Durrell often suggested that the Gnostic element in *The Alexandria Quartet* is very strong, though scholarship has not borne this out. I contend Gnostic elements are embedded in the structure of its narrative pragmatics. True to the esoteric nature of Gnosticism, Durrell chose to lay the traces of a Gnostic reading not so much in the substance (themes, incidents, words), but in the weft so-to-speak of, his text: in the prominent, yet not directly registered, conditions of his complex authorial apparatus.

The Author and the Demiurge: Gnostic Dualism in *The Alexandria Quartet*

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Lawrence Durrell often suggested that the Gnostic element in *The Alexandria Quartet* is very strong, though scholarship has not been able bear out such a level of investment in the text. By congratulating Roger Giroux for remarkably bringing out the Gnostic element in his translation of the *Quartet*, Durrell has provided an indication that this element is apparent only to initiates, that it is the novel's "hidden weft" (Alyn, *Big Supposer* 17). The reason why Gnosticism is not apparent in Durrell's novel is because it is mostly not located where we expect to find it; it is not located in its themes or discourse, nor in the incidents of its narrative. It is, as we shall see, embedded in the structure of its narrative pragmatics.

> I remember her [Justine] asking one night, so anxiously, so pleadingly if she had interpreted his [Balthazar's] thinking rightly: "I mean, that God neither created us nor wished us to be created, but that we are the work of an inferior deity, a Demiurge, who wrongly believed himself to be God? Heavens, how probable it seems, and this overweening hubris has been handed on down to our children." (Durrell, *Justine* 40-41)

The dark Demiurge of Justine's plaint is that of Gnostic theology. It is a theology that contains one of the saddest, the most heart wrenching of fates for humanity. According to

Gnosticism, the God of the Old Testament, whose most glorious creation is the world, turns out to be a foolish and conceited deity who is unaware of his secondary status as created, "who rules this world of sadness and confusion" (Forster 77). And he is not simply created, but the product—literally the abject—of the grief of his mother Sophia, the female of the thirteenth pair[1] (aeon, or emanation of God), who fell from grace because she "desired too ardently" to be united to the light of the true God (Forster 76). How much more tragic is the fate of the creature, the human, in Gnosticism than in Christianity! The Christian is fallen through original sin, yet exists within the scheme of a Divine Providence that promises redemption. The Gnostic comes to the realization that s/he is placed in the same position as the hapless Sophia, condemned to live separated from the divine light as part of a mistake.

In Justine's lament lies, for me, the crux of the relationship between the Marquis de Sade's and Durrell's synonymous heroines.

Durrell's use of Sade is one of the persistent, yet little-addressed, mysteries of the *Quartet*, whose salient features are the following: the coincidence of the title of the *Quartet*'s first volume and the name of a main character with that of Sade's is not accompanied by a similarity either in the incidents of the novels (Sade's is a nightmare of unredeemed cruelty; in Durrell cruelty, if any, is a by-product of the fortuity of human relations) or in the character traits of the heroines with the same name (Sade's Justine is unwaveringly virtuous and relentlessly abused; Durrell's Justine is earnest in her metaphysical anxieties, but otherwise world-savvy.)

Joseph McMahon's essay "Where does the real life begin?"—to my knowledge the only full-fledged effort to treat of Durrell's use of Sade in the *Quartet*—compares the ideological systems of the two authors and claims that Durrell aimed to subvert the Sadean system. McMahon's claim is essentially right, especially when one compares Sade's and Durrell's conceptions of Nature, encapsulated in the following quotations. The first is a passage from Sade's *Justine* used by Durrell as an epigraph for *Clea*:

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[1] E. M. Forster's *Alexandria*, which was Durrell's initial source for Gnosticism and also of some direct quotes—including the one of Sophia's story—actually states "thirtieth pair" (76). Critics have speculated that Durrell has made a mistake in transcribing (if truth be said, plagiarizing) Forster's text; however, the ordinal depends on which Gnostic source one is relying on: if it is the *Pistis Sophia* then it is the "thirteenth"; if it is the Robert M. Grant's *Gnosticism: A Sourcebook of Heretical Writings from the Early Christian Period* then it is the "thirtieth" (164). We know that Durrell consulted the first of these and may have been familiar with a lot of the material compiled by Grant. Nevertheless, in all likelihood he opted to "correct" Forster because of the centrality of the *Pistis Sophia* in Gnostic literature (it is after all a text often attributed to Valentinus himself, one of the major Gnostics) and because it is a text entirely devoted to the story of Sophia.

> "The Primary and most beautiful of Nature's qualities is motion, which agitates her at all times, but this motion is simply the perpetual consequence of crimes, it is conserved by means of crimes alone." [2]

The second is from a letter Pursewarden sends to *Clea* about the last volume of his projected tetralogy *God is a Humorist*, which is never finished because he commits suicide:

> "I feel I want to sound a note of … affirmation—though not in the specific terms of philosophy or religion. It should have the curvature of an embrace, the wordlessness of a lover's code. It should convey some feeling that the world we live in is founded in something too simple to be over-described as cosmic law—but as easy to grasp, as say, an act of tenderness, simple tenderness in the primal relation between animal and plant, rain and soil, seed and trees, man and God." (*Balthazar* 238)

For Sade, Nature's essential mode is crime; for Durrell it is tenderness. Nevertheless, even such an understanding of McMahon's claims about Durrell's relation to Sade only addresses the ideological background of the novels and does not adequately account for the coincidence in title and name. In other words, it does not really answer the question: in what ways do the novels and heroines resemble each other so that any ideological difference can be seen to receive substantial textual treatment?

To further complicate matters, in his correspondence with Henry Miller, Durrell persisted in referring to *Balthazar* (the second volume) as "Justine II" until it was completed[3]—a fact indicating that whatever "Justine" element Durrell was borrowing from Sade, exceeded the purview of a single volume and had implications for the entire *Quartet*.

