THE STRUCTURAL CONTINUUM OF LAWRENCE DURRELL'S ALEXANDRIA QUARTET

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THE STRUCTURAL CONTINUUM

OF LAWRENCE DURRELL'S

ALEXANDRIA QUARTET

by

© Laurie Lind McCarthy, B.A.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an examination of Lawrence Durrell's Alexandria Quartet, a "space-time continuum" the structure and style of which are based on certain ideas arising from Einstein's relativity proposition: in particular, the indivisibility of space and time, and the unity of subject and object. Durrell believes that Einstein's ideas have had a profound effect upon contemporary literature. The Quartet is his exposition of these ideas.

The first half of the thesis examines certain stylistic features, for example, symbol and image, tone, and presentation of character, since Durrell uses them all as means of achieving structural unity. The second half examines certain features which are predominantly structural, for example, overall organization, point of view, and use of time; and attempts to assess the ultimate importance to the Quartet of Einstein's theory.

Throughout the thesis, as throughout the Quartet, we see how the philosophical implications of the relativity

proposition lead Darley, the Quartet's narrator, away from seeking for truth in facts. Eventually he realizes that the type of truth relevant to the artist is not factual but intuitive, the truth found in what Durrell calls the world of "heraldic reality," the world of myth and symbol.

This thesis examined and approved by

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The Structural Continuum of Lawrence Durrell's Alexandria Quartet

Introduction

"There is so far no outstanding exponent in literature or art of einsteinian physics, for necessarily there is a certain interval, as things are, between the idea and the representation."[1]

So wrote Wyndham Lewis in Time and Western Man (1927), a book Durrell cites[2] as one which helped him formulate his own ideas about literature.

In the Alexandria Quartet, a series of books which he has referred to as his "relativity poem," Durrell has attempted a literary representation of Einstein's ideas and has produced a work which, while, in Pursewarden's phrase, "... not ... original but merely contemporary" (C p. 135),[3]

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[1] Wyndham Lewis, "An Analysis of the Mind of James Joyce," Time and Western Man, 1957 edition, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957), p. 89.

[2] L. Durrell, "Preface," A Key to Modern British Poetry, (Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1952), pp. xi-xii. From now on, this book will be referred to as Key for the sake of brevity.

[3] Throughout this thesis, quotations from the Quartet will be referred to by the following abbreviations:
J - Justine B - Balthazar M - Mountolive C - Clea.

may mark one of the important crossroads in the map of twentieth-century literature.

Since its emergence as a recognizable art form in England in the eighteenth century with such works as Pamela and Tom Jones, the novel has undergone many changes and developments in form and structure. At first, the novel was written usually in the picaresque form, with one hero giving unity to a series of otherwise unconnected stories. Richardson's Pamela, with its introduction of the letter-form and its attendant interest in subjective characterization and analysis, may be regarded as the beginning of the development of the novel proper. With Fielding arose the beginning of interest in novelistic theory and form with the development of the "comic epic" and the technique of depicting type through archetype. Gradually, as the novel came to be accepted as an art form, interest grew in questions of structure and technique, ways of handling time, methods of presenting character, and means of achieving unity.

Some of the most striking features of twentieth-century literature have been the abolition or subordination of plot; the widespread use of the so-called "stream-of-consciousness" technique; the new views of character resulting from the theories of Freud and his successors; and the new views of time and space resulting from the

theories of such figures as Darwin and, later, Einstein. In his Key (chapter 1), Durrell acknowledges his debt to Darwin and the part he played in revealing the world's antiquity, thus discrediting Biblical concepts of chronology. He says: "Time as history and evolution took its first blow from Darwin, from geology and archaeology. Time as an idea took its second great blow from Einstein." (Key, p. 23). Although the Darwinian revelations did not alter the classical concept of linear time, they did have the effect of freeing the mind of arbitrary and mystical concepts of history. This freedom allowed scope for speculation and experiment in the scientific and quasi-scientific spheres which, at least indirectly, has affected modern literature. However, it is the seemingly-limitless possibilities of space-time manipulation revealed by the philosophical ramifications of Einstein's relativity theory upon which Durrell organizes the structure of the Alexandria Quartet. In the Key he expresses in detail the views behind his introductory Note to Balthazar. The most notable literary presentation of these views in his work before the Alexandria Quartet is found in The Black Book (begun in 1936), which contains the germs of many ideas, situations, and characters

which later emerge full-grown in the Quartet.[4]

It is Durrell's belief that the observations of Einstein and of the psychologists have brought about a change in the direction of literary endeavour. The new points of view raised by these observations have led to modifications in the artistic concepts of form and character and have resulted in a distinctive genre in modern literature.

Scientific ideas have always been embodied in culture. They are part of the spirit of any age and influence most writers at least indirectly. The concerns of twentieth-century novelists cannot be traced solely to nineteenth- and twentieth-century science, if we remember, for example, how many of the modern writer's devices (particularly those dealing with time) were anticipated by Sterne as early as 1760. However, while Sterne's methods were opposed to those of the other novelists of his time, Durrell's reflect the main lines of interest of an increasingly large group of twentieth-century novelists, most notably Proust and Joyce, who are attempting to communicate a new way of

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[4] It would be interesting to compare closely The Black Book and the Alexandria Quartet to see points of similarity. However, for reasons of scope, I shall, in this thesis, confine myself to a detailed examination of the Quartet. The only other work of Durrell's which I shall draw on to any degree will be his Key to Modern British Poetry.

apprehending the universe. In this attempt they mirror the increasing preoccupation of the modern world with science resulting from the increasing degree to which science and technology affect our lives.

Within this field of literary experiment, the Alexandria Quartet is, I believe, a minor masterpiece. Durrell's considerations in writing the Quartet, as explained in his "Note" to Balthazar, may sound, as he says himself, "somewhat immodest or even pompous." (B "Note"). The impression of pomposity is heightened by his use of scientific terms in a hitherto largely alien context. However, these terms are central to Durrell's attempt to relate modern literature to modern science. In this attempt, he reworks philosophical ideas of space and time which until this century were regarded as suitable for practical exploitation mainly in science. He borrows scientific terms to emphasize the relationship that he feels must exist between the two disciplines if human knowledge and understanding are to reach their furthest limits.

Durrell has turned from the Aristotelian plan - that of a plot with a beginning, a middle, and an end; containing no extraneous detail; and concentrating on action - to a form which demonstrates what Pursewarden calls the "Elephant's Eye view" (C p. 128) in which Time becomes the fourth dimension. This dimension is suspended in order to

allow consideration of a block of Space-Time in which certain events take place. These events are viewed from different positions in time and space so that they show new facets as the particles within a kaleidoscope reveal new patterns at every re-settlement, or as the revolving figures on musical jewellery-boxes show different facets to the mirror as they revolve.

Justine is the story of a significant time in the life of Darley, a would-be writer who recalls his affair with an exotic Jewess, his friendship for her husband, and the tenderness he felt for his Greek mistress Melissa. His point of view in describing this period in his life must, as he realizes, be largely subjective. However, when he discusses Alexandria and the motivations of other characters and events, he attempts objectivity. This "objectivity" is later shown to be fallacious since his deep emotional involvement added to the deliberate deception practised upon him obscure his view of whatever "truths" later emerge.

In Balthazar, Darley is presented with more information about the block of space-time occupied by Justine in the form of comments written between the lines of the Justine manuscript by a friend whose view of the events is more objective, more disinterested, than was his own. New scope for interpreting events which he had

thought were satisfactorily explained in Justine and explanations of previously inexplicable happenings are offered by the new information. Darley now sees that his concerns in Justine were merely part of a complex scheme in which he was a besotted pawn. In Balthazar Darley shifts from stage centre to a minor position in the wings from which he again attempts the objective viewpoint of events and people in the light of his new intelligence.

Mountolive has its beginning placed several years before the block of space-time of Justine and Balthazar, but catches up and coincides for the duration of the other two books. Mountolive is written seemingly from the omniscient viewpoint and discusses many of the events already mentioned in the previous books. However, since its pages reveal contradictions through a series of letters and other documents, it is not truly omniscient and is perhaps better regarded as the official viewpoint. The central character, Mountolive, is a career diplomat, and events are viewed mainly for their political import. This view is the most convincing, not only because it offers a more complete explication of motivation, but because, being the official viewpoint, it is more impersonal and may be accepted as more objective. The differences of interpretation between Mountolive and the previous two books do not necessarily

conflict as did those of Justine and Balthazar. Instead, they tend to supplement one another and thus give the reader the illusion that he is seeing events in a rounder perspective.

The last book of the Quartet, Clea, is removed by time from the others. It serves as a sequel to Justine and Balthazar and to complete the continuum begun in the first three books by the addition of the fourth dimension. In Clea Darley again occupies the central position of what is now, except for the inclusion of some extraneous detail, a return to the Aristotelian form. Clea is not so much concerned with speculation and recollection as with the narrative of action. It answers no questions posed by the first three books, but tidies up ends left by them while imparting a sense of the continuity of life. Now, presumably, the complete continuum emerges. Whether or not Durrell's idea and portrayal of this continuum are successful is the topic of this thesis.

However, although style and structure are, in the last analysis, indivisible, there are certain aspects of Durrell's technique in the Quartet which must be looked at before reaching the crux of the thesis in Book II. Therefore, Book I will deal with the style of the Quartet, emphasizing as far as possible Durrell's use of stylistic devices as structural elements.

CHAPTER I

SYMBOL AND IMAGE

Lawrence Durrell has proved himself to be more than competent in almost every field of literary endeavour. His most notable work includes criticism (Key to Modern British Poetry); poetry (The Tree of Idleness, On Seeming to Presume); travel books (Prospero's Cell, Bitter Lemons, Reflections on a Marine Venus); plays (Sappho, An Irish Faustus); and novels The Black Book, The Dark Labyrinth, and, of course, The Alexandria Quartet.

When one reads Durrell's books, it becomes evident immediately that Durrell is primarily a poet, and that his work is most arresting and most satisfying when his poetic faculties are allowed to dominate. This is an important fact to be borne in mind when one examines the structure of the Alexandria Quartet since it is the poetic devices of symbolism, imagery, and repetition that interconnect the four books and give unity to the whole.

In this chapter I shall examine the most important symbols and images of the Quartet, paying particular attention to their use as structural elements and as means of unification. The table at the end of Book II will show

the recurrence and significance of the main symbols and images, and one or two which I consider particularly interesting will be discussed in the "Notes on Symbols" (Appendix No. 2).

Durrell's choice of the musical term "quartet" suggests that pattern and rhythm will play an important part in the structure of his four-book continuum. E.K. Brown[1] has listed what he believes to be the main methods of establishing rhythm (which E.M. Forster defines as "repetition with variation")[2] in the novel. All the methods he lists are used by Durrell in the Quartet:

(1) "combinations of word and phrase,"[1] for example, the repetition of "Jamais de la vie", both as a song and as a perfume;

(2) "sequences of incident"[1] (circularity of plot), for example, Darley's hearing the singing of the blind muezzin at dawn, first with Melissa in Justine, years later, with Clea in Clea;

(3) "groupings of character,"[1] for example, Darley's finding Clea in the same place and attitude in which, years before, he had found Melissa;

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[1] E.K. Brown, "Phrase, Character, Incident," Rhythm in the Novel, 3rd ed., (Toronto : University of Toronto Press, 1963), p. 9.

[2] E.M. Forster, "Pattern and Rhythm," Aspects of the Novel, 4th ed., (London: Edward Arnold Publishers Ltd., 1960), p. 154.

(4) "the growth of a symbol as it accretes meaning from a succession of contexts,"[1] for example, the mirror symbol, which not only gains in meaning from its use in different contexts; but also gathers significance from associations with other symbols and images, such as images concerning sight and descriptions of mirages;

(5) interweaving themes "repeating and varying in an interactive relationship,"[1] for example, the theme of the growth of an artist, exemplified by the three writers Arnauti, Pursewarden, and Darley, and by the painter Clea.

Among these methods of achieving rhythm in a novel, Durrell has used most strikingly the fourth and fifth. The fifth will be discussed in a later chapter, but here we shall examine the fourth, using as an example the mirror symbol, which is the most pervasive symbol in the Quartet.[3] It first appears early in Justine and suggests both the method of characterization which Durrell will follow throughout the Quartet and also one of the ideas underlying the multiple-volume structure of the whole:

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[1] E.K. Brown, "Phrase, Character, Incident," Rhythm in the Novel, 3rd. ed., (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1963), p. 9.

[3] See Appendix No. 1 which shows this in tabular form.

> 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. 27).

It is both the strength and the weakness of a symbol that it can have overlapping and even contradictory layers of meaning as does a superinscribed palimpsest, one of the many images used by Durrell to convey his technique, when he speaks of a novelistic form as "perhaps, like some medieval palimpsest where different sorts of truth are thrown down one upon the other, the one obliterating or perhaps supplementing another" (B p. 183). Many of the meanings of a symbol are intended by the author, although some may arise from personal associations made by the reader. The mirror symbol as used by Durrell in the Quartet has two main clusters of association, which in themselves interconnect. The first arises from the theme of modern love: the symbolic association of human lovers with blinded canaries or with birds deceived with mirrors; the Narcissus-like mirror-worship surrounding incest and homosexuality (both, attempts to love another as much like oneself as possible); even the old adage "love is blind." The second arises from Durrell's interest in the subject-object relationship, the relationship of lovers, and the relationship of Alexandria and its exemplars. Since this second to a large degree includes the first, let us examine it in more detail.

Durrell's concern with the subject-object relationship is stated in his Key, a book based on lectures given in Argentina in 1948 when, as we gather from his correspondence with Henry Miller, the Quartet was already taking shape in his mind:

> Under the terms of the new idea a precise knowledge of the outer world becomes an impossibility. This is because we and the outer world (subject and object) constitute a whole. If we are part of a unity we can no longer objectivize it successfully. (Key, p. 30).

The relationship between mirror and viewers is used as an example of the impossibility of completely separating subject and object. When one looks into a mirror to see oneself, distortion arises since what one sees is largely predetermined by what one wants to see. The same is true of the face one turns to others - one shows them what one wants them to see, although in all likelihood such care is wasted since others will see only what they want to see:

> I realize that each person can only claim one aspect of our character as part of his knowledge. To every one we turn a different face of the prism. (J p. 118-9).

What one sees in a mirror, whether it be an actual mirror or a person or event used as a mirror, is only a reflection, however accurate that reflection may appear to be. If one chooses merely to look at the reflection, at the mirror image, and accept it as reality, one can never reach an apprehension

of the truth of an object. This is close to Plato's "Myth of the Cave." While men are content with the shadows on the cave wall or with the reflections in the pool, they will never find within themselves the power to look beyond these illusions to the final truths which may be intuited with sufficient effort, patience, and finally, insight - Pursewarden's "Great Inkling" (C p. 139).

As in the Einsteinian Principle of Indeterminacy, the mere act of seeing influences what is seen, so that subject and object must be thought of as parts of a whole rather than as two distinct entities. Lover and loved are one, not only in the traditional sense, but because they use each other to see themselves even more than to see each other. The symbolism of the mirror as regards love is most explicit in Mountolive:

> ... cafés sweet with the trilling of singing birds whose cages were full of mirrors to give them the illusion of company. The love-song of birds to companions they imagined - which were only reflections of themselves! How heartbreakingly they sang, these illustrations of human love! (M p. 286).

Significantly, it is only Melissa, the exemplar of unselfish love, who uses the mirror to see her lover rather than herself: "Yes, I am looking at myself, but it helps me to think about you" (J p. 54).

Many of the layers of meaning which are gradually built up around the mirror symbol arise from its association with images of sightlessness and of mirages.

Many characters are partially or wholly blind from the time we first meet them: Darley wears glasses; Scobie has a glass eye; Da Capo and Hamid wear black patches to conceal a missing eye; Liza, Pursewarden's sister, is completely blind; the sheik who sings for Memlik and the muezzin are both blind; the village singer who entertains Narouz and Nessim is almost blind. In Clea, Nessim and Scobie's former protegé Abdul have each lost an eye; Justine has had one eye slightly paralyzed by a stroke; and Mountolive needs reading glasses. The only one whose eyesight seems to have improved is Darley who has discovered that he never really needed his glasses. This last example arouses the reader's suspicion, since Durrell's symbols are often at least partially ironic and paradoxical. Blindness is not necessarily a metaphor for restricted perception; if anything, it allows a more concentrated focus. Clea says of Liza: "The blindness does not seem like an incapacity, rather it gives an expression of double awareness." (C p. 114). Thus Darley's restored vision carries the ironic suggestion that he may not, after all, have grasped the truth to the degree to which he believes he has, and that he may be on the way to still more illusions.

Images of sight and of its relative accuracy or inaccuracy are the basis for the repeated image of the mirage of Alexandria which is experienced several times by different viewers[4]. The city, which Darley refers to as "half-imagined (yet wholly real)" (B p. 13), has two realities for Durrell: that of the object in itself, the "Ding-an-Sich," and that imposed by the viewer. In its turn, the city, (or the Groddeck-like "It" which the city exemplifies[5]), imposes its own reality on the viewer. Gradually, illusion and reality, subject and object, become intermingled in the mind and are one, as in the recurrent descriptions of mirages:

> Liquid mud exploded by rainstorms in the dust-laden air throwing up mirages everywhere, despoiling perspectives. A lump of mud swells to the size of a man, a man to the size of a church. Whole segments of the sky and land displace, open like a lid, or heel over on their side to turn upside down.

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[4] See table in Appendix No. 1.

