TIME

IN

THE ALEXANDRIA QUARTET

THE IMPLICATIONS OF TIME

IN

THE ALEXANDRIA QUARTET

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I

INTRODUCTION

This thesis attempts both to describe and to discuss the use of a concept fashionably designated "Time" as it appears in The Alexandria Quartet. It will be clear that its importance as an ingredient in the novel form is by no means realised exclusively by Durrell, and that his version of time is not necessarily more profound than that of scores of other modern artists, in all fields, music, painting, poetry, prose, sculpture. The attention afforded to time, and the number of studies which have appeared this century, in many disciplines, scientific, artistic, mathematical, philosophic, mystical, might lead one to the reasonable supposition that it is a typically modern preoccupation. But this is not to suggest that the twentieth century has any monopoly on the subject, although it could be argued that a certain sense of urgency which has beset the civilisation of the present day, and which is perhaps largely responsible for the current excursions back into, for instance, the thought of the Eastern Mystics and their accounts of reality and time, has caused an acute awareness of the multiplicity of facets and patterns which this phenomenon presents to us.

The choice of the title of this thesis is not intended to imply that Durrell has been chosen as a representative, or extraordinarily original, or even profound "thinker", in the sense

that he re-defines or sharpens our apprehension of time in its many modes. Neither does it argue that the sense of time is itself the major area of Durrell's concern in the Quartet. His use of the concept is not capable of being defined, as in a theorem, despite suspicions to the contrary which may arise from the ideas he discusses in the Note to Balthazar, except by a description of its functions.

This thesis works from the assumption that Durrell is, first and foremost, an artist - he might describe himself as a "poet" - and therefore deals in "ideas", which otherwise might seem to be abstract or scientific or philosophic, only as an artist absorbs and transmutes them in his work, that is, he directs them to ends other than their isolation, description and propagation. Sidney's classic description of the poet's intention in imitating as being "to delight and teach" assumes that the delightful medium through which the core of sound teaching is passed during the act of artistic creation, qualitatively changes the essential teaching, causing mere didacticism to be less arid, indeed, transforms Nature, its very substance - "Her world is brazen, the poets only deliver a golden". Through the artist Darley Durrell re-expresses a similar view:

> . . . . only there, in the silences of the painter or the writer can reality be reordered, reworked and made to show its significant side. Our common actions in reality are simply the sackcloth covering which

hides the cloth-of-gold - the meaning of the pattern.[1]

To assume that an element, such as time, can be readily isolated from the reworked reality of the artist without doing violence to the totality of his artifact, can be, as is generally acknowledged, an idle and distorting pursuit. This thesis must resort to such a practice at times, in the hope that by so doing it can better uncover and describe the process of integration of the part into the whole. But, because it is often impossible to do this, issues which do not immediately appear to be connected to the stated subject are discussed. It is, then, the contexts in which time appears which are important, rather than the dismembered concept itself.

It will seem that a study of this sort begs a number of vital literary questions, including that of the relative degree of indebtedness of Durrell's methods to those of Proust and Joyce, a question which Durrell himself raises, and the extent to which his treatment of the time mechanisms of the novel is original. To include a major discussion of this sort would, however, extend the bounds of the study to unmanageable proportions, and inaugurate a line of enquiry tangential to the main axis. The investigation of time is not intended to be comparative, but mention is made

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[1] Lawrence Durrell, Justine (London, 1964), p. 14. In subsequent references to the four volumes of the Quartet, only the initial letter of the title and the page number will be used.

of its use by other authors when it might illuminate the relationship of this element to Durrell's most central concerns, which I take to be literary expressions of the attempt to attain in life, through art, some measure of personal resolution in the midst of a world in which reality is seen to have a disconcerting habit of proving itself illusory, elusive, and unobtainable - perhaps the resolution meant by Durrell's phrase "the heraldic universe".

This approach must, therefore leave untouched interesting areas of speculation such as the literary derivation of Durrell's techniques with regard to time and narrative patterns, which could lead one back to Sterne and Richardson, or, logically, even to Homer.

four novels follow this pattern.

> The first three parts, however, are to be deployed spatially (hence the use of the word 'sibling' not 'sequel') and are not linked in a serial form. They interlap, interweave, in a purely spatial relation. Time is stayed. The fourth part alone will represent time and be a true sequel.
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> The subject-object relation is so important to relativity that I have tried to turn the novel through both subjective and objective modes. The third part, Mountolive, is a straight naturalistic novel in which the narrator of Justine and Balthazar becomes an object, i.e. a character.
>
> This is not Proustian or Joycean method - they illustrate Bergsonian 'Duration' in my opinion, not, 'Space-Time'. (B., p. 7)

It is clear that Durrell's preoccupation with "science", and his turning to it for a possible structural design, predates both Balthazar and the publication of Justine, the first of the tetralogy, in 1957. He affirmed, in answer to the question of an interviewer, that "I have been holding the form in my head".[2] Not only had he simply held the idea, but had discussed it at length in one of a series of lectures undertaken for the British Council in Argentina as far back as 1948. In this lecture, "Space Time and Poetry", a galaxy of distinguished names from the world

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[2] "Lawrence Durrell Answers a Few Questions", in Harry T. Moore, ed., The World of Lawrence Durrell, p. 159.

of science - Einstein, Rutherford, Planck, Newton, Freud, among others - is placed alongside the influential figures of modern literature - Proust, Gide, Eliot, Virginia Woolf, Aldous Huxley, Joyce, Rimbaud, Laforgue - in the general context of an account of the recent history of ideas in its relationship to contemporary literature:

> We have not far to go with the history of Joyce's Ulysses thought before we come to some new scientific ideas which have a direct bearing upon time, and which, I make bold to say, can be seen reflected in the new style of writing for which our age has become distinguished.[3]

He argues that new concepts of time and causality were joined together by Einstein in the theory of Relativity, "under the terms of which we were presented with a new kind of space and time".[4] The subsequent discussion of old and new methods of treating time leads to a statement concerning Einstein's achievement which is couched in terms remarkably similar to those used in the prefatory Note to Balthazar:

> Einstein, in order to give his new theory a shape, suddenly saw that the space and time ideas we were using were not flexible enough to fit the

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[3] Lawrence Durrell, A Key to Modern British Poetry (University of Oklahoma Press, 1964), pp. 24-25.

[4] Ibid., p. 25.

> picture. He suggested a marriage of the two into a four-dimensional volume which he called a 'continuum'. Time, then, was given a new role to play - it was not the old extended time of the materialists but a new time-space hybrid. Time and space, fixed together in this manner, gave one a completely new idea of what reality might be.[5]

He might as accurately have concluded that it provided the novelist with a possible structural method to enable the eternal reality of the artist to be approached and presented.

It is evident from this quotation that Durrell is giving expression in non-specialist language to ideas from the realm of pure science and mathematics, in terms which tend easily toward the dramatic - "suddenly" - and the metaphorical - "a new role to play". The use of the word "volume", in what can hardly be a technical scientific sense, also implies the presence of a literary mind. In fact, the whole lecture is presented in the familiar manner of the story-teller, not omitting direct appeals to the audience. The transmutation of the abstract terms of science into language immediately accessible to the senses is everywhere apparent:

> Time has become a thick opaque medium, welded to space - no longer the quickly flowing river of the Christian hymns, moving from here to there along

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[5] Ibid., p. 28.

> a marked series of stages. But an always-present yet always recurring thing.[6]

His interpretation of ideas is given in language that points to a literary, poetic ambience, appropriate to his views upon "The Semantic Disturbance"[7], caused, he says, by the impingement of modern science upon thought. Thus a quotation from T. S. Eliot's Burnt Norton is aptly used to illustrate the idea of relativity as it is incorporated into modern literature, and as an example of the kind of language which Durrell sees as having been forged to meet the exigencies of the new philosophic and scientific speculation:

> Time present and time past
> Are both perhaps present in time future,
> And time future contained in time past.
> If all time is eternally present
> All time is unredeemable.[8]

The treatment of time in these lines is, in many ways, a perfect example of the time conditions which govern the structure of The Alexandria Quartet. The assimilation of the idea into the very nature of the poetry gives it a life independent of what we might term the scientific theory. That Durrell sees these lines as being an expression of relativistic time is significant because it indicates the method by which he transforms the idea into art, perhaps what he means by the reworking of reality so that it can

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[6] Ibid., p. 31.

[7] Ibid., p. 39.

[8] Ibid., p. 38.

be "made to show its significant side". (J., p. 14) His comment following the quotation is revealing of his attitude to the subject:

> . . . . I think in the light of what we know about physics we can see - those of us who have not the sensibility or experience to understand straight off - the sort of thing the poet is getting after, the sort of time he is trying to convey.[9]

His art, as he might claim is also true of Eliot's, is not to demonstrate relativity, but the latter is used that it might lead to an understanding of the basic shape of the work of art.

Durrell's interest in relativity is clearly focussed upon its use and effect, the imaginative areas opened by the theory. It is not surprising, therefore, to find mentioned in this lecture a third and intermediary group of names, which are those of the philosophers of science and popularisers of ideas whose language is largely imaginative and metaphorical, rather than precisely descriptive. They are writers widely separated in historical time, from Giordano Bruno to Francis J. Mott, H. V. Routh and Sir James Jeans. Bruno's description of time is used to demonstrate a remarkable similarity to the twentieth century notions arising supposedly from the impact of relativity:

> In every point of duration is beginning without end and end without beginning. It is

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[9] Ibid., p. 38.

> the centre of two infinities. Therefore the whole of duration is one infinite instant, both beginning and end, as immeasurable space is an infinite minimum or centre.[10]

Like his character Darley - "all ideas seem equally good to me . . . . Does it matter whether they are objectively right or wrong?", (J., p. 36) - Durrell is not concerned to judge the validity of the ideas he assimilates, nor even the accuracy with which his versions of them correspond to the exact scientific conceptions,[11] but regards them according to their usefulness to his artistic consciousness.[12]

Elsewhere he joins relativity, sometimes used "in a fuzzy sense to refer to all of modern physics"[13] to ideas even

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[10] Ibid., p. 35.

[11] If, as he claims in A Key to Modern British Poetry, p. 25, "Science . . . . is the art of imaginative arrangement", then the facts upon which it is based, or which it employs, have very little value in themselves, even for the scientist, and the form in which they are arranged becomes all-important, thus denying, in effect, that the final truth can rest in anything other than structure.

[12] For the same reasons Georg Groddeck's imaginative, rather than scientific, account of sexual psychology in The Book of the It finds great favour with Durrell, and becomes a major influence on the conception of the Quartet.

[13] Alfred M. Bork, "Durrell and Relativity", Centennial Review of Arts and Science, VII (1963), p. 193.

further afield in history, and makes clear his reasons for so doing:

> After Proust the novelist becomes a ruminant when he isn't a plain photographer; I wondered if we couldn't get out of the cyclic memory-groove and recapture the act prime by applying more modern cosmological ideas. After all, science is now beginning to pose really religious questions to itself. We are still just moving up to the point where Patanjali's metaphysics begin; another two thousand years . . . But I wonder if there is going to be time? It is maddening, though, to feel that Lao-tzu and Einstein are within hailing distance. What's wrong with us? Why can't we make the bridge?[14]

In this statement Durrell handles, in an abbreviated, conversational manner, several concepts which begin to fill out his more fundamental concern with time, in which his interest in relativity takes its place. Firstly, however, attention should be drawn to the rather misleading suggestion of the first sentence that new cosmological ideas could be applied to the novel. Taken literally, it is misleading in the same fashion as his claim in the Note to Balthazar, previously quoted, that the Quartet is "based on the relativity proposition". Yet if one looks for signs of this supposed relativity basis in the Quartet, it becomes clear that the relationship is not nearly so direct as Durrell's tone would tend to indicate, and that

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[14] Lawrence Durrell, "The Kneller Tape (Hamburg)", in Harry T. Moore, ed., The World of Lawrence Durrell, p. 167.

this theory has undergone extensive transmutation to take its place in a wider scheme of time and space, which removes it from the realm of pure theory. The technique of the novelist is his foremost thought, as the first sentence also indicates, and it is this which he wishes to consider against a composite background of time, in an artistic rather than a scientific sense, one element of which, admittedly a major one, is the metaphor of relativity. To employ a characteristic expression of Durrell, the "relativity proposition" provides a "spring-board" of metaphor from which to leap into the business of novel structure, primarily with regard to the milieu of time, in which the novel form habitually moves as if in response to its inherent nature. In the brief space of this quotation his sensitivity to time scales and patterns emerges. The most modern theory is thought of as lying somewhere astern of Patanjali's much older metaphysics, and there is the surprising, enigmatic "two thousand years . . . .", giving hints of a stranger form of time measurement. When he places Lao-tzu and Einstein together, the strict import of their theories is probably intended to be secondary to the sense of some time scale and historical pattern implied by their mention in the same breath, and the feeling conveyed by the image of the bridge. This bridge Durrell attempts to make after a fashion, but for his use as an artist, not as a philosopher.

The apparent certainty, then, with which Durrell announces his use of relativity is misleading unless taken in the larger

context of his structural intentions with regard to time, but this use has, nevertheless, drawn critical fire, and become, by circuitous reasoning and implication, a ground upon which to make a more general adverse criticism of the Quartet.