Finally, Durrell consistently used epigraphs from Sade's *Justine* in all four volumes of the *Quartet*.

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[2] Durrell has in fact slightly emended the text: the last phrase in the original translation reads "she conserves it by means of crimes only" (Sade, *Justine* 72), not "it is conserved by means of crimes alone." It appears that Durrell felt free to change texts that he was quoting if they were translations. Durrell followed a similar practice in the quotations he used from Freud in *A Key to Modern British Poetry*—and this is also the case with the quotation from Freud that he used as an epigraph in *Justine* that we will discuss later.

[3] See *Durrell-Miller Letters* 289, 290, and 291 (the last reference being Durrell's announcement that he is sending off the finished manuscript to Miller to read).

McMahon claims that, in each volume, the 'moral' stands in an ironic relation to the epigraphs and shows that Sade's 'truths' are only of partial value. Again, it is difficult to argue against McMahon's claims. He is essentially right; there is indeed an ironic distance between the epigraphs and Durrell's most profound depictions of (and statements about) the human condition in the *Quartet*.

Still, something is amiss. McMahon does not make even a passing reference to the one clue that Durrell provided to the riddle of the epigraphs,[4] which is found in Pursewarden's "Obiter Dicta" at the end of *Balthazar* (purportedly anthologized by the journalist Keats):

> "Why do I always choose an epigraph from de Sade? Because he demonstrates pure rationalism—the ages of sweet reason we have lived through in Europe since Descartes. He is the final flower of reason, and the typic of European behaviour. I hope to live to see him translated into Chinese. His books would bring the house down and would read as pure humour. But his spirit has already brought the house down around our ears." (Durrell, *Balthazar* 247)

This statement, we must note, is a clever sleight of hand by Durrell, at once providing a clue to the epigraphs and dropping another hint that Pursewarden may be the author of the *Quartet* (since he follows the same practices as its author).[5] By itself, the quote does

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[4] The one clue, that is, within the novel. The substance of Pursewarden's comment is contained (expanded and diluted) in one of Durrell's seminal interviews, "The Kneller Tape (Hamburg)":

> The quotations from Sade? In a sense he is the most typical figure of our century with his ignorance and cruelty. I regard him as both a hero and a pygmy. Freud has rightly framed him in his gallery of infantile subjects—he is infantile, the very apotheosis of our infantile unconscious. But he had the courage to try and conquer in his despair by going the whole hog, giving way to it. If he is a pygmy it is because the experiment didn't succeed, didn't break through to those spiritual responsibilities which he unconsciously craved. It was rotten luck, really. He couldn't find the key and convert his energy into laughter or rapture. He is the champion whiner of all time; yes, infantile as modern man is: cruel, hysterical, stupid, and self-destructive—just like us all. He is our spiritual malady personified. And then how wonderfully the world of Sade symbolizes the limbo of passion in which we live so restlessly; we are afraid even to risk damnation by trying his vertiginous way through aboriginal sin. Our motto is: Accidie, Satiety, Modernity! But if he had not existed we should have found it necessary to invent him so let's be grateful for this candid snapshot of ourselves 'living,' as we call it. It is instructive if unlovely. (165-66)

[5] Notice also that understanding the tetralogy as a work by one of the fictional characters makes the text something of a topological equivalent of a Klein bottle in which the diagetic is found to be continuous with the extradiagetic. (A Klein bottle is a 4-D object that has only one side, and it results when we extend a Moebius strip to a form one continuous surface. Hence, just as in a Moebius strip one side is continuous with what appears to be other side, in a Klein bottle the inside is continuous with

not merely bespeak ironic distance, but also establishes an alien perspective on Sade. Fronting, as he often does, an Eastern viewpoint, Durrell brings out the absurdity of the Western metaphysical existential angst—a point he raised on several occasions (interviews for the most part) without being quite understood. What is absurd is, of course, not the anguish suffered or the pain portrayed by Sade, but his willful positioning of God as an intentional antagonist and his use of crime as a weapon in this battle.

The West's morbid preoccupation with a teleological universe structured on the architectonics of a causality based on reason starts indeed with Descartes' foundational doubt that unravels the entire sensible world only to reconstruct it on the firm ground of God as the first cause (i.e. the only idea that I have that "cannot have proceeded from me" (Descartes 165)).[6]

'The final flower' and culmination of the 'ages of sweet reason' is, therefore, Sade who seeks to unfound Descartes' God by driving rational causality to its extreme limit (questioning in other words, the legitimacy of the creator by examining the creation):

> "I believe," this dangerous woman [Madame Dubois] answered, "that if there were a God there would be less evil on earth; I believe that since evil exists, these disorders are either expressly ordained by this God, and there you have a barbarous fellow, or he is incapable of preventing them and right away you have a feeble God; in either case, an abominable being, a being whose lightning I should defy and whose laws contemn. Ah, Thérèse! is not atheism preferable to the one and the other of these extremes?" (Sade, *Justine* 250)

Such is the reasoning that Sade puts in the mouth of one of his villains, who is trying to convince Thérèse (Justine's alias for most of Sade's novel) to enter a life of crime. Through Madame Dubois (and various other villains throughout his text), Sade inadvertently represents God in the two versions of the Gnostic Demiurge Ialdabaoth—the malevolent and the inept—a fact that cannot have escaped Durrell's attention. And though in the introduction as well as in the conclusion of his work, Sade will affirm (rather unconvincingly) the existence and unequivocal justness of the Christian God, the fact remains that having put his blameless heroine through an unbelievable and inexorable succession of torments, he strikes her dead (via lightning, no less[7]) right at the moment

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the outside and if you move far enough on one side you will find yourself on the other.)

[6] See Descartes' "Meditations on the First Philosophy in which the Existence of God and the Distinction between Mind and Body are Demonstrated" (*The Philosophical Works of Descartes* Vol. I, 144-199), and especially the third meditation.