[5] Georg Walther Groddeck (1866-1934) is a minor psycho-analyst whom Durrell discusses in chapter 4 of his Key. One of Groddeck's ideas, summed up in the phrase "I am lived by the It," denies the existence of the individual ego, as Durrell denies the idea of fixed personality traits. The mysterious force which Groddeck calls the "It" unknowable but all-powerful, provides the motivation for human action as does the city in the Quartet.

> Flocks of sheep walk in and out of these twisted mirrors, appearing and disappearing, goaded by the quivering nasal cries of invisible shepherds. (C p. 46).

In this mixture of reality and illusion, Durrell suggests that one must learn not to attempt the impossible, which is to see reality undistorted by subjective viewing. As Clea says to Darley:

> I think, my dear, you have a mania for exactitude and an impatience with partial knowledge which is ... well, unfair to knowledge itself. How can it be anything but imperfect? I don't suppose reality ever bears a close resemblance to human truth as, say, El Scob to Yacoub. Myself I would like to be content with the poetic symbolism it presents, the shape of nature itself as it were. (C p. 119).

The Quartet is structured so that we move steadily away from intense personal involvement as we read the views of Darley, Balthazar, and the public voice of Mountolive. However, as we learn more and more facts, we move farther and farther from the "Great Inkling" which, Durrell suggests (C p. 176-7), is found in what he calls the world of "heraldic reality," the world of myth and symbol, whose truth is beyond the truth of facts. Thus, Darley must learn to enter this world of heraldic reality, the world of "once upon a time." Paradoxically, Clea, the book which shows Darley entering this world, leaves the reader feeling as far, if not farther, from the "Great Inkling" than he

felt in Justine.

Another recurrent symbol, or group of symbols, is contained in the death and rebirth pattern followed by several of the characters. Chief among these are Scobie, who dies in the flesh and is resurrected as El Scob; and Clea, who though losing her hand, finds herself as an artist. Darley's rescue of her from death by drowning, his first decisive act against the powers of the city, is the medium of his own salvation as well as of Clea's since it frees him from his former passivity.

Among the other death symbols, we find the recurrent image of dead children, the children of Justine, Liza, Clea, and Fosca. These children symbolize the Alexandrian way of love with its attendant miscarriages and abortions and its almost total lack of innocence. Justine, who was raped as a child, tells Pursewarden that her kidnapped child died in a child brothel, a fact which she refuses to acknowledge in order to be able to go on looking for it. It is only the casual encounter of Melissa and Nessim, the most gentle and compassionate of all the characters, who come together with tenderness rather than passion, which produces a child who survives. Clea and Amaril conceive a child in the first passion of their love, but neither love nor child can be allowed to live, and so the child is aborted. However, when

they become loving friends, they conceive, and successfully produce, Semira, by giving her a nose and introducing her into the world.

Associated with the life-death symbolism is the change from land, which is the main setting of Justine, Balthazar, and Mountolive, to water, which is the main setting of Clea. Throughout the Quartet, the sea and harbour are two-faced. They are a place of beauty and freedom, with great white liners sailing past the harbour bar and seagulls wheeling in the sunlight. However, there is a sinister shadow to this beauty in the form of battleships which suggest the coming war and the intrusion of outside forces on the city of Alexandria and on its inhabitants:

> the white city itself ... whose veridian and black marble harbour-water reflects the snouts of foreign men-of-war turning through their slow arcs, depicting the prevailing wind; or swallowing their own inky reflections, touching and overlapping like the very tongues and sects and races over which they keep their uneasy patrol: symbolising the western consciousness whose power is exemplified in steel - those sullen preaching guns against the yellow metal of the lake and the town which breaks open at sunset like a rose. (B p. 105).

The harbour is also associated symbolically with Clea, and Darley returns to her as to a place of peace and beauty in a relationship which has already been foreshadowed by the letters which end both Justine and Balthazar. However,

the dark overtones are still present in Clea's "horror" and in the terrifying even though ultimately saving experience of Clea and Darley in the water around Narouz's island.

Water is the traditional element of purification and rebirth and the rebirths of several of the characters are associated with water. Most notable is the experience of Clea and Darley. Also, Pombal's rebirth as the Gallic lover comes after Fosca dies from small-calibre gunshot wounds fired from the otherwise impotent battleships in the harbour; Da Capo goes through a mock-death by water (and later finds mock-life in the production of homunculi), ironically revealed by the epitaph on his tombstone: "Not Lost But Gone Before." (C p. 197).

Up to this point we have been discussing the symbolism of Durrell's imagery. However, his imagery is not only symbolic. It is also used to convey sensuous experience, especially of the city of Alexandria, whose pervasive ambience is one of the most important unifying devices of the Quartet. Durrell creates an Alexandria whose sights, tastes and smells all come alive in the mind as one reads, a mental atmosphere which is reinforced and pointed by magnificent set-pieces such as the duck-shoot on Mareotis and the carnival scenes. Durrell has been accused of writing plum-pudding prose larded with purple patches. However, although one wonders what happened to Darley's

desire to "put things down simply and crudely, without style - the plaster and whitewash" (J p. 83), such writing effectively conveys the artistic reality of the city as created by Durrell, and successfully evokes a strong sense of its atmosphere. This is enhanced by Durrell's palimpsest method of using historical images and references to Cavafy, the "Old Man of the City" as parts of a continuous historical present which is the Alexandria of the moment. Death has little effect on the presence or absence of the characters. Pursewarden and Scobie are in one sense more fully alive and omnipresent after their deaths than they were when alive, whereas Melissa is gone and forgotten even before her death, despite Darley's guilty attempts to keep her alive in his mind.

The recurring descriptions of Alexandria found throughout the Quartet serve as one of the main unifying devices. As well as these, there are many other examples of "repetition with variation" which tend to shape and unify the Quartet. Justine and Balthazar are both remembrances of things past, and as in one's memory certain smells, songs, or phrases take on symbolic meaning in the mind so that the encountering of them can recall an entire period of one's existence, so do they for Darley, and, by the time of Clea, so do they for the reader. Most outstanding of these is

"Jamais de la vie," which is both the perfume used by Justine and by Melissa, and a song which recalls for Darley the entire summer in Alexandria leading up to the Duck Shoot and Justine's disappearance. Gradually, the reader becomes aware that each time the song is heard it signals a turning point in the life of an individual: Cohen sings it on his deathbed; Mountolive hears it just before meeting Leila for the last time; Darley and the child hear it as they enter the harbour of Alexandria.

Another example of "repetition with variation" used by Durrell is the presentation of situations repeated with different characters: Darley's meeting Melissa and Clea in the same place and attitude but at different stations in time; Justine and Clea saying the same thing after making love with Darley for the first time; three visits to a child brothel. One section of about a page in length is repeated almost word for word in Justine (p. 25) and Clea (p. 99) when Darley hears at dawn "the sweet voice of the blind muezzin from the mosque reciting the Ebed - a voice hanging like a hair in the palm-cooled upper airs of Alexandria," the prayer winding "in coil after shining coil of words." The first time he is with Melissa, but the second time Melissa is dead and he is with Clea in a scene which shows the fulfilment of the promise made by Clea to Melissa to make love with Darley after Melissa's death.

"Cannot a friend make love on another's behalf?" (B p. 135).

There are also scenes which happen only once, but which are given varying explanations, for example, the scene in which Darley observes a prostitute and her customer. As he looks at them he does not consciously recognize the man. Later, he thinks it to have been the dwarf Mnemjian. However, we are later still led to believe it was Narouz. This scene, like those involving different characters, illustrates Pursewarden's belief that, at least potentially, "Everything is true of everybody" (B p. 140). It is also another example of the fallibility of human viewing. The scene is particularly noticeable since the characters involved are so different. Narouz and Mnemjian are among the few characters whose physical appearance Durrell describes in detail, and it is a shock to find that Darley could not recognize at first the person involved and later could be unsure as to whether it was Mnemjian or Narouz.

All these recurrent symbols and images, phrases and situations, plus many not mentioned in this chapter are imaginatively and intellectually satisfying to the reader. Just as importantly, they interconnect the separate books to make of the Quartet a unified, balanced whole. As Durrell has said:

> If you remember scenes or characters and can't quite remember which book they come in, it proves that the four are one work tightly woven, doesn't it? The joiner is the reader, the continuum is his private property. One dimension in the light of the other. 6

The use of repetition and variation in symbol and image has served an important structural and stylistic purpose in achieving this unity, not only adding rhythm to each book and to the Quartet as a whole, but, through this rhythm and pattern, providing the work with a means of internal coherence.

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[6] L. Durrell, "The Kneller Tape (Hamburg)," The World of Lawrence Durrell, ed. Harry T. Moore, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1962), p. 163.

CHAPTER II

TONE

One of the most important aspects of an author's style is the tone he adopts. This is determined both by his attitude towards his subject and towards his readers, and by the message (or moral, if any,) which he wants to convey. The author's tone, although usually established early in a work, becomes progressively clearer as the work takes shape.

The Alexandria Quartet has two main themes. One is the investigation of what Durrell calls "modern love." The other shows the growth of an artist.

There appears to be nothing essentially "modern" about the various manifestations of love portrayed in the Quartet except insofar as the modern science of psychology helps us to fix labels on them. "Alexandrian love" would be as good a name as any to define this plethora of love attitudes which range from "the monster with two backs" of Plato's "Symposium" to "the sacrificial suicide of a true cathar." ("The Kneller Tape," p. 168).

Secondly, the Quartet is concerned with the struggle of an artist to find himself, his need to realize the gap between appearance and reality, and the gradual maturing of his psyche which makes it possible for him to rise above the world of relative fact and to enter the heraldic universe.

Love (in all its forms) and art are inseparable to Durrell. Pursewarden, who frequently expresses what seems to be the truth as Durrell sees it, says:

> For culture means sex, the root-knowledge, and where the faculty is derailed or crippled, its derivatives like religion come up dwarfed or contorted ... (C p. 141),

a statement which echoes Clea's: "When a culture goes bad in its sex all knowledge is impeded." (C p. 113).

Of course, these are the views of two of Durrell's characters; they are not given us directly from the author. The problem of catching the author's tone is complicated when, as in the Alexandria Quartet, there is a veil between reader and author, not only in the form of various characters, some of whom give us the author's views and some of whom do not, but also in the form of a first-person narrator. In this case the reader must also understand the author's attitude towards his narrator.

The main two characters who represent Durrell in the Quartet are Darley and Pursewarden,[1] who may be said to represent different facets of Durrell's personality: Pursewarden being wiser than Durrell, the idealized writer as genius; Darley being less wise, the writer as fledgling artist. In Clea we see an intermediate stage where an older and somewhat wiser Darley looks back on the young Darley. Since Pursewarden is presented as the wiser voice, it may be inferred that his statements, especially about art, are usually to be taken more seriously than those of Darley, even though Pursewarden often expresses himself flippantly. Darley, although usually serious, is often mistaken.

Durrell's attitude towards Darley, Pursewarden's towards "Brother Ass," and Darley's comments on his younger self all enhance the ironic tone pervading the Quartet. The latter, indicating Darley's belief in his own maturation, when read in the light of this pervading irony, suggest to the reader that the Darley who wrote Clea still has far to go. One example of the change in Darley is the change in his attitude towards Alexandria. In his first flush of happiness with Melissa and later in his passion

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[1] See Book II, chapter 2 for further discussion of this statement.

for Justine, Darley sees the city as exciting, exotic and sensual. His attitude towards the city is in many ways a reflection of his love for Melissa and for Justine, just as Mountolive's love for Egypt is largely a product of his love for Leila. As Darley says, "A city becomes a world when one loves one of its inhabitants." (first ref. J p. 63). For Darley as for Mountolive, disillusionment with the loved one means disillusionment, with the city in Darley's case, the country in Mountolive's, so that in Clea Darley can write of Alexandria: "I had come to see it as it must always have been - a shabby little seaport built upon a sand-reef, a moribund and spiritless backwater." (C p. 103). But, as Justine remarks, the difference is in Darley and in what he chooses to see.

I have said that an ironic tone pervades the Quartet. There are many types of irony present. Among the most important are verbal irony, dramatic irony, and irony of situation. All literary ironies have in common a discrepancy or an incongruity of expectation and often have the aim of persuading the reader to reach conclusions for himself. He feels slightly ahead of the characters or of certain of the characters, as, for example, the reader is aware of the true identity of Sophocles's Oedipus long before he is himself. The tragic effect is greatly increased for the reader because he sees disaster approaching but is helpless to do

anything but watch it arrive.

However, the reader knows more than the characters only because the author intends him to; because he is given enough hints to see something which the other characters cannot see. The novel is structured so that the proper information is fed to the reader to keep him ahead. If the author chooses to withhold information deliberately, for example, through plot manipulation, the reader may be behind the characters.

The ironic method can become sardonic when the irony is private to the author. Durrell's irony becomes somewhat sardonic in his technique of presenting different facets of himself, fictionalized, and only partially revealing his views. In the final analysis one never sees Durrell or his views directly, but has to build up a composite and incomplete picture from the views presented by his characters.

The ironic tone is implicit in Durrell's choice of the literary implications of the relativity theory as the structural basis for his work, since the theory implies a discrepancy between appearance and reality, and raises the questions of how much factual truth can be known, how valuable factual truth is, and whether there is another form of truth beyond relative truth. It is also implied by

the use of multiple viewpoints, since each view is limited and reveals only partial truth.

The careful building up of the ironic tone is accomplished through the use of many examples of the main types of literary irony:

(1) verbal, in Pursewarden's statement: "Yes, Brother Ass, the choice of a style is most important ... O to write like Carlyle! Haggis of the mind." (C p. 133), or Balthazar and Clea calling Darley "wise one" in a tone of gentle mockery;

(2) dramatic irony, in Melissa's innocently exploding Pursewarden's beliefs about Nessim and the Palestine plot, thus helping to bring about Pursewarden's suicide, or in Scobie's being kicked to death by the sailors of the same ship which, years later and quite unknowingly, celebrates him in the guise of a local saint by a display of fireworks;

(3) irony of situation, in Darley's view of his affair with Justine versus the views of, say, Melissa or Justine herself, or the mock-death and reappearance of Da Capo.

Some examples of irony, such as Leila's finding refuge after disfiguring disease in the veil which she disdained in her youth, are evident at the time one encounters them. However, much of the irony emerges only when one possesses later information relating to a formerly straight-forward occurrence, such as Justine and Darley's

guilty belief that Nessim is about to confront them when we later learn it was Maskelyne spying on Nessim.

So effective does the repeated use of irony become that eventually the reader learns to expect discrepancy between what is shown and what is not shown, and to question his ability to distinguish between appearance and reality. Gradually, he learns to realize that viewpoint is all-important. By the time of Clea, he is conditioned to be suspicious of the seemingly idyllic relationship which springs up between Darley and Clea; and at the end of Clea, when the way seems clear and straight with new vistas opening and promises of old relationships resumed, the reader reserves judgment.

The ironic tone is also present in the circularity of plot. Although progress seems to have been made, in many ways things have come full circle, for example, Justine and Pombal are almost exactly as they were at the beginning of Justine. Darley and Clea seem to have entered their kingdoms, but Durrell's ironic tone throughout the Quartet has taught the reader caution so that he no longer accepts as fact or as truth what one person believes to be true.

In Durrell's view (delivered implicitly through tone and explicitly in the views of Pursewarden), irony has an important part to play both in art and in life. Pursewarden

says:

> About Art I always tell myself: while they are watching the firework display, yclept Beauty, you must smuggle the truth into their veins like a filter-passing virus! This is easier said than done. How slowly one learns to embrace the paradox! (C p. 138).

This is very much Durrell's method in the Quartet. Or again, as Pursewarden says: "Truth disappears with the telling of it. It can only be conveyed, not stated; irony alone is the weapon for such a task." (C p. 144).

The truth which Durrell is attempting to convey is that there is no final truth available to man within the world of relative fact. The truth which is available to man resides in myth and symbol, and can only be grasped either by the very young (who are not bound to the world of fact to nearly the same degree as are adults), or by an adult whose psyche has matured sufficiently to be able to regain the clear vision of a child. Darley at one point wonders, "is not life itself a fairy-tale which we lose the power of apprehending as we grow?" (C p. 16). Still later he comes to realize the need to look beyond the world of factual truth:

> 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! Nor was there any way in which I might be instructed in the matter - save by the ironies I had found so wounding. For now I realised that his [i.e. Pursewarden's] irony was really tenderness turned inside out like a glove! (C p. 176).

As Darley has been instructed through irony, so has the reader.

Irony is not only important in art. It is also a means of defending oneself against the crassness of the outside world. It is, in Durrell's view, a generally estimable attitude, especially when combined with tenderness. Darley says of Balthazar: "His exquisite balance of irony and tenderness would have put him among the saints had he been a religious man." (J p. 93).

Passion is looked upon with distrust by almost all the characters of the Quartet, even when they are in its throes, and it is suggested that passion can be as much of a perversion and sin as that which is usually thought of as perversion. The important thing is one's attitude. "Anything pressed too far becomes a sin." (J p. 40); so passionate love is treated in terms of illness and arouses only pity or revulsion. When Darley taxes Clea with being in love with Amaril he writes:

> Between us we had never used this dreadful word - this synonym for derangement or illness - and if I deliberately used it now it was to signify my recognition of the thing's autonomous nature. It was rather like saying 'My poor child, you have got cancer!' (C p. 256).

The reason for this distrust of passionate love in the Quartet arises from the fact that this type of love, the love of "austere primitive mindless Aphrodite," is an

absolute; and in a world in which there can be only relative truth, absolutes are to be distrusted. "The other feelings, compassion, tenderness and so on, exist only in the periphery and belong to the constructions of society and habit." (J p. 105). Love in these terms leaves no room for either irony or tenderness. So we have the repeated scene of one member of a couple turning from the former loved one in disgust or emptiness: Melissa from Cohen, Darley from Melissa and later from Justine, Mountolive from Leila.

