

A Universe Perpetually Shifting: Transition and Liminality in Lawrence Durrell's Opus

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is of my own composition, and that it contains no material previously submitted for the award of any other degree. The work reported in this thesis has been executed by myself, except where due acknowledgement is made in the text.

James M. Clawson

Abstract

In his 1952 text *Key to Modern Poetry*, Lawrence Durrell describes the collective of human ideas and knowledge to be like a shifting, dynamic universe. He develops this sense of instability throughout his works, drawing it close to his central themes by consistently favoring revision over continuity and variation over predictability. I recognize the construction of such a sense of flux, with constant change superseding stability, to be crucial in understanding Durrell's major novels, what he has called his "opus": *The Black Book*, *The Alexandria Quartet*, *The Revolt of Aphrodite*, and *The Avignon Quintet*.

My project considers changeability in these major novels in light of the writings on liminality by Victor Turner. Turner's sense of liminality is one that is fruitful: the liminal stage of the rite of passage not only problematizes structural categorizations, but it also offers interface among them. Far from a unidirectional construction, the liminal stage presents an upheaval and indeterminacy that can work to strengthen or weaken a sense of movement along a linear construction.

I approach Durrell's opus from a number of these linear constructions—each warranting its own theoretical model—looking first at the relationship of the subject and object, secondly at that of fiction and reality, thirdly at geographical locales, fourthly at considerations of time, and finally at the placement of the opus along the construction of modernist and postmodernist trends. In these works, Durrell hoped to reinvigorate what he thought to be a dying art; I suggest that liminality in his opus vivifies by emphasizing the potential for mutual influence in any two elements of transition. Ultimately, the liminal in Durrell's writing is offered as a method of extending categories and categorization, challenging staid expectations by repositioning art to be always at the edge.

To my parents, Jim and Sandi Clawson

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Introduction

The third book of Lawrence Durrell's *The Alexandria Quartet* opens with the vivid description of a fishing expedition at dusk. Mountolive, titular character and British diplomat in training, sits in darkness, carried by boat across the surface of Alexandria's Lake Mareotis, a silent presence among others whose voices echo off the water in a blurring of sensation and form. His Egyptian host positions their boat in an agglomeration of other boats to form a loose circle and at a signal lights a lamp. At this, the water below unmeshes itself from inky darkness, becoming viscous with life as schools of fish coagulate and roll at the surface. At the same time, the sky thickens, differentiating itself in a mirror image of that watery transformation: edges of blackness sharpen into the talons and beaks of hundreds of unseeing and unseen pelicans, flamingos, and kingfishers, all moved to hunger by the aquatic activity. As the men scoop nets of fish into their boats, they struggle to keep back the birds, whose unplanned paths often—occasionally fatally—intersect those of the men, the boats, and each other (*Quartet* 397–402).

These men in boats represent an intermediate third intruding between two otherwise stable states: the sea and the sky. A strange kind of surface tension suspends the men between the aerial and the aquatic, threatening the inhabitants of the two suddenly overlapping worlds whose structural categories, in the darkness of the night, merge and collide. In this scene, the infinitely thin surface of the water represents a margin, a structural differentiation that, normally, is invisible: without the boats, there is nothing more than sea and sky. And yet, the addition of the third, the men in boats, those of the not-sea-and-not-sky, displaces by projecting this non-category upward into the air and downward into the water, penetrating both worlds.

The men in the boats present the *liminal*, what the anthropologist Victor Turner calls “an interstructural situation” (Turner, “Betwixt” 93), challenging and defying categorical identification by temporarily residing between states. Turner's liminal phase represents a middle ground “betwixt and between” the beginning and end of any rite of passage. The men in boats, “transitional beings,” by virtue of their inability to

be classified are “polluting”: they “are neither one thing nor another; or may be both; or neither here nor there; or may even be nowhere” (97). The passage of a herring into the talons of a kingfisher might seem instantaneous: the flash of feather and shine of fishy scale would bear the only witness to the transition between watery life and airy death. Likewise, a dead flamingo sinks beneath the waves far too quickly to consider such a structural change. But Turner writes that this is because the subject of such a passage is “structurally, if not physically, ‘invisible’” (95); from the vantage of the surface, however, such a transition demands attention. The violence in *Mountolive*’s fishing expedition bespeaks much of the trouble of the structural transition.