[7] An obvious ironic twist on Madame Dubois' words of defiance, since she is not the one struck by the

when it seems that her fortunes are finally in clement hands. One may surmise what this implies about Sade's views on Divine Providence!

Note the tenor of the plaint (variously repeated throughout the text) by Sade's Justine:

> Under what doom-spelling star must I have been born, I wondered, in order that I be utterly incapable of conceiving a single generous sentiment without immediately being drowned in a sea of misfortunes! And why is it that this enlightened Providence whose justice I am pleased to worship, the whole punishing me for my virtue, simultaneously shows me those who crush me with their crimes carried to the pinnacle of happiness! (Sade, *Justine* 288)

It would have taken very little out of Durrell, or any intelligent reader for that matter, to realize that the Divine Providence that is blamed by Sade's Justine is none-other than the infamous Marquis himself—the literal author of the unrelenting barrage of his character's misfortunes. Parallels of Justine to the Biblical Job and of Sade to the wrathful God of the Old Testament are the obvious sequiturs. Such, then, are the devious byways through which an equivalence begins to emerge between the Sadean author and the subaltern god of the Gnostics.

The lamentation of Durrell's Justine for a God that, if not indifferent, is limited and flawed, is then the precise moment when her name finds its full justification in Durrell's text. Durrell was no stranger to the (in any case, commonplace) notion of the author as God/creator. For instance, Anaïs Nin, in one of her diaries, refers to a conversation to this effect between Henry Miller and Durrell as goading her to develop her notion of the woman artist as mother-creator.[8] However, Durrell was not to have entertained delusions of omnipotence long, if in fact he ever did. Being fluent in Greek, he was well aware that the word "Demiurge" used by the Gnostics (with all its attendant connotations of sorcerer's apprentice) designates in Greek both God (in the orthodox sense) and the artist.[9] Doubtless, part of the intended effect and the reason for the title of

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lightning she defies—this fate goes to the consistently virtuous Justine! This is the message that Sade delivers to the attentive reader at the end of his novel about his God's perversity, which gives the lie to his proclamations of the didactic purpose of his tale.

[8] II 233-236, cited in Ellen Peck Killoh. "The Woman Writer and the Element of Destruction" (35). Here, we should perhaps remark that a persistent theme in Durrell's work is the problematic of the child, which may indicate that he was trying to come to terms with all aspects of the creator.

[9] For example, in "Oil for the Saint" an account of Durrell's return to Corfu after 20 years written in 1966 for *Holiday* magazine (a rather fictive reconstruction as James Gifford has shown in "The Corfiot Landscape and Lawrence Durrell's Pilgrimage") he has Niko, his unsuspecting Greek friend, quip on

the first volume was to imply that Darley, whose solipsistic and ego-centric (*Justine* 18) version of events is the first volume of the *Quartet,* stands in the same relation to his characters as the Gnostic Demiurge to his creatures. Durrell's persistence in calling *Balthazar* "Justine II" is due, then, to the fact that the putative author of the second volume is still Darley, albeit after his ego has been punctured by Balthazar's corrective (i.e. the Interlinear).[10]

True to his Gnostic paradigm, however, Durrell did not leave matters there; the 'Demiurge's' domain is the purview of the individual volumes, the limited 'reality' of each book. Just as in Gnosticism, where the True God in his divine scheme encompasses and goes beyond the Demiurge's, eventually sending Christ to enfold Sophia like a robe and restore her in her proper place, so does Durrell's supra-novel, *The Alexandria Quartet in toto*, operate on a redemptive scheme whereby the traumatic meaninglessness of events in the local versions is resolved in the grand movement of the whole.

One instance of this redemptive scheme[11] is summed up by Balthazar at the end of *Justine*; it concerns the role that Melissa's child by Nessim is to play in resolving a number of traumatic and painful events: "by one of those fearful displacements of which only love seems capable the child Justine lost was given back by Nessim not to her but to

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the two Greek meanings (creator-artist) (*Spirit of Place* 302), implanting his own Gnostic joke for the wise (and in his usual fashion, another clue for the critic who might be in need of a bit of help with modern Greek to read the *Quartet*).

[10] Each of the first two novels in fact contains a statement about God's indifference. In *Justine*, Darley comments, trying to reason the cause of Pursewarden's suicide:

> It is not mysterious that any artist should desire to end a life which he has exhausted—(a character in the last volume exclaims: "For years one has to put up with the feeling that people do not care, really care, about one; then one day with growing alarm, one realizes that it is God who does not care; and not merely that he does not *care*, but does not care *one way or the other*"). (*Justine* 118)

In *Balthazar*, Justine, having confronted Capodistria with the fact that he had raped her as a child, finds to her shock that he has no recollection of the event. That night she has a strange thought,

> a thought about Da Capo forgetting so completely an act which had cost me so many years of anxiety and indeed mental illness and had made me harm so many people. I said to myself "This is perhaps the very way God himself forgets the wrongs he does to us in abandoning us to the mercies of the world." (*Balthazar* 146)

[11] The redemptive scheme inevitably encompasses practically all the major characters of the *Quartet*:

- Leila, deprived of her young lover and her beauty at one stroke, gains a true intellectual companion when her ex-lover, Mountolive, becomes the correspondent to whom she communicates the range of her thoughts, knowledge, and culture.
- Clea loses a hand (while being saved from certain death), thereby registering a blow to her perfect beauty; but, the prosthesis of a mechanical hand transforms her into a true artist.
- Liza loses her brother and lover at one stroke, only to find a husband in Mountolive.
- Scobie dies a disgraceful death in drag, but is beatified after death.
- Narouz is transformed from an isolated misanthrope to a leader of his people and dies the death of a Messiah.