The love which is approved in the Quartet is a gentler love, based on tenderness, yet seasoned with gentle irony. Darley writes: "Loving is so much truer when sympathy and not desire makes the match ...." (J p. 204). As we saw in chapter I, it is only this sort of match (for example, that of Melissa and Nessim, or of Clea and Amaril after their passion has died down) that is fruitful.

Sex in such a code becomes important, not as an expression of passionate love, but as "a psychic and not a physical act ... a primitive method of introducing minds to each other, engaging them." (B p. 124). Hence the importance of the apparent promiscuity displayed by most of the main characters: Nessim is Justine's husband and the father of Melissa's child; Darley lives with Melissa, is infatuated with Justine, and finally has an affair with Clea, whom Melissa asked to make love to Darley for her, and who in the

past loved first Justine, then Amaril; Pursewarden loves his sister who loves Mountolive who loved Nessim's mother. It is no wonder the characters display a revulsion towards the word 'love' in the face of so many of its manifestations. The characters interweave in an intricately-patterned dance of which Pombal says: "It is all a merry-go-round, isn't it? Like a Paul Jones. New partners until the music stops!" (C p. 45).

However, Durrell is not showing a promiscuous society for the sake of sensationalism or for purposes of moral censure. His aim, in his own words, is the development of the idea that "the sexual act is our 'knowing machine'."[2] Pursewarden's character Parr the sensualist gives as an explanation for his promiscuity a hunger for beauty which cannot be satisfied but which one tries to satisfy through sex. In the Quartet it is Da Capo who is identified with Parr and who gives the same reason for what others might call his "contemptible skirt-fever" (J p. 211).

It is through the proper use of sex that most people can approach the world of mythical reality which Durrell calls heraldic. It follows that this approach is more open in a

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[2] Kenneth Young, "A dialogue with Durrell," Encounter, My.,'60, p. 65.

society whose attitude towards sex is liberal without being obsessive. Obsession with, or suppression of, sexuality are forces which confine or pervert natural expression. If we believe, like Durrell, that sex and art are complementary, the sexual mores of a society can stimulate or stifle the artistic impulse. Alexandria, with its preoccupation with sex per se is generally restrictive, and lesser artists, such as Clea and Darley, feel the need to escape from its oppressive atmosphere and to return to Europe, especially France, where the artistic soil is richer. It is possible for a strong personality, for example, Pursewarden, to rise above his surroundings, but, to return again to the interlinking of sex and art, this is so at least partially because he passed through his own emotional crisis (his affair with his sister and the death of their child) elsewhere.[3] We see Pursewarden as an established artist whose defense against the crassness of the city is irony.

By the end of Clea the prevailing ironic tone has served an important structural purpose. It has not only helped give unity to the work as a whole, but, more importantly, it has led the reader to arrive at conclusions which make him ready to accept the philosophical implications

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[3] The influence of the city upon the characters will be discussed at further length in chapter III.

of the relativity proposition, on which, according to the Note in Balthazar, the form of the Quartet is based. It has done this first by leading him to reach for unreachable conclusions, in other words, to find absolute truth in the world of fact; but it has led him to decide that such conclusions are unreachable, that he must look beyond the world in which Pursewarden can write to Darley: "Everything you say is truthful and full of point; relative truth, and somewhat pointless point ...." (C p. 133). By demonstrating how various characters in the book, Darley in particular, learn to look beyond the world of relative truth, and by suggesting the greatness of the one writer who has achieved a vision of a type of truth which seems more valid than any other offered, Durrell has managed to convince the reader at least of the possibility of finding an approximation to absolute truth in the world of myth and symbol, the heraldic universe.

CHAPTER III

CONCEPTION AND PRESENTATION OF CHARACTER

For reasons of scope, I shall not, in this chapter, examine each character individually. Instead, I shall discuss the ideas underlying Durrell's conception of character in general, since they arise from the ideas underlying the structure of the Quartet, in particular, ideas arising from the relativity proposition. Most important among these ideas are first, that "personality as something with fixed attributes is an illusion - but a necessary illusion if we are to love!" (B p. 15); and second, that the characters are at the mercy of their environment, their actions being merely facets of the city's unknowable pattern, working itself out through its exemplars.

These ideas are not peculiar to Durrell. Theories on the fragmentation of personality and on the influence of environment on character have been part of the discipline of psychology since its inception. However, Durrell's use of them is original. He makes characterization into a key area in which to demonstrate his literary presentation of the relativity proposition by emphasizing the importance of

the subject-object relationship. Not only does he suggest that "each person can only claim one aspect of our character as part of his knowledge. To everyone we turn a different face of the prism" (J p. 118-9); but he suggests also that no one has a complete "personality"; that everyone is Everyman, and that it is only in the eyes of others that we become personalities, as distinct from persons. Darley puts this idea most clearly in Clea (p. 56):

> There was no question of true or false. Nymph? Goddess? Vampire? Yes, she was all of these, and none of them. She was, like every woman, everything that the mind of a man (let us define 'man' as a poet perpetually conspiring against himself) - that the mind of man wished to imagine. She was there forever, and she had never existed! Under all these masks there was only another woman, every woman, like a lay figure in a dress-maker's shop, waiting for the poet to clothe her, breathe life into her.

In other words, as Pursewarden suggests, "Everything is true of everybody" (B p. 140). Two of the most important symbols in the Quartet, mirrors[1] and masks, support this idea. One illustration of the mask symbolism is in the description of men and women at Carnival wearing dominoes. With the absence of reflection in another's eyes and mind, personalities disappear. The same idea explains Durrell's general avoidance of detailed physical description. He is

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[1] See discussion in chapter I.

interested in exhibited personality traits rather than in appearance, in demonstrating the fragmentation of a personality rather than its unification. His method of presenting this conception of character is via the multiple viewpoint, especially via the viewpoint of Darley, the narrator of three of the books.

As I mentioned in chapter I, Durrell makes his method clear very early in the Quartet (J p. 27), when we are shown Justine looking at herself in multiple mirrors and exclaiming:

> 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?

Throughout three of the books we have not only Darley's impressions of characters, but also other characters' impressions of each other as reported to and by Darley, in other words, not only direct observation, but reflection and re-reflection as in a hall of mirrors.

In examining Durrell's use of the multiple-viewpoint in presenting his characters, it is interesting to compare briefly Durrell's method with that of Dickens. Both methods spring from the idea of the solitariness of each human being and the inability of humans to understand and communicate with each other. Both involve characters who soliloquize at

length, as much for their own benefit as for those listening. Both make use of caricature, as both writers have a keen eye for the grotesque and for the ridiculous. Also, both methods include over-writing and the giving to many characters a distinctive expression or turn of speech. Dickens, however, uses these methods, combined with an impressionistic visual approach, to give the illusion of life to almost all of his characters. Durrell uses them for the same purpose with only a few of his characters, most notably Scobie.

What is most interesting about this comparison is the way in which the methods of characterization used by Durrell and Dickens bear out Durrell's idea that personality with fixed traits is illusory. Dickens' characters give such a convincing illusion of life because of a deliberate restriction of the information given to the reader by the author. Dickens' characters remain "in character." Even though new information about them may be a momentary surprise, on reflection it is always possible to see that they have not departed from the traits originally attributed to them.

Viewing from different angles helps to round a character in the mind of the reader when the different aspects presented complement each other and can be reconciled, even if secondary revelations are surprising after the first

view of character. This is how we see such characters as Melissa, Pursewarden, Pombal and Scobie. However, when the different presentations of a character contradict each other, the character is fragmented in the mind of the reader, and he loses the sense of a clearly defined personality, which is exactly what Durrell intends. Nessim, for example, is portrayed as a jealous husband, a 'mari complaisant,' a dilettante, a dangerous schemer, all views which tend to fragment the reader's impression of him and which cause him to remain intangible as a character.

All of this suggests that for a character to give the illusion of life, he must be presented with fixed personality traits. In Durrell's view this is a type of wish-fulfilment. We do not want discrepancies in friends or in the characters about whom we read. Instead, we cherish the illusion of a knowable person whom we can see clearly, and we will often choose to disregard as irrelevant, things which do not fit the illusion we have chosen, the illusion which is necessary for intercommunication to be meaningful for us, "a necessary illusion if we are to love."

Durrell and Dickens are also alike in their portrayal of characters who are déracinés, however much they may be involved in the social and political life of a city. They are turned inward, have a very limited awareness of other

people, and use others as mirrors in which to see themselves. The characters of the Quartet, however much they may be influenced by the general atmosphere of the city of Alexandria, are not a part of Egypt proper or of anything outside the bourgeois and upper-class European society of the city. Durrell writes:

> The Alexandrians themselves were strangers and exiles to the Egypt which existed below the glittering surface of their dreams, ringed by the hot deserts and fanned by the bleakness of a faith which renounced worldly pleasure: the Egypt of rags and sores, of beauty and desperation. Alexandria was still Europe - the capital of Asiatic Europe, if such a thing could exist. It could never be like Cairo where his [i.e. Mountolive's] whole life had an Egyptian cast, where he spoke ample Arabic; here French, Italian and Greek dominated the scene. The ambience, the social manner, everything was different, was cast in a European mould where somehow the camels and palm-trees and cloaked natives existed only as a brilliantly coloured frieze, a backcloth to a life divided in its origins. (M p. 147).

Durrell claims he is attempting a literary expression of the relativity proposition. One way in which he does this is to demonstrate changes of interpretation made necessary by changes in time and space. The several interpretations of Pursewarden's suicide, for instance, all vary considerably, made as they are by Mountolive, Liza and Darley and reflecting their different angles of vision as political official, sister and lover, and fellow writer. Similarly,

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Darley develops a new view of his affair with Justine at a remove in time and space and with the addition of new information.

> '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.' Something of this order ....
>
> And as for human characters, whether real or invented, there are no such animals. Each psyche is really an ant-hill of opposing predispositions. Personality as something with fixed attributes is an illusion - but a necessary illusion <u>if we are to love</u>!' (B p. 14-5).

Durrell also expresses his concept of relativity through the disposition of characters, by demonstrating how subject and object influence each other, in a literary analogy of the Principle of Indeterminacy. This relationship is best seen in the confrontation of character with character. Not only is each character presenting only a partially true picture of himself, but each viewer is seeing him through a veil of his own selected fictions, attempting to find the part which will most successfully mirror the view of himself he wishes to see.

The usual way of presenting a character is to do so temporally, to follow him, if not from youth to old age, at least through a period long enough to show some change or

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development in his personality. The most dramatic examples in the Quartet of confrontations after a period of time are those of Mountolive and Leila, Darley and Justine. In both, Durrell emphasizes the fact that much of the shock they feel on seeing again their former lovers comes from the fact that they had originally seen them through the distorting eyes of love, and, secondly, had re-invented them in their minds, losing sight of everything but their own imaginings. Justine says to Darley: "You see a different me .... But once again the difference lies in you, in what you imagine you see!" (C p. 53).

Durrell also emphasizes the importance of viewing a character spatially, from different positions. "Two paces east or west and the whole picture is changed." For example, Justine, Darley, Balthazar and Melissa had very different views of the affair between Darley and Justine. Darley's view of the affair changes with additional information.

Durrell also uses Darley to show how vision distorts or obscures. Nessim is difficult to visualize in Justine because Darley is seeing him through the eyes of his love for Justine and his guilt at betraying Nessim. Pursewarden is a shadowy figure in Justine because Darley sees only an apparently irresponsible and inexplicably successful person. One feels it is mainly his death which causes Darley to

mention his life. These characters emerge more clearly in Mountolive where they are portrayed dispassionately.

When we speak of seeing characters clearly, we must face the question of whether relativity admits essence. It is one thing to believe that one cannot know another's character because one's view is inevitably limited and one's knowledge relative and incomplete. However, the suggestion that "character as such is an illusion" implies that in a discussion of the "knowability" of personality, the limitations and incompleteness of the human viewpoint are irrelevant. If something does not exist, it does not matter how fine or how blunt are one's instruments of perception. The Quartet suggests that it is impossible to know another person, not because of the limitations of human understanding, but because personality in the traditional sense does not exist. There is no fixed personality to get to know, because each psyche contains opposing pre-dispositions, every character is Everyman.

Nevertheless, the characters in the Quartet are individual in many ways. Although their reactions are sometimes the same, they are often different. Durrell finds his explanations of motive in two areas. A person's public face and reactions will be determined largely by his dealings with others, by the various subject-object relationships in

which he finds himself. On another level, Durrell finds in geographical location (the city of Alexandria in the case of the Quartet) a prime mover to thought and to action.

> As a poet of the historic consciousness I suppose I am bound to see landscape as a field dominated by the human wish - tortured into farms and hamlets, ploughed into cities. A landscape scribbled with the signatures of men and epochs. Now, however, I am beginning to believe that the wish is inherited from the site; that man depends for the furniture of the will upon his location in place, tenant of fruitful acres or a perverted wood. It is not the impact of his freewill upon nature which I see (as I thought) but the irresistible growth, through him, of nature's own blind unspecified doctrines of variation and torment. She has chosen this poor forked thing as an exemplar. (J p. 112).

This idea is repeated several times with more direct reference to Alexandria and to the characters of the Quartet; particularly in Justine: "the city ... precipitated in us conflicts which were hers and which we mistook for our own" (J p. 13); "the connotation of every kiss would be different in Italy or Spain" (J p. 39); "We are the children of our landscape; it dictates behaviour and even thought in the measure to which we are responsive to it." (J p. 41).

A large part of the Quartet is devoted to the city, its history, its atmosphere, the many ways of life which exist within it, and its effect upon its exemplars. Like Egdon Heath in Hardy's The Return of the Native, Durrell's

Alexandria becomes a presence which remains vividly in the mind after memories of its inhabitants have dimmed. The most memorable character in the Quartet is the one who is most fully integrated into all the different areas of existence within the city. Scobie, working for the Egyptian police and living in the Arab quarter; visited by Darley, Clea and Melissa; visiting Mnemjian's barber shop, entertaining the fleet, and eventually worshipped either sincerely or ironically by the inhabitants of Alexandria, serves as a link between the different worlds of the city: between the heightened emotional world of the main characters and their social background; between the Arab quarter and the European community; between the world of politics and intrigue and the world of personal preoccupations. In his roles of homosexual who dresses as a woman and saint who is credited with being able to cause barren women to conceive and impotent men to become potent, he even forms a link between the worlds of male and female. Clea says of him:

> There is a kind of perfection to be achieved in matching oneself to one's capacities - at every level. This must, I imagine, do away with striving, and with illusions too. I myself always admired old Scobie as a thoroughly successful example of this achievement in his own way. He was quite successfully himself, I thought. (C p. 120).

Scobie also serves as a link between the worlds of life and death as he lives on not only in his saintly re-incarnation

as El Scob, but through his pet parrot and in the memories of his friends who re-evoke him in the extended imitations we find in Clea.

Cavafy, too, although never shown as a live character, is continually present and serves as a voice of Alexandria, the city of which he was an exemplar, and as an exponent of the Alexandrian way of love. He becomes an expression of the soul of the city and his influence is strong on the writers living in Alexandria who are portrayed in the Quartet. Like Arnauti he serves to indicate what Durrell calls "the continuity of literature." ("The Kneller Tape," p. 165). It is Cavafy and D.H. Lawrence, both of whom deal in their work with various expressions of love, who are or were supposedly in direct contact with characters in the Quartet, Cavafy being a former chess-partner of Balthazar, Lawrence a correspondent of Pursewarden.

One of the most important points which Durrell makes about character as he presents it in the Quartet is that, despite the widely differing public faces of his characters and despite the multiplicity of reaction available to everyone (implicit in the suggestion that everything is true of everyone), his characters often react in similar ways when confronted with similar situations. The influence of geographical and social environment is, he implies, strong

enough to overcome the omnidirectional nature of character and to produce archetypal personalities as we see in the characters of Melissa, Justine, Clea, Narouz and Pursewarden in particular.

To illustrate this point Durrell uses the doppel-gänger technique[2] throughout the Quartet. When Mountolive meets Leila again after several years' separation and when Darley meets Justine again, both men feel general revulsion for the women they once loved, and both are repelled specifically by the smell of the women. Clea, after making love with Darley for the first time, says the same thing as did Justine after she first made love with Darley.

The general similarity in human reactions is also demonstrated by the repeated use of cyclic patterns[3] and by the presentation of parallel situations and reactions, not only in the way mentioned above but in such things as Darley's description of Clea's love for Justine being a transcription of the symptoms of one of Balthazar's mental patients.

With such emphasis laid upon environment (both geographical and social) as the instigator of action and the

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[2] Yet another technique he shares with Dickens.

[3] See chapter I.

determiner of the personality's public faces, one must conclude that Durrell's presentation of character is largely deterministic. Near the beginning of Mountolive we find the statement:

> Mountolive instantly recognized in him [Nessim] a person of his own kind, a person whose life was a code. They responded to each other nervously, like a concord in music. (M p. 26).

This determinism is seen most clearly by their reactions to the circumstances in which they are placed by Pursewarden's discoveries concerning the Palestine plot:

> They had embarked on a free exercise of the will only to find themselves shackled, bricked up by the historical process. And a single turn of the kaleidoscope had brought it about. (M p. 216).

However, the characters are free to change their geographical location. Such a change will not free them from the determining force of atmosphere, but the nature of the influence will change. Most of the characters are aware of the necessity to seek a more fecundating atmosphere than that of Alexandria. Many of the characters (Mountolive, Pombal, Balthazar) go to Europe, Amaril and Semira to America. Clea and Darley, the remaining artists among the Quartet's characters, seek their fortunes in France which has traditionally been regarded as the ideal atmosphere for artists. Even Nessim and Justine, who find their new source

of stimulation where they found their old, in Alexandrian intrigue, speak of moving to Switzerland in connection with their intrigue.