B. Further Implications

If the critics are to wage war over Lawrence Durrell, the field of their preliminary skirmishes might be as well located in the question of relativity as any other, for it presents, at least seemingly, a tangible problem, an area from which to launch argued attack and defence into the more significant problems to which his art, especially the Quartet, gives rise. These problems can be portentous and extend far beyond the merely qualitative assessment of his achievement. They are commonly expressed in the most dramatic manner, with the enlarged spectres of Proust and Joyce and what their work means to the genre, insistently imprinted on the backdrop. For the critic engaged in these larger, more momentous speculations, some attention must be afforded to the implications of Durrell's work for the development of the novel in the full view of its recent history. One critic bases her conclusions squarely on the matter of his treatment of time:

> Durrell's manner of staying time is not a mere tour de force. In a scientific age that knows very little about science, the application to fiction of a theory as occult as relativity has

> strong appeal. To see it in action is to understand its meaning and inevitability. After Durrell's revelations, the reader recognises the validity of the layered "sliding panel" view of life. It is impossible after such an exposure to see how he can be satisfied with anything less. And if he cannot, then Durrell's apex is an epitaph.[15]

Another critic, in considering that Beckett and Durrell represent "the horns of a dilemma that everyone faces today",[16] calls Durrell

> . . . . a genuine poet who had survived morally and literarily the cultural disasters that had typically shattered his post-Proustian, post-Joycean generation . . . . a "waste-land" intellectual who had come through. He had found a way, in the intervening decades, to cope with the disintegration that had been his legacy and to convey a tone that was justifiably affirmative.[17]

This "tone" which Sykes observes is seen as the diametric opposite to a stark, pessimistic quality in the writing of Beckett; it is, to paraphrase, a life-affirming quality in Durrell epitomised by the symbol of the sun which Sykes employs in the title of his

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[15] Nancy Sullivan, "Lawrence Durrell's Epitaph for the Novel", The Personalist, XLIV (Winter, 1963), p. 88.

[16] Gerald Sykes, "One Vote for the Sun", in Harry T. Moore, ed., The World of Lawrence Durrell, p. 146.

[17] Ibid., p. 147.

article.[18] This affirmative quality naturally stands in intimate relationship to Durrell's much-discussed style, to which Sykes indirectly refers when he offers the conclusion that

> He has therefore in the Quartet broken with all "tough-minded" schools of fiction, such as the social determinist, the psychoanalytic, the existentialist, and put his emphasis, not upon the harsh realities of our day, but upon the "mythopoeic reference which underlies fact" . . . . Again and again he reminds us ingeniously of the poetry we missed while we were being hardheaded, factual, and rough on any form of "escapism".[19]

A consensus of critical opinion makes it overwhelmingly clear that the style of the Quartet constitutes the major point of contention. For some it bespeaks a new and valuable affirmation, a new sense of direction; for others it is a regrettable puerile decadence which makes Durrell, in view of the popularity of the Quartet, look like a regressive influence on present day culture. It is not, of course, a very large step from this to the question of Durrell's moral responsibility, perhaps the most daunting and

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[18] There is support for Sykes' opinions in "The Kneller Tape (Hamburg)", in Harry T. Moore, ed., The World of Lawrence Durrell, pp. 167-168, when Durrell agrees with the suggestion that the Quartet is, in an important sense, "a four-part masque", the lesson of which he summarises in the epigram "You must become a Knowbody before you can become a Sunbody".

[19] Gerald Sykes, "One Vote for the Sun", in Harry T. Moore, ed., The World of Lawrence Durrell, pp. 152-153.

grandiose issue with which a writer can be saddled by his judges, and one to which Durrell does not take kindly, if one is to credit his comments published recently in the appropriately entitled Writer's Dilemma. He is unwilling to be the kind of artist who will

> add his mite to the flood of opinionation which is slopping over the world, obscuring the inner world of values which once he was supposed to sift within himself before expressing his findings in a work of art - poems, paintings, plays.[20]

This position adopted by Durrell is, naturally enough, relevant to the Quartet also, in which Bonamy Dobrée, in a typical reaction against the attitude, finds the author to be irresponsible and bent on the expression of a situation of total amorality, whilst at the same time acknowledging the richness of the tapestry woven by Durrell's prose. From the standpoint of a moral concern, interpreted apparently in a strictly orthodox manner, he asks with some bewilderment

> For whom then in these volumes can we feel admiration even respect? Which of these people has any trace of nobility, even of that self-discipline without which the bonds of society are loosed?[21]

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[20] Lawrence Durrell, "No Clue to Living", The Writer's Dilemma (London, 1961), p. 17.

[21] Bonamy Dobrée, "Durrell's Alexandrian Series", in Harry T. Moore, ed., The World of Lawrence Durrell, pp. 199-200.

The comfort to be derived from the answer he provides to this question is very limited. In the same vein John C. Kelly mentions the "damnable ethics" of the Quartet's characters, but seeks to reassure the Christian reader that all is not as bad as it might seem at first acquaintance:

> He has however made it possible for the Christian reader to imagine how a pagan, amoral libertinism is profoundly unsatisfactory even from a human point of view. The final state of Mr Durrell's characters varies then from a discredited and disoriented bewilderment to being on the verge of turning away from amorality. It is not much but it is something.[22]

This is making the best of the situation the critic finds himself forced to adopt, which can only provide a distorted image of the Quartet, containing as it does a great deal directly inimical to the rigid precepts assumed by Kelly in his readers. The necessary estrangement between this species of moral approach and Durrell's intentions makes it difficult to consider with any sympathy the kind of "message" (a word used with reservations) with which Durrell is attempting to confront the reader, because the "message" stems from - in fact, is indivisible from - the artistic imagination and consciousness. Of this message more will be said at a later stage in the discussion when its connection with the philosophy of time will be outlined. For the moment it remains to explain

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[22] John C. Kelly, "Lawrence Durrell: The Alexandria Quartet", Studies, LII (Spring, 1963), p. 53.

the presence of the foregoing discussion, so seemingly irrelevant to relativity.

It may seem strange that the question of Durrell's style should lead in this direction, because style, as a facet of any author's work, is customarily the most easily isolated factor, and is often capable of being assessed in purely aesthetic terms. The connection between Durrell's avowedly extravagant, baroque style and the charge of moral decadence in the Quartet, however, will be easily appreciated with little more discussion. For Durrell, more than most literary artists, style is indivisible from both the form of the novel, and what might be described, for present convenience, as its meaning. In fact, the question of the novelist's style constitutes a portion of the subject matter of the Quartet. This meaning is arrived at partly through the attempt to recapture with the aid of memory, the full force, flavour, and significance of certain moments in time. Throughout the Quartet there is a strongly developed feeling of the constant dichotomy between the world and experience, as it is gripped and controlled by manifold systems of time, and the means the artist is forced to employ to recapture its quality and significance - florid constructions of words. It is a feeling of the "indifference of the natural world to the constructions of art" (J., p. 13) which precipitates the artist's elaborate effort. Darley, the artist, who is beginning to share this indifference at the opening of Justine, is nevertheless acutely conscious of his rôle as one

who must rescue truth from time with the inadequate means of words:

> I return 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 . . . . (J., p. 11)

At the beginning of the following volume he is again meditating upon this problem:

> The city, half-imagined (yet wholly real),
> begins and ends in us, roots lodged in our
> memory. Why must I return to it night after night,
> writing here by the fire of carob-wood while
> the Aegean wind clutches at this island house,
> clutching and releasing it, bending back the
> cypresses like bows? Have I not said enough about
> Alexandria? Am I to be reinfected once more by the
> dream of it and the memory of its inhabitants?
> Dreams I had thought so safely locked up on paper,
> confided to the strong rooms of the memory! You
> will think I am indulging myself. It is not so. (B., p. 11)

The charge of indulgence, which Durrell, in the person of Darley here, anticipates, gives rise, in the manner I have attempted to indicate, to a questioning of his moral integrity. Steiner takes up cudgels on Durrell's behalf over the issue, and in so doing explains the tight interrelationship of form and style:

> This mystique of sensual insight encompasses
> more than individual identity. Our entire
> perception of reality depends upon similar
> illuminations (Joyce called them "epiphanies").
> It is by accumulating these moments of vision,

> touch by exact touch, that we arrive at a grasp of the surrounding world - in this instance, at a true image of Alexandria. The long, glittering arabesques of adjectives with which Durrell surrounds objects are no mere verbal acrobatics. They are successive assaults upon the inner mystery of things, attempts often exasperated and desperate to trap reality within a mesh of precise words.[23]

Viewing Durrell's style as an entity, separate in itself, it is possible to agree with the vast majority (if not all) critics and readers, that it is exotic, highly wrought and dense with a kind of metaphor intended to evoke brilliantly and sensually the physical, and by extension, spiritual features of Alexandria. Critics who attest to this can be chosen almost at random - it has become one of the commonplace points of departure for Durrell criticism. Because the style is so disturbing, some response, whether excuse, condemnation or admiration, qualified or otherwise, seems usually to be found necessary:

> This writing of his is splendid, even when the pedal is down, because contemporary English prose has either - in one of Durrell's phrases - got a hot potato in its mouth or has been nibbled close by the bleak teeth of modern criticism. In either case it looks like rain. The writer whose subject is illusion - Mr Durrell's - is entitled

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[23] George Steiner, "Lawrence Durrell: The Baroque Novel", in Harry T. Moore, ed., The World of Lawrence Durrell, p. 18.

to colour, image and fantasy . . . .[24]

Equally, and this is more significant, one can find in the Quartet itself examples of Durrell's own awareness of the character of his prose, expressed through the two major novelist figures, Pursewarden and Darley. The typical response of Darley, narrator of the first two volumes, to his awareness of the shifting, mirage-like nature of reality, is to attempt to pin down, to record with finality in words the essence of the major "character" itself - the city. In the very act of attempting to record a specific scene or moment, and thus to rescue it from the flux of time, one part of his mind is aware of the futility of his enterprise and the inadequacy of the tools he employs to encompass it:

> Dinghies racing for home moved about the floor
> of the inner harbour, scuttling in and out
> among the ships like mice among the great boots
> of primative cottagers. The sprouting tiers of
> guns on the Jean Bart moved slowly - tilted -
> and then settled back into brooding stillness,
> aimed at the rosy heart of the city whose
> highest minarets still gleamed gold in the
> last rays of the sunset. The flocks of spring
> pigeons glittered like confetti as they turned
> their wings to the light. (Fine writing!) (B., p. 37)

The same restless, anxious quality in the play of words makes

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[24] V. S. Pritchett, The Working Novelist (London, 1965), p. 30.

itself felt both in Darley's description of his situation at the time of his writing, and in his attempt to capture another sense of place in retrospect. The time difference between the two scenes, in a chronological sense, has been banished and the feeling of anguish, which always subtly informs the passage of time, has been transferred to the scene in question. In the passage quoted earlier (p. 20) when Darley is in the act of remembering the city, the wind "clutches" at his island refuge, whilst in the passage above (p. 22), with a heightened impression of fantasy and unreality, the small ships are seen as "mice" avoiding gigantic crushing boots. Even the visual intensity of the language does not dispel the impression that the scenes he describes are not brought finally to an emotional equilibrium. The guns of the battleship settle back only into "brooding stillness", with ominous implications for the future.

Implicit in Durrell's magnificent confections of images is a profound sense of despair, mirrored chiefly in Darley's attempts to bring reality to rest in words, which arises from the desire to neutralise the effects of the time element in the relativistic structure of nature and experience. Darley finds this same problem also when trying to express something which is at rest:

> I am hunting for metaphors which might convey something of the piercing happiness too seldom granted to those who love; but words, which were first invented against despair, are too crude to

> mirror the properties of something so profoundly at peace with itself. Words are the mirrors of our discontents merely; they contain all the huge unhatched eggs of the world's sorrows. (C., p. 222)

Thus Durrell's controversial style, as he is always aware, is an outcome of his intent to express a satisfactory formula, in an imaginative and poetic interpretation of the word, which will reflect the relativistic structure of experience. This, of course, clearly implies the form of the Quartet. These connections have to be made because indulgence in the critical vice of analysis leads often to an isolation of the elements, which, necessarily, when standing apart, will appear to be no more than appendages. It is commonly recognised that style and form in the works of Beckett, who is also concerned with the question of the discrete personality, the problem of knowledge, and time, imply and illustrate the meaning, but because Durrell's style represents the other polarity (and also an optimistic answer to those problems, rather than Beckett's nihilistic response to absurdity) the recognition in his case is less easily afforded. Beckett's progressive simplification towards the point of impotence and silence reduces style and structure to one point in which they are readily apprehended, whereas Durrell, who seems to emphasise the vitality and richness of the universe, seems to offer a diversity in which the strict unity of style and structure could be regarded as dissipated, because it is less easily observed.