Melissa" (*Justine* 237). The reader has to wait until the beginning of *Clea* (the fourth volume) to see this redemptive scheme play out (in other words, for the child to be returned to Nessim and thereby to also enter the custody of Justine), by which time (and in keeping with the requirement that Balthazar's statement, coming too soon, must reveal only a partial truth[12]) the child has also touched Darley's life (staying with him for the few years of his island retreat and alleviating the pain of Melissa's death), rendering also onto him a surrogate paternity and completing a circle that brings two official couples (Justine-Nessim, Melissa-Darley) and two clandestine couples (Justine-Darley, Melissa-Nessim) into fruitful union.[13]

Such, then, is the answer that Durrell has in store for Sade: an answer that is symbolically coded in the two epigraphs in the beginning of Justine. The first quotation (and the only one not by Sade[14]) is taken from a letter written by Freud to Wilhelm Fliess (August 1, 1899):

> I am accustoming myself to the idea of regarding every sexual act as a process in which four persons are involved. We shall have a lot to discuss about that.[15]

As Corrine Alexandre-Garner has noted, what is omitted in Durrell's epigraph is the antecedent that frames it as a comment on bisexuality (*Le Quatuor* 26).[16] Despite the fact that bisexuality is a central concept (the Tiresias thread) in the novel, Durrell has omitted any reference to it in the epigraph. However, he has not omitted what one would have

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[12] This requirement, presented in Durrell's various theorizations of the *Quartet,* is that no single volume should contain the whole truth and that truth is gradually revealed as the *Quartet* unfolds, always partially, as in a palimpsest.

[13] Needless to say such a redemptive scheme was suggested to Durrell by a couple of significant influences. The first is Goethe. In *Elective Affinities* again a child is born, this time from the physical union of husband and wife and the quasi-metaphysical union of each to their respective beloved—the child supernaturally resembling only the latter two. Other sources are Graham Greene's *The Heart of the Matter* (which also provided Durrell with the name for one of his characters, Scobie) and *The End of the Affair*, in which the redemptive scheme works to unite the husband and the lover to console each other in their bereavement for the woman they both loved.

[14] This is only true for the *Quartet*'s four-volume edition. Durrell added an epigraph from Stendhal to *Mountolive* when he prepared the Faber one-volume edition in 1962 (396).

[15] Again this is a quotation that differs somewhat from the text found in the *Complete Letters* (see note below), but in this occasion it is not clear whether Durrell, in his usual fashion, modified the quotation to suit his purpose or fancy, or whether he was quoting from a different edition of the Freud-Fliess letters.

[16] "The farther the work of the past year recedes, the more satisfied I become. But bisexuality. You are certainly right about it. I am accustoming myself to regarding every sexual act as a process in which four individual are involved. We have a lot to discuss on this topic" (*Complete Letters* 364).

expected him to: Freud's little afterthought. This leads one to presume that the epigraph does not function as a simple comment on the action of the novel. Is "we shall have a lot to discuss about that" addressed to the reader? It is hard to imagine otherwise! At the very least, it invites the reader to ponder on the possibility of a certain dialogism (the author or a character masking behind Freud's voice). Though the reason for the addition is not altogether clear, that of the omission is probably this: while Durrell may have hoped that 'bisexuality'—under erasure[17]—would provide a clue for some future inquisitive critic, he still diverts the intention of the quote to allude to the redemptive scheme which features the child as the obvious outcome and token of the 'sexual act'/union of the four characters (Justine, Nessim, Darley, and Melissa).

The second epigraph comes from Sade's *Justine* (placed second presumably to denote its subordinate status):

> There are two positions available to us—either crime which renders us happy, or the noose, which prevents us from being unhappy. I ask whether there can be any hesitation, lovely Therese, and where will your little mind find an argument able to combat that one? (Durrell, *Justine* 10; Sade, *Justine* 47)

Wise from the discovery of the redemptive scheme in the previous epigraph, one is led immediately to surmise that this quotation is meant to gloss Pursewarden's 'mysterious'

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[17] The notion of 'under erasure' (*sous rature*) that we encounter in Derrida's *Of Grammatology* is rich: In summary it presupposes that a word is written and crossed out within the body of the text. Spivak, Derrida's translator, glosses this practice as follows: "Since the word is inaccurate, it is crossed out. Since it is necessary, it remains legible" (xiv). Later she goes on to elaborate the special significance that this practice acquires for Derrida (in contradistinction to Heidegger from whom he borrows it) as "the mark of the absence of a presence, an always already absent present" (xvii). 'Under erasure' therefore entails the notion of the trace of an absence that is made present through language—this is required by the very structure of language according to Derrida.

Clearly, Durrell's handling of quotations (and epigraphs) can only refer to the initial, more basic, sense that Spivak introduces without any of the more profound deconstructive Derridean implications. When Durrell omits context (or a phrase) from a text he is not simply suiting the quotation to his purpose, he is invoking the context through its absence (that is why he carefully—for the most part—attributes his quotation or—and that too is significant—he goes out of his way *in order to quote*). In other words, the reader is supposed to ponder on the significance of what is quoted in the light of what is omitted. As my discussion has already suggested, this is a practice that well exceeds the purview of epigraphs and extends to the use of quotations throughout Durrell's oeuvre, and even concepts. The practice is at the core of what Durrell calls the 'heraldic operation,' which is something he sees at work in all of literature, in fact all textual production. As such, it requires a discussion entirely devoted to it and cannot really be addressed in a footnote.

suicide[18] (here we should recall his predilection for using epigraphs from Sade). In contrast to the implied 'moral' of the quote (the superiority of crime to suicide given their respective outcomes), Pursewarden chooses the latter, in other words the lesser of two evils. Again we might note that Durrell seems to have quoted a bit more than was required if his purpose was a simple comment: the second part of the question, "where will your little mind find an argument able to combat that one," is surely superfluous unless it is an invitation to the reader to endeavor to find a counter-argument, or the promise of one during the course of the novel. Or, perhaps, the conversational superfluities in each quote are intended to suggest a debate of sorts between the two positions.