In the final analysis, one must judge Durrell's presentation of character with regard to his aims, which he has expressed as follows:

> ... That's what I've tried to do in this series - break up the personality and show its different facets. There's no such thing as a whole personality ... My characters aren't real. I haven't taken them from 'real life.' They're invented. I wanted to get away from this sterile realism and back to characters that aren't like life, but that are larger than life. Prototypes, if you want .... Puppets that you can turn and look at from different angles and against a spatial background. [4]

His success in presenting character in this way is demonstrated by the way in which, at the end of Clea, the reader feels a definite sense of incompleteness so that he agrees with Durrell that

> even if the series were extended indefinitely the result would never become a roman fleuve (an expansion of the matter in serial form) but would remain strictly part of the present word-continuum. 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. (C Author's Note).

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[4] C. Cate, "Lawrence Durrell," Atlantic, ccviii, Dec., '61, p. 63.

One feels the axis has been well and truly laid down, and an important part of its fulcrum has been Durrell's conception and presentation of character.

CHAPTER IV

METHOD AND TECHNIQUE

In the last three chapters I have discussed method and technique by examining Durrell's use of symbolism and imagery, his cyclic rhythm, the tone of the Quartet, and Durrell's method of presenting character. However, before moving on to a consideration of structure proper, it is necessary to examine two or three other matters which, while basically stylistic, are important to the structure of the Quartet as a whole, both as unifying factors and in showing Darley's progress in his search for artistic truth. Among these, I shall include romantic and classical elements in the Quartet, style seen as theme and as a structural element, and Durrell's use of description. I shall also discuss the difficulty in evaluating style in a first-person work in which the voice of the narrator is only partially the voice of the author.

There are many superficially romantic elements in the Quartet, particularly in Justine where they serve to emphasize Darley's temperament. (In Mountolive, as one would expect, there are few romantic elements.) Frank Kermode has listed several:

(a) the interest in occult religion;

(b) the character of Pursewarden, who "despises the bourgeois notion of 'literature' ... mistrusts language ... believes critics to be useless ... honours Blake ... has to face his end when young;"[1]

(c) the character of Justine, "the classic emblem of the romantic image, and of its suicidal cost to the artist;"[1]

(d) the character of Narouz, who is "in the book primarily because of the romantic need for a genuinely primitive figure."[1]

It is oversimplifying things to say that Narouz's primary purpose is to fit the romantic pattern. He not only serves an important function in the plot, but also shows the other side of Nessim in yet another variation on the mirror image. However, Narouz does have many elements of Rousseau's "noble savage": the innocence, the directness, the strength, the vision that can be remarkably clear. Pursewarden is a Romantic figure not merely in his art but in his life: his Brontë-esque childhood, his self-imposed exile from his native land, his incestuous relationship with his sister, the secret passion and sorrow which eventually lead him to suicide - all familiar traits of the Byronic hero. Even Darley has a

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[1] F. Kermode, "Durrell and Others," Puzzles and Epiphanies, (New York: Chilmark Press, 1962), pp. 214-27.

moment of Byronic splendour as he describes himself striding through a grove of planes in a sea-tempest: "My hair is clenched back to my scalp and one hand guards the burning dottle of my pipe from the force of the wind." (J p. 113). Clea and Semira can be fitted into the Romantic tradition at one remove. They are both Arthurian damsels who, in their symbolically similar life patterns, provide us with another example of Durrell's use of the doppel-gänger relationship. Both are innocent and beautiful, shut up in a symbolic tower, (Clea because of her choice of self-isolation, Semira because of her deformity) and rescued by a knight in the form, for both, of Amaril.

Northrop Frye believes that

> the essential difference between novel and romance lies in the conception of characterization. The romancer does not attempt to create 'real people' so much as stylized figures which expand into psychological archetypes. 2

If we accept this criterion, then the romanticism in Durrell's approach to characterization is far more than superficial, since in one of his main literary concepts, that of the "heraldic universe," a feature not only of the Quartet, but

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[2] Northrop Frye, "Specific Continuous Forms," Approaches to the Novel: Materials for a Poetics, ed. Robert Scholes, (San Francisco: Chandler Publishing Company, 1961), p. 43.

of all of his work, character becomes archetype. Durrell has said of the characters in the Quartet: "I'd like to hope that seen from the other end of the continuum my characters seem not just 'people' but symbols as well like a pack of Tarot cards" (The World of Lawrence Durrell, p. 157).

However, although the Quartet contains many romantic elements in its characterization and subject matter, it is classical in its concern with form. The form of the Quartet as it emerges throughout the work will be discussed at length in Book II. Here, however, it should be noted that Durrell takes great pains to bring to the attention of his readers exactly what he is doing and to keep reminding them throughout all four books. This is useful to the critic since he is made aware of what the various authors in the work, Arnauti, Darley, and Pursewarden, are attempting. As a composite, they put forward many of Durrell's own aims so that the critic can use Durrell's own standards in deciding how successful he has been.

The first direct statement on the form the Quartet will take is Justine's statement on the "multi-dimensional effect in character" (J p. 27). Then there is Arnauti's wish to "dispense with the narrative articulation" (J p. 75). Later in the same book there is Darley's expression of his desire to put down events not in the order in which they

happened, but in the order in which they became significant for him (J p. 115). Finally, in the Workpoints of Justine there is a paragraph headed "Pursewarden on the 'n-dimensional novel' trilogy." The other books contain similar remarks, made on writing in general, but for the most part applicable to the Quartet.

In the final analysis, a work should be able to speak for itself, the result should make clear the aim. However, in a multiple-volume work such as the Quartet, it is useful for the reader (and for the author since he can indicate main areas of interest early in the work) to have guidelines laid down at the start. Also, since one of Durrell's aims in the Quartet lies in demonstrating his conception of art, it adds to the reader's interest to be shown the ideas of various authors in the work portrayed as fragments of Durrell's own personality. Their views are not only similar and complementary, but their works demonstrate progress in skill and in apprehension. At the end, knowing what, theoretically, is being attempted, the reader is able to judge the completed Quartet by the standards laid down by its authors.

It is always difficult to distinguish between style and content or theme and to discuss one apart from the other. It is particularly difficult in this case since style itself is one of the most important of Durrell's themes. This is

shown by his discussions of the purpose and value of art, the value of criticism, the function of the artist, and the form of the modern novel. Durrell portrays artists in different stages of their development, for example, Darley, who has not yet learned to rise above the world of factual truth; Pursewarden, who has entered the world of heraldic reality. Progress occurs within individual cycles, but the reader becomes aware that the individual cycle must lead on to decay and death. Only art, it is suggested, lives on. Darley, after reading Pursewarden's letters to Liza, writes:

> And in brooding over these terrible letters I also suddenly stumbled upon the true meaning of my own relationship to Pursewarden, and through him to all writers. I saw, in fact, that we artists form one of those pathetic human chains which human beings form to pass buckets of water up to a fire, or to bring in a lifeboat. An uninterrupted chain of humans born to explore the inward riches of the solitary life on behalf of the unheeding unforgiving community; manacled together by the same gift. (C p. 177).

Not only are Durrell's style and subject-matter inseparable, but his attempt to demonstrate in literary form Einstein's relativity theory is carried out as much through style as through structure in ways we have already mentioned: the repetition of symbols and images, descriptions which show the importance of the subject-object relationship.

In examining style it is necessary to distinguish between Durrell and Darley. Darley is extremely good at fine-writing, at purple patches, at descriptions, and Durrell uses Darley's style as a means of characterizing him. He is self-consciously clever and undoubtedly effective, occasionally in Pursewarden's definition of the word.[3] His writing is full of hyperbole and unusual metaphor, for example, his presentation of Scobie begins:

> Frankly Scobie looks anybody's age; older than the birth of tragedy, younger than the Athenian death. Spawned in the Ark by a chance meeting and mating of the bear and the ostrich; delivered before term by the sickening grunt of the keel on Ararat. Scobie came forth from the womb in a wheel chair with rubber tyres, dressed in a deer-stalker and a red flannel binder. (J p. 127).

Durrell has been accused by several critics[4] of stylistic faults in the Quartet. A sample of such criticism is as follows:

> Durrell's style is, alas, riddled by cliches, clogged with stock phrases and characteristically vitiated by over-writing. It tends to be somewhat fruity - as Pursewarden himself says, a style 'touched with plum pudding.' 4

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[3] "The effective in art is what rapes the emotion of your audience without nourishing its values" (B p. 115).

[4] For example, Ambrose Gordon, Jr., "Time, Space and Eros: The Alexandria Quartet Rehearsed," Six Contemporary Novels: Six Introductory Essays in Modern Fiction, ed. William O.S. Sutherland, (Austin, Texas: The University of Texas Press, 1962), pp. 6-21.

Certainly there are parts of the Quartet which are open to criticism: stilted and unnatural conversations (Justine says after she meets Darley again:

> And yet, in truth, I enjoyed deceiving you, I must not deny it. But also there was regret in only offering you the pitiful simulacrum of a love (Ha! that word again!) which was sapped by deceit.(C p. 54));

metaphors which try too hard to be unusual (the moon, at one point, is referred to as "a sputum-coloured meniscus" (C p. 26)). The high-sounding talk indulged in by the writers in the Quartet sometimes becomes word-play, with little underlying substance, for example, Pursewarden describes the art of living in these words:

> What appears to be perhaps an arbitrary act of violence is precisely the opposite, for by reversing process in this way, he [the poet] unites the rushing, heedless stream of humanity to the still, tranquil, motionless, odourless, tasteless plenum from which its own motive essence is derived. (C p. 153).

There is always the excuse, when faced with a lapse in style, that one is not reading Durrell's direct observations. He is speaking through various narrators, Darley in particular, and what he causes them to write reveals different facets of their public faces and must be viewed accordingly. Certainly many such lapses, especially those in Justine, have been made

deliberately by Durrell in order to show us a would-be writer (Darley) who has not yet come of age. Kenneth Rexroth writes:

> [Justine] is an imitation of what the French call a 'recit' of a weak, pretentious schoolmaster and amateur of the sensibility, who is very busy writing fine writing about his ridiculously self-conscious amours. But the take-off on fine writing is itself fine writing - very fine writing indeed, and the two qualities, the real and its satirical mirror image, are so blended and confused that the exact nature of the 'aesthetic satisfaction' is impossible to analyze. [5]

However, since the style does not change significantly in Mountolive, the book not written with Darley as narrator, one must conclude that at least part of the criticism of style, especially that of overwriting, belongs to Durrell himself. He has said of his prose:

> It's too juicy ... I always feel I am overwriting. I am conscious of the fact that it is one of my major difficulties. It comes of indecision when you are not sure of your target. When you haven't drawn a bead on it, you plaster the whole damn thing to make sure. And that leads to overwriting. [6]

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[5] Kenneth Rexroth, "Lawrence Durrell," Assays, (New York: New Directions, 1962), p. 120.

[6] Julian Mitchell and Gene Andrews, "The Art of Fiction xxiii: Lawrence Durrell," The Paris Review, No. 22 (Autumn-Winter 1959-60), 33-61. Reprinted in Writers at Work: "The Paris Review" Interviews (Second Series), ed. George Plimpton, (New York: Viking Press, 1963), p. 267.

In the Quartet, his tendency to overwrite is often deliberately harnessed with good effect to create the exotic sensual atmosphere of Alexandria as he presents it. Many of the purple patches in the Quartet are not only magnificent set-pieces, but serve as focal nodes for his portrait of the city. The duckshoot and fish-hunt on Mareotis, Carnival, the religious fairs, the visits to the child brothel, all help create an impression of the city as a living presence with the power to influence those within its field. In his description of the city, Durrell changes his style deliberately to suit a change in mood. In Clea, Alexandria is losing its hold on the lives of the main characters of the Quartet, or, perhaps more accurately in Durrell's conception of the city, has finished with them. So Darley's descriptions of the city in Clea become more exaggerated and a little strained as he tries to recapture the city he once saw:

> The whole quarter lay drowsing in the umbrageous violet of approaching nightfall. A sky of palpitating velours which was cut into by the stark flare of a thousand electric light bulbs. It lay over Tatwig Street, that night, like a velvet rind. (C p. 259).

Gradually, as the city's influence wanes, it fades from Darley's (and the reader's) foreground of consciousness, just as the imitations of Scobie by his parrot gradually fade from its memory. After Darley has left Alexandria, he writes:

"I feel it fade inside me, in my thoughts, like some valedictory mirage" (C p. 276).

Whether the occasional lapse in style belongs to Durrell or to one of his created characters, it is the exception rather than the rule. It is the occasional slip of a writer who tends to overwrite and who is working under the pressure of time. Taken as a whole, the style of the Quartet serves to create a work of considerable beauty and sensuous power - rich, evocative, and absorbing. Indeed, after half a century which has produced so many restrained, wordshy writers and so many obscurantists, it is a great pleasure to find an author with the ability to engage the imagination totally, to absorb the reader completely. It is in this sphere of power over words and, in turn, power over the imagination of the reader that Durrell takes his place among the epic story-tellers of the world; the writers who begin, either literally or figuratively, with "once upon a time"; the artists who, as Durrell would put it, have entered the world of heraldic reality.

Durrell is, as V.S. Pritchett has observed "a raconteur, a master of the episode."[7] We have already noted that Durrell has attempted a literary representation of the

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[7] V.S. Pritchett, "Alexandrian Hothouse," The Living Novel and Later Appreciations, 2nd. ed., (New York: Random House, 1964), p. 305.

relativity proposition, and that much of the subject matter of the Quartet arises from this attempt in discussions of the form of the modern novel and the function of the artist. However, in remembering the Quartet, I believe one is unlikely to remember it mainly because of its attempt to unite science and art. Instead, one will probably remember the great set-pieces: Carnival, the duck-shoot, Narouz's funeral, the Arab fairs. It is in this area of description and the evocation of atmosphere that Durrell's great gift lies.

It is interesting to note that the Quartet displays what E.M. Forster states were the main characteristics of the Alexandrian literature which grew up after the Golden Age of Greece: "a decorative method, mythological allusiveness, and the theme of love."[8] All three are, of course, part of Durrell's structure as well as features of his style. Style and structure, while always interwoven to a great degree, have become even more involved with each other in modern literature, with its break-down in narrative, increasing preoccupation with psychological time, fragmentation of character, and concentration upon subjectivism.

Yet insofar as style and structure may be separated, I believe that Durrell's style may prove to be of greater

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[8] E.M. Forster, "Ptolemaic Culture," Alexandria: a History and a Guide, (New York: Anchor Books, 1961), p. 33.

interest than his structural techniques. That his great gifts lie in description, in the use of symbol and image and in the creation of atmosphere is borne out by the fact that, in a letter to Henry Miller, Durrell wrote:

> I wanted you to read Balthazar as it was counter-sprung and have a clue to the form. This big novel [i.e. Mountolive] is as tame and naturalistic in form as a Hardy; yet it is the fulcrum of the quartet and the rationale of the thing. 9

Since Mountolive is the only novel of the four which Durrell calls "a straightforward, naturalistic novel" (B Note), this implies that his attempt to demonstrate the relativity proposition in a layered series is not completely successful, since the series does not remain within the framework of the subjective viewer. This, however, is a question that will be discussed in Book II, which will deal with structure proper.

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[9] Lawrence Durrell and Henry Miller, A Private Correspondence, ed. George Wickes, (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1963), p. 327.

BOOK II

CHAPTER I

STRUCTURE AND THEME

Durrell's intentions in the construction of the Alexandria Quartet are put forward in a prefatory Note in Balthazar where he states that the form of the Quartet "is based on the relativity proposition," and that its parts, "three sides of space and one of time," are turned "through both subjective and objective modes." These statements are a variation of Pursewarden's comments on "the 'n-dimensional' novel trilogy":

> The narrative momentum forward is 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 lead backwards to things which have passed. A marriage of past and present with the flying multiplicity of the future racing towards one. Anyway, that was my idea. (J p. 248).

As I mentioned earlier, Durrell's interest in relativity is not recent. In many ways the Quartet may be taken as a literary expression of the ideas expressed in

A Key to Modern British Poetry, a book based on a series of lectures given by Durrell in Argentina in 1948. In this book he states that such revolutionary theories as those of Freud and Einstein have changed man's mode of thought.[1] In literature this change is shown in the breakdown in Aristotelian structure, not merely in plot, but even, in many cases, in sentence and paragraph construction. Aristotle's unities are no longer enough for authors today, if, indeed, they ever were, and in their search to find an alternative, many twentieth century writers have turned to cyclic forms[2] and place emphasis upon subjectivity and upon psychological time. Through their interest in the subject-object relationship, science and art become interdependant to a greater degree than that engendered by Aristotelian preoccupations, so that Durrell can attempt to find in science, or at least in the philosophical implications of a scientific theory, a new source of literary form.

The degree to which Durrell has been successful in basing a literary form on the relativity proposition will be discussed more fully in chapter IV. However, there are

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[1] This was mentioned in the Introduction, but it is relevant here to restate it as one of the most important ideas behind the structure of the Quartet.

[2] Here we may remember Pursewarden's contention that "the Relativity proposition was directly responsible for abstract painting, atonal music, and formless (or at any rate cyclic forms in) literature" (B p. 142).

alternative ways of approaching an understanding of the structure of the Quartet which may lead one just as far as an examination of its points of similarity with the relativity proposition.