Critical treatment of the relativity proposition leads often to a discrediting of the form of the Quartet, with precisely the same result as that which ensues from the isolated treatment of the style - a failure to see its relationship to the meaning. Ironically many critics insist on judging its validity as if it were a purely literal statement, with the result that when the form is measured against such a yardstick it is found not to comply, and the triple interdependency of form, style and meaning is destroyed. Metaphor mistaken for theory produces the following critical assessment:

> Durrell's theorizing, like his prose, seems excessively elaborate decoration contrived simply to disguise or ennoble what is essentially a startling series of tricks and reversals. Durrell has really written "adult" thrillers in the exotic setting of a corrupt Alexandria. But sometimes I wonder. Is the whole Alexandria Quartet really an elaborate hoax, calculated to satirize the lavish praise that all the overblown prose and the pompous theorizing has received? This seems to me barely possible, though unlikely. If so, if Durrell is really deliberately overdecorating his thrillers to spoof a public concerned with art, sensitivity, culture, and fine writing, I applaud his achievement. He has then fooled me too.[25]

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[25] James Gindin, Postwar British Fiction (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1962), pp. 221-222. This sneer does not, however, match that of Martin Green, "A Minority Report", in Harry T. Moore, The World of Lawrence Durrell, pp. 129-145, who appears

In an informal interview Durrell explained briefly the relationship between what Gindin regards as theory and the Quartet:

> I am simply using the continuum as one of the most important cosmological formulations of the day to do a poetic dance upon as it were.[26]

More explicitly in another interview Durrell modifies the word "continuum" to leave no doubt that it is being employed in a figurative sense as one feature in some larger intention:

> I don't pretend that what I'm doing is a continuum exactly. What I'm saying is that Mercator's projection is not a sphere but it does give you a very good impression of what a sphere is like . . . . I'm trying to give you stereoscopic narrative with stereophonic personality.[27]

Alfred Bork, in an article not intended as a literary critique, but as an explanation of the use of relativity in the Quartet, recognises that Durrell does not use the theory in any

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to suffer physical distress - "sickening for a bad cold" - whilst sharing with Dr. Leavis the feeling that Durrell is anathema, and administring a deserved "public denunciation", apparently on account of Durrell's upbringing, "culturally retarded mind", and lack of political and social consciousness.

[26] Kenneth Young, "A Dialogue with Durrell", Encounter, XIII (December, 1959), p. 64.

[27] "Lawrence Durrell", in Writers at Work, introduced by Van Wyck Brooks (2nd series; New York, 1965), p. 278.

technical or any precise manner, but suggests a kind of symbolic use of certain features of the theory such as the word and number "four", highly significant in the mathematical expression of relativity, which indicates that relativity takes its place in the other symbols which constitute Durrell's own poetic cosmology - the "heraldic universe" - and is thus the most contemporary feature in a series of symbols which derive from a recondite antiquity. Bork further suggests that since the theory is being used for the purpose of producing art, the word "relativistic" must not be held to its rigid scientific connotation:

> Other events are also seen from varying points of view. Pursewarden's death is attributed both to his love of his sister and to his error in judgement concerning the political plot. Darley describes Da Capo's "death" in detail, but later we learn that the affair was carefully staged and he is actually still alive. Thus the subject-object relationship in the novels is a "relativistic" one but not in the precise sense of the theory of relativity.[28]

Thus, from a non-literary viewpoint, it can be seen that the theory is not the same as its application in the terms of a totally different discipline, and that it sets up reverberations throughout the Quartet and possesses continued relevance to the subject-object mode, which is the predominant feature conditioning

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[28] Alfred M. Bork, "Durrell and Relativity", Centennial Review of Arts and Science, p. 199.

the novels. More significant and interesting speculations result from Edel's view of the space-time relationship as extrinsic, which is not, however, to give it summary dismissal:

> The petty pedantries of the Quartet, the notes after the manner of Eliot in The Waste Land, the pretence of biographical scholarship, the lofty talk of relativity and time and space, are so much critical window-dressing in this series of novels, along with the epigraphs from de Sade and Freud. They amuse; they serve an atmospheric function for Darley, who seeks to "rebuild" Alexandria in his brain. We note that the academic apparatus is appended only to the subjective movements.[29]

This is a strangely ambivalent statement in that, on the one hand, relativity is seen as a pedantry and ascribed its undeniable rôle as "window-dressing" and an atmospheric prop, and on the other, no conclusion or suggestion is drawn from the observation made in the last sentence. But he also notes, and again fails to draw a conclusion, the incident in which Clea smacks Darley across the mouth in response to his announced intention of writing a book of criticism. Since both Justine and Balthazar are written, according to the structure of the Quartet, by Darley, the Note to Balthazar might suggest an attempt on the part of Durrell, parallel to that of Darley, to surprise and capture a description

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[29] Leon Edel, The Modern Psychological Novel (New York, 1964), p. 187.

of reality by metaphor. Given Durrell's customary ingenuity, and the central concern of the Quartet with the full education of the artist, it is partly credible that such theories become expendable for both artists, Darley and Durrell, again in accordance with Durrell's conviction that words and metaphors become useless for both reader and artist after they have been understood. In view of the partial nature of knowledge for the individual, bound to his inevitably subjective vision - facts which the Quartet demonstrates - not only the novelists within the novels but Durrell himself are also limited to the use of "academic apparatus" on occasions. More simply expressed, the Quartet is a constantly reiterated warning against taking statements in an absolute sense at their face value.

One critic, confining his remarks to the ground enclosed by the novels themselves, argues that they represent a progressive disillusionment with passion of various kinds and with esoteric and unduly complicated theories, one of which is that of novel writing, and then cautions against criticism of Durrell's theories on the strength of their face-value meaning:

> Darley in Clea, apparently liberated from his preoccupations with the relationship between life and art, has the last word and it is deflating. Methods are not as grandiose as they seem, people not as big as they look and novel writing, Darley finds, when all is said and done begins with the words "Once upon a time".[30]

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[30] John C. Kelly, "Lawrence Durrell: The Alexandria Quartet", Studies, p. 68.

The process of healthy disillusionment is brought about by the ability to laugh at oneself, as Pursewarden argues, and as the insistence on laughter throughout Clea indicates. We are reminded that Durrell's "paper construct" is only "a toy". Art, claims Durrell, tends not only towards its self-realisation in terms of an artifact, but, at its best, spills over into the lives of the artist and his reader alike to improve the quality and intensity of their living. Thus the "paper construct" is not an end in itself only, but a beginning also. "I find art easy. I find life difficult"[31] he said in explaining his theory of the artist.

The careful, formal structure of the Quartet brings one to the realisation that the relativity pronouncement is a metaphor which is to be modified for the reader also, and understood in the larger context of the novelist's intentions. So is the form itself which also utilises the concept of time.

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[31] "Lawrence Durrell", in Writers at Work, p. 282.

III

TIME AND STRUCTURE

"The most interesting thing about it for me is the form"[1] said Durrell, à propos of the Quartet, and many of his critics and commentators are to be found echoing the same sentiment. But this interest, at least as Durrell envisages it, should not be taken to imply the exclusion of the ideas and feelings for which the form is the appropriate vehicle. The momentarily convenient distinction between these two elements is but a crude way, in itself, of isolating the form for critical observation, because, just as surely as in Eliot's Four Quartets, which interests Durrell considerably, it is itself a crucial part of the meaning of the work. In common with many, if not all literary artists, Durrell discourses upon a definite, limited number of favourite ideas and preoccupations, most of which, as a large proportion of his critics have noted, fall within the spectrum of Symbolism, and are not, therefore, radically new or startling. These ideas can be traced in their embryonic forms throughout Durrell's serious literary output, and arguably find their most satisfactory mode of expression in the Quartet. In the work written prior to the Quartet

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[1] "Lawrence Durrell", in Writers at Work, p. 282.

these ideas remain largely unrealised in their full potential because the question of a suitable form has not been given a viable answer. This answer seems to lie in the creation of a series of novels which interrelate in a special and strictly defined manner, which is, of course, brought about in the Quartet. When Durrell does achieve the satisfactory form - it is probably not too extreme to call it a formula - it is through the solution to the problem of time in the novel. This involves techniques for dealing with succession, causality and simultaneity, and the techniques, when evolved, enable him to free himself from the cramping dictates of conventional narrative and the concept of the discrete, stable personality, thereby releasing a whole new area of subject matter for the novels themselves. The problems which he posed for himself became problems, in various stages of solution, for the artists within the novels. The structure of the Quartet can be seen as Durrell's formal response to, and recognition of, the insurmountable limitations of the single subjective view bound in by the dimension of time, to which Eliot gives terse and lucid expression:

> There is, it seems to us,
> At best, only a limited value
> In the knowledge derived from experience.
> The knowledge imposes the pattern, and falsifies,
> For the pattern is new in every moment
> And every moment is a new and shocking
> Valuation of all we have been. We are only undeceived

Of that which, deceiving, could no longer harm.[2]

Since the patterns and valuations are both new and endless in any given moment, the artist's attempt to recapture and express these can only be possible when he destroys or disrupts in the form of his work the common illusion of time as a succession of moments, linked by some principle of causality, which move from some point we call past to some other point we call future. In order to do this, the form of the novel must first provide that the narrator, whether he be the author or a character or an observer, has a personal time scale different from that of the novel's course of action, which will serve to provide a position of comparison and an angle which will permit him to disrupt a sequence of events located in the past.

Experimenting with the possibilities inherent in the dislocation of a conventional time sequence, Durrell's earliest serious novel, The Black Book, the first to be published under his own name rather than the pseudonym "Charles Norden", furnishes his narrator with a locus and a position in time different from that of the main scene of the novel. Not surprisingly the narrator is to be found on a Greek island from which position he remembers another time and another place:

> Do not ask me why, at this time, on a remote Greek headland in a storm, I should choose, for my first

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[2] T. S. Eliot, Four Quartets (New York, 1963), p. 23.

> real book, a theater which is not Mediterranean. It is part of us here, in the four damp walls of a damp house under an enormous wind, under the sabres of rain.[3]

The disintegration of a straightforward time scale is further established by the use made of Gregory's diary. This is, in a sense, an assessment of a past brought up to an historic present when the narrator reads it, yet the account he is reading is also in the historic present, that is, in fact, has its only real existence in the narrator's imagination at the time of his own writing. Looked at schematically, the length of time during which the narrator's imagination is at work is fragmented, pierced to reveal a number of sub-strata of other time scales so that no single one can be said to hold or enclose the action of the novel as a whole. It can perhaps be best explained by the use of a characteristic Durrellian concept of the prism. Time is refracted like light, and thereby broken into a number of component parts which, like the colours which compose white light, assume a quality of their own independent of their function as parts of the whole. The complication, or disintegration of composite time, follows a pattern of infinite regression, as even the characters introduce new time possibilities by their acts of retrospection and their diaries and their habit of dreaming back to past occasions. The reordering of time, therefore, allows of several views of the same characters so

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[3] Lawrence Durrell, The Black Book (New York, 1963), p. 23.

multiplying , theoretically to infinity, the chances of valuations and patterns arising from the limitations imposed by necessity on the knowledge of any individual personality. Thus The Black Book, by groping towards a new structure based on a fragmented time sequence, opens the possibilities of prismatic views of personality to be explored more fully in the Quartet. The reordering of time in this manner places so much emphasis upon the imagination and the memory that the author is further exonerated from the need to create an illusion of realism which would make his time sequence strictly credible. The potentialities, only half-realised, but no less exciting, crowd in upon the author in the person of the narrator:

> The truth is that I am writing my first book. It is difficult because everything must be included: a kind of spiritual itinerary which will establish the novel once and for all as a mode which is already past its senium. I tell myself continually that this must be something without beginning, something which will never end, but conclude only when it has reached its own genesis again: very well, a piece of literary perpetual motion, balanced on a hair, maintaining its own precarious equilibrium between life and heraldry.[4]

Durrell's enthusiasm for what he felt he had achieved in The Black Book finds an equally enthusiastic echo in Henry Miller, as their correspondence in March of 1937 indicates. Both in the

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[4] Ibid., p. 69.

novel and when writing about it, Durrell seems to be over-dramatic, and thus overstates his aims and ideas which fall out in something of a jumble, but despite the enthusiasm and tendency to claims in excess of the facts, he was strongly aware that this was only a beginning. It is especially clear, looking back to The Black Book from the vantage point provided by the Quartet, that Durrell's ideas on both style and form were only partially unfurled in the earlier work, although the style of this is vastly over-developed, inasmuch as it is too frenetic. The difficulty arises from the fact Durrell mentions, that "everything must be included". In order to do this, and to continue the reduction and division of time, it would be necessary to produce more than one volume so that the prismatic view of character might be employed to greater artistic effect. The Black Book is so tightly packed with material and ideas capable of greater expansion, that Durrell's concern with the "heraldic universe" remains almost totally latent, and where it does occur gives the impression of being excessively forced by the prose. It is evident from the Quartet that the ability to possess the heraldic universe arises from a wisdom born of a certain exhaustion of experience which the canvass of The Black Book was too narrow to encompass. Of this Durrell must have been at least partly aware when he wrote

> I have planned AN AGON, A PATHOS, AN ANAGNORISIS. If I write them they should be The Black Book, The Book of Miracles, The Book of the Dead. Perhaps

I shan't write them.[5]

Durrell's need for an elaborate formal structure and the reworking of time is underlined by the difficulties he seems to have encountered in The Dark Labyrinth in which he manipulates characters who are confined to the conventional time sequence imposed by the presence of an omniscient narrator. Admittedly a much slighter work than The Black Book in its scope and intention, it exhibits nonetheless all Durrell's major preoccupations which are displayed in a perfunctory manner because of the dictates of the conventional structure employed. From time to time the author finds it necessary to insert into the narrative conclusions which we as readers are intended to draw, but which are extraneous because they are not worked into the fabric of the novel, as they were later to be in the Quartet. The Trumans, who emerge from the labyrinth onto a high isolated plateau, the roof of the world, have symbolically endured a spiritual ordeal and are rewarded with the purity of a timeless existence in which even the processes of physical ageing appear to be transcended. The formal pattern alone is not sufficient to carry the burden of the symbolic implications so the author finds himself overtly pointing the message:

> Their function became more absolutely defined by the work demanded by the season. Yet there was no sense of calendar time left in either of them. They gathered the barley and the wild corn;

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[5] Lawrence Durrell, in George Wickes, ed., Lawrence Durrell and Henry Miller A Private Correspondence (New York, 1964), p. 83.

