggest that the city has torn the flesh of her children, who, as I have argued, are merely living elements fused with the city's own physical topography and, thus, remain an integral aspect of her own shedding of flesh. I propose that Durrell's representation of the city can be read as a parallel to Francisco Goya's painting, *Saturn devouring his Son* (1820-1824). Goya's painting is horrific. Holding a 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. This is a revelation of Saturn's indifference to the flesh that nourishes him. The figure of Saturn fills the enclosing frame of the painting's dark background; a huge, terrifying, bestial creature. Art critic Robert Hughes (2003:383) calls this figure 'goggle-eyed and gaping, tormented by his lust for human meat, for an unthinkable incest'. Durrell's city is equally ancient and indifferent to her children, destroying them at will. I proffer that Durrell has purposely inverted the figure of Saturn, instead he seems to figure the city in the guise of the sorceress Medea, who slaughtered her children. Medea's act was an equivalently transgressive and violently 'incestuous' one. Yet, unlike Saturn, Medea's actions resulted in her being branded as iniquitous, evil and a vile murderess. Women should not kill their progeny, but stereotypically adopt a position of maternal and nurturing instincts that provide the illusion of domestic security and safety associated with the mother as representative of home.

A symbolic Medea, the city, exhibits no fostering tendencies, instead bleary, slow and sated, aged like a tortoise and myopic, the city momentarily ceases her destructive behaviour. She stares indifferently at those who are both her sustenance and her progeny, and seems to ponder the lives she continually balances between the notes of a shrill love-song and the threat of death. Darley's description evokes Alexandria



as a space-place that functions for her own end, and her inhabitants, far from being the purpose of her existence, become the means to keep her alive (Miéville 1998:2). This representation of the city is simultaneously that of the familiar place of nostalgic recollection, as well as a disturbing and uncanny one that awakens Darley's anxiety and fear. This is nowhere better revealed than in Darley's depiction of the chaos and confinement of Alexandria's streets which are termed a 'mauve jungle' (Durrell 1958:128). This emphasises the primitive but progenitive nature of the city. However, this fecundity of the myriad alleyways, thronging with bodies and light, contrasts with the 'hinterland' where black, winding and decay-filled alleys, with 'smashed and tumbled masonry, of abandoned and disembowelled houses', exist (Durrell 1958:128, 131). Life and death co-exist in this ancient and feminised space-place. What really disturbs and shocks the reader is the word 'disembowelled'. The house, a symbol of security, like an animal or human, has been eviscerated in an act of excessive and abject violence. Home, as symbolic of domesticity and security, lies in an uncanny state of dreadful ruination.

The uncanny and excessive space-place holds Darley in thrall to the city as home, yet, Darley is, in equal measure, repulsed by Alexandria's primordial, non-human and alien monstrosity. Durrell scholar, Corinne Alexandre-Garner (1985:209, my translation) indicates that Durrell's Alexandria is 'Alternately virgin and whore, Alexandria ... carries within her all the fictional characters who live and die at her breast'.³ Darley's reaction to this city is marked by an abject, dualistic response when he refers to her as 'poetical mother-city' but also as 'whore among cities' (Durrell 1958:37, 19). Using the pronoun her and the nouns mother and whore, Darley maps the city as an *Unheimliche* feminine space-place, which causes an abject 'overflow into disgust and terror' (Durrell 1957:21). The nostalgic perceptions of the mother as home, I suggest, assume rather different and defamiliarised aspects when applied to this city. Alexandria has mutated into a space-place of uncanny terror and perverse delight and, I posit, exemplifies a powerful metaphorical reversal of the stereotypical personification of home as representative of the mother and domestic tranquillity. Durrell's city becomes an embodied presence that denies any attributes that might be considered homely.