One has already been mentioned in chapter IV, Book I. Structural aims are expressed by the characters, and while they may be traced to implications of the relativity proposition, they may also be taken alone, without reference to Einstein's theories. The main examples in Justine were listed in chapter IV. Another is found in Balthazar when Balthazar writes:

> 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 where different sorts of truth 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. 183).

The most pretentious explication of the structure of the Quartet is given by Pursewarden in Clea:

> No, but seriously, if you wished to be - I do not say original but merely contemporary - you might try a four-card trick in the form of a novel; passing a common axis through four stories, say, and dedicating each to one of the four winds of heaven. A continuum, forsooth, embodying not a temps retrouvé but a temps delivre. The curvature of space itself would give you stereoscopic narrative, while human personality seen across a continuum would perhaps become

> prismatic? Who can say? I throw the idea out. I can imagine a form which, if satisfied, might raise in human terms the problems of causality or indeterminacy ... And nothing very 'recherche' either. Just an ordinary Girl Meets Boy story. (C p. 135-6).

In view of such explanations, the Note in Balthazar and the Workpoint in Justine seem unnecessary, like the addition of elms to Trafalgar Square which Durrell undertakes in Mountolive. As Durrell is aware, his ideas on form and structure are not original, variations of them being found in, for example, the works of Browning, James, Conrad, Ford, Gide, Proust, and Joyce. Durrell is presenting his own version of a structure which he believes to be gaining more and more importance as the twentieth century progresses and people come to look at things in a different way because of the influence of science.

Therefore, another way in which we may approach the Quartet is to compare Durrell with another twentieth-century author and see points of similarity which, to Durrell, reveal the spirit of the age. In his Key to Modern British Poetry Durrell singles out T.S. Eliot's Four Quartets as worthy of special attention:

> One of the Four Quartets is built upon the phrase 'In my end is my beginning', and this is repeated in the form of fugue, sometimes changed, sometimes turned upside down, and sometimes repeated. It is in small things like this that we discern the new values of the age. Nothing has permanent value -

> that is really the message behind it - everything depends upon its context in a given system, depends on the way you use it. The identity of opposites precludes any complete and final judgment upon reality. (Key, p. 37).

The above description could apply to the Alexandria Quartet as well as to the Four Quartets. Since both make use to some extent of a literary analogy of a musical quartet, let us examine certain similarities between Durrell's Quartet and Eliot's Four Quartets. We shall take the Four Quartets as a whole since, although each quartet has the five-part form of the conventional musical quartet, all four are linked, like the books of the Alexandria Quartet, by recurrent themes, symbols, and images, and by an overall cyclic form.

Eleanor N. Hutchens[3] suggests that the relationship between Durrell and Eliot is more than a matter of common sources. Durrell, she believes, has drawn upon Eliot, especially in his use of symbols. In her article she compares the Alexandria Quartet to The Wasteland, which also makes use of the quartet form:

> The configuration [of symbols] is the same. This is perhaps best illustrated in the climax of The Quartet, which corresponds closely, in roughly reverse order, to 'Death by Water' and the focal passages of 'What the Thunder Said.' ("The Heraldic Universe," p. 59).

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[3] "The Heraldic Universe in The Alexandria Quartet," College English, XXIV (1962), 56-61.

Although both Durrell and Eliot use the quartet form, Eliot, especially in his Four Quartets, attempts a closer analogy to the musical quartet than does Durrell. Therefore, he departs from a strict four-part structure by using a five-part musical structure within each of his quartets, although there are four quartets and all four are linked by the recurrence of four symbols: air, earth, water, and fire.[4] Durrell restricts himself more to use of the four-part structure, not only in the number of books within the Quartet, but in having four voices, four main characters, and four themes.

Durrell manipulates his four-part structure to build up an expectancy which he deliberately does not fulfil. Mountolive, the only straight, naturalistic novel of the four, has no formal chapter divisions although one could argue that its subject matter makes it fall into four general divisions: Mountolive's history as a diplomat, Mountolive and Leila, Mountolive and Nessim, Mountolive and Pursewarden. Justine and Balthazar are divided formally by Durrell and have four parts each. However Clea has only three parts. Within the three parts of Clea, the first two contain five chapters each, but the third contains only four. This

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[4] In an interesting M.A. thesis on Eliot's influence upon Durrell submitted to the University of Toronto in 1964, David Hamilton Stouck suggests (page 85) that the four books of the Quartet follow Eliot's order of air, earth, water, and fire as being the elements in which Justine, Balthazar, Mountolive and Clea take place.

deliberate curtailment emphasizes Durrell's suggestion that the series could be extended, as does the inclusion at the end of Clea of possible further points of departure.

The word 'quartet' not only suggests that the four parts are to be judged as a whole, but also that the last movement will contain a recurrence and resolution of the themes which have been present throughout the work. Here, the thematic matter of Eliot and Durrell makes their endings vary. "Little Gidding," particularly in its last section, shows a masterly bringing together and final dissolution of the elements of earth, air, fire, and water. Although the movement has been circular, the image of the Wheel of Life has implied a spiritual progression. However, not only does Durrell deliberately leave many things unresolved and incomplete, but, as we have already seen, his ironic tone suggests that there has been only an illusion of progress without anything actually being achieved. In Clea familiar characters, places, phrases, symbols, and tunes recur, but with a rather exhausted air.

Although different subject matter makes Durrell's and Eliot's use of the quartet form diverge eventually, there are many similarities in idea, Durrell giving personified examples of ideas which Eliot states abstractly. Darley's experience with the multi-sided nature of truth when he discovers from Balthazar that his view of the events in which

he had been intimately involved had been so limited at best, so wrong in so much, is an experience which fits Eliot's lines:

> There is, it seems to us,
> At best, only a limited value
> In the knowledge derived from experience.
> The knowledge imposes a 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. 5

Darley's attempts to recapture the meaning of the past, and the effect of these attempts upon his life, are expressed in Eliot's lines:

> We had the experience but missed the meaning,
> And approach to the meaning restores the experience
> In a different form, beyond any meaning
> We can assign to happiness. 6

In fact, the whole of the Alexandria Quartet may be looked upon as a novelistic exposition of the lines:

> We shall not cease from exploration
> And the end of all our exploring
> Will be to arrive where we started
> And know the place for the first time. 7

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5 T.S. Eliot, Four Quartets (London: Faber and Faber, 1959), p. 26 (East Coker, II).

6 Four Quartets, p. 39 (The Dry Salvages, II).

7 Four Quartets, p. 59 (Little Gidding, V).

I have said that Durrell uses the four-in-one structural device on many levels throughout the Quartet. Most obvious is the four-book structure. He also uses four voices: young Darley, Balthazar, the public voice of Mountolive, and older Darley. The work is an investigation of what Durrell refers to as the four faces of love. The main events concern four characters: Darley, Melissa, Justine, and Nessim. There are four themes: the investigation of modern love; the growth of an artist; the art of the novelist; and the influence of environment upon action.

It is the repetition and interweaving of these four themes, characters, and voices throughout the Quartet that give unity to the whole, in a technique similar to that of Eliot in the Four Quartets where he introduces, interweaves, and finally resolves the four elements of earth, air, fire and water. Much of Durrell's structural organization will be examined in the following chapters. Here, however, let us see how Durrell introduces and resolves the themes which will recur throughout the Quartet. On the first page of Justine the scene is set - a man on an island out of time and place attempting to understand and write about events in his past. On this page the names of the main characters are given and the first theme, that of Alexandria's influence upon action, is introduced. The second theme, the

growth of an artist, is implied in Darley's reference to needing to remove himself from Alexandria in order to understand the past, and he is established as a writer on the third page which also introduces his ideas on the indifference of most of the world to art. Love in Alexandria is introduced on the second page and begins to become personal on the third and fourth. Thus the four themes and the four main characters have been introduced in the first four pages. The important symbols and images also appear early in Justine, for example, Anthony's music on the second page, blindness on the sixth; the mirror on page 23; 'Jamais de la vie' on page 25. Gradually, repetition and supplementation make certain phrases (such as those in which mirrors occur) stand out and become focal points for symbolic meaning. By the end of Part I of Justine the main themes, characters and ideas have been touched on and associated in various ways, to be returned to and developed further as the Quartet progresses. As the symbol table in Appendix No. 1 indicates, there are certain symbols and images which dominate the Quartet, in particular, mirrors, masks, and images of death and deformity. However, as in a musical quartet, although one theme may dominate a certain section, the others are omnipresent though subordinate, reminding one of their underlying importance to the whole.

At first there is very little sense of the order of events. It is difficult to distinguish between characters

and to place events in time. For example, both Justine and Melissa are often referred to as 'she' with nothing which at first helps the reader to differentiate between them. This serves a double purpose. It begins to establish Durrell's ideas on the "Everyman" nature of character, and also shows how the way in which a viewer sees others clothes them with attributes that soon serve to differentiate between them. For instance, the reader becomes aware that when Darley speaks of candour or gentleness he is referring to Melissa. When he uses the adjective 'magnificent' he is referring to Justine. Durrell's impressionistic technique gradually builds up an atmosphere in the mind and a general sense of symbolic import which promises that the work will not stale on repeated rereading.

In the concluding volume of the Quartet, the remaining characters are brought together again. Darley meets Justine and finds she no longer holds any fascination for him. He visits the room he shared with Melissa and finds that her spirit has completely disappeared. He has a relationship with Clea which ends with the decisive act which supposedly frees them both from their period of artistic stagnation and, incidentally, from Alexandria. Or perhaps in the latter case it is Alexandria delivering its final blow which in destroying brings life. As Nessim said of Justine:

> Nor can I say that she harmed nobody. But those she harmed most she made fruitful. She expelled people from their old selves. It was bound to hurt, and many mistook the nature of the pain she inflicted. Not I. (J p. 33).

At the end of Clea Darley feels he has come to terms with the past through experience and through the medium of his art. He feels he is ready to begin a new cycle of existence elsewhere, with Clea and in the capacity of a mature artist. However, as we have seen, he may be deceiving himself still about both his artistic and his personal future.

The general exodus from Alexandria began in Justine with the retirement of Da Capo[8] after his feigned death. Justine left, but returns to imprisonment at Karm. Darley left for Upper Egypt but returned. Clea left but returned. Leila left and died in exile. Other characters left Alexandria (or at least their physical bodies left) through death - Melissa, Pursewarden, Narouz, Scobie.

At the end of Clea, all the remaining characters either leave or plan to leave. Darley, Clea, Mountolive and Liza leave for France, where Pombal is living already. Balthazar is to go to Europe, Amaril and Semira to America, Nessim and Justine, reunited by a new conspiracy, plan to

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[8] Perhaps to Rhodes or one of the other Dodecanese which were colonized by the Italians before World War II. This could explain why a Greek passport would admit safety and an Austrian be suspect. It would also explain the Italian servants.

leave for Switzerland.

> For last year's words belong to last year's language
> And next year's words await another voice. 9

Durrell states in A Key to Modern British Poetry (p. 37) that the cyclic form in literature "is one which becomes more and more apparent in the art of the age." He defines it as follows:

> The cyclic technique (the problem is stated, but the statement itself is not resolved and ended), the halt and recovery, the perpetual branching off to come back to the argument by another road and from another angle - ... (Key, p. 128).

Durrell was thinking about the Alexandria Quartet (at first referred to by him as The Book of the Dead) during his stay in Argentina, so it is not surprising that many of the ideas expressed in the Key are seen to be behind the Quartet. The form of the Quartet is circular. It ends more or less where it began, with a new cycle about to begin. As Durrell sees it, the city has finished with these characters, has used them as far as it requires. Their actions (which are its actions) have been played out, and now they are free; at least free of Alexandria. Durrell's deterministic view of character suggests that they are not

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9 Four Quartets, p. 54 (Little Gidding, II).

so much free as tossed like a ball from one geographical jester to another - Europe. (In this connection, one remembers the title of Pursewarden's trilogy: God is a Humorist).

However, the form is not completely circular. For one thing, there is the deliberate open-endedness which we have seen. The circular pattern may merely be completed. Yet at any moment there is room for that intuitive leap which will remove one, at least as an artist, from the continuing pre-determined cycle, and which will allow one to attain entry into the world of heraldic reality. It is suggested that Darley has done this, and the very end of Clea sounds a note of affirmation:

> I wrote: 'Once upon a time ...'
> And I felt as if the whole universe had given me a nudge! (C p. 282).

Paradoxically, Darley stops writing, at least for the reader, at the moment when he is about to begin, so that one is left with a possibility of promise fulfilled, but without the proof.

In this chapter I have attempted to examine the overall structure of the Quartet as it may be understood without having recourse to a discussion of Einstein's relativity proposition. I have suggested that we may examine it as an analogy both to a musical quartet and to at least one other literary exposition of the quartet form.

We may examine it as an expression of the modern trend to use the poetic devices of recurrent themes and symbols rather than the traditional structural device to achieve unity in a general abandoning of the old Aristotelian order.

If we examine the structure of the Quartet from these angles, it seems that Durrell's talk of the relativity proposition, of continuums, of space-time, is peripherally interesting, not centrally important. His attempt to link art and science is interesting, and he may be correct in believing that behind modern literary forms lie the ideas of Freud and Einstein. Perhaps it is impossible to attempt a closer connection. This we shall examine more closely in later chapters. At the moment, however, let us examine Durrell's approach to one of the most important structural devices: point of view.

BOOK II

CHAPTER II

POINT OF VIEW

An author's choice of point of view determines much of the rest of his technique, especially with regard to characterization and description. It is Durrell's aim in The Alexandria Quartet to demonstrate the many-sided nature of truth, the faceted surface of reality. To do this, he has attempted to view the block of space-time which he has chosen from as many angles as possible, both between the different books (Justine, Balthazar, and Clea are written in the subjective mode, Mountolive in the objective mode), and in each particular book, which is made to contain many different views.

In the subjective books, Durrell makes use of a minor character as narrator, a bespectacled schoolteacher with aspirations towards becoming a writer. Darley is romantic, capable of much self-deception, and is of only peripheral significance in events in which he believes himself a central figure. Durrell, in choosing Darley as his narrator, is carrying on a fairly common tradition in English literature

(as demonstrated, for example, by the pilgrim narrator of the Canterbury Tales) in using as his narrator a simple, ordinary man who serves as a type of mirror, reflecting for the eyes of the reader the narrator's society and environment.

In Justine and Balthazar there is a progression from total to partial subjectivity. Darley's tale in Justine is completely subjective. He is recreating Alexandria and its inhabitants as they appeared to him during a period of his life when he was engaged in an intense love-affair with the beautiful Jewess Justine, while at the same time involved with the gentle, tubercular cabaret dancer Melissa. Everything he sees is coloured by his own emotions and interpreted in the light of his feeling of self-importance. Nessim appears to become unbalanced with jealousy and to be planning to kill Justine. Justine appears unable to prevent herself from continuing her affair with Darley, but deeply concerned with its effects upon her husband. An event as disturbing as a murder, which one would expect to be at least worthy of recording, is omitted because it has no personal relevance for Darley. When Justine disappears (to Darley, it seems she has forsaken Nessim), Darley leaves Alexandria, returning only when Melissa dies, when he takes her child by Nessim until the time when Nessim may want it.

The knowledge of this child's existence is the first of a series of revelations which show Darley the vast areas of motivation and relationship of which he knew nothing. In Balthazar his ignorance is brought even more forcibly to his attention when Balthazar, a less intimately involved and therefore more objective onlooker, shows him another side of his affair with Justine. In the interlinear (which is the name Darley gives to Balthazar's comments on his Justine manuscript), he learns that Justine was using him as a decoy to prevent her husband suspecting the man she really loved. This, according to Balthazar, was Pursewarden, a better and more successful writer than Darley, and one whom Darley had been unable to portray satisfactorily in Justine since he had seen only the most superficial of Pursewarden's social masks. In the light of this new knowledge, Darley sees Alexandria and its inhabitants afresh. The block of space-time has begun to revolve before him; the mirror has become a prism, exhibiting new and hitherto unsuspected facets.

The first two books of the Quartet are written from Darley's point of view and show how additional information forces him to re-examine his first, completely subjective view of events. In Mountolive the viewpoint changes. Mountolive is written in the objective mode, in the third person, and from what at first appears to be an omniscient viewpoint. The image changes from the prism to the palimpsest

as we see that beneath all the amatory intrigues, the jealousies, the sexual passions, the psychological disturbances, lies a political base. Justine's affair with Darley now appears to have been necessary as a means of checking up on the information given Melissa by Cohen. Pursewarden's suicide now appears to be not depression following the completion of a book, as was suggested in Justine, but the result of Melissa's revealing to him that he was wrong about the extent of his friend Nessim's involvement in a Coptic conspiracy which would work against British interests in Egypt. It was Pursewarden's belief in Nessim's innocence that caused crucial delay in the official reporting of the conspiracy. It is also suggested that a contributing factor was his receipt of a letter from Liza, the blind sister to whom he had been bound by ties of incestuous love, telling him of her love for Mountolive.

The viewpoint in Mountolive seems omniscient, yet it is not completely so, as alternate explanations are given for the same actions (for example, Pursewarden's suicide), information is still incomplete in many areas and much of the book is written through the eyes of Mountolive or of Pursewarden. It is difficult to understand why Durrell chose to write Mountolive as what he calls "a straight naturalistic novel" (B Note) written in the objective mode. The style

varies very little between the books supposedly written by Darley and that written by what might best be called the public or official viewpoint of Mountolive. Durrell states that one reason for turning the novel through both subjective and objective modes is to show Darley as an object rather than as a subject, but this could have been done by choosing another subjective narrator, for example, Mountolive. In fact, Darley is hardly mentioned in Mountolive and is seen most clearly as an object in Clea when Darley himself includes Pursewarden's notebooks in his writing. There is more information given, but most of it could have been revealed through the use of another character as narrator, especially when we bear in mind Balthazar's explanation for the inclusion of information which a narrator could not reasonably have possessed:

> To imagine is not necessarily to invent ... nor dares one make a claim for omniscience in interpreting people's actions. One assumes that they have grown out of their feelings as leaves grow out of a branch. But can one work backwards, deducing the one from the other? Perhaps a writer could if he were sufficiently brave to cement these apparent gaps in our actions with interpretations of his own to bind them together? (B p. 98).