We are dealing, once more, with a quotation from which the context is missing. Despite the disjunctive structure of the sentence, Sade's villain, Coeur-de-fer ('Ironheart'), is not advocating the free choice between two society-defying options (crime or suicide); rather, he is describing the wages of crime, which are either 'happiness' in having served one's own personal interests, or punishment (the noose) which, having failed to serve the aforementioned interests, prevents one from being unhappy. Sade's world admits of no real sovereignty since virtue is punished by misery, and crime, if punished, by death. How happy is Sade's 'happiness' in either the apparent or the 'proper' interpretation of this quote, one is led to ponder.

Thus, behind all this—yet very much on the surface, waiting patiently for us to register it—is Durrell's indication of a way out of Sade's infernal syllogism: Sade's name gives the lie to his proposed mode of 'happiness'; whereas, as Durrell has noted, "[t]he name Freud means 'Joy', and in time he will be recognized in the world as a real joy-bringer" (*Key* 54). There should be no doubt that for a novelist who quips on names throughout his novel, pitting 'Joy' against Sade can be no accident. How uncanny, though, does the passage from Durrell's *A Key to Modern British Poetry* and this game with names become when we consider that Durrell was barely saved from being named Samuel Amos (his paternal grandfather's name) by his mother's steadfast refusal that a child of hers should have initials spelling out SAD (MacNiven, *Biography* 14-15)?

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[18] Several, not altogether plausible, explanations are presented for Pursewarden's suicide: The official explanation is that he commits suicide in order not to have to reveal the Palestine conspiracy, which implicates his friend Nessim, as he is morally and officially obliged to do, being a British diplomat. A more personal explanation is that he wants to remove himself as an obstacle so that his sister and lover Liza is free to transfer her affections to the much more suitable Mountolive (having realized that there is indeed a budding romance between the two). A more metaphysical explanation is offered by Durrell in an interview: "Pursewarden's suicide is the sacrificial suicide of a true cathar" ("The Kneller Tape (Hamburg)" 168). Given the above, one may venture that Pursewarden commits suicide to pay for his 'crimes' and at the same time, in the Gnostic/Cathar sense, to put an end to the fundamental mistake of his existence (being a creature of the Demiurge).

Fortuitous wordplay aside, however, to the careful scholar it is patent how pervasive Freud's influence (and that of psychoanalysis in general) has been on Durrell's work. Such influence should be understood at work precisely at the level of the supra-novel (the collective *Quartet*) in which the subtle operations of the 'unconscious' work across books to resolve the tensions created locally. Therefore, rather than construct a simplistic binary of Sade as the 'Demiurge' and Freud as a 'true God,' we should see them as two paradigms of explication of the phenomenology of experience and, by extension, as two narrative models. Freud is then merely the theorist who was able to divine the elusive pattern in what is the fortuitous grace, the apparent incongruity, the mindless cruelty of so much of human existence. The unconscious, whose elusive traces Freud managed to detect and decipher, is no divine entity; it is merely the parser of the code that spells 'destiny' out of the fragments of our intentions, choices, and desires.

It is Pursewarden again that gives us a clue to what is involved here in the same letter to Clea referred to earlier:

> Keep silent awhile and you feel a comprehension of this act of tenderness—not power or glory: and certainly not Mercy, that vulgarity of the Jewish mind[19] which can only imagine man as crouching under the whip. No, for the sort of tenderness I mean is utterly merciless! "A law onto itself" as we say. Of course, one must always remember that truth itself is always halved in utterance. Yet I must in this last book insist that there is hope for man, scope for man, within the boundaries of a simple law; and I see to see mankind as appropriating to itself the necessary information through mere attention, *not reason*, which may one day enable it to live within the terms of such an idea—the true meaning of "joy unconfined". How could joy be anything else? This new creature we artists are hunting for will not "live" so much as, like time itself simply "elapse." Damn, it's hard to say these things. Perhaps the key lies in laughter, in the Humorous God? (*Balthazar* 238-9)

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[19] Here Durrell (Pursewarden) does not really mean "Jewish," but rather "Judeo-Christian," a mentality that he viewed as permeated by the cult of the vampire: Durrell dealt with rabid vehemence with the Eucharist as the ritual of "the cult of the vampire" in the first (untitled) section of the "Les Suppositoires Réquisitoires" (one may roughly translate the elaborate wordplay here as "the required invective suppositories") (*Big Supposer* 141-42).

While most religions have mercy as one of their central concepts, it is Christianity that ultimately relegates mercy to the discretion of God as an instrument of salvation thereby eliciting Pursewarden's disdain for the implied servitude of the creature before his/her creator. This, not to suggest that there aren't plenty of attacks on Judaism and Jews in the *Quartet*, especially in the Pursewarden sections.

Pursewarden's letter, as we have seen, is an answer to Sade's theory of nature. Against a nature whose primary modality is crime, Pursewarden posits a nature operating via a merciless tenderness (merciless because mercy is not a factor; nature's operations are nomological and autotelic).

Once more, Pursewarden acts the spokesman of the Eastern viewpoint, a role befitting one who chooses the epitaph "Here lies an intruder from the East" (*Balthazar* 241), and locates hope for humankind not in *reason*, of which Sade is the 'final flower,' but in 'attention' as a means to procure the necessary information for joy.[20] "The truest form of right attention is of course love," Pursewarden states a hundred pages earlier, as though to gloss his point (*Balthazar* 141). The 'right attention' is part of the Eightfold/Dharma path that is one of the Four Noble Truths of Buddhism; Durrell would have encountered a description of it in the writings of Alexandra David-Neel[21]:

> We must watch carefully our reactions to the various contacts made by our sense and our spirit with our environment. We must catch, as it were upon the wing, the various manifestations of our physical and mental activity, hold them and interrogate them. "Whence did you come?" "What engendered you?".... (*Initiations and Initiates* 174)

This Buddhist attention "upon the wing" is not unlike that proposed by Freud, who makes his phantom appearance in "joy unconfined," the otherwise incongruous quote from Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*.[22] Freud recommended a particular kind of free-floating attention both for analysands performing free-associations (*Introductory Lectures* 130) and for analysts listening in on the same process:

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[20] Notice how 'happiness' is carefully avoided here as tainted by Sade!