The city's unhomeliness is readily apparent in the portrayal of her as a glutinous matrix, where her inhabitants, irrespective of creed, race or tradition, function to form the fabric of her organically non-human body:

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. (Durrell 1958:127)

3. Tour à tour vierge et putain, Alexandrie ... porte en elle ... les personnages de la fiction qui s'animent et meurent en son sein.

The long, almost serpentine construction of the quoted sentence enforces the feeling of something amorphous and suffocating. The phrase 'great, sprawling jellyfish' emphasises the city's uncanny, primeval and protoplasmic nature. The words 'great' and 'sprawling' offer space and size to the image, where 'jellyfish' intimates that Alexandria is a place viscid in nature. Her embodied space-place encloses and forms the 'cells' of her inhabitants and their human history, ensuring that the city assumes the characteristics of an unhomely uterine integument. The inhabitants seem stripped of agency and fuse with and sustain the sentience of Alexandria, who assumes the role of a living creature with its own personality. As an alien, feminised being, the city seems to cause all boundaries to become amorphous, so that Durrell's playful evocation of the gelatinous nature of Alexandria partakes of what Nataly Tcherepashenets (2008:82–83) refers to as an eclectic locus of otherness, an alternate order that possesses an absence of a centre. This lack of a centre represents the threat the abject poses as it 'disturbs identity, system, order, what does not respect borders, positions, rules' (Kristeva 1982:4). The liquescent quality of the city's jellyfish body destroys the fragile division between the notion of inside and outside and takes on the attributes of what Kelly Hurley (1996:120), in her study of the Gothic body, terms 'Thing-ness' or the 'abhuman'. The horror and fear of Thing-ness are associated with the abject, and all these aspects form a part of the jelly-like embodiment of the city, which becomes a 'world where no fixity remains only a series of monstrous becomings' (Hurley 1996:28). In this monstrous locus of the city, Durrell's characters function as the basic units of the living and containing body of the city, being 'one with city'. The boundary between terrifying organic creature and space-place has become confused, so that the city remains what Julian Wolfreys (2007:45) terms an 'amorphous, uncanny perception of a 'there'.

My argument concerning the city as a monstrous, amorphous and sentient being mirrors the argument in an article by China Miéville (1998) entitled 'The conspiracy of architecture'. In this paper, Miéville writes about the anxiety associated with the concept of animate and alien buildings. I have adopted Miéville's ideas in a slightly altered form by applying them to Durrell's evocation of the city. For Miéville (1998:1 emphasis in text), 'buildings are projected as active even *conscious agents* able to intervene in the world. They are seen as alien in their agendas, their motivations are utterly *non-human*'. Unlike the specific architecture that Miéville discusses, Durrell's descriptions of Alexandria depict her as an amorphous agency – a spirit of place – without any overtly specific architectural descriptions. However, Durrell's portrayal of the city makes her a conscious agent underpinned by dark desires. Sara Wasson (2010:111), in a similar manner to Miéville, mentions the manner in which a 'story can be controlled by an unknown agency that may well be malevolent'. Isabelle Keller-Privat (2005), writing on the *Alexandria quartet*, mentions how the architecture of the city seems contaminated with malevolent shadows. In similar manner to Keller-Privat, I would argue that Durrell's Alexandria seems to possess a powerful and malevolent



agency. However, I would go further and suggest that these maleficent attributes of the city construct the character Justine's embodiment by means of superimposition. She is the city's dark queen: a human extension of this space-place. Part of Alexandria's womb-like body, Justine is the human form of the city's uncanny, evil and monstrous motivations and remains the woman who incarnates the sense of home and Alexandria for Darley.