This use of a public viewpoint which is not omniscient and yet not subjective, but which includes insight into characters' emotions and feelings as well as their political motivations, seems to me an admission of partial failure. The relativity proposition excludes any but a

relative viewpoint, and the mock-omniscience of Mountolive exceeds the limitations imposed by recognition of the relativity proposition. Durrell refers to Mountolive as the rationale of the Quartet. Its mode of presentation is really neither objective nor subjective, but somewhere in between. There are certain differences in construction between Mountolive and the other books, especially Justine and Balthazar. For instance, the story proceeds fairly straightforwardly, and there is a progressive time-sequence. There are phrases which underline the seeming omniscience of a public or official viewpoint, for example: "... it is necessary once more to retrace our steps briefly to the period immediately before their marriage." (M p. 193).

However, Durrell's style is far more obtrusive than any other part of his technique, except where he brings forcibly to the reader's attention his aims regarding structure. Because of this, one tends to overlook the differences in construction and to seize on the similarity of style between the subjective books and the objective one, so that the overall impression resulting is that Darley and the public voice of Mountolive are identical. Perhaps a more careful restriction of knowledge in the first person books and a greater difference in style between Mountolive and the other books would have helped. As it is, I think we must conclude that Durrell's handling of point of view,

while completely successful in illustrating multiplicity of interpretation, is less successful in differentiating between the subjective and objective modes of writing.

The point of view in Justine, Balthazar, and Mountolive presumably becomes progressively more objective and hence more factually true. However, Durrell uses this progression in objectivity to reveal its ultimately limited value, until in Clea, where Darley has most factual information at his disposal, he finds himself stagnant as a writer: "I somehow can't match the truth to the illusions which are necessary to art without the gap showing - you know, like an unbasted seam"(C p. 72); and he feels that his original portrait of Justine contained truth of a more valuable kind even though it was based on ignorance: "... despite the factual falsities of the manuscript ... the portrait was somehow poetically true - psychographically if you like." (C p. 72).

Durrell suggests in Clea that the search for factual truth is necessary, if only to make one realize its limitations, but that eventually one must trust in one's senses and emotions and make the intuitive leap which will enable one to grasp poetic truth, the truth of symbol. Thus in Clea, although certain other items of factual information are revealed (for example, we learn of Pursewarden's guilt

when his child by Liza died); on the whole, the past remains a closed book and Darley, in beginning to perceive the value of symbolic truth, moves towards the Heraldic Universe. The change in him is shown most clearly in his attitude towards Clea. He endlessly analyzed his affair with Justine, but he says of Clea: "I had stopped rummaging through my own mind, had learned to take her like a clear draught of spring water." (C p. 107).

Throughout the Quartet, Durrell is suggesting first, that human knowledge is necessarily limited and dependent upon the angle of viewing, and that distortions arise both from within the viewer and the object viewed; second, that the human ego is a series of masks, the personality a presentation of selected fictions. For both these ideas the best method of exposition is obviously one which includes as many interpretations as possible. As we have seen, a new interpretation may sometimes destroy a former belief. Sometimes it adds to it. Sometimes two conflicting beliefs may be held simultaneously, being neither mutually destructive nor complementary, but serving different areas of the mind. The fact that Justine began an affair with Pursewarden with Nessim's knowledge and agreement, in order to find out how much he knew about the Coptic conspiracy, does not mean that Balthazar was wrong in believing that she loved, if anyone,

Pursewarden. It was merely that Balthazar, like Darley, could not see the whole picture. The fact that she did not love Darley does not invalidate the affair for him. As Ford Madox Ford's narrator writes:

> If for nine years I have possessed a goodly apple that is rotten at the core and discover its rottenness only in nine years and six months less four days, isn't it true to say that for nine years I possessed a goodly apple? 1

a question which brings us back to a consideration of relative and absolute truth and to the hypothesis that human knowledge must always be relative.

Durrell brings out this idea by showing many facets of many situations. He does so, not only by showing events through the eyes of different narrators, but also by making use of books, notebooks, diaries, letters and reported conversations by or about many of the different characters. This device is often used by authors employing the first-person narrative as a means of solving the problem of the narrator's limitation of knowledge. The convention also demands that the narrator possess an exceptionally good memory, enabling him, for example, to repeat verbatim long conversations, often coming to him second or thirdhand. Matters are complicated somewhat when, as in the case of the

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1 The Good Soldier, (New York: Vintage Books, 1955), p. 7.

Quartet, the narrator himself is writing a novel, since this means that he is concerned with making the most, artistically, of his material rather than with merely reproducing events as they appeared to him. Also, Durrell's voice alternates skilfully with Darley's throughout the books. Except when Durrell is drawing attention to it, Darley's writing is from the beginning altogether too good for the fumbling author he is meant to be.

Darley's searching after factual truth serves two purposes. First, the revelation that much of the information he gave the reader in Justine was false establishes Darley (and gradually everyone else as well) as being only partially reliable, which is only to say that the knowledge of any character must be limited. For example, Darley writes unequivocally of Justine and Nessim, "It was clear to them both that he had stolen it" (J p. 175), whereas we learn later that Justine had stolen "it" (the key to Balthazar's watch) and placed it in Nessim's stud-box.

The searching after facts is also used, as I have suggested, to show an element in Darley's writing which leads eventually to a point of exhaustion in Clea. It is necessary for Darley to reach this stage before he realizes the ultimate futility of the search for factual truth.

An ever-present problem in the use of the first-person narrator is that of the relationship between the narrator and the actual author. Durrell has certainly identified himself (probably his younger self) with Darley to some extent. Darley has Durrell's initials, his sometime profession (teacher and part-time writer and lecturer), and a general physical resemblance to him. He also shares some of his ideas. Pursewarden is a type of idealized Durrell, perhaps Durrell as he hopes to become, the writer as fully-achieved artistic genius.

It is always difficult to portray genius, particularly when, as in this case, both the genius and the narrator are in the same profession. Durrell uses the technique of distancing to lend credibility to Pursewarden's genius. We read nothing that Pursewarden has written apart from collections of epigrams and verbal pyrotechnics. Darley seldom speaks directly to him and so Pursewarden is kept at one remove from the reader, a device which helps establish his genius.

Darley and Pursewarden are the main sources in the <u>Quartet</u> for Durrell's ideas, although his views are also given, to a lesser degree, by the other characters, especially the other artists, Clea and Arnauti.

This fragmentation of Durrell's own personality among his created characters is another method of presenting his views on the ego as a series of masks and on the potentiality of every character as Everyman. As each character shows a different side of his personality to different people he meets, so Durrell shows the reader different sides of his own personality in his characters and in the public voice of Mountolive.

I have said that the style of Justine, Balthazar, and Clea is very similar to that of Mountolive. This is especially true in the sensory evocation of atmosphere, especially the atmosphere of places. Alexandria comes alive throughout the Quartet - its smells, sights, sky-scapes, multiple races, houses of prostitution, carnivals, fishing and hunting expeditions. The reader is given an impressionistic picture which takes hold of the imagination completely. On a smaller scale the same phenomenon occurs with Durrell - Darley's evocation of Upper Egypt and of the small island to which Darley retires. This very personal and vivid style detracts from the reader's conviction that Darley, Pursewarden, Arnauti, Mountolive, and the public voice of Mountolive are different and distinct characters; but, again this is Durrell's intention, to show similarities between characters and especially between writers, who form a type of continuous chain from generation to generation. It also emphasizes

Durrell's belief in the importance of the senses as a road to truth, a belief we have already seen in the equation, throughout the Quartet, of sex and knowledge.

The similarities in style between different characters may also be traced to the Chinese-box structure of the Quartet - Durrell the writer writing about Darley the writer writing a novel including other writers. The structure is similar in this way to Gide's Faux-Monnayeurs, and, as with Gide, Durrell's interest in technique causes him to extend this interest to his characters so tnat they discuss the problems of writing technique which concern their creators.

It is always necessary to criticize a work of art in terms of the aims of its author. It is fruitless to criticize a post-impressionistic painting in terms of naturalistic truth. Similarly, it is ultimately fruitless to criticize Durrell for not differentiating between the styles of writing or speaking of his various characters when one of his main theses is that the human ego is made up of conflicting pre-dispositions. Scobie is the character who illustrates this thesis most clearly. He is made up of conflicting yet harmonizing opposites: male/female; old/young; European/Arab; mortal/immortal. He shows a full adaption of opposites which makes him the most distinct and memorable character of all those in the Quartet.

Also, since Durrell has pointed out that in his chosen form it is permissible for a narrator to imagine or guess at facts which he is unable to substantiate, it is pointless to level criticism when his narrators express views resulting from information which they cannot reasonably be expected to possess.

However, it is possible to criticize the manner in which Durrell has applied the Einsteinian concept of three sides of space plus one of time. It seems to me that a greater degree of unity between the four books and a greater degree of conviction for Durrell's views on the relativity of apprehension would have been gained had he retained the subjective mode in all four books. Since the relativity proposition admits of no objective truth, for Durrell to write Mountolive in the objective mode, even though the view is not one of omniscience, clouds rather than clears the reader's way towards an understanding of the points he is making, and the use of a seemingly omniscient viewpoint lends a spurious authority to the narrative presentation of "the facts." Durrell describes Mountolive as the rationale of the Quartet, yet only if it were written more within the omniscient convention could it be so described. As the books stand, each one of them serves as a key to any other of them since each offers a rationale to satisfy one or another aspect of the reader's psyche. As I suggested earlier, very little, if any,

of the subject matter of Mountolive need have been changed or omitted if the book were narrated by Mountolive himself. Another possible narrator would be the solitary Maskelyne. As a gatherer and collator of information he would be in a unique position above the other characters from which to ape omniscience, while his aridity of character and grim morality would impose the need for a vast stylistic change.

Durrell, like Gide, wants to leave nothing out, not only to cut lengthwise, breadthwise, and depthwise, but to utilize different techniques of presentation. However, in the execution, through attempting to show both subjective and objective mode, he weakens his original emphasis on the relativity of human knowledge. We shall examine Durrell's use of the possibilities implied by the relativity proposition in chapter IV. First of all, however, let us look at Durrell's use of time, a technique which not only is an important element in the structure of the Quartet, but which arises from his attempt to give a literary illustration of Einstein's concept of the universe.

BOOK II

CHAPTER III

TIME AS A STRUCTURAL ELEMENT

Unlike either drama or poetry, the novel is basically anecdotal - the author is recording events which have happened, either in actuality or in imagination, and which he is recording from memory. Thus it has been of great interest to novelists to learn about the ways in which the human memory works, and as psychology uncovers more and more about the functioning of the mind, we find an increasing preoccupation with time among twentieth-century novelists. As Darley says in Justine:

> (What I most need to do is to record experiences, Not in the order in which they took place - for that is history - but in the order in which they first became significant for me.) (J. p. 115).

Although the function of remembering and recording may be often an exercise of interest and a stimulus to nostalgia, the prime function of memory is to serve as a basis on which to organize present existence and to plan future action. By bringing the past into the present we believe we are able to come to terms with both.

As Durrell is aware, the artist is attempting a misleading task from the outset in trying to impose a pattern upon experience, to find order and coherence in a series of probably random occurrences, since the pattern and order are imposed from without by the organizing mind of man rather than being an integral function of the events themselves. Nevertheless, for Durrell, art can reveal significance:

> The solace of such work as I do with brain and heart lies in this - that only <u>there</u>, 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 sack-cloth covering which hides the cloth-of-gold - the meaning of the pattern. For us artists there waits the joyous compromise through art with all that wounded or defeated us in daily life; in this way, not to evade destiny, as the ordinary people try to do, but to fulfil it in its true potential - the imagination. (J p. 17).

Such a task is best fulfilled through the conquering of the past with the aim of liberating oneself into a present that includes both past and future. As T.S. Eliot put it:

> This is the use of memory:
> For liberation - not less of love but expanding
> Of love beyond desire, and so liberation
> From the future as well as the past. 1

It is here that Durrell's stress on the importance of time differs from that of Proust. Durrell is concerned, as he

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1 <u>Four Quartets</u>, p. 55 (<u>Little Gidding</u>, III).

says, not with a temps retrouvé, but with a temps délivré; in other words, with the active conquering of the past in the interests of the present and future.

In a discussion of memory, one must consider psychological time as well as calendar time. Hence the presentation of events, not in chronological order, but as they appear in the memory, connected not by cause and effect or by sequence, but rather by repeated phrases and situations, tunes, perfumes, and all the other stimuli of the non-rational elements of the mind. Darley's path moves gradually away from the world of logic and fact towards the Heraldic Universe, the universe of symbols and correspondences which allow man to approach most closely an intuition of truth.

To portray this world Durrell uses the traditional framework: a man in the present recalling and ordering the past. The present is the starting-point and the point of reference, the past is pulled in to meet it and becomes part of it. At the end of the work the characters are ready for the future. In most of the older novels, the past is recalled chronologically. In the Quartet and in the works of many modern writers, for example Proust, past and present are juxtaposed and mingled as the author moves backwards and forwards both in space and in time. Gradually, in the recreation of significant facets of the past as selected by

the psychological screens of the characters' memories, past becomes present. As the outlook of the person remembering changes, so do the significant facets of his past, since his interpretation of them changes. Hence Durrell's presentation of conflicting interpretations, his emphasis on the necessity of taking both time and space into account, the need of remaining aware of the fourth dimension since "Two paces east or west and the whole picture is changed." (B p. 15).

Durrell does not take his treatment of reality and relativity to the point at which dream and reality are confused in the mind (as, for example, in the film Last Year at Marienbad and in Robbe-Grillet's novels generally). There are certain main events which take place within a certain block of space-time, and Durrell interests himself not in whether or not they took place, but in their motivation, their significance, their possible interpretations, their importance for the present. Durrell says he is rejecting Bergsonian "Duration" in favour of Einsteinian "Space-Time." According to Bergson's concept of duration the sequence of past-present-future remains and the emphasis is upon the way in which the past, through memory, exists in the present and influences present perception. In space-time, time exists only as an attribute of matter. Past, present and future are no longer divisible parts of a constant flow. However, both

duration and space-time seem to lead to much the same end, a consideration of

> The continuous present, which is the real history of that collective anecdote, the human mind; when the past is dead and the future represented only by desire and fear, what of that adventive moment which can't be measured, can't be dismissed? (C p. 14).

It seems to me that both Durrell and Eliot ("The moment of the rose and the moment of the yew-tree /Are of equal duration"[2]) are presenting at least partial expositions of Bergsonian duration except that Durrell attempts to approach it from another angle, through the philosophical implications of Einstein's relativity theory. The difference is one of emphasis. Eliot is more concerned with the idea of "a lifetime burning in every moment,"[3] the concept of the shadow between the thought and the deed, the limited value of experience, the importance of the 'now'. Durrell is interested in the multiplicity of experience, the many-sidedness of human nature, relationships between people and between the different parts of personality.

As we have already seen, it is Durrell's belief that the new ideas about time resulting from Darwin, who made

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[2] Four Quartets, p. 58 (Little Gidding, V).

[3] Four Quartets, p. 31 (East Coker, V).

necessary a new view of the past by destroying traditional ideas about the age of man and of the world; and from Einstein, who destroyed the idea of a constant time reference as separable from matter; have contributed towards a new method of assessing the universe. It is this new world-view which Durrell is attempting to convey in the Alexandria Quartet through the medium of a space-time continuum.

These ideas, at least in their literary and philosophical expression, are not completely new. The idea of the relativity of truth has been present to some degree for many years, for example, in the old Japanese fable of Rashomon. Use of such devices as the time-shift and chronological looping can be found in Sterne's Tristram Shandy. What is new is not the ideas so much as the modern vocabulary pertaining to these ideas. It is here that Durrell's variation on a fairly common twentieth-century form shows most clearly, in the use of phrases such as "word-continuum," "space-time," "the n-dimensional novel," and "events collecting like quanta," a description of literature in scientific terms. It has been said that one of Einstein's great contributions to the world has been the re-uniting of the spheres of philosophy and science. Perhaps this is Durrell's contribution - his attempt to bring science and art closer together.

As is usual with Durrell, his ideas are expressed not only in terms of abstract ideas, but also through the use of symbols. Some have already been mentioned. Another illustration will perhaps serve to show how Durrell expresses symbolically his belief in the importance of time. The symbol arises first in Justine (p. 93-4) in the scene where Darley finds Balthazar searching for a small ankh-shaped key which he uses to wind his watch. The ankh, Forster tells us, is a key-shaped cross "that the [Egyptian] gods and goddesses carried as a sign of their immortality,"[4] a symbol of life and generative power. Darley says, "Without the key it was useless to open the delicate golden leaf and expose the palpitating viscera of time itself stirring." (J p. 94). Later in Justine Darley reports that Nessim found the key in his stud-box. In this scene we are shown Darley in his first stage of belief. He acts the part of the omniscient author who records the scene with apparent certainty, describing the feelings and reactions of both Nessim and Justine, and concluding, "It was clear to them both that he had stolen it." (J p. 175). In Balthazar the idea of relativity enters with Balthazar's story of Justine's returning the key to him, explaining that she had borrowed it to see if it would open a wall-safe. Finally the overt symbol appears in the phrase "... hunting ...