> they gathered the burst vessels of fig from the trees, full of the cloying richness of summer.[6]

Lacking the space and the time, the structure takes on the appearance of a shorthand version of Durrell's ideas imposed upon a straightforward narrative adventure, in which each of the characters has to be looked at in turn so that the reader will know what each is doing during the unfolding of the sequence. Time motifs are to be found thrust unceremoniously into the narrative to indicate the existence of other time scales, which would be much better done by making the multiplicity of time systems a basis for the structure itself, as in the Quartet. For example, when Graecen is lost in the labyrinth, part of the headlong narrative process runs as follows:

> It was hopeless. Somewhere they had forded a river, a long time ago. He looked at his watch and found that it had stopped. What was to be done? Graecen felt the blood freeze in his veins as he got slowly to his feet and walked about the cavern . . . .[7]

There is also the sheer technical awkwardness of disposing of characters who are no longer required for the central idea of the Trumans' achievement of a state outside time and the physical decay which is always attendant upon it. Durrell himself does not seem to have been unduly hopeful about the artistic success of

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[6] Lawrence Durrell, The Dark Labyrinth (New York, 1963), p. 232.

[7] Ibid., p. 153.

this novel, nor did he consider that it solved any formal problems for him:

> I have deliberately chosen that most exasperating of forms, the situation novel, in which to write it. I wonder what you'd think of it. I knocked it off in a month in order to hold my depression at bay.[8]

The novel is relevant to this study only inasmuch as it illustrates Durrell's need for a form which directly incorporated his ideas about time, rather than the random, and somewhat superficial agglomeration of time motifs. In the structure of the Quartet itself, however, there is room also for the time motif where it fulfills its proper function of deepening the reader's awareness of the author's intentions. There they create an ambience which is essential to the feeling of exhaustion and urgency which exist side by side.

It is not surprising, then, that Durrell emphasises the importance of The Black Book in which he first heard the sound of his own voice.[9] The Quartet manages to incorporate the modes of both of the novels discussed, if the form of Mountolive can be taken as a vague approximation to that of The Dark Labyrinth, but it is not a crude juxtapositioning of them, rather an amalgamation into a larger scheme based upon Durrell's developed sense of time.

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[8] Lawrence Durrell, A Private Correspondence, p. 201.

[9] Lawrence Durrell in the Preface to The Black Book, p. 13.

He seems to be quite accurate critically when he considers that The Black Book is the most crucial early document in an elucidation of the structure of the Quartet:

> I think The Black Book, in which I struck oil for the first time, might suggest a confused sort of sketch for the present Alexandria Quartet.[10]

He seems, however, to have been less exact and less clear in his private opinions concerning his use of time prior to the completion of The Black Book, although the tone, in his understandable exuberance, is more emphatic:

> What I propose to do, with all deadly solemnity, is to create my HERALDIC UNIVERSE quite alone. The foundation is being quietly laid. I AM SLOWLY BUT VERY CAREFULLY AND WITHOUT CONSCIOUS THOUGHT DESTROYING TIME. I have discovered that the idea of duration is false. We have invented it as a philosophic jack up to the idea of physical disintegration. THERE IS ONLY SPACE. A solid object has only three dimensions. Time, that old appendix, I've lopped off. So it needs a new attitude. An attitude without memory. A spatial existence in terms of the paper I'm writing on now at this moment.[11]

The time which Durrell claims to be destroying seems to require considerable modification because his claim makes no sense

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[10] Kenneth Young, "Dialogue with Durrell", Encounter, p. 67.

[11] Lawrence Durrell, A Private Correspondence, p. 19.

of the structure of The Black Book if we are to understand time as the same fourth dimension on which he discourses in the Note to Balthazar. If the opinion mentioned earlier is valid, that Durrell is refracting time, in its common connotation of a causal sequence of moments proceeding along a set direction, into its component parts, which are other time scales, intimately connected with things, places or people, then the time sequence he is really destroying, or perhaps ignoring, is the structural device which contains the typically conventional narrative fiction. The tone is misleading in that Durrell appears to be talking with philosophical sureness about abstract concepts which one might be led to assume are capable of being defined. The truth seems to be that Durrell is stumbling towards the metaphor or formula for structure which finds its expression in the Quartet. He gives the impression that his formula is to be neither conventional narrative, nor the memory-duration idea, which one feels justified in associating with the structural method of Proust, but rather, as his last sentence probably means, that he will employ the historic present tense. More to the point is that Durrell's structure in The Black Book intensifies one's awareness of time as being other than an orderly measurable sequence. If this interpretation is accurate to some degree, it helps to explain a statement on time in the novel, made by Durrell after the publication of the Quartet. He has been asked by the interviewers about the comparison of his work with that of Proust, and replies:

> The artists immediately following him [Proust] become dissatisfied with the existing forms and try to invent or grope around for new forms . . . . in Joyce, of course, there is such an emphasis on time as to literally block up the drains: if you get too much time into works of art you stop the process - so that the focus in the works of Joyce, Woolf, and the rest seem like a colossal blown-up image of an incident, which, of course, is the Bergsonian concept.[12]

In this second statement time seems less like the abstract concept and more like the ingredient which it really is - an ingredient which must be present in the structure of his novel in exactly the right proportion if the novel is to succeed in conveying to the reader the intricate and absorbing patterns created from the play of prismatic character, through which Durrell constructs and presents the kind of symbolism congenial to him - the "heraldic universe". Looking back upon the earlier pre-Black Book statement, it can be seen that his treatment of time is the foundation upon which the "heraldic universe" is built, which seems to confirm the contention that "A fictional technique always relates back to the novelist's metaphysics".[13] Durrell's metaphysic advocates the deliverance from destructive time, achieved through the form of

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[12] "Lawrence Durrell", in Writers at Work, pp. 277-278.

[13] Jean-Paul Sartre, Literary Essays, translated by Annette Michelson (New York, 1957), p. 79.

the novel, which necessitates first the fragmentation, or definition of time which, in its turn, reveals the nature of personality and knowledge as it is bound and restricted in the human limitations of time and space. With the caution renewed against interpreting Durrell's theories of time in a purely conceptual or abstract manner, and with the sense in which he uses the word "time" more closely labelled, it should prove possible to describe the structural use of the idea in the four parts of the Quartet.

Referring again to the formula announced in the Note to Balthazar, it can be recognised that Durrell has modified the description of his deployment of time which differs in respect to the Quartet from his claims for The Black Book. It will be useful to quote again from the section which refers specifically to the structure:

> The first three parts, however, are to be deployed spatially (hence the use of "sibling" not "sequel") and are not linked in a serial form. They interlap, interweave, in a purely spatial relation. Time is stayed. The fourth part alone will represent time and be a true sequel.

In this case time is not "destroyed" in the first three novels, but merely "stayed". What this seems to mean, fundamentally, is that the possible causal, progressive sequence has been fragmented, so that the consequences of actions and scenes described in the novels are not followed up until the fourth volume, Clea. But the neat distinctions between the first three and the last sections do not strictly apply. The first part, Justine, can be defined

within the limits of a certain time progression, or several, but the reader is not being presented primarily with a jig-saw puzzle which he must solve in order to understand, and in this sense the causal time sequence is made into a secondary affair.

Justine is based upon two main loci - Darley's island and Alexandria. The first of these is involved in its own time sequence through the course of Justine and Balthazar. Exactly how long Darley is there writing his memories of Alexandria we are not to know; neither does it matter, because the order in which things occur before the reader is one radically different from the common dictates of time. Darley neatly points out that the random selection of nature is a process curiously and ironically like that of the imagination of the artist, and neither is in any sense responsive to the arbitrary order which the human mind places upon event and process, and calls time, or sequence:

> I have been looking through my papers tonight. Some have been converted to kitchen uses, some the child has destroyed. This form of censorship pleases me for it has the indifference of the natural world to the constructions of art - an indifference I am beginning to share. After all, what is the good of a fine metaphor for Melissa when she lies buried deep as any mummy in the shallow tepid sand of the black estuary? (J., p. 13)

In this short passage he brings together, with no other causality than that of the imaginative memory, two different situations separated by some time period which is unmentioned, unimportant -

his island, situated in the present of the act of writing, and Alexandria, in the past of the memory, but brought insistently into the present by the strength of an emotional attachment to Melissa. It is Melissa who is at the end of a posited finite time sequence - she is dead - but two pages further on Darley remembers "A door had suddenly opened upon an intimacy with Melissa", and in the course of the novel he goes on to describe the development of this relationship with allusions again to her death. The last sentence of the passage, which is ironically a "fine metaphor", poses a question which the Quartet both embodies and answers. Objectively Melissa's sequence is at an end, but she is, in a very real sense, and continues to be through Justine and Balthazar, an important factor in Darley's subjective present of memory. The compulsive act of the poet's imagination, working upon the material uncontrollably turned up by his memory, forces him to capture and record it in the written word. It is not until the "time novel", Clea, that Darley is finally freed from this:

> "Melissa" I said again, hearing the lovely word echo in the silence. Name of a sad herb, name of a pilgrim to Eleusis. Was she less now than a scent or a flavour? Was she simply a nexus of literary cross-references scribbled in the margins of a minor poem? And had my love dissolved her in this strange fashion, or was it simply the literature I had tried to make out of her? Words, the acid-bath of words! (C., p. 41)

The ramifications and reverberations of his relationship with

Melissa exist spatially inasmuch as they are unconfined by the logic of causality, and project themselves into a futurity which is timeless because it has no fixed duration and does not expend itself as an hour expends itself in sixty measured minutes. The controlling factor in this process is the individual personality and imagination which exhausts the power of memory as if it were matter rather than an adjunct of time. "I had worn her out like an old pair of socks", (C., p. 41) Darley comments.

The process described here in respect of Darley and Melissa is present throughout the first two volumes between Darley and all the other characters he remembers, with his memory being frequently refurbished by new, and often startling, information provided in a number of ways, most notably by written pieces of information such as Arnauti's novel Moeurs, which Darley read whilst resident in the city as an aid to his understanding of the enigma which Justine presented to him, Justine's supposed diary, and Balthazar's "Interlinear", which serves to throw a totally new light upon the facts which Darley believes he has ordered into a truthful pattern of their mutual experiences. In Balthazar, Darley's bunch of notes, which we assume to be the first novel - "the huge bundle of paper . . . . to which I had loosely given her name [Justine] as a title - though Cahiers would have done just as well" (B., p. 13) - appears itself as one of the rapidly proliferating "wheels within wheels" of reference and counter-reference which go toward establishing the intended "prismatic"

view of character. This in itself indicates a time progression taking place in the course of Darley's writing, but he places little emphasis upon this passage of time, although it turns out to be vitally important to his personal development, and indeed, he is not even certain of its exact length - "The two or three winters we have spent in this island have been lonely ones". (B., p. 14) He measures, or rather notices the passage of time only in terms of its physical, material aspects, the cicadas, the tortoise, the lizard and the weekly packet from Smyrna which marks out the "only day of the week I know by name here - Thursday". (B., p. 14) One such day brings Balthazar to the island, a "character" from the past which Darley thinks he has "safely locked up on paper, confided to the strong rooms of the memory!" (B., p. 11), like an intrusion from a totally different time scale into the present. He brings with him his interlinear, but its presence and significance is not seen as a new arrangement of a time scale or as another version of a pattern imposed on time, but as an object with a concrete, material, and hence spatial, existence, just like the past itself, and is, therefore, by Durrell's definition, nothing to do with time.

> And there, lying upon the table in the yellow lamplight, lay the great interlinear to Justine - as I had called it. It was cross-hatched, crabbed, starred with questions and answers in different coloured inks, in typescript. It seemed to me then to be somehow symbolic of the very reality we had shared - a palimpsest upon which each of us had

left his or her individual traces, layer by layer. (B., p. 18) It is in this way that the products of time past become the immediate materials of time present - the act of writing, and thereby fulfill the aim Durrell set for himself in the autumn of 1936, prior to the completion of The Black Book, expressed in the letter to which reference has previously been made (p. 40), to create "A spatial existence in terms of the paper I'm writing on now at this moment".