Alexandria's symbiotic flâneuse

Haunting the memories of Darley, Justine is the essence of the city and the object of his desire and nostalgic yearning. Representative of the multi-cultural mixture of Alexandria and its historical past; Justine, originally a poor Alexandrian Jewess, is perceived by Darley as an intriguing alien Other. However, Darley is disturbed by Justine's otherness and her autonomy of action, which he conceives of as a threat aimed to subvert his masculine position of privilege and dominance. Justine's wayward character is, in many ways, located in her aggressive sexuality and her wandering through the city. Durrell's evocation of both Justine's free sexuality and liberty of movement, I would propose, means that Justine is positioned in the narrative of the *Alexandria quartet* as that most unusual of beings: a *flâneuse* (lady stroller). In Western culture, a *flâneuse* represents such a rare identity for women that it is hardly mentioned. The word is the feminine derivative of the masculine *flâneur*, a figure made prominent in the writings of the French author and poet Charles Baudelaire. Writing about the *flâneur's* awareness of the prismatic impressions of the city both during the day and at night-time, Baudelaire (1964:11) indicates that this stroller is aware of the commodities and fashions around him. Yet, the *flâneur*, whilst closely watching the parade, remains distanced and unobserved with the possible implications of voyeurism. Philosopher Walter Benjamin adopted the concept of Baudelaire's *flâneur* for his descriptions of the stroller who drifted through the shopping arcades of 19th century Paris. Benjamin's *flâneur* 'goes botanizing on the asphalt' whilst remaining invisible in the crowd (Benjamin 1973:36). Michel de Certeau further explored this masculine wandering through the streets in his figure of the walker in the city. De Certeau's (1984) *flâneurs* appear to have complete mastery of the urban space-place and can see everything without being seen. In this manner, the *flâneur* can read and map the cityscape as a text. For Baudelaire, Benjamin and de Certeau the figure of the *flâneur* or walker possesses positive connotations in his experiencing of the city's urban landscape. These positive connotations are central to an androcentric entitlement to the urban world because the *flâneur* owns the city both visually, and via his movement through its space and place. The figure of the *flâneur* has received fairly extensive critical attention, in this regard (Buck-Morss 1986; Jenks 1994; Shields 1994; Tester 1994; Walkowitz 1992).

However, it is the notion of the *flâneuse* and her mobility and spectatorship in the city that remains a question for debate. For feminist theorists such as Janet Wolff (1985, 1990) and

Griselda Pollock (1988), the *flâneuse* either does not exist, or is an invisible presence in the urban public space-place of the city. Keith Tester (1994) supports both Wolff and Pollock when he argues that the *flâneuse* could not exist. These theorists have posited that women were denied the freedom to roam the modern city and, thus, had no ability to engage in *flânerie*. They further argue that the city and its spaces and places were gendered masculine and go on to indicate that for women the only space-place available was the home, where they played the roles of dutiful wife and mother. These theorists contend that the home assumed the sheltering haven away from the life of the city streets and became a feminised space-place of intimacy to which women were confined. To the contrary, men could move freely between the home and the urban world. The *flâneur*, it is suggested, lost agency if he remained in the confines of the home and was born with a hatred of home. Being away from home was the *flâneur's* aim whilst, simultaneously, continuing to experience a sense of home everywhere (Tseng 2006:234). *Flânerie* became a repudiation, examined by Tester (1994:2), who notes that 'the private world of domestic life is dull and possibly even a cause for the feelings of crisis'. According to Buck-Morss (1986:119), the *flâneur's* strolling through the city represented an absorption of the life of the city, but any and 'all women who loitered risked being seen as whores'. The desiring gaze of the *flâneur*, which feminist scholars have considered both controlling and voyeuristic in nature, seems to deny the *flâneuse* the right to an existence. According to these theorists, the *flâneuse* is not only denied the ability to be a spectator, but she is enjoined from the right to freedom of movement through the city streets without being sexualised.