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[4] Guide to Alexandria, p. 74.

for the key to a watch which is Time." (C p. 64).

The recurrence of death imagery also increases one's awareness of time. On the one hand, it serves to remind the reader of the continuity of calendar time with its attendant physical changes. On the other hand, the many deaths remind one of Durrell's belief that time is "the measure of our death-consciousness." (Key, p. 4). Durrell uses death, as do many other writers, to heighten the reader's (and the characters') awareness of the present. Any reference to death reminds one, at least subconsciously, of one's own mortality, and evokes the sense of instancy resulting from the realization that the sum of all instants is death. Death influences life, gives one the idea of all time being present in every moment of time, with past and future contained in the present. Death and life are complementary, harmonized opposites. Darley writes of Pursewarden's death:

> Nor, for the purposes of this writing, has he ceased to exist; he has simply stepped into the quicksilver of a mirror as we all must - to leave our illnesses, our evil acts, the hornets' nest of our desires, still operative for good or evil in the real world - which is the memory of our friends. Yet the presence of death always refreshes experience thus - that is its function: to help us deliberate on the novelty of time. (J p. 118).

Time, as we have already mentioned, is the fourth dimension which serves to form the "space-time continuum" as

opposed to the pre-Einsteinian "space continuum." One way in which Durrell demonstrates this is in his revelation of character motivation. This motivation is revealed through both space and time. It is only after a period of some years and from another position in space that Darley begins to see motivations previously unsuspected by him. Yet Durrell shows that the two are inseparably linked. A person's interpretations of motives are made from his position in space. Through changing his position a person may change his interpretation, but time is the agent of this change and the medium which allows removal to a new position. Even when we come to compare the views of two observers watching an event at what can be called the same time, since the relative difference in time between them is not appreciable, we still find different views because of the difference in spatial position. Illustrations of these two factors are first, Darley's interpretation of certain events at the time of personal involvement in them; and second, the difference in interpretation between Darley and Balthazar even during the period in which the events were taking place.

It may be helpful at this point to review briefly the sequence of events insofar as it can be gathered from Durrell's impressionistic presentation aided by occasional time references. (A more detailed plan of events will be given in

Appendix No. 3). There is no evidence that Durrell mapped out an actual time chart as an aid to composition, but obviously he had in his mind a fairly clear picture of what happened when, and it is possible to reconstruct the main events more or less in order.

The main space-time block with which Darley is concerned is a period of approximately one and a half years in the late 1930's in Alexandria, beginning with his first meeting with Justine, continuing throughout the period of their affair, and ending when Justine disappears after the duck-shoot on Lake Mareotis. However, there are, of course, events which took place earlier but which bear importantly on the events of the main block, in particular, Mountolive's affair with Leila, which took place between twenty and thirty years earlier, and the marriage of Justine and Nessim, which took place just a few months before the beginning of the space-time block. The mainspring of the action is, we learn in Mountolive, a Coptic conspiracy in which Nessim and Justine, Narouz and Leila are involved. This conspiracy entails supporting the Jews in Palestine in the hope that the success of one minority group will aid the Coptic minority group in regaining an important place in Egyptian affairs. It is supposedly to assure the Jews of his support that Nessim marries Justine a Jewess, although one wonders why, if this

is the case, Justine is said to have renounced Judaism because of Nessim's wishes. (B p. 98). The conspiracy also explains Justine's affairs with Darley and Pursewarden (both for the purpose of finding out what they know), and separates Nessim and Leila from Mountolive. Thus it provides a political motive for events (affairs and marriages) which would normally have emotional motives. However, Durrell reverses this by suggesting that a suicide which appears to have been precipitated by a political situation arose instead from personal emotion.

Darley is in a good position to demonstrate the importance of viewing events from different angles. He is largely unimportant as far as the main events in the plot are concerned, the only reason for Justine's affair with him being the fact that he lives with Melissa who was formerly the mistress of a now-dead agent who might have told her things which she might have passed on to Darley. However, in Justine, Darley is completely concerned with his love for Justine, with their affair, and with the effects of their affair on Nessim and Melissa. Balthazar shows him being forced to look beyond himself and see the motivations of other people. Mountolive, the last of the spatial novels, shows Darley's fundamental unimportance to the main events. In Clea Darley has shed much of his former self-importance and no longer analyzes his emotions to the same extent. His change in

manifested character has been brought about by a progression in time which completes the continuum.

All four books of the Quartet were written quickly (taking between three and eight weeks each) under financial pressure and published as they were finished rather than as a completed whole. It is, then, not surprising to find certain minor discrepancies between the books, the amazing thing being that there are so few in such a complicated network of events and personalities. Also, there is always the excuse that the error lies in Darley's reconstruction of the events and in the fact that he is writing a book and may not stick closely to chronological order. Some discrepancies have been noted in The World of Lawrence Durrell, for example, in a letter to Durrell by W.D.G. Cox. Two examples of errors in reconstruction not mentioned are (1) when Nessim meets Mountolive in Berlin he tells him of the death a month earlier of old Cohen the furrier. He also tells him of his approaching marriage to Justine. Darley does not meet Justine until after her marriage. Yet in his description of his visit to Cohen's deathbed we find the sentence:

> Walking slowly home through the dark avenue of trees, tasting the brackish harbour wind, I remembered Justine saying harshly as she lay in bed: "We use each other like axes to cut down the ones we really love." (J p. 112);

(2) When Darley meets Justine she has been married only a few

months. Within two years of his meeting her, she has left Alexandria. Yet in Justine (p. 192) we find:

> For seven long years of marriage he [Nessim] had repeated on every day the words, "I am so happy" - fatal as the striking of a grandfather-clock upon which silence is forever encroaching. Now he could say so no longer.

Discrepancies such as these are largely unimportant. However, they do add an element of confusion to a work such as the Quartet whose main premise is that there are infinite possibilities of interpretation surrounding any set series of events. It is not the actual occurrence of events that Durrell questions, but rather the possibility of their yielding ultimate truth either to the observer or to the participant.

There is much more which might be said about Durrell's use of time in the Alexandria Quartet. Some of it will be included in the next chapter. However, before we move on to a discussion of time in relativity, it is interesting to note that at the end of Clea Darley no longer attempts to pin down, dissect, and explain temporal events. Instead, he moves into the world of "Once upon a time," the timeless world of the eternal story-teller which is outside time as a moment of memory is outside time, and which is one element which helps give art its permanence. In doing this he brings to mind

Wyndham Lewis's prediction[5] that the movements of the space-time theorists (who have supposedly influenced Darley strongly) must lead to a form of primitivism. Thus Darley, in his attempt to enter the world of myth and symbol, finds himself returning to the oldest of story-telling formulae. He finds himself writing "Once upon a time" and tells Clea that as he did so he felt "as if the whole universe had given me a nudge!" (C p. 282).

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5 Time and Western Man, p. 203.

BOOK II

CHAPTER IV

THE RELATIVITY PROPOSITION

"Modern literature offers us no Unities, so I have turned to science and am trying to complete a four-decker novel whose form is based on the relativity proposition." (B Note).

This statement has aroused perhaps more interest than any other idea expressed in the Alexandria Quartet. It has evoked much discussion as to first, the possibility of expressing scientific theories through the medium of literature; and second, granting a limited possibility, the measure of success which Durrell has attained in his attempt.

The Key to Modern British Poetry shows that ideas on the importance of Einstein to modern literature have been an important part of Durrell's poetic canon for many years. Since the Key contains the clearest and most detailed explanations of those aspects of relativity which Durrell feels affect literature, it may be useful here to quote extensively from chapter II, "Space Time and Poetry":

> Now in order to obtain a coherent view of the bewildering world of science Einstein formulated a theory which everybody has heard about and very few people understand. As far as we are concerned only two aspects of it interest us: its attitude to time, and its attitude to the subject-object relationship. The materialists, as we saw, assumed that the divorce was complete - that the observer could observe the object and surprise it in its pure state. The theory of relativity contradicted that view. It showed us that the picture which each observer makes of the world is in some degree subjective ....
>
> 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 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 .... But Einstein's time was not a past-present-future object.... It was a sort of time which contained all time in every moment of time .... (pp. 28-9).
>
> Under the terms of the new idea a precise knowledge of the outer world becomes an impossibility. This is because we and the outer world (subject and object) constitute a whole. If we are part of a unity we can no longer objectivize it successfully .... (p. 30).
>
> In place of the pragmatically and eternally true, science has placed a new, a more humble objective: provisional truth, as complete as possible, and as fully aware of the limitations of thought as possible (p. 34).

Whether or not this is an accurate translation of Einstein's theory into literary terms, only a philosopher who was also a scientist could fairly decide. However, I think

that in the Quartet Durrell does at least succeed in demonstrating those aspects of the relativity proposition in which he is interested as he sees them. Most important to the Quartet, his thoughts about Einstein cause him to choose a structure, a multi-view approach, in which events are conditioned by the viewpoints of many different characters in different positions both in time and in space. Durrell uses Darley as the prototype of the naïve would-be writer to whom the idea of relativity in reality is gradually revealed. In the traditional first-person novel structure, the technique of having someone looking back at and reconstructing a certain period of his life with the aid, not only of his memory, but of additional matter such as other people's diaries, letters and conversations, would lead the reader to expect a coherent, rational account. Such expectation results from the common delusion that the sense of perspective given by elapsing time frees the writer from the influences of personal involvement in the described events, so that he can avoid mistaken judgments, emotional clouding, and general distortion. Durrell uses this technique of retrospection to emphasize the fact that we see no more clearly from a distance so long as we are still looking in the same direction. While the perspective of the scene may seem to emerge more clearly, we do not see it as a whole, we do not see it from the back

or sides. Or, like Darley, we may be seeing it from the back or from one side while imagining ourselves to be seeing it from the front.

Durrell not only shows us scenes from different angles, but also characters as they are distorted by angle of vision, both because of the limited amount of their personalities which they show to others, and because of the distortion occurring in the subjective viewpoint of another. This, too, results from Durrell's interpretation of Einstein: "The Principle of Indeterminacy, as it is called, is founded upon the theory that we cannot observe the course of nature without disturbing it" (Key, p. 29).

One of the most difficult problems facing a writer who holds such views is going to be the problem of presentation of information, since so long as one adheres to the ideas of Einstein as expressed by Durrell, one cannot choose any single fixed point of reference, but must keep comparing and contrasting the views of many observers at different points, no one of whom can see more than a limited, subjectively-qualified facet of the whole. This being so, the use of the seemingly omniscient author in Mountolive seems, as I have mentioned before[1], to detract from the

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[1] See discussion in Book II, chapter II.

overall structural integrity of the Quartet, since relativity and omniscience, even the mock omniscience of the public viewpoint, are mutually exclusive unless, and perhaps this was Durrell's intention, such use is designed to demonstrate as a delusion the common belief that the official viewpoint is omniscient.

As we have seen, one of Durrell's main areas of interest in the Quartet is Art, particularly the art of the novelist. Certain of his characters are authors; there is much discussion of Art and the Artist, particularly the Artist as Novelist; and there is some general and specific literary criticism by Pursewarden in the section in Clea entitled "My Conversations With Brother Ass." Links are established with actual authors. For example, Pursewarden corresponds with D.H. Lawrence. There are also passages which echo the works of other writers. This is particularly so with T.S. Eliot, as we have already observed,[2] even to the point of almost direct quotations, for example: "Footfalls echoing in the memory" (C p. 63) as compared with Eliot's "Footfalls echo in the memory"[3]

Such connections with actual authors, besides lending an air of credibility to Pursewarden as an established writer,

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[2] See discussion in Book II, chapter I.

[3] Four Quartets, p. 13 (Burnt Norton, I).

bring out Durrell's ideas on the common pool of talent shared by the authors of all times and in all places in what he has referred to as "the continuity of literature which I was trying to hint at in my writers from Arnauti upwards."[4]

Durrell goes further than to establish a sense of unity among all writers. He also attempts to find some sort of unity in Art and Science, a unity made necessary by his belief in the importance of scientists, particularly Einstein, to literature. Art and Science are usually thought of as opposite poles: one subjective, the other objective; one dealing with human experience, the other with depersonalized fact; one concerned with relative truth, the other with absolute truth. For Durrell, one of the important influences of Einstein's theory lies in its bringing Art and Science closer together by giving both artists and scientists a new understanding of the nature of reality, a new awareness of the impossibility of total objectivity.

Certain writers, for example Alfred Perlès,[5] have suggested that these new ideas mark the end of the novel, at least as we have known it up until this century. Certainly

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[4] The World of Lawrence Durrell, p. 165.

[5] My Friend Lawrence Durrell: An Intimate Memoir on the Author of The Alexandria Quartet (Middlesex: Scorpion Press, 1961).

they have resulted in many technical changes. Yet beneath these technical changes remains the conception of the novel as the expression of its author's apprehension of life, truth as he sees it, even if he finally decides that there is no truth.

It is interesting to note the progression of the Quartet as the ideas behind it emerge more clearly. Durrell contends that we could keep on endlessly rotating any given block of space-time, bringing into view new facets at every turn. Several characters, as we have already seen, demonstrate the novel's potential of revealing character from different angles, of revealing different layers of truth, and of seeing a situation from many sides. However, as we see this process of rotation and revaluation unfolding, we do not seem to get any further towards the Truth, and although we are told that to intuit Truth to any degree we must search for symbolic rather than factual truths, we are not given them, but only the suggestion that Darley is ready to write the type of book which will share with the reader the Heraldic Universe of which he is becoming aware.

The first step towards the Heraldic Universe is taken when one learns to recognize that the truths which are within man's power to reach are subjective and relative; "Fact is unstable by its very nature." (B p. 102). The

question then arises as to the importance of these beliefs to literature which has traditionally been thought of as a way to truth, a medium of instruction as well as delight, a revelation of some underlying pattern in human existence and experience. Durrell's conclusion is not unique. It is very similar, for example, to that reached by Hans Meyerhoff in his book Time and Literature. This conclusion is that scientific truth and literary truth are concerned with different areas of knowledge. While they may complement each other they have different premises and different aims. The truth which we look for in literature is only incidentally a truth of facts. It is primarily a subjective truth arising from the recognition in a certain group of people portrayed in a certain situation of something which either confirms what we may have thought about human existence but never put into words, or the recognition of something which we never thought of before but which we suddenly apprehend in the light of the artist's illumination. And in the common practice of identification, subject and object become one in yet another example of Einstein's ideas.

Eventually Darley learns to look for poetic rather than factual truth. The search for factual truth had been necessary in order to show him its ultimate futility, but now, presumably, he is ready to look beyond it:

> It was only now, tracing out the lines written by that rapid unfaltering pen [i.e. that of Pursewarden in his letters to Liza], that I realised that poetic or transcendental knowledge somehow cancels out purely relative knowledge, and that his black humours were simply ironies due to this enigmatic knowledge whose field of operation was above, beyond that of the relative fact-finding sort. There was no answer to the questions I had raised in very truth. He had been quite right. 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).

So, just as Keats leaves journalism for the world of literature, Darley leaves the world of literature as he believed it to be for the world of heraldic reality, the world of analogy and symbol, the "realm where unreason reigns, and where the relations between ideas are sympathetic and mysterious - affective - rather than causal, objective, substitutional."[6]

This, as A.A. Mendilow has noticed, has been the general tendency of the novel throughout its history:

> ... it first tries to reflect reality as faithfully and as fully as it can, and then, despairing of the attempt, tries to evoke the feeling of a new reality of its own. 7

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6 The World of Lawrence Durrell, pp. 39-40.

7 A.A. Mendilow, Time and the Novel (London: Peter Nevill Ltd., 1952).

As we have already suggested, this reality is both subjective and relative. Ideas about relativity have existed in some form for many centuries. However, it is in this century that they have not only been formulated into a scientific theory, but have become part of the general mental climate in which we live, part of the spirit of the age. Hence Durrell's insistence on their widespread influence on twentieth century artists, an influence seen most clearly, so Durrell believes, in the predominance of cyclic rather than extended forms.

As Balthazar records of Pursewarden:

> He defended himself by saying that the Relativity proposition was directly responsible for abstract painting, atonal music, and formless (or at any rate cyclic forms in) literature. (B p. 142).

So the Alexandria Quartet is, as one would expect, cyclic in form, with absolute truth still unreached, with problems of the past still unsolved, and with prospects ahead of similar cycles of existence. Yet something has been achieved in the spirit of the narrator, a hint of the realm of symbolic truth in which he can escape the never-ending cycle of the search for factual truth.

The forcing one to realize the impossibility of objective human truth is one of the important effects Einstein has had on man, in Durrell's view. Concepts of

relativity in the form of ideas about the way in which time changes space can be traced back as far as Heracleitus and his statement that one can never step into the same river twice. Indeed, the type of truth which the relativity proposition eventually leads one to seek out is an intuited truth similar to that sought by Plato and his followers, in which one attempts to transcend the world of time and space where all things are relative and subjective and to reach the world of the ideal Forms. Durrell has said:

> whatever I do [in the future] will depend upon trying to crack forms. You see, I have a feeling about forms that they are up in the air in the Shelleyan way. If the damn things would come down like soap bubbles and settle on my head I'd be very grateful. If the form comes off, everything comes off. [8]

So we reach the question of whether or not the form of the Alexandria Quartet, a space-time continuum based on the relativity proposition does "come off." I think we must conclude that if it does, it does so in a way which qualifies its success. We do, I think, accept most of Durrell's conflicting interpretations of character and scene; we see the overall pattern of spatial deployment in the first three books, temporal progression in the last (although both modes

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[8] Interview with Durrell in Writers at Work, p. 281.

must inevitably overlap to some extent); we feel that the series could be extended indefinitely without its form shifting axis or becoming linear; we accept the fact that because we are human our judgment will always be subjective and based on partial knowledge. However, with Darley and Pursewarden we conclude that all of these ideas about relativity are largely unimportant in the final analysis since they lead to a concern with only "the superficies of real life (acts and facts about acts)" (B p. 26).