A further and most important advantage of the time structure which he has created is that it serves to draw the reader's attention to the central concern of the first two volumes, which constitute an account of the problems and difficulties of artistic creation. Darley's island and the work he is doing "with brain and heart", (J., p. 14) is the focus to which these two books insistently return. Both novels begin and end with Darley on the island, and have frequent return visits in between. The last line of Balthazar has Darley, again in the immediate present, describing the letter from Clea which he has just recorded and finished reading himself, as if they were almost simultaneous actions: "There are a few more lines and then the affectionate superscription". (B., p. 208) Significantly both books are brought to a close by letters from Clea to Darley. She is, in both letters, away from Alexandria, in Syria, and talking of changes which are to be found within herself:

> Somewhere deep inside a tide seems to have turned in my nature. I do not know why but it is towards you, my dear friend, that my thoughts have turned

> more and more of late. Can one be frank? Is there a friendship possible this side of love which could be sought and found? (J., pp. 214-215)

In Balthazar also she informs Darley tentatively of these changes with a warning to him not to expect the same person he once knew:

> I've changed. A new woman, certainly a new painter is emerging, still a bit tender and shy like the horns of a snail - but new. A whole new world of experience stands between us . . . . How could you know all this? (B., p. 201)

Both these letters point unmistakably forward to a future action and consequence which the reader realises will be in terms of time simply because things will occur from this causally, a sequence will ensue. It is clear also that the "refunding into time" happens only by a state of preparedness in the two characters, as a result of their being able to exhaust from their psyche the destructive influences of Alexandria. In Justine Clea's letter is left unanswered, perhaps, one might be justified in assuming, because Darley has not achieved this necessary state himself. Both letters from Clea are heavily studded with statements and aphorisms on the subject of time and its connection with the problems of life and art, the one in Balthazar being reinforced in this respect by the inclusion of a letter from Pursewarden to Clea. Pursewarden, who seems often to express artistic aims which become those of Darley, and also Durrell, talks of the creation of the last volume of his work in which he proposes to deal with the problems of life and art:

> The questions you ask me, my dear Clea, are the very questions I am putting to myself. I must get them a little clearer before I tidy up the last volume in which I want above all to combine, resolve and harmonize the tensions so far created. I feel I want to sound a note of . . . affirmation - though not in the specific terms of philosophy or religion. (B., p. 203)

Such a description could easily apply to Clea in which all the major implications of the last sections of Justine and Balthazar are carried forward to be expressed in serial form.

One of the ingenious devices of the Quartet commonly noticed by critics, is the tendency on the part of a number of characters to arrive at descriptions of the structure which Durrell is forging, and to suggest these as possible ways in which Darley might write his novel or novels. Justine, in a flash of intuition, describes her idea of a novel form:

> I remember her sitting before the multiple mirrors at the dress-makers, being fitted for a shark skin costume, and saying: 'Look! five different pictures of the same subject. Now if I wrote I would try for a multi-dimensional effect in character, a sort of prism sightedness. Why should not people show more than one profile at a time? (J., p. 23)

That characters can ordinarily show only one profile at any given moment is a result of the fact that narrative continues in a time-like sequence. Durrell's structure aims at overcoming this

necessity by establishing space and angle of vision as predominant over the time mode. Thus, many versions of a single character can be found throughout the novels, which is brought about by the device of recording a great number of subjective visions. Finally, of course, there remains the obstacle of the human inability to read a number of things simultaneously and without time lapse, although Durrell suggests that this, were it possible, would be the ideal way in which to read the Quartet:

> Of course, ideally, all four volumes should be read simultaneously, as I say in my note at the end; but as we lack four-dimensional spectacles the reader will have to do it imaginatively, adding the part of time to the other three, and holding the whole in solution in his skull.[14]

With typical ingenuity and resourcefulness, Durrell hereby confronts the reader, "the sleeping artist", with the problem of overcoming time himself, and offers the suggestion that the answer lies in the imagination, which is the solution to the Quartet as a whole, and, incidentally, to Darley's artistic problems. It is also the solution which Balthazar reports as having been used by Pursewarden in one of his books:

> 'Justine protested: "The beast is up to all sorts of tricks, even in his books". She was thinking of the famous page with the asterisk in the first volume which refers one to a page in the text which is mysteriously blank. Many people take this for

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[14] "Lawrence Durrell", in Writers at Work, p. 279.

> a printer's error. But Pursewarden himself assured me that it was deliberate. "I refer the reader to a blank page in order to throw him back upon his own resources - which is where every reader ultimately belongs." (B., p. 120)

Darley also employs the same device to conclude Justine (p. 214) - his and Durrell's first volume. Quite apart from its amusing novelty effect, it serves the serious purpose of drawing attention to what Romberg usefully terms the narrator's "epic situation"[15], which is essentially the key feature of the time structure. Simply expressed, Durrell attempts in Justine and Balthazar to contract the time span to one scale[16], that of the immediate present, even

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[15] Bertil Romberg, Studies in the Narrative Technique of the First-Person Novel (Stockholm, 1962), pp. 277-308 passim. In the course of his interesting and informative chapter on The Alexandria Quartet Romberg points out that many of the epistolary devices used by Durrell are by no means unique to him, but follow a conventional line in the English novel established by Richardson and Sterne. Thus, although Durrell may be rejecting the use of one classical formula, that of the continuous time sequence narrative told by an omniscient narrator, except to some degree in Mountolive, he is revivifying another one which has equal precedent. This is not to suggest, however, that Durrell's approach to the technique and the use made of it would justify a claim that the entire structure is derivative, since other and more recent theories are involved in the synthesis.

[16] That is, he attempts, in Darley's phrase, to move "back and forth in the living present". (B., p. 127)

when dealing with actions which have occurred in the past, and does not develop implications for a future tense, although these are hinted at, in the manner already demonstrated. Romberg neatly summarises the effect achieved as follows:

> There is no long narrative distance to separate the narrator's experiencing "I" and his narrating "I"; on the other hand the two contrasted planes - the plane of action and memory where the events of Alexandria take place, and the "now" plane where we see the narrator at work - serve to underline the narrator's uncertainty and hesitation, and give an illusion of reality to the existence and work of the narrator.[17]

This effect is not solely an analytical abstract but is incorporated into the fabric of the Quartet when Durrell has his characters propose their schemes of novel writing, as it has already been noted. Balthazar, for instance, has the idea that he may have provided Darley with a potential novel structure:

> 'I suppose (writes Balthazar) that if you wished somehow to incorporate all I am telling you into your Justine manuscript, you would find yourself with a curious sort of book - the story would be told, so to speak, in layers. Unwittingly I may have supplied you with a form, something out of the way! Not unlike Pursewarden's idea of a series of novels with "sliding panels" as he called them. Or else, perhaps, like some medieval palimpsest

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[17] Romberg, op. cit., p. 283.

> where different sorts of truths are thrown down one upon the other, the one obliterating or perhaps supplementing another. Industrious monks scraping away an elegy to make room for a verse of Holy Writ! (B., p. 155)

Perhaps the frequency of passages carrying the same import as this could lay Durrell open to the charge of trivial ingenuity and thus support the contention that the Quartet is built around the "thriller" method of coincidence - cleverness devoid of real artistic merit - but it is susceptible of another, more serious interpretation. Throughout the Quartet Durrell wishes to impress on the reader the truth he observes, and which is made into a structural premise in the first two volumes, that "Fact is unstable by its very nature" (B., p. 86); therefore it is impossible to say exactly where the idea which Darley uses for his novels comes from. It arises partly from Darley's own experience, but it is possibly galvanised into the more explicit formula under the influence of someone's suggestion - possibly Balthazar, possibly Pursewarden. As Balthazar notices, his offered suggestion is "Not unlike Pursewarden's idea". The structural idea itself emerges like some sort of "palimpsest", the result of communal activity brought about by the interdependency of the lives of the characters, and the consequent cross-fertilisation of ideas. It may not be stretching the point too far to note that the word "palimpsest" is used by Darley (B., p. 18), and may have been appropriated to his vocabulary under the influence of Balthazar, or vice versa, during

their Alexandrian past, and thus returned again to Darley. This re-echoing of words and phrases, however, can be construed as poverty of invention on Durrell's part. The view that it might not be is allowed for by the structure. If the explanation offered here is accurate, it provides a small concrete example, one of many which exist by virtue of the same argument, of the point which Pursewarden argues would ensue from a "four-card trick in the form of a novel", with a time structure similar to that of the Quartet, namely the raising in "human terms the problems of causality or indeterminacy" (C., p. 136). The realisation of the nature of this problem, which is a primary reason for the structure of the first two novels, and explains also the presence of the totally different time structure of the third, is made by Darley after he has read Pursewarden's letters:

> If two or more explanations of a single human action are as good as each other then what does action mean but an illusion - a gesture made against the misty backcloth of a reality made palpable by the delusive nature of human division merely? (C., p. 176)

Action is thus as much an illusion as fact, and both depend entirely upon a pattern which the mind is prone to impose on time. Only when time is seen as a procession of discrete actions, events and facts can this illusion arise - a premise which is embodied in the structure of Mountolive.

The conception of the Quartet is such that one is not

justified in looking for or assuming an ultimately truthful or accurate set of facts and information which will explain all the events of the novels. If this is attempted, however, it results in the feeling of having been tricked by Durrell in the way one might expect when reading a detective story - being offered false clues and misleading emphases in order to disguise the identity of the culprit until the very end. This may seem a sufficiently obvious, even banal point, but one critic, at least, has squarely based his criticism of the Quartet, as if it were a story of the mystery kind, upon the objection that "Had I been given enough of the proper information in the first place, I could have solved the mystery within the very first chapter".[18] The result of this is to discredit the structural premises of the novels concerning the instability of fact:

> 'Truth' said Balthazar to me once, blowing his nose in an old tennis sock, 'Truth is what most contradicts itself in time.' (B., p. 19)

The truth of which Balthazar speaks here is not the final truth of the imagination for which Darley hunts, and which he finally captures, but the illusory truth of fact, in the meshes of which the hero-writer finds himself caught during the first two volumes. Darley feels that this illusory truth is potentially available to

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[18] Matthew N. Proser, "Darley's Dilemma: The Problem of Structure in Durrell's Alexandria Quartet", Critique, IV (Spring-Summer, 1961), p. 22.

him, and that greater effort in gathering facts will yield it up:

> But in order to go on, it is necessary to go back: not that anything I wrote about them is untrue, far from it. Yet when I wrote, the full facts were not at my disposal. The picture I drew was a provisional one . . . (B., p. 12)

The paragraph which follows the one above corrects this mistake, although it is not for Darley to realise at the time:

> 'We live' writes Pursewarden somewhere 'lives based upon selected fictions. Our view of reality is conditioned by our position in space and time - not by our personalities as we like to think. Thus every interpretation of reality is based upon a unique position. Two paces east or west and the whole picture is changed'. (B., p. 12)

Thus Durrell prepares his argument against mistaking fact for reality, so that the reality, when it is achieved, is not sprung upon an unwary reader, and this much Proser seems prepared to grant, even quoting the following crucial passage, illustrative of Darley's progress towards realisation:

> Blind as a mole, I had been digging about in the graveyard of relative fact, piling up data, more information, and completely missing the mythopoeic reference which underlies fact. I had called this searching for truth! (C., p. 176)

Yet after recognising this, Proser comes to the remarkable conclusion that Darley, and hence Durrell,

> have created at least three novels based on an admittedly faulty concept, an "apoetical" concept

> which has mistaken facts - information - for reality. Furthermore, we have been inveighed into reading all these books, constructed as they are with a hole in them, without any real centre, before the admission comes.[19]

Thus his argument appears to be that although Durrell is writing something other than a mystery thriller, the Quartet must be judged as one, and that the final recognition of the instability of fact must be regarded itself as the fact which is wilfully withheld in order to cause suspense and confusion in the mind of the reader. Proser sees, therefore, no reason for Durrell to have published the novels, which is tantamount to arguing that any story concerning a quest or a search is superfluous once we know what the object of the search is. One might equally well argue that since Eliot knew the resolution of The Waste Land, all that goes before is unnecessary. This conclusion ignores also the special time structure of the Quartet with its emphasis upon the process of growth in the artist, rather than the chronological sequence in which each fact has its vital place in the causal chain.

Of the various descriptions which comprise the composite image of the Quartet's structure, the clearest, and the least equivocal occurs outside the strict limits of Justine, in the author's "Workpoints":

> Pursewarden on the 'n-dimensional novel' trilogy: 'The narrative momentum forward is

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[19] Proser, op. cit., p. 26.

> counter-sprung by references backwards in time, giving the impression of a book which is not travelling from a to b but standing above time and turning slowly on its own axis to comprehend the whole pattern. Things do not all lead forward to other things: some look backwards to things which have passed. A marriage of past and present with the flying multiplicity of the future racing towards one. (J., p. 217)

This statement, which describes particularly Justine and Balthazar, clarifies Durrell's reasons for claiming that his novels illustrate Space-Time and not Bergsonian Duration. By using a figure very similar to this Bergson attempts to define a concept which he considers to be fallacious, and to which he opposes his theory of pure time or duration:

> . . . let us imagine a straight line of unlimited length, and on this line a material point A, which moves. If this point were conscious of itself, it would feel itself change, since it moves: it would perceive a succession; but would this succession assume for it the form of a line? No doubt it would, if it could rise, so to speak, above the line which it traverses, and perceive simultaneously several points of it in juxtaposition: but by so doing it would form the idea of space, and it is in space and not in pure duration that it would see displayed the change which it undergoes.[20]

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[20] Henri Bergson, Time and Free Will, translated by F. L. Pogson (New York, 1960), pp. 102-103.