Contrary to the above, other feminist scholars such as Anne Friedberg (1991); Rachel Bowlby (1985); Elizabeth Wilson (1992, 2001); Deborah Parsons (2000); and Catherine Nesci (2012, 2007) have argued for the existence of the figure of the *flâneuse*. Elizabeth Wilson has called into question the masculine supremacy of the *flâneur* thereby challenging the accepted gender division, which she regards as playing too much on the 'passivity and victimisation of women' (1992:105). Similarly, Deborah Parsons argues against a binarised separation of genders, rather, she suggests that this purposely overlooks the 'deviant' or 'rare' forms of female freedom in the city streets located in the figures of the prostitute or cross-dressing woman (2002:40). Female *flânerie* suggests that the *flâneuse* also possesses the gaze and becomes a desiring subject, a position feminist critics have strenuously denied, because this implies that the *flâneuse* is not merely a passive object of erotic pleasure. From this brief overview, it is apparent that the idea of the *flâneuse* remains a contentious and vexatious issue amongst feminist critics. Ching-fang Tseng (2006:237) notes that 'debates over the *flâneuse* or female *flânerie* that are not historically situated become somewhat misplaced'. Whilst certainly relevant to studies of Modernity as a historical and cultural time period, this form of situation remains outside the scope of this particular article.



In accordance with the arguments made by Wilson and Parsons, I would like to assert that Durrell does indeed depict Justine as a transgressive and apparently aimless female stroller. Darley's statement that he catches 'an unexpected glimpse of her walking idly toward town in her white sandals, still half asleep' seems to confirm Justine's status as a *flâneuse* (Durrell 1957:17). Still, when examining Durrell's narrative, it needs to be considered that the perceptions of the city remain Darley's, as his memories alone track and access the sight of Justine strolling through the city. In only allowing the reader access to the male perspective on Justine's movements through the surrounding urban space-place, Durrell ensures that what is visually offered, remembered and described is done so from a certain disengaged and mastering position. In this way, whilst Justine seems to navigate the city as a *flâneuse*, her image is controlled from Darley's focalising viewpoint, which establishes a sense of his own autonomy from his enthrallment with both the city and Justine. Darley's focalising position raises questions about the reality of Justine's independence and her embodiment as a representative of the city's space and place. For the sake of my argument, I contend that Justine possesses sufficient agency to assume the role of a *flâneuse*, one whose connexion to Alexandria establishes the intimate relationship between the city and herself.

The relationship that exists between the city and Justine ensures that Justine becomes the proponent of Alexandria's own maleficent and erotic spirit. Justine's human corporeality, I proffer, is bound to the non-human but sentient living body of the city, causing any distance between human and non-human to be conflated. This fusion allows the city to assume a living skin and moving body. Justine's meandering through Alexandria's streets provides motility to this enclosing spatial membrane and, I argue, Justine weaves and shapes the space-place of the city through her chorography (Collie 2011:426). Justine as synecdoche of the city assumes an ambivalent nature and Darley indicates her power is located in her being 'a true child of Alexandria; which is neither Greek, Syrian, nor Egyptian, but a hybrid: a joint' (Durrell 1957:24). Merged together to form a single entity, Justine and the city destabilise both sexual identity and the identity of the self. The word 'hybrid' alerts the reader to the manner in which Durrell represents both the city and Justine as uncanny sexual creatures, who combine both masculine and feminine traits. Justine's identity appears to oscillate between the two states of male and female, as Darley indicates she 'talked like a man and I talked to her like a man' (Durrell 1957:21), but he goes on to add, 'how pliantly feminine this most masculine and resourceful of women could be' (Durrell 1957:18). Justine's androgynously ambivalent nature captivates Darley and is the focus of both his erotic desire and his need for security and home. Yet, Justine's role is to render what should be familiar unfamiliar. The mutual and constitutive relationship between Justine and the city represents home for Darley because the city is instrumental to the materialisation of the woman Darley believes he loves (Rogers 2013:267). Simultaneously, Darley feels an

abject sense of dread and horror towards these two female forms with whom he is infatuated. They come to epitomise an aspect of the home as a space-place filled with dangerous and perfidious propensities.