In the traditional novel if a character undergoes a "volte-face" not consistent with his previous characterization we say that he is poorly drawn or that the author has been guilty of plot manipulation. In the form adopted by Durrell for the Alexandria Quartet, surprising developments in characters are the order of the day and are necessary to complete the literary presentation of the relativity proposition. The departures from previous characterizations lead, inevitably, to a lessening emotional interest for the reader as the series progresses. The characters, in their multiplicity of significance, lose personal significance. As each sliding panel opens to reveal fresh views of reality, and even as the reader's mind is engaged in assessing the intricacies of the new views, he becomes less involved emotionally. If Darley is approaching the Heraldic Universe

(and although he claims he is, we are shown nothing written after he has attained it), the reader is forced steadily away from it by the essentially cerebral nature of the form. One feels better able to intuit truth in Justine and Balthazar than in Mountolive and Clea.

Pursewarden says: "Art occurs at the point where a form is sincerely honoured by an awakened spirit." (C p. 128). Undoubtedly Durrell is sincere in his attempt to honour his chosen form, and the Alexandria Quartet can, according to this definition, be classed as a work of art. The form, however, exerts a two-way pull upon the reader's susceptibilities, which arrests and scatters the artistic integrity of the work. The triumph of the form defeats the splendour of the younger Darley's Alexandria. After the Quartet has been read and laid aside one may reflect that Durrell is probably right in his ideas on relativity. Yet, as I have mentioned previously, the dominant impression will probably be of the characters as we first see them and, above all, the Alexandria of the younger Darley, throbbing with vitality, vulgar, raucous, gaudy, and yet lovely. This memory is qualified by later developments. The characters lose stature; Alexandria relaxes its hold on Darley. We have moved away from, rather than towards, the world of symbolic truth.

So, in the end, the relativity proposition, like the doctrines of certain religions, particularly Eastern religions in which Durrell sees a tie-up with Einstein's ideas, has its importance in the fact that it teaches the artist the unimportance to the soul of the world of space-time and the necessity of rising above this world into a region which is timeless and universal, the world of heraldic reality.

Conclusion:

It now remains to sum up what has been said in the preceding eight chapters. We have been concerned primarily with structure. However, Durrell's structure and style are even less easily divisible than those of other writers. Not only does his structure depend largely upon style for its rhythmic unity through the use of recurring and expanding symbols and images, but his style contains his meaning. Hence the emphasis placed upon fragmented characterization, situations repeated with different characters, and changes in viewpoint, the effects of which reveal the essential relativity of human knowledge.

As to the novelty or lack of novelty in Durrell's "word-continuum," his "relativity poem," I think we must conclude that any true novelty in the Alexandria Quartet lies not in technique but in approach. The work restates ideas, some as old as Art itself, others relatively new, in a different way, with a different vocabulary which gives them new life in our minds. As R.W. Flint has said:

> Balthazar and Mountolive each pick up hitherto neglected strands of action and develop them, shifting the point of view and demonstrating how, in expert hands, plot, tone, style, and point of view must all change when one of them changes. This provides a demonstration of fictional technique that recapitulates most of what we have learned

> about the possibilities of the novel, but so cleverly and concisely that the lesson seems fresh. 1

The Alexandria Quartet is a complex work full of diverse riches, but the single aspect of the work which may eventually prove to be of greatest interest is Durrell's restatement, in the middle of a century increasingly ruled by technology, of the belief that the world of myth and not that of factual truth is the proper sphere for the artist's endeavour. Seen from this viewpoint the Quartet, with its theme of a writer's search for truth, is a brilliant exposition of the quest for artistic reality.

Durrell does not suggest, however, that the world of the senses has no place in art. What he does suggest is that artistic truth must be intuited from sensuous intelligence. Sensuous apprehension must be reworked and shorn of irrelevancies until experience becomes archetypal symbol so that the artist may intuit and convey a truth which is not contingent upon any particular set of space-time co-ordinates.

It is this belief in the power of sensuous intuition that explains Durrell's statement[2] that in Clea he was attempt-

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[1] R.W. Flint, "A Major Novelist," Commentary, xxvii (April, 1959), p. 354.

[2] Kenneth Young, "A Dialogue with Durrell," Encounter, XIII 6 (December, 1959), p. 62.

ing to develop the idea of sexual intercourse as man's "knowing machine." The artist takes life as he experiences it in the world of spatial and temporal reality and transforms it into Art. In the process of this transformation he reveals its coherence and universality in the world of heraldic reality.

> Somewhere in the heart of experience there is an order and a coherence which we might surprise if we were attentive enough, loving enough, or patient enough. Will there be time? (J p. 221).

Appendix No. 1

Table of Main Symbol and Image Recurrence

Symbol or Image	Significance	Page References: Justine	Balthazar	Mountolive	Clea
Mirrors	Subject-object relationship	23, 27, 31, 36, 37, 38, 39, 45, 47, 50, 54, 65, 70, 71, 72, 73, 97, 118, 119, 136, 137, 138, 143, 159, 168, 174, 185, 192, 194, 199, 202, 206, 210, 225.	Introductory quote from DeSade, 14, 22, 24, 28, 30, 44, 52, 53, 64, 70, 79, 94, 118, 123, 126, 150, 151, 199, 233, 249.	28, 37, 38, 44, 53, 57, 63, 64, 76, 77, 80, 131, 146, 157, 158, 159, 165, 170, 175, 178, 196, 201, 207, 212, 215, 221, 239, 252, 270, 275, 285, 286, 301, 315.	13, 14, 32, 34, 41, 44, 46, 68, 71, 88, 99, 110, 131, 143, 168, 189, 222, 237, 286.
Mirages	Subject-object relationship. Reality as imposed by viewer. City as illusory.	147, 157, 190.	16, 88, 161.	11, 56, 119, 131, 146, 161, 295, 306.	28, 45, 46, 276.
Physical disabilities: 1) blindness - complete or partial, literal or figurative.	Outer disfigurement mirroring inner lack, especially in sexual relationships.	18, 25, 58, 59, 80, 82, 101, 122, 148, 151, 152, 159, 171, 210.	28, 39, 43, 54, 72, 79, 82, 109, 130, 144, 155, 166, 172, 176, 185, 214, 224.	14, 61, 62, 65, 66, 67, 133, 162, 172, 174, 175, 188, 190, 210, 243, 256, 262, 263, 264, 266, 289, 294.	13, 18, 29, 30, 33, 39, 44, 51, 52, 80, 83, 84, 99, 114-118, 120, 134, 140, 142, 166, 167, 168, 173, 174, 176, 181, 188, 189, 190, 218, 219, 220, 226, 258.
2) ugliness or maiming of hands.		91, 100, 182, 188, 242.		280.	18, 30, 51, 52, 66, 69, 248-251.

Symbol or Image	Significance	Justine	Balthazar	Mountolive	Clea
Miscellaneous physical disability, disease, deformity	Same as above. Alexandria as place for those "wounded in their sex" (J p. 14)	13, 14, 18, 24, 36, 37, 50, 57, 62, 104, 119, 121, 131, 163, 187, 190.	24, 68, 71, 72, 76, 77, 89, 94, 96, 113, 131, 139, 152, 156, 161, 176, 177, 229, 232.	12, 13, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 27, 34, 36, 37, 39, 40, 42, 43, 44, 58, 75, 100, 118, 151, 152, 153, 154, 156, 163, 192, 210, 224, 235, 249, 255, 270, 281, 307, 308.	15, 17, 49, 66, 67, 79, 80, 84, 179, 203, 207, 236, 260.
Death	Death as other side of the mirror (See J p. 118). Presence of death as means of heightening one's awareness of time.	15, 16, 21, 35, 36, 37, 45, 80, 103, 104, 105, 118, 120, 131, 153, 157, 167, 185, 193, 216, 217, 218, 219, 236, 238, 242, 243, 248, 249, 250.	14, 20, 24, 28, 34, 47, 56, 84, 94, 102, 112, 114, 126, 129, 131, 132, 134, 136, 140, 141, 143, 147, 148, 149, 162, 170, 171, 172, 173, 174, 179, 187, 190, 191, 198, 200, 209, 211, 216, 218, 223, 230, 241, 242.	48, 56, 57, 82, 94, 100, 119, 169, 171, 174, 178, 180, 183, 184, 185, 187, 197, 199, 206, 210, 212, 213, 214, 215, 219, 227, 235, 247, 248, 258, 300, 313-319.	13, 14, 16, 18, 19, 21, 26, 28, 41, 57, 80, 82, 96, 104, 105, 106, 112, 115, 127, 144, 174, 175, 183, 185, 191, 195, 205, 208, 212, 213, 214, 221, 229, 230, 231, 245, 250, 252, 263, 265, 266, 275, 283.
Harbour. Also, references to warships	Harbour-associated with Clea. Avenue of escape to the future. Warships - premonitions of war. Outside influences.	63, 85, 111, 112, 113, 196, 221, 236.	13, 32, 43, 45, 95, 104, 105, 152, 156, 210.	140, 143, 146, 197, 216, 252, 277, 278, 279.	22, 24, 26, 27, 28, 31, 34, 38, 65, 84, 98, 103, 161, 162, 195, 207, 208, 209, 210, 223, 228, 243, 244, 263, 270.

Symbol or Image	Significance	Justine	Balthazar	Mountolive	Clea
Historical references, including references to Cavafy.	Establishing idea of historical present, abolishing past-present-future line.	14, 15, 20, 27, 30, 31, 39, 40, 77, 88, 93, 97, 111, 119, 141, 172, 175-181, 230, 250, 251, 252, 253.	151, 166, 183, 184, 192, 193, 207, 208, 209.	35, 36, 41, 42, 43, 45, 46, 119, 125, 149, 163, 250, 301.	14, 15, 25, 34, 39, 40, 140, 146, 191, 227, 231, 245, 285, 286, 287.
Masks	Abolition of personality with fixed traits. Impossibility of knowing another person.	55, 94, 136, 137, 167, 241.	14, 78, 94, 100, 178, 188, 189, 190, 191, 192, 193, 194, 198, 199, 201-206, 209, 211, 216, 217, 223.	20, 145, 148, 150, 183, 185, 187, 190, 206, 217, 232, 237, 246.	23, 56, 115, 149, 153, 252, 268.

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Appendix No. 2

Notes on Symbols

I The table in the preceding appendix is, of course, far from complete. To deal exhaustively with the symbols in the Quartet would be to rewrite the books. The table does list the most frequently occurring symbols and images, but even with these it is difficult to be exhaustive. Not all the references are directly symbolic except insofar as, once an object has been established successfully as a symbol, any reference to it reminds the reader of its symbolic significance.

There are also associated symbol and image clusters which have not been included in the table. For example, associated with the physical diseases and deformities are mental disturbances, visions, dreams, and trances; and all of these are, in turn, linked with mirages. Associated with masks are such disguises as Scobie's Dolly Varden, Leila's veil (and her face, following her disfiguring disease), and Pombal's female disguise. Taking the idea a step further, the face Justine turns to Darley is a mask, Nessim shows a mask to Mountolive. In fact, all the characters turn different faces to each other, and this idea brings us back to the mirror symbol.

Many symbol and image clusters have been omitted for reasons of scope. These include anatomical imagery, references to the occult, the recurring scenes of a camel being cut up, of dazed quail, of a dog scratching itself. Recurrent phrases and proverbs have not been listed, for example, "Jamais de la vie," "Jewish fox," "selected fictions" (the last again linked with masks and mirrors).

For the symbols listed in the table, the significance given is, of course, very general. Not all meanings are included. Not every reader will see the significance of a given symbol in the same way. For the purposes of this table I have concentrated on symbolic meanings related to the place of each symbol in the structure of the Quartet.

Within these limitations, therefore, the table merely attempts to show the predominance of certain symbols and images, as a supplement to the discussion of symbol and image in Book I, chapter I.

II "Capodistria ... how does he fit in?" (J p. 33).

One of the most interesting minor characters in the Quartet is Da Capo. Like the other characters, he is portrayed from many angles. We see him as a sensualist, a rapist, an ironist, and an acolyte in the "dark path" to knowledge.

His letter to Balthazar (C pp. 198-204) seems at first glance an entertaining digression into the realms of Paracelsian phantasy. However, viewed in conjunction with the rest of the Quartet, it becomes more significant. Da Capo's experiments in black magic are a variation on one of the recurrent themes of the Quartet, the search for truth. Different characters take different roads: Darley tries to find truth through art; Keats through facts; Balthazar through the refining medium of the Cabal, Da Capo through the occult. Durrell suggests that, however one approaches it, truth is to be found only in the realms of heraldic reality. The world of the homunculi may be regarded as one of these realms, with the homunculi themselves representing prototypal heraldry. In their ability to prophesy, they show themselves to be a part of the type of world promulgated by the space-time theorists, in which there is no past-present-future line, but only the historic present.

It is possible to see an echoing of the Quartet characters in the homunculi: Nessim, the king; Justine, the queen; Amaril, the knight; Balthazar, the monk; Clea, the nun; Darley, the architect; Narouz, the miner; Mountolive (?), the seraph; Pursewarden, the blue spirit; Da Capo, the red spirit.

In this analogy, Pursewarden and Da Capo are opposed antithetically, a position they hold throughout the Quartet. This is best exemplified where Pursewarden frees Justine from the "check" imposed upon her by Da Capo. In general, the influence exercised by Da Capo upon the other characters is malign whereas Pursewarden's is benign.

Durrell, as I mentioned before, has called Pursewarden's suicide "the sacrificial suicide of a true cathar."[1] The Cathars held a belief in dualism, a concept of the nature of the universe which is expressed in many ways throughout the Quartet. The harmony of the opposing poles of subjectivity and objectivity is expressed as intuition. Subject and object are parts of a whole, not separate and distinct. Good and evil, light and dark, life and death, all opposites, are reconciled and harmonized in a world whose symbols are the distorting prism or mirror which can neutralize polarity into a balanced point of view, dependent on the point of balance any character holds at any given time.

Da Capo writes:

> I did not know then [i.e. at the time when he was attending meetings of the Cabal] that my path was not the path of Light but of Darkness. I would have confused it morally

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1 The World of Laurence Durrell, p. 168.

> or ethically with good and evil at that time. Now I recognize the path I am treading as simply the counterpoise - the bottom end of the see-saw, as it were - which keeps the light side up in the air. (C p. 198).

In this expression of dualism, the traditional concepts of good and evil no longer apply. Reserve replaces ardour since excess of any kind will upset the balance of opposites. "Anything pressed too far becomes a sin" (J p. 40). Da Capo excuses his feverish womanizing as a search for beauty, and the satanic figure which results may be another example of "the sad thirtieth child of Valentinos who fell, 'not like Lucifer by rebelling against God, but by desiring too ardently to be united to him.'" (J p. 40).

It seems then that Da Capo fits into the Quartet in the same way as he claims that the dark path fits in with the path of light, as a sort of balance, a seldom heard but constantly felt presence.

Appendix No. 3

Table of Order of Events

The main events of the Quartet take place within a period of approximately one and a half years in Alexandria in the late 1930's.

I Events occurring before the main space-time block which influence events within it:

(1) Mountolive's affair with Leila, which takes place about twenty years earlier.

(2) Justine's marriage to, and subsequent divorce from, Arnauti. The disappearance of her child takes place within this period.

(3) Melissa's affair with Cohen, during the course of which she learns about the Coptic conspiracy.

(4) Darley's meeting with Melissa and their subsequent affair. They are living together at the time of Cohen's death, which takes place a month or two before Nessim's marriage to Justine.

(5) Nessim's marriage to Justine for the purpose of forwarding the Coptic conspiracy. The marriage takes place a few months before the beginning of the main space-time block.

II Order of events in main space-time block insofar as they can be deduced from the text:

(1) Darley meets Justine and after a period of friendship with her and Nessim is drawn into an affair with her.

(2) Mountolive returns to Egypt.

(3) The yearly Alexandrian early-winter Carnival takes place. During this Carnival:

(a) Toto is murdered by Narouz, who believes Toto to be Justine making advances to him;

(b) Leila, who learned the night before of the extent of Nessim's involvement in the Palestine plot and of its implications, disappoints Mountolive by not appearing at their rendezvous.

(4) During the same winter, presumably just after Carnival, Pursewarden, in the course of a night spent with Melissa, learns of his mistaken judgment about Nessim's part in the conspiracy. He also reveals his love for Liza.

(5) Shortly after this discovery Pursewarden received a letter from Liza telling him of her love for Mountolive. He commits suicide after writing Mountolive to tell him what he has discovered about Nessim.

(6) Mountolive is forced to take action about Nessim. Nessim bribes Memlik to protect him until Christmas when he will no longer be implicated in the conspiracy.

(7) The night before the annual duck-shoot on Lake Mareotis, Mountolive meets Leila again for the first and last time.

(8) Nessim holds his annual duck-shoot on Mareotis. At this duck-shoot:

(a) Capodistria apparently dies;

(b) Justine apparently leaves Nessim.

The above is a summary of the main events within the space-time block with which Darley is concerned. Shortly after the duck-shoot, Leila leaves for Kenya and Darley leaves for Upper Egypt, returning briefly to Alexandria when Melissa dies. About a month after the duck-shoot Narouz is murdered, presumably by Memlik's agents. There is then a break of some two or three years before Darley returns to Alexandria in Clea. In this last book, which shows a progression in time, events are more or less in chronological order except for those revealed retrospectively (i.e. what has happened during Darley's absence), and no table is needed.

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