Given the added complexity of an axis through which, in theory,[21] an infinite number of lines might pass, rather than a single straight line, since the "straight line" of one human progress implies the many more with which it comes into contact during a given limited extent of time - the hub of the axis - and it could well provide an accurate theoretical description of the first two novels of the tetralogy. By removing the consciousness above the line or the hub, the position occupied by Darley, one arrives at the pure duration which it is Bergson's intention to define:

> If our conscious point A does not yet possess the idea of space . . . . the succession of states through which it passes cannot assume for it the form of a line; but its sensations will add themselves dynamically to one another and will organize themselves, like the successive notes of a tune by which we allow ourselves to be lulled and soothed. In a word, pure duration might well be nothing but a succession of qualitative changes, which melt and permeate one another . . . . [22]

Thus Durrell's claim that his novels do not illustrate duration is shown to be accurate by the fact that their structure follows

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[21] "If the axis has been well and truly laid down in the quartet it should be possible to radiate in any direction without losing the strictness and congruity of the continuum". "Author's Note", Clea.

[22] Bergson, op. cit., pp. 103-104.

fairly closely that of a fallacy which Bergson has to dismiss in order to arrive at his definition. Bergson is not arguing that it is a fallacy of attitude, rather that it represents space not time, which is precisely Durrell's point.

The third part of the group, Mountolive, which is prefixed with the Stendhalian motto "Il faut que le roman raconte", in complying with this injunction, dispenses with the complex inter-relations of time and structure exhibited by the other two. As a straight naturalistic novel, it does away with the "epic situation" of the narrator, which is replaced by the conventional omniscient one, making Darley a character. The novel follows a much more extensive time sequence than the other two previous ones, based largely upon the career of Mountolive, the British diplomat, from the early days of his friendship with the young Hosnanis and their mother, Leila, to the point at which the destinies of Mountolive and Nessim take irreconcilable directions dictated by their positions and ambitions. Time in this novel plays the much more familiar role as the agent of change. It marks process and progress from youth to age, from vigour into decay. In a much less complex, and more readily comprehensible manner, time, in the common sense, controls the structure of the novel. There is a strong sense of inevitability, in which milieu the characters perform their actions. Quite unlike Darley, Mountolive accepts that he is the creature of time and thus does not make, or is incapable of making, any effort to constrain its movement:

> Was it possible to imagine a time when they might no longer embrace like this or sit hand in hand in the darkness to feel each other's pulses marking time quietly away into silence - the dead reaches of experience past? He averted his mind from the thought - feebly resisting the sharply-pointed truth. (M., p. 42)

The novel is marked by the recurrent images of time, counted as if on a pulse, symbolic of physical decay and degeneration. This is most dominant in the relationship between Leila and Mountolive which is felt from an early stage to be doomed to suffer the inevitable ravages which time brings:

> Leila appeared to be fading, receding on the curvature of a world moving in time, detaching herself from his own memories of her. (M., p. 45)

There are multiple parallel processes which mirror this central change - Mountolive's careful climb up "the slow Gyres" (M., p. 50) to an important diplomatic rank, the gradual ageing of his facial features, the rise and fall of Nessim's power, the death of Narouz and the sombre, inevitable movement towards war and wholesale death felt in the cabaret in Berlin seen as "the carousings of death-dedicated warriors heading for Valhalla" (M., p. 73). As the canvas spreads far beyond Alexandria, Western Europe becomes an emblem of a death-ridden impetus towards change, thereby filling in an ominous dimension to complete the faintly and intermittently felt stirrings of guns of the battleships in Alexandria harbour during Justine and Balthazar. The feeling of anxiety and change in

the love affair of Leila and Mountolive, underlain by the parallel with Marvell's Ode To his Coy Mistress,[23] is felt also in the brief contact between Melissa and Pursewarden in which the act of love making becomes a desperate clutching at relief from the inevitable process:

> 'Cheri'. Their embraces were like the dry conjunction of wax-works, of figures modelled in gesso for some classical tomb. Her hands moved now charmlessly upon the barrel-vaulting of his ribs, his loins, his throat, his cheek; her fingers pressing here and there in darkness, finger of the blind seeking a secret panel in a wall, a forgotten switch which would slide back, illuminate another world, out of time. It was useless, it seemed. (M., p. 155)

A further emphasis on the role of time in this novel is the importance attached to death and its overwhelming sense of finality, which is absent from the two previous volumes. In those deaths are alluded to, but so long as Darley holds events in the historic present of his imagination, they do not become final. Although the death of Pursewarden has occurred in both Justine and Balthazar, his writings and his memory remain a powerful force in the present, but in Mountolive, where the causes of his death

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[23] Adapted by Leila to her own situation:

> The veil's a fine and private place:
> But none, I think, do there embrace. (M., p. 53)

are made clear, it registers as a totally irrevocable and final severance. The ambience of Mountolive, laden with an almost medieval sense of time, is not one in which Pursewarden, as an artist or as a man can any longer survive, as his final letter to Mountolive announcing his death makes clear:

> Ach! what a boring world we have created around us. The slime of plot and counter-plot. I have just recognised that it is not my world at all. (M., p. 166)

Taken in conjunction with the preceding two novels, Mountolive completes the subtlety and complexity of the structure of the series to that point, existing in contrapuntal relationship which gives it a significance wider than that of a naturalistic novel standing by itself. It peels away another layer of the palimpsest of truth to reveal a political aspect, hitherto unsuspected by the reader, and explains many of the actions of the first two books. Although it presents a new and startling perspective on much of the material of the first two books, a great deal of it carries heavy overtones of irony derived from the view of truth presented earlier. Being written in a time sequence based upon causality and succession, the characters labour under the illusions about truth which arise of necessity from this time scale. The most important of these, appropriately for a political novel, is the illusion of free will and action which the two main protagonists share:

> Nessim too, so long self-deluded by the same dreams of a perfect finite action, free and

> heedless as the impulse of a directed will, now found himself, like his friend, a prey to the gravitational forces which lie inherent in the time-spring of our acts, making them spread, ramify and distort themselves; making them spread as a stain will spread on a white ceiling. Indeed, now the masters were beginning to find that they were, after all, the servants of the very forces which they had set in play, and that nature is inherently ungovernable. (M., p. 192)

The impression of the struggle of human power against the force of time is deepened by the symbol of the chess game set over in its illusion of order against the "exigencies of the historical process", and the outcome is demonstrated by the almost truculent stoicism of Narouz as he defies the sinister portents of death, and also by the final gigantic struggle of his will against death with the inevitable outcome:

> He could hear the nerves ticking away in their spirals of pain, the oxygen bubbles rising ever more slowly to explode in his blood. He knew that he was running out of funds, running out of time. (M., p. 278)

The differences between the time structures of, on the one hand, Justine and Balthazar, and on the other, Mountolive, if seen in terms of character, represent, like two sides of the same coin, opposite courses taken in the struggle against time. Darley employs the forces of the artistic imagination in his attempt to stay time, whilst Mountolive, Nessim and Narouz attempt to ride time by the

exercise of the human will. The final vindication rests with the former response, as Clea, the sequel novel, indicates. Pursewarden is perhaps an illustration of this in that he nearly falls between the two stools, being compelled, as an amateur diplomat, to concede defeat in his attempt to manipulate and stave off the historical process, but is saved, in a sense, by his quality as an artist and creature of the imagination.

Clea, which is aptly said by Durrell to represent time, is a book of resolution. Whereas death occurs as an inevitable result of the attempt to oppose time in Mountolive, "rebirth" is found to be possible in Clea, most notably when Darley, who now acts unequivocally for the first time, saves Clea from drowning. The price to be paid is wounding, both spiritually and physically, but a solution and potential escape from the destructive flux of time is affirmed. Of this there is more to be said at a later stage; for the present purpose the over-simplifications are adequate to indicate some essential features which effect the time structure.

The first three volumes, in echoing the anxiety of Clea's letter, "There is so little time", (B., p. 207) point forward to the need for a sequel, which Clea fulfills. From the "now" plane, the present of Darley's writing, the action moves forward in time with the return of Clea, and of Darley with the child to Alexandria. Darley is again confronted with revelations and further continuations of actions which have been stayed, most of

which emphasise a spirit of rebirth, as with Scobie's translation to the ranks of Coptic sainthood, which endows his shrine with special healing powers, or rebuilding, as in the case of Semira's nose and Balthazar's attempt to regain self-confidence and respect following his debâcle, and also in the new viorous manhood of Keats, the sometime shabby journalist. Painfully rejecting the impetus towards a "temps retrouvé", Darley moves, not always smoothly, towards the "temps délivré", advocated by Pursewarden. (C., p. 135) The narrator's "epic situation" is resumed, but much less insistently than before, since Darley is now moving forward in time himself, in concert with the characters who had earlier been largely aspects of his past. In Clea the past is actually recognised as such, and although it still has great efficacy, is clearly separated from the present by a distinct time division. This Darley comes to accept:

> It is not hard, writing at this remove in time, to realise 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. (C., p. 223)

Romberg, employing his method of analysis of tense, presents a clear summary of Clea from this structural viewpoint:

> The past tense here concerns not the plane of the narrative itself, but rather the plane of action, and is contrasted with a present on the plane of the "now", where the narrator is really sitting and looking back over these events, a

> "now"-plane which this time is only sporadically worked into his story.[24]

The earlier struggle of the narrator figure, epitomised by the words "I know that the key I am trying to turn is in myself", (B., p. 19) also finds its answer in Clea, with the recognition repeated throughout in various forms that

> The seeds of future events are carried within ourselves. They are implicit in us and unfold according to the laws of our own nature. (C., p. 223)

In a noticeable trend to a more overtly, often ritualistic,[25] representation in Clea, the potential escape from the ravages of time, as displayed particularly in Mountolive, is equated with the world of the imagination, and the powerful time motif itself takes on the quality of an heraldic form, as does the actual discussion of a possible novel form itself. Clea, writing to Darley with her new artificial hand, has the feeling that he has achieved this world of the imagination which she claims herself:

> As for you, wise one, I have a feeling that you too perhaps have stepped across the threshold into the kingdom of your imagination, to take possession of it once and for all. (C., p. 281)

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[24] Romberg, op. cit., pp. 288-289.

[25] Eleanor N. Hutchens, "The Heraldic Universe in The Alexandria Quartet", College English, XXIV (October, 1962), pp. 56-61, compares the Quartet with The Waste Land and sees the ritual resolution, especially Clea's rebirth by water as closely corresponding with Eliot's form of resolution.

This much achieved towards his liberation from time, Darley finds also that he is liberated from the difficulty of time and structure as it applies to his art of novel writing, and is thus able to discard his previous need to record and reinterpret reality, and commence upon an unencumbered work of art:

> Yes, one day I found myself writing down with trembling fingers the four words (four letters! four faces!) with which every storyteller since the world began has staked his slender claim to the attention of his fellow men. Words which presage simply the old story of an artist coming of age. I wrote: "Once upon a time . . . " (C., p. 282)

This acceptance of a classical narrative formula marks a new stage in the successful practice of art for Darley, and also for Durrell, and thus, in its way, constitutes an answer to the problems of time and structure jointly. A critic offers the opinion with which one can concur - an opinion perhaps nearer to the truth than he may have intended or realised:

> . . . . the labyrinth of form will one day be seen in its true, its instrumental value, as little more than a device that Durrell found necessary to "set his novel free to dream" . . . . and perhaps all the Gnostic-cum-Einsteinian philosophy as well will be recognised as the elaborate means Durrell was forced to use, for whatever unconscious reasons, to release the fantastic imaginative energy of his Alexandria visions.[26]

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[27] David Littlejohn, "The Permanence of Durrell", Colorado Quarterly, XIV (1965), pp. 64-65.

IV

IMAGES OF TIME

Aside from its function as a structural determinant, time appears in the Quartet in a vast number of guises and forms fulfilling a considerable range of purposes, from the delineation of the central meaning of the work to atmospheric effect. Its various uses can be traced largely in terms of recurrent images and symbols which gather often into continually re-appearing themes, generally of a familiar cast, since they represent themes common to almost all European literature. As these themes are largely, if not wholly conventional, they do not excite the controversy and critical attention which have been afforded to Durrell's more theoretical treatment of time. Often the dicta concerning time are contradictory and offer no immediately perceptible unified pattern, as one might expect when they are put into the mouths of contrasted characters, but they do all share in common the effect of making the reader constantly aware of the equivocal and elusive nature of time as an enemy of the human endeavor to establish states of permanence, and so, naturally, by the time one comes to read Clea the struggle against time in its many manifestations is clearly to be recognised as the most crucial issue.