[21] Durrell was an avid reader of this remarkable woman's books since childhood (Pine, *Mindscape* 26). Alexandra David-Neel was a French woman who visited Tibet in the 1920's disguised as a man, at a time when all foreign visitors and especially women were forbidden to enter Tibet, and meticulously studied Tibetan Buddhism.

[22] Did ye not hear it?—No; 'twas but the wind,
Or the car rattling o'er the stony stret;
On with the dance! let joy e unconfined;
No sleep till morn, when Youth and Pleasure meet
To chase the glowing Hours with flying feet—
But, hark!—that heavy sound breaks in once more,
As if the clouds its echo would repeat;
And nearer, clearer, deadlier than before!
Arm! Arm! and out—it is—the cannon's opening roar!
(Canto III, stanza 22.)

> [It] simply consists in making no effort to concentrate the attention on anything in particular, and in maintaining in regard to all that one hears the same measure of calm, quite attentiveness—of "evenly hovering attention," as I once before described it. ("Recommendations for Physicians" 118)

Two ostensibly disparate theories, yet very much close to Durrell's heart, come into fruitful conjunction here, in the manner favored by his pervasive syncretism. This coincident sort of attention proposed both by Buddhism and psychoanalysis offers humans the possibility of becoming self-aware and not merely driven by their compulsions and fears.

With the invocation of Freud via the signified, all of the elements that were originally put in play by the two epigraphs in the beginning of *Justine* are textually made present and resolved. Durrell via Pursewarden affirms the possibility for joy and places his faith on a 'Humorous God' since the implicit argument is that laughter is the non-discursive way out of the nightmarish metaphysical trap laid by Sade. Pursewarden's letter to Clea is meant to recall one of the important Hermetic texts, Plutarch's "Concerning Isis and Osiris," subtitled "Address to Klea Concerning Gnossis and the Search for Truth" (*Thrice Greatest Hermes* I, 182 ff).[23] This explicit parallel reifies Pursewarden's letter to Clea into a document that functions both within and without the narrative economy of the *Quartet.* Its exceptional status in a book whose professed intention is to engage in a 'search for truth' by shifting through the multiplicity of partial, relative, and conflicting truths calls for particular attention to its pragmatics. In the equivocal position that omniscient authorship (Pursewarden signs his letter "your omniscient friend") is placed by this particular text—at once complete and incomplete or complete in its incompleteness—we should recognize the colophon of the Gnostic Pursewarden. It seems that Pursewarden's resounding laughter is intended to take the

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[23] G. R. S. Mead notes in his introduction to Plutarch's text:

> Plutarch wrote his essay at Delphi […], and addressed it to Klea, a lady who held a distinguished position among the Delphic priestesses, and who had herself been initiated in the Osiriac Mysteries—her very name Klea being, perhaps, her mystery-name […]. The treatise is, therefore, addressed to one who was prepared to read into it more than appears on the surface. (*Thrice Greatest Hermes* 181).

Needless to say that the name Clea in *The Alexandria Quartet* derives its importance precisely because of the connection to Plutarch's text (a fact that was first noticed by Carol Pierce in "'Wrinkled Deep in Time': *The Alexandria Quartet* As Many-Layered Palimpsest" (495), but without realizing the full potential of this association), and especially given Mead's explanation, which obliges us to read Pursewarden's letter as a text with an esoteric meaning.

place of the missing fourth volume of his tetralogy, calling attention, as it does, to the completeness of Durrell's authorial enterprise and giving it the lie.

If the story of Sophia and the Gnostic Demiurge provided an instrumental model and metaphysical allegory for the *Quartet,* another Gnostic text also provided an allegorical model. In the *Hermetica*[24] (which Darley keeps in a suitcase under his bed (*Justine* 95)), Durrell found a symbolic form to match the subject matter of his novel, a city of the mind that mirrors the form of the world, Philo of Alexandria's "The City of God":

> For the Intelligible City is nothing else but the reasoning of the Architect determining His Mind to found a city perceivable by the sense after [the model of] the City which the mind alone can perceive.
>
> This is the doctrine of Moses and not [only] mine. At any rate in describing the genesis of man he expressly agrees that he [man] was fashioned in the image of God. And if this is the case with the part—the image of the Image—it is plainly also the case with the whole Form, that is the whole of this sensible cosmos, which is a far greater imitation of the Divine Image than the human image is.
>
> It is plain, moreover, that the Archetypal Seal, which we call Cosmos which is perceptible only to the intellect, must itself be the Archetypal Pattern, the Idea of ideas, the Reason (*Logos*) of God….
>
> Passing, then, from details, behold the grandest House or City, namely, this cosmos. Thou shalt find that the cause of it is God, by whom it came into existence. The matter of it is the four elements, whom it came into existence. The matter of it is the four elements, out of which it has been composed. The instrument by means of which it has been built, is the Reason *(Logos) of God. And the object of its building is the Goodness of the Creator.* (Mead, *Thrice Greatest Hermes* I, 163)

Philo's ingenious metaphor predates by approximately three centuries St. Augustine's far better known *Civitate Dei*, with which Durrell was also familiar.[25] That Philo[26] was a child

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[24] In other words, the three-volume *Hermes Trismegistus* by Herbert Mead.

[25] Miller all but recommends reading it in one of the first letters he writes to Durrell (13) in answer to what was presumably a request for reading suggestions (Durrell's postcard to which Miller responds is not included). Other references to Augustine abound in the *Durrell-Miller Letters* (142, 396, 398, 437).