This seems epitomised in Justine's *flânerie* which, in similar manner to the *flâneur*, bespeaks her dangerous and undomesticated disposition. Coincident to her repudiation of domestic characteristics is Durrell's clever and misogynistic allusion to Justine's *flânerie* as an act of 'streetwalking', where she takes on the aspects of the city as whore. For Justine, the city is home but not the incarcerating architectural ideal of the house. Consequently, the fusion of the city and Justine results not only in a blurring of the concepts of house and home, but also that of individual identity. Darley, threatened by Justine's unison with the city, and her casual navigation of the streets at night, comments rather bitterly: 'after all, she seemed free as a bat to flit about the town at night, and never did I hear her called upon to give an account of her movements' (Durrell 1957:37). Justine's slipping through the crepuscular city acts, I propose, to conflate the stroller with something predatorily noctambulant. This intimates at a being not only sexually rapacious, but through her comparison to a bat, one in possession of a nimble, assured and silent motion. My contention is that through this imagery Durrell alludes to Justine being of an uncanny vampiric disposition.⁴

Fred Botting (2007:20, 24), in his article 'Hypocrite vampire ...', writes about vampires being *flâneurs* that use the labyrinth of the city as a space-place of edible goods because of their driving need to consume. Justine seems to emulate the need of these dead or undead *flâneurs* to cruise the streets at night hunting and lusting with a craving to consume. I consider that Justine is the human apotheosis of Alexandria's own need to consume her children by metaphorically sucking them dry. A child of this ancient place, part of its earth and its archaic nature, Justine can observe that: 'We are not strong or evil enough to exercise choice. All this is part of an experiment arranged by something else, the city perhaps, or another part of ourselves. How do I know?' (Durrell 1957:23). With this statement, Justine reveals an ambivalence towards this city, which dictates her own nature and behaviour. The city rules her inhabitant's lives and, as Richard Pine (1994:203) notes, is the 'controlling myth, the sole reality: everything else is diminished by it, lived by it'. Alexandria dominates her children causing them to become continuations of her own sentience and deviant desires, and their destinies remain unknown and unknowable being 'already inscribed in the autonomous, cryptic geometries of the place they inhabit' (Colombino 2012:28). In this regard, Justine's role as *flâneuse* has melded her embodiment with the encompassing skin of the city as home, so that she acts as the synecdoche of the city's dark appetites and monstrously abject disposition.

4.The representation of Justine as possessing the attributes and nature of a vampire will be further alluded to in the second novel of the tetralogy *Balthazar*.



Conclusion

A dwelling space has always been an idealised and nostalgic conception perceived to offer security and permanence, alongside a comforting womb-like protection. Specifically, it is the home that represents the ideal space; one tied to a certain conception of the feminine as nurturing. Quite to the contrary, I have contended that Durrell's city and her human extension Justine represent the antithesis of this ideal space-place and induce an uncanny and peculiar anxiety in Darley. Durrell's representation of these two female beings rouses a sense of the home as an *Unheimliche* space-place ready to turn on its inhabitants. Durrell's evocation of the city of Alexandria seems to render it a non-human, uncannily sentient metaphorical representative of home. The city authorises the narrative and the construction of her own spatial and temporal being through the creation and control of the lives of her inhabitants. My aim throughout this article has been to demonstrate how the city usurps the concept of home and alters it into an uncannily abject space-place of fascination and dread. I have argued that the narrator Darley perceives the city to be an alien, monstrous living creature that sustains itself by devouring its unlucky inhabitants, who are marked by an inert lack of agency. Durrell's representation of this cityscape establishes her as a feminised locus of violence, corruption and ancient horror. These malicious and horrific traits are superimposed onto Justine's embodiment, and she is inserted into the city as its emissary in the form of a transgressive *flâneuse*. In wandering through the city, Justine is the human agent through whom Alexandria weaves the narrative of her own perverse proclivities and non-human consciousness. For the reader of Durrell's four novels, the city of Alexandria is an exceedingly powerful feminine subjectivity that is embodied as an *Unheimliche*, loathsome and horrific home-creature.

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