From the vast network of references to, and images of time, a very clear and surprisingly simple attitude, no less

absorbing for all its longevity as a literary form, can be observed. It starts from the most fundamental recognition that the human being, whilst having aspirations towards that which is infinite and immutable, is yet, of necessity, bound to a body and a conditiion containing an inbuilt principle of change and decay, which is the work, perhaps the definition, of time, and is therefore a finite being. All work, and especially the creation of the artist, because it is the most eloquent and articulate, stands constantly opposed to the flux of things and tends always to iterate that which will preserve it and make it immune to decay. Durrell's expression of the universal problem of time is not only entirely orthodox, but charged with a diction and grandeur which would make it as symptomatic of the medieval mind as of the modern:

> From the very beginning of recorded history our world has been apparently in the same disturbed and racked condition. Every attempt at a humane and rational order is subject to limitations of Time, on whose slippery surface neither kings nor empires nor dictators could find more than a precarious and temporary purchase.[1]

This, then, is the familiar negative side of the picture, but since Durrell, as an artist, and a significant proportion of his characters in the Quartet are concerned to establish an optimistic alternative, the corollary to this statement is one which, in

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[1] Lawrence Durrell, "No Clue to Living", The Writer's Dilemma, p. 23.

general terms, holds good as an expression of the quest which the Quartet undertakes:

> Is the artist, then, only a messenger of despair, can he say nothing? He can only say what his predecessors have said in their various dialects and voices. It is a magnificent prospect that he can offer. There remains, until the very last moment, the great Choice, the great act of affirmation. Raising his cracked and somewhat sardonic voice in every generation he utters the same, and by now somewhat shop-soiled, truth: Choose!
>
> This is not very helpful. I know. But we must take into account the limited field of operation of even the greatest talent. He is only a conveyor of the good news, the herald who plays his part among the other actors on the stage. Feeble in everything but these intuitions of possible miracles which lie buried and unrealized in every human psyche, and out of which one could pattern the real cloth-of-gold fabric of a possible Way.[2]

As the city of Alexandria is the chief "character" in the Quartet, often suspected of living its life vicariously through its inhabitants, choosing them as its exemplars; (J., p. 16) it bears within itself all the qualities ascribed to time, is itself

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[2] Ibid., pp. 23-24. It is interesting to note that his words here echo those given to Darley - "the cloth-of-gold - the meaning of the pattern" (J., p. 14) - when he is formulating his artistic enterprise. In this sense at least, since his final aim is very much the same, Darley represents the ideal artist in seeking a personal solution to the problem of time.

a "palimpsest" of time, in the same way as it exhibits and embodies all the kinds of love. Always changing and always decay-ridden, it is also, paradoxically, a living present of all the accretions of time past, the history and mythology of the city remaining thereby operative on all its citizens of the moment. There is always a love-hate relationship in play within the characters, expressing the ambivalence of their feelings towards the city whose pleasures they exhaust, and whose inner, inscrutable will exhausts them. As the characters exemplify the moods of the city, so it reflects their preoccupations and fears, and thus, on occasions, its threat is felt palpably to be menacing, particularly in Mountolive when the city is felt to be redolent with the "obsessive rhythms of death", (M., p. 194) as befits the peculiar character of that novel.

Commonly the various time consciousnesses of the city are expressed in images of sound and music, most notably in the fine passage describing the death of the old furrier, Cohen:

> He sighed once more and then to my surprise, in a small gnome's tenor muffled almost to inaudibility sang a few bars of a popular song which had once been the rage of Alexandria, Jamais de la vie, and to which Melissa still danced at the cabaret. 'Listen to the music!' he said, and I thought suddenly of the dying Antony in the poem of Cavafy - a poem he had never read, would never read. Sirens whooped suddenly from the harbour like planets in pain. Then once more I heard this gnome singing of chagrin and bonheur, and he was singing not to

> Melissa but to Rebecca. How different from the great heart-sundering choir that Antony heard - the rich poignance of strings and voices which in the dark street welled up -Alexandria's last bequest to those who are her exemplars. Each man goes out to his own music, I thought, and remembered with shame and pain the clumsy movements that Melissa made when she danced. (J., p. 99)

The splendid orchestration which accompanied the love-death of Antony, contrasted to the thin gnome's voice of Cohen's more squalid and insignificant demise, is an anthem to the timelessness of mythology, the "mythopoeic reference" which transcends the decay of time, and remains always the glorious possibility open to the artist who discovers the personal "Way". All the harsher and more grating sounds of the Quartet are associated with things which are bound to decay, and to death-oriented time. It is not by accident that Darley hears the sounds of the sirens at this time, for Cohen, as it transpires, is deeply implicated in the political plot of Nessim, and thus, in his small way, contributes to the destructive powers of war ensuing from political intrigue, which is the most violent manifestation of time consciousness. The association becomes explicit again when Darley is approaching Alexandria for the last time, at the beginning of Clea - approaching significantly from the sea, which has been established as the "one clock" which marks off the totally different time obtaining on the island. (J., p. 14) He returns across "the dense thickets of time", only to hear on arrival,

> A faint and terrible moaning . . . . pulsing like the wing beats of some fearful prehistoric bird - sirens which howled as the damned must howl in limbo. (C., p. 24)

This augurs a return to a world locked in time and suffering its utmost ravages. Darley must return, however, since his period of ascetic preparation was in order to enable him to conquer time, to cross over it into the kingdom of his imagination, rather than simply to avoid the struggle. Not that the second alternative is a valid proposition, for not only is he drawn into the gravitational field of Alexandria inexorably, but his island refuge has been suddenly shaken by the effects of war, and the immortality of its special insular atmosphere is seen to be an illusion during the farewell banquet which the islanders prepare for him. Appropriately, it is the speeches which accompany the occasion which impress the fact upon him:

> They seemed to have the cadences of immortal poetry - the poetry of a desperate hour; but of course they were only words, the wretched windy words which war so easily breeds and which the rhetoricians of peace would soon wear out of use.
>
> But tonight lit them up like tapers, the old men, giving them a burning grandeur. Only the young men were not there to silence and shame them with their hangdog looks - for they had gone to Albania to die among the snows. The women spoke shrilly, in voices made coarsely thrilling with unshed tears, and among the bursts of laughter

> and song fell their sudden silences - like
> so many open graves. (C., p. 21)

Once again the death-fear and, thus, the awareness of time, is emphasised in the unpleasantly frenetic sounds of the women's voices, complemented by the familiar traditional death image of the taper.

During the crossing from the island to Alexandria Darley becomes solemnly aware that his outlook on time has changed, the fruits of his careful preparation as an artist:

> I should see Alexandria again, I knew, in the
> elusive temporal fashion of a ghost - for once
> you become aware of the operation of a time
> which is not calendar-time you become in some
> sort a ghost. (C., p. 23)

"Ghost" is an aptly chosen figure in this context because of its implications of a life independent of the controlling factors of human existence, and also because of its quality of being fleshless, and therefore not subject to the corruption to which flesh is heir, as the Quartet throughout, with its multiple woundings, illness, and the loss of physical beauty, particularly in the cases of Justine, Leila and Nessim, makes insistently clear. Flesh-oriented love, in which Alexandria abounds, has also its special sound associations:

> . . . from some hidden alley by the slaughter-
> house, above the moans and screams of the cattle,
> came the nasal chipping of a Damascus love-song;
> shrill quartertones, like a sinus being ground
> to powder. (J., p. 17)

This description makes the association of mere, mindless, corruptible flesh with love as an animalistic, purely biological function, the lowest common denominator of love. It occurs in one of the "still" impressionistic descriptions by Darley of Alexandria. Thus when he takes the step of being refunded into time again, the same associations of slaughter and this exotic love-music impinge upon his mind, but on this occasion, as befits the "time novel", with all the kinetic fury of the war, which expands the associations into universal implications for the fate of city man:

> The crackle of shards which fell back like a hailstorm upon the corrugated roofs of the waterside cafés: the scratchy mechanical voices of ships' signallers repeating, in the voices of ventriloquists' dummies, semi-intelligible phrases which sounded like "Three o'clock red, Three o'clock red". Strangely too, there was music somewhere at the heart of all the hubbub, jagged quartertones which stabbed; then, too, the foundering roar of buildings falling. (C., p. 25)

In Clea Darley is fully aware of what his quest entails in its new dimension of a "temps délivré" rather than a "temps retrouvé", and, significantly, the inner thoughts of the hitherto enigmatic Pursewarden are revealed to him through his "Conversations with Brother Ass" and Pursewarden's last letters which symbolise Darley's literary inheritance. In this novel certain ideas and attitudes are clarified for him, especially towards time, because in the manner of a medieval romance, he has successfully undergone his spiritual trials. The novel is replete with revelations, now in their fulness,

which before were fragmentary and intuitive. So when he comes to claim his tangible reward, Clea, half woman and half symbol, again in the romance fashion, he is liberated from a number of illusions of which he has been striving to this point to unburden himself. Whilst lying with Clea, the words of Arnauti come to his mind and uncover the falsity of the lowest kind of love, that of the flesh alone:

> "You tell yourself that it is a woman you hold in your arms, but watching the sleeper you see all her growth in time, the unerring unfolding of cells which group and dispose themselves into the beloved face which remains always and forever mysterious . . . . All this process is human, bears a name which pierces your heart, and offers the mad dream of an eternity which time disproves in every drawn breath. And if human personality is an illusion? And if, as biology tells us, every single cell in our bodies is replaced every seven years by another? At the most I hold in my arms something like a fountain of flesh, continuously playing, and in my mind a rainbow of dust." (C., p. 98)

These words, written of Justine with some bitterness by Arnauti, are now made the basis of a relationship founded in wisdom rather than the fallible human desire for possession of another person, and mark, therefore, an important stage in Darley's progress towards an apprehension of the timeless. In the same situation is heard a sound which is at the very centre of the city, yet alien to it and in contrast to its character as a milieu in which human desire and frustration only blossom:

> . . . I caught the sweet voice of the blind muezzin from the mosque reciting the Ebed - a voice hanging in the palm-cooled upper airs of Alexandria. "I praise the perfection of God, the desired, the Existing, the Single, the Supreme; the Perfection of God, the One, the Sole" . . . . The great prayer wound itself in shining coils across the city as I watched the grave and passionate intensity of her turned head where she stood to observe the climbing sun touch the minarets and palms with light: rapt and awake. (C., p. 99)

Once before Darley had described the prayer of the blind singer - blind so that the temptations of the city should not enter through the eyes and pervert the perfect vision of the timeless - when he lay with Melissa. Then he catches an intimation of its "marvellous healing powers" (J., p. 22), which finally become efficacious in Clea. In the earlier parallel scene, however, Melissa, in contrast to Clea, sleeps, "rocked upon the oceanic splendours of a language she would never know" (J., p. 22), since she is fully a child of the city's temporal nature, and dies unable to escape the disease which the city gives to her. In a sense, however, her fulfillment comes through Clea - one of the many rebirths of Clea - to whom, while on her deathbed, she bequeathed Darley as a lover. In this novel time as a cycle is also completed, although it is not merely a reiterative cycle, because the essential quality of the cyclical experience alters. Darley's first meeting with Clea in the last volume is very

deliberately reminiscent of a situation described previously:

> My heart heeled half-seas over for a moment, for she was sitting where once (the very first day) Melissa had been sitting, gazing at a coffeee cup with a wry reflective air of amusement, with her hands supporting her chin. The exact station in place and time where I had once found Melissa . . . . Yet it was in truth Clea and not Melissa. (C., pp. 76-77)

It is perhaps worth noting also that the establishing of this cyclical time (although it may be truer to call it spiral) reforms the time sequence which is shattered in Justine and Balthazar by fulfilling the implications of actions and relationships which had been suspended. Thus, in the above quotation, a time sequence from "the very first day" to the point of his meeting with Clea is indicated, but it is not a sequence dependent so much on the cause and effect of action freely chosen by the individuals concerned, but dictated as a sort of poetic pattern by the city's inner, impersonal will.

Into the restricted cycle of time of the characters involved in the Quartet intrudes the cyclical pattern of the history of the city, especially the lives of its great historical and mythical figures. The figures of Antony and Cleopatra are ever present as the mythopoeic references for the love stories of the Quartet, as are the great lovers of the Delta folklore, Yuna and Aziz. Indeed, so extensive is the historical and mythical heritage of the city, that Durrell can call upon an appropriate archetype for

any of his characters when required, and also an appropriate aspect of the city's origin to give depth to the moods he wishes to evoke. Darley is acutely conscious of the presence of the city's history, "studded by the great names which mark every station of recorded time". (B., p. 127) So pervasive is this influence that the commonplace action of travelling in the city awakes the feeling of these other presences of time:

> Even the place-names on the old tram-routes
> with their sandy grooves of rail echo the
> unforgotten names of the founders and the
> names of the captains who first landed here,
> from Alexander to Amr; founders of the anarchy
> of flesh and fever, of money-love and mysticism. (B., p. 127)

The central point of the city, the site of Alexander's tomb, which can no longer be located, symbolises for Darley

> . . . the great conquests of man in the realms
> of matter, space and time - which must inevitably
> yield their harsh knowledge of defeat to the
> conqueror in his coffin. (J., p. 35)

But Darley's interest in the historic past of the city is not solely that of the scholar. Its importance to him is realised in Clea, when he recognises that the connections between past and present, emotional and literary, have to be made explicit in his imagination to complete the full meaning of the pattern, and to this end the final journey to Alexandria must be undertaken:

> Walking those streets again in my imagination
> I knew once more that they spanned, not
> merely human history, but the whole biological

> scale of the heart's affections - from the painted ecstasies of Cleopatra (strange that the vine should be discovered here, near Taposiris) to the bigotry of Hypatia (withered vine-leaves, martyr's kisses). And stranger visitors: Rimbaud, student of the Abrupt Path, walked here with a belt full of gold coins . . . . Between pity, desire and dread, I saw the city once more spread out before me, inhabited by the faces of my friends and subjects. I knew that I must re-experience it once more and this time for ever. (C., p. 15)