[26] Philo of Alexandria (15–10 BC to AD 45–50) was a Jewish philosopher who sought to reconcile Judaism and Ancient Greek (mainly Platonic) influences through a syncretic approach. His influence on orthodox Christian thought was significant, but he is considered to have anticipated "much of

of Alexandria certainly adds a certain formal elegance to this particular choice of a model. What is striking when *The Alexandria Quartet* is seen from the perspective of Philo's "City of God" is the fortuity of an understanding of the cosmos as a city (one reminiscent of Spengler's secular version of the same notion) in which the traces of a pattern (the Archetypical Seal) can be detected, rendering two modes of apperception: one with the senses and one with the mind. The juxtaposition in Philo's text of the sensible city and the intelligible city is coincidental with the two forms of the novel, the concrete manifestation of the four individual volumes and the extrapolated form of the supra-novel. Durrell found in the context of Alexandria not simply a locale, a whole worldview, the historical and symbolic material, but also the very texts that provided the philosophical and formal support for his text.

Understood through these Gnostic paradigms, the *Quartet*'s elaborate scheme yields not only a certain philosophical attitude towards human existence and by extension narrativity; it also renders a narrative system that operates on two levels.

On the first level is a narrative that proceeds, in each volume, through the obvious function of narrators delimited by their specificity—taking, in other words, their point in the axes of space and time as a point of absolute reference. Despite the fact that three out of four volumes are for the most part narrated by Darley, it is a Darley who is substantially bound by the particular perspective of his moment in space-time. Each moment is also characteristically marked by a significant event: the first volume by Justine's departure for Palestine; the second volume by the arrival of Balthazar and his Interlinear; and the fourth volume by the return to Alexandria in wartime. Even the omniscient version of events in *Mountolive*, with its multiple focalization, is limited because whatever it gains in 'objectivity,' it loses in the truth entailed in the limited subjective perspective (the integrated, however biased, version required by the ego of a single narrator). Equally, the enlightened subjective version of *Clea* that confers retrospective meaning on the events of the first two volumes is bracketed by the lack of awareness of the events of the omniscient third volume (to wit, the political aspect introduced by the conspiracy all but disappears). In addition, even as the fourth volume ties the threads of the redemptive scheme of the supra-novel, it displays a characteristic lack of full awareness that such a redemptive scheme is at play: Scobie's beatification, Narouz's Messianic betrayal and death, Pursewarden's canonization as a national literary figure with his death-mask placed among those of Keats and Blake in the National portrait gallery (*Clea* 115-6) are aspects of the redemptive scheme that are clearly indicated. On the other hand, Clea may toy with the idea that the nose she designed for Semira's plastic surgery will be inherited by Amaril and Semira's child, but does not

Gnosticism" ("Philo Judaeus," *Britannica Online*) hence his inclusion in Mead's *Thrice Greatest Hermes*.

realize that this child will take the place of the one she had aborted after her own ill-fated affair with Amaril. Equally, the narrative economy that compensates Justine for her lost daughter with Melissa and Nessim's daughter is not remarked on in *Clea* despite being foreshadowed in *Justine* (as we have seen). Furthermore, although Nessim is carefully supplied with a black patch over one eye to match the one worn by the mysterious ravisher of Justine when she was a child (and Justine has a mild stroke that makes one of her eyelids droop), there is no recognition that these are tokens of the resolution of Justine's neurosis.[27] All this appears while asides enough throughout the *Quartet* invite the deployment of a psychoanalytic mode of interpretation.[28]

On the second level, where Gnostic dualism becomes apparent, the redemptive scheme works between the lines to effect not the closure of a happy end for each of the characters, but a higher justice so-to-speak, one that assigns each character his or her rightful Symbolic place. By the end of the novel, characters acquire an emblematic quality, albeit tinged with nostalgia: the transvestite saint (Scobie), the awkward Messiah (Narouz), the tragic-comic womanizer (Pombal), the tender ironist (Pursewarden), the sad but machinating prostitute (Melissa).

Near the end of *Clea*, Darley is led to conclude that there must be a grand scheme at work:

> It is not hard, writing at this remove in time, to realize that it had all *already happened*, had been ordained in such a way and in no other. This was so to speak, only its "coming to pass"—its stage of manifestation. But the scenario had already been devised, somewhere, the actors chosen, the timing rehearsed down to the last detail in the mind of that invisible author—which perhaps would prove to be only the city itself: the Alexandria of the human estate. (*Clea* 223)

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[27] By assuming the insignia (black eye-patch) of the man who raped Justine as a child, Nessim places himself in the position of the man who controls her desire—an equivocal position because it indicates both love and aggression—in other words, he truly becomes Justine's husband. As for Justine's drooping eyelid (due to a mild stroke), which mirrors her husband's infirmity, it signals what Lacan has variously called "assuming responsibility for one's desire." At the time when the reader is informed of their respective infirmities, Nessim and Justine's marriage seems all but finished; nevertheless, the couple emerges a few months later passionately in love with each other again (*Justine* 281)—a fact that betokens the end of the process of the resolution of the symptom.

[28] For example, this statement by Balthazar which alludes to the Freud's theory of parapraxes:

> These obstinate little dispossessed facts, the changelings of our human existence which one can insert like a key into a lock—or a knife into an oyster: will there be a pearl inside? Who can say? But somewhere they must exist in their own right, these grains of truth which '*just slipped out*'. Truth is not what is uttered in full consciousness. It is always what 'just slips out'—the typing error which gives the whole show away. (*Balthazar* 146)

Darley borrows a phrase, oft-repeated in the New Testament (Luke's and Mark's gospels), that accompanies Jesus in the various events that mark his emergence as Christ (the anointed), to describe the uncanny sense that what he is about to narrate carries the sense of inevitability. The phrase "coming to pass" signals the recognition that the immanent destiny of the city (the magnetic force that surreptitiously dictates that the fates of Durrell's characters are shaped by the city's history) is in fact the manifestation of a redemptive scheme that Darley himself can only barely descry.