The easy transition in his mind from the historical figures to his friends and subjects marks their close inter-relationships and serves to picture the city as the instrument by which their passions and desires are weighed and measured. Only a slight rupture in the membrane of Nessim's normal consciousness is required for the flood of history to break through into the daily reality and become inexorably bound up with it, the reason being, Durrell tells us, that "man is only an extension of the spirit of place". (J., p. 156) A shift in the panels of his realistic mind reveals behind it the other, more important, reality of the interpenetrated time scales, which under these circumstances shed their illusion of being discrete. What Nessim achieves in his madness is a glimpse into something very much akin to that for which Darley searches - "the heraldic universe", although for Nessim it is entirely unwelcome, hence designated "madness" since his objectives remain squarely in the temporal world - the

furtherance of his political ambitions:

> But while the gallery of historical dreams held the foreground of his mind the figures of his friends and acquaintances, palpable and real, walked backwards and forwards among them, among the ruins of classical Alexandria, inheriting an amazing historical space-time as living personages. (J., p. 156)

This aspect of time, which is the opposite of mutability, and, therefore, nearer to the "magnificent prospect" which Durrell claims the artist's vision should be able to proffer, indicates an answer to the human desire to achieve the timeless. The process of associating the characters of the Quartet with the immortal figures from Alexandria's past, operates in two directions. The characters become larger than their merely time-bound selves inasmuch as they approximate to their mythical and historical archetypes, and thereby form a part of Durrell's effort to translate life into the larger and more forceful perspectives of art. Thus, as Darley remembers Justine and re-fashions her in his imagination, she becomes in stature, as does Clea later, more than a representation of a woman, but a symbol of certain timeless and permanent features of Woman:

> Justine, lying back against a fallen column at Taposiris, dark head upon the darkness of the sighing water, one curl lifted by the sea-winds, saying 'In the whole of English only one phrase means something to me, the words "Time Immemorial".' (B., p. 193)

The setting of this passage in the ancient ruined city heightens

the contrast between the products of human endeavour in the last phase of decay under the process of mutability, and the unchanging fundamental quality of man's nature or psyche. The same effect is provided as Liza informs Darley that she and her brother are but further examples of an incestuous relationship for which an archetype in Alexandria's history is to be found:

> That is why he was pleased to come here to Egypt, because he felt, he said, an interior poetic link with Osiris and Isis, with Ptolemy and Arsinoe - the race of the sun and the moon! (C., p. 191)

The first direction in which the association works gives rise to the feeling, mentioned previously, that Durrell's characters are exemplars of the forces from a realm outside mutability which constantly operates in time through them. This offers continually a potential intersection of the timeless, or "heraldic" reality, with time. This particular insight is offered by Henry Miller in his perceptive comments on the Quartet:

> Alexandria - your Alexandria - is the whole pantheon of Homer's bloody senseless gods - doing what they will, but conscious of what is done . . . . Alexandria - through and by her inhabitants, climate, odors, temperament, diversity, freaks, crimes, monstrous dreams and hallucinations (but why imitate you?) - gives the impression of living herself (her pantheonic self) out, of washing herself clean through complete enactment. Alexandria enacts for us - that's it. The act and the actor,

the dream, or vision, and the drama - all in one.[3]

As Alexandria enacts, the two-way process is completed with constant additions to its store of timeless figures, like Scobie who becomes a saint in the Coptic Church's register, and so finds his delivery from the wastage of time:

> Now the retreating tide has left him high
> and dry above the speeding currents of time,
> Joshua the insolvent weather-man, the islander,
> the anchorite. (J., p. 113)

Although Alexandria provides historical mentors for its lovers, soldiers, statesmen, saints and philosophers, it also provides literary forebears, the most notable of whom is Cavafy, the "old man" of the city, whose poems frequently occur to Darley's mind. As artists their preoccupations are very similar - love, memory, time and the peculiar quality conferred on the individual by reason of his being a child of Alexandria. Cavafy's poetry frequently expresses, in common with Darley, that the memory of the past, however poignant it may be, is not a sufficiently reliable strongroom to resist the force of time, and hence resorts to the thought that only in art is to be found the means of perpetuation, as the old man in his poem "Very Seldom" realises:

> Now the young people recite his verses
> In their lively eyes his fancies pass.
> Their sound voluptuous minds,

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[3] Henry Miller, A Private Correspondence, p. 34.

their shapely, firm flesh
are stirred by his expression of beauty.[4]

He too has his predecessors in the ancient Mousein of Alexandria, poets like Callimachus, who was also concerned to preserve fine expression and sentiments against time, as in his epigram upon Heracleitus:

But your nightingales, your songs, are living still;
them the death that clutches all things cannot kill.[5]

The images of time in the Quartet, by cumulative effect, present a composite picture of the ceaseless conflict against decay and mutability which is engendered in the human psyche. The focus of all the major images occurs in the highly significant scene of Clea's narrow escape from drowning, which is the climax of Clea. The drama of Clea's near death as a result of being pinned by a harpoon to a sunken wreck, occurs in a situation fraught with suggestive symbolical overtones accumulated from the Quartet as

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[4] C. P. Cavafy, The Complete Poems. Translated by Rae Dalven (London, 1964), p. 45. Cavafy is aptly chosen as a literary mentor for Darley, in that he too is acutely conscious of Alexandrian history, the awareness of which adds a great deal of force and point to his poetry.

[5] Quoted in E. M. Forster, Alexandria: A History and a Guide (New York, 1961), p. 34. This work is used extensively by Durrell as a source of his information on the city's history - more so than his acknowledgement would indicate, as, for example, when Forster's actual words are put into Justine's mouth, J., p. 36.

a whole. It is suggested by Clea that the island from which she and Darley swim is Timonium to which Antony retired following the disastrous battle of Actium. That it is an island away from and yet within sight of Alexandria for the well trained eye, effectively serves to isolate the incident from the time sequences of Alexandria, and thus emphasise the ritual quality of the rebirth. The harpoon with which Clea's hand is transfixed belonged to Narouz, her unrequited lover, of whom it was prophesied by Scobie that he would try to imprison her and drag her down to a dark place in which the person with her would be powerless to assist. Not only is there material evidence of the effect of destruction in the presence of the wreck, but also the dead seamen standing erect in the pool like mummies (a common symbol in the Quartet) awaiting resurrection. The ritual defeat of time - for Clea's death would have been a replica of Narouz's in that will power would not have proved sufficient to stave off time and the inevitable - takes place in the sea, which has been established as a symbol of the timeless, and through the agency of Darley, who is now fully prepared, in a spiritual sense, like a knight in an Arthurian romance, to undertake his first, and only, great physical action of the Quartet. The failure of the harpoon, a weapon, and thus a symbol of violence and war, to kill Clea, implies the defeat of time in another of its aspects.

What Darley succeeds in doing is not only to bring to "forcible rebirth" (C., p. 252) his lover in a sexual sense, but

also to capture the "heraldic universe" of his imagination which he has assiduously wooed throughout the Quartet. As she returns to the surface of the water prior to the accident, Durrell prepares us for such an association by the following description:

> It was here, spiralling up through the water with her hair coiled out behind her, that the image of Clea was restored once more. Time had rendered her up whole and intact again - 'natural as a city's grey-eyed Muse' - to quote the Greek poem. (C., p. 245)

During the scene which follows, the planes of narrative action and of the Quartet's theme of growth towards artistic consciousness coalesce. The scene itself possesses as much the quality of metaphor as of a description of realistic action - a kinetic metaphor, or allegory, of the struggle against time which is the sum of all the individual images of time in the Quartet. It also serves to climax the tension, the race against time, towards which the structure of the first three novels points, anticipated by Clea's remark to Darley, "There is so little time". (B., p. 207) We are prepared for the idea that in Clea is the solution to the time problem by the list of possible time scales offered by Balthazar, who is engaged in finding through his cabbalism, a specifically philosophical solution,[6] which he believes will

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[6] His story of Capodistria's homunculi and the annals of Time (C., p. 202) provides a parallel solution to the time problem on the level of pastiche, and thus underlines the more serious one which the Quartet offers.

come about through a full understanding, and hence acceptance, of the extent of both good and evil:

> One lies here with time passing and wonders about it. Every sort of time trickling through the hour-glass, 'Time immemorial' and 'for the time being' and 'time out of mind'; the time of the poet, the philosopher, the pregnant woman, the calendar . . . . Even 'time is money' comes into the picture; and then, if you think that money is excrement for the Freudian, you understand that time must be also! (C., p. 71)

Balthazar's major omission is the truth about time which Clea proceeds from this point to propound, less cryptic than Balthazar's view, that it can also, for the artist, provide the springboard into eternity.

V

CONCLUSION

There is no good reason, in theory, why Durrell's claim announced in the prefatory note to Clea, that the series could be indefinitely extended, using the same characters and the same structural premises, should not be possible. Nevertheless, in practice, it is clear that the final volume is conclusive of the series as it stands, because in that book the emotional impulse of the Quartet is finally expended, and the ideas with which Durrell has been working spelled out as a concrete message. Were the series to have been continued along the lines indicated in "Workpoints" at the end of the volume, we would arrive at a condition in which the theoretical basis of the Quartet's structure would cease to act as a backing for the subject matter, which is its only real justification. As this thesis has attempted to argue, the theoretical considerations which Durrell presents to the reader are of little value in themselves, and at their most effective are extensions of the subject matter.

As the series stands, however, Durrell has skilfully made the structural theory coterminous with the ideas of the Quartet, so that, in an important respect, Clea performs the function of a ritual solution to the problems which have been raised. One of the recurrent themes of the Quartet, as has already been

emphasised, is a concern with the past, and the difficulty found by the characters in dealing with its influence on their lives and relationships. In Clea final removal of this encumbrance has been achieved, symbolised by Darley's act of cutting Clea free from the underwater wreck, which is a symbol of time in its destructive aspect. Thus the thematic mainstay of the Quartet is terminated, at least insofar as Darley and Clea, who have become the two major characters, are concerned. With them also ends the basic "boy meets girl" narrative line. Their enslavement to a principle of decay and change is broken by the decisive acts of leaving Alexandria, which, as Ambrose Gordon Jr. rightly points out, as a city, reflects the pattern of the Quartet as a whole.[1] Once the force of the magnetic pull of Alexandria has been broken, yet another major factor in the structural arrangement is brought to a full stop. The same critic, using Durrell's contrasted moon and sun image, summarises the condition of the characters up to the point at which Darley and Clea break through into their heraldic kingdom to become "Sunbodies":

> What reality the characters have is lunar, reflective; only by mirroring the city do they achieve their existence and become consubstantial with it.[2]

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[1] Ambrose Gordon Jr., "Time, Space, and Eros: The Alexandria Quartet rehearsed", in William O. S. Sutherland, ed., Six Contemporary Novels (University of Texas, Austin, 1962), p. 8.

[2] Ibid., p. 8.

The reality of the individual personality, which imagines itself to be a discrete entity defined by its physical presence, is shown to be illusion, a fact which is constantly underlined by the number of mirror images and scenes which occur in the Quartet. Hence love, as it is seen in its many varieties, is generally a more or less complex variation upon narcissism, as Clea subconsciously realises when she asks Darley whether there might not be a possible relationship "this side of love . . . . which is deeper, even limitlessly deep, and yet wordless, idealess?" (J., p. 214) This involves the destruction of the illusion of personality and a realisation of what Pursewarden means when he claims that "In the end . . . everything will be found to be true of everybody." (B., p. 13) To this end Clea is made to become a depersonalised character, illustrated symbolically by her gaining of a steel, and thus imperishable, hand to replace the natural one lost in the underwater accident. With this goal achieved, it is difficult to see how Durrell could return to the illusion as a basis for further books in the series.

Inasmuch as the central meaning of the Quartet, the end of the quest, is established in the relationship between Clea and Darley, it is unlikely that the axes of the novels could be extended indefinitely on what could only be descriptions of similar quests by other characters. That Durrell intended the focus to rest here is clear when, speaking of Clea and Darley, he claims that

They discover the fulcrum in themselves to lie

> outside the possession of each other, but in the domain of self possession (art).[3]

In Clea, by implication, since Darley's story is left at the point where he will become the great artist of which we are to believe him capable, another conclusion is reached in "the achievement of "artisthood" - the mysterious secret of which Pursewarden was trying to pass on to Darley",[4] which for Pursewarden involves the final destruction of personality by suicide, and for Darley, the loss of his personality potential when he ceases to struggle and be confused, and becomes "ideal". Although rightly termed the "time novel" of the tetralogy, Clea also spells the end of the time theme when Clea's wish expressed in a letter to Darley comes about:

> Not to force time, as the weak do, for that spells self-injury and dismay, but to harness its rhythms and put them to our own use. (B., p. 207)

In locating Durrell's meaning we see the limitations of the theoretical pronouncements of the Quartet, including the theories of time. Outside the framework of the novels' subject matter they have no valid meaning, and therefore cannot be profitably studied for their intrinsic value, nor necessarily thought of as constituting a "morphological form one might call 'classical' - for our time." (Note to B.) The study of time is thus best

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[3] Lawrence Durrell, "The Kneller Tape (Hamburg)" in Harry T. Moore, ed., The World of Lawrence Durrell, p. 167.

[4] Ibid., pp. 166-167.

utilised as a means to approach the meaning of the Quartet, for the theories seem in reality to be metaphorical descriptions in aid of an understanding of the work, rather than the dogmatic tenets which precipitate the work. They are the exemplars of the artistic creation rather than the reverse, and being such, it is fruitless to attempt the extraction of a definitive description of Durrell's theory of time - it is too closely interwoven with the other concerns of the Quartet.

VI

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