Even in this passage whose ostensible intention is to affirm the extraordinary morphological power of the Spenglerian city, the phrase "invisible author" applied to *a city* rings strange, especially given the theological undertones. What is this "Alexandria of the human estate," if not the 'city of God' in which God *is* the invisible author? A significant displacement appears to have occurred in which the author is all but elided by his scheme.

The clue lies in the triumphant appearance of the redemptive scheme in Pursewarden's almost delirious description of his 'Ideal Commonwealth' in the Notebook addressed to Darley, titled "My Conversations with Brother Ass":

> My spirit trembles with joy as I contemplate this city of light which a divine accident might create before our very eyes at any moment! Here art will find its true form and place, and the artist can play like a fountain without contention, without even trying. (*Clea* 141)

Joy once more makes its evanescent appearance in this passage as the prospect of Pursewarden's city of light, which is the 'intelligible city' or 'city of god' made reality. Here, the artist is neither God nor Demiurge, but a logical corollary of the scene: a 'fountain' playing, a natural effusion—spontaneity coupled with ease. Not surprisingly, this simple image of spontaneity is underwritten by yet another apocryphal symbol, the Mercurial Fountain found in the *Rosarium Philosophorum* discussed in *The Psychology of Transference* by Carl Gustav Jung—an author whose work on psychology and alchemy Durrell consulted extensively. Jung suggests that the water in the fountain (mercurius) stands for the unconscious which cycles through the psychic apparatus replenishing the creative resources.[29] Hence, Pursewarden's artist is a 'mercurial fountain,' his or her

[29] Jung sums up the symbolism of the fountain as follows:

> The text that follows the picture of the Mercurial Fountain is mainly concerned with the "water" of the art, i.e., mercury. [...] I will only say that this fluid substance, with all its paradoxical qualities, really signifies the unconscious which has been projected into it. The "sea" is its static condition, the "fountain its activation, and the "process'' its transformation. [...]

spontaneity being the outcome of an uninhibited connection with the spring well of the unconscious, the source of imaginative symbolic activity, which in ordinary life is subordinated to the rigid dictates of the ego and hence 'normalized.' The image of the fountain in Pursewarden's 'Ideal Commonwealth,'[30] therefore, brings into fruitful conjunction two potent elements of apocryphal thought that developed side-by-side, Alchemy and Gnosticism, and two powerful thinkers in psychology, Freud[31] and Jung. This is the point that joins together the various strands that we have been tracing throughout this paper. The promise of the redemptive scheme is ultimately not for the characters in the novel, but for the artist whose redemption is oddly to go beyond the ego, to reach the unconscious source of his imaginative existence, to find him/herself a mere object, a natural effusion of the glorious city of light.

To return to my initial contention, the use of Gnosticism in Durrell's novel has always posed something of a problem for scholars. Durrell certainly gave the impression that its use was pervasive and yet an examination of the text yields only scattered references, but no sturdy support for such a claim. "If you wish to hide something," "hide it in the sun's

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> Although not expressly stated in the text, the gushing up and flowing back of the Mercurial Fountain within its basin completes the circle, and this is an essential characteristic of Mercurius because he is also the serpent that fertilizes, kills and devours itself and brings itself to birth again. We may mention in this connection that the circular sea with no outlet, which perpetually replenishes itself by means of a spring bubbling up in its centre, is to be found in Nicholas of Cusa as an allegory of God. (*Psychology of Transference* 47-8)

[30] Pursewarden's description of the 'Ideal Commonwealth' is in many ways presaged by an earlier passage describing Nessim's hallucinatory dreams:

> He could hear, like the distant reverberations of the city's memory, the voice of Plotinus speaking, not of flight away from intolerable temporal conditions but towards a new light, a new city of Light. "This is no journey for the feet, however. Look into yourself, withdraw into yourself and look." But this was the one act of which he now knew himself for ever incapable. (*Justine* 181)

This passage indeed anticipates Pursewarden's (showing Nessim as aware and yet incapable of following the redemptive path of the artist where Pursewarden leads) and at the same time confounds Philo and Plotinus; the quotation is from Plotinus' *Enneads* (First Ennead, Sixth Tractate, sections 8-9), where Plotinus (similar to Nicholas of Cusa above) also speaks of a fountain—'the Good' as "the Fountain at once and Principle of Beauty." However, Plotinus does not mention 'a city,' so Durrell obviously has confounded the two Alexandrian scholars, Plotinus and Philo.

Similarly, while Plotinus, as I said before, does mention a fountain, the "mercurial fountain" of the *Rosarium Philosophorum* and Jung's discussion of it certainly seem like a more appropriate association with the artist than Plotinus' fountain of 'the Good' (implicitly, of God). Discussions like this can take scholars far afield into esoteric studies, when the point is rather that Durrell, always keen to discover affinities in philosophical, religious, and mystical systems, recognizes in these more or less fortuitous coincidences the very essence and reason for their importance (their heraldic quality) since they provide his readers with layers upon layers of meaning.

[31] invoked through the mention of 'Joy'

eye" Darley states unwittingly near the end of the novel, borrowing an Arabic proverb (*Clea* 223). True to the esoteric nature of Gnosticism, Durrell chose to lay the traces of a Gnostic reading not so much in the substance (themes, incidents, words), but in the weft so-to-speak of his text: in the prominent, yet not directly registered, conditions of his complex authorial apparatus.

Ultimately, however, one must recognize in this elaborate endeavor a determined effort to question the status of the author as creator. By showing that the 'omniscient' solipsist who writes the text is always underwritten by an 'other' whose scheme exceeds his or her own, Durrell set out in his own fashion to pose the question "What is an author?" The purling fountain in the city of light persists as Durrell's horizon of expectation; but, there remains for us to discover whose voice we have been tracing in the labyrinth of the text—the Author's or the Demiurge's?

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