The image of surface tension is emblematic to the whole of Durrell’s oeuvre; as such this thesis will focus upon similar issues of liminality and transition in Lawrence Durrell’s later novels. Particularly, it will consider Durrell’s favoring of variability over stability, acknowledging and extending the metaphor he uses to describe “the whole universe of ideas—a universe perpetually shifting, changing its relations and tenses as verbs do in speech, altering its outlines” (*Key xi*). In this introduction I will first present the theoretical impulses of my thesis. Secondly, I will distinguish and justify the scope of my considerations, what I mean by Durrell’s *opus*. Finally, I will set out the expectations of each chapter and explain the structure of the thesis-at-large.

A Pluralistic Universe Perpetually Shifting

While the utilitarian terminology and the coarser texture of my theoretical deliberations are greatly indebted to Victor Turner’s work (furthering that by his predecessor, Arnold van Gennep) on liminality and rites of passage, beneath my usage of Turner’s more overt considerations lie deeper ones responsible for this very sense of change, implicitly informing every aspect of my argument. The bulk of these considerations is informed by the work of William James. In *A Pluralistic Universe*, James differentiates empiricism and rationalism by the methods in which they approach an understanding of the world:

empiricism means the habit of explaining wholes by parts, and rationalism means the habit of explaining parts by wholes. Rationalism thus preserves affinities with monism, since wholeness goes with union, while empiricism inclines to pluralistic views. (James, *Pluralistic* 7–8)

James writes that the rationalist predilection for starting with the concept of an absolute whole also absorbs into it the idea of any change (51). In this philosophical line, “Nothing ‘between’ things can connect them, for ‘between’ is just that third thing, ‘between’” (220). Turner, too, writes of the dangers inherent in thinking of transition as a concatenation of *states*, advocating instead the consideration of “transition as a process, a becoming, and in the case of *rites de passage* even a transformation” (Turner,

“Betwixt” 94). James attributes this fault of thinking to an over-confident surrender of the analyst to the terminology of analysis: “The stages into which you analyze a change are *states*, the change itself goes on between them. It lies along their intervals, inhabits what your definition fails to gather up, and thus eludes conceptual explanation altogether” (James, *Pluralistic* 236).¹ Paradoxically to an empirical approach, the nature of change is such that the true significance of it is irreducible to parts, mere moments in a larger process whose scope is only fully appreciable *après-coup*.

Durrell’s fictive world embodies this sense of change as beyond understanding, beyond distillation into an easily digestible notion of *truth*, that which “most contradicts itself in time” (*Quartet* 216). Likewise, in his criticism Durrell employs a similar whole-by-parts approach, lamenting that man is presented with a fragmentary understanding of the world, the understanding of which is available only by joining the pieces together:

Man is simply a box labeled personality. He peers out of the box through five slits, the senses. On this earth he is permitted access to three dimensions of space and one of time. Only in his imagination can he inhabit the whole—a reality which is beyond the reach of intellectual qualification: a reality which even the greatest art is incapable of rendering in its full grandeur. It is a ridiculous and humiliating situation but we must accept it, and be content with our provisional truths, our short-range raids on this greater territory which permeates our inner lives. (*Key* 5)

In the manner I have structured this thesis, I have limited the slits available to the reader whose scrutiny I, likewise, guide and limit to one dimension at a time (of which more later); nevertheless, I have settled upon such limitations only because they are the ones I envision most suited to arrive at a sense of the “whole.”

A Whole of Parts

As evidenced in part through *Mountolive*’s fishing trip and *Balthazar*’s pronouncements on the nature of truth, the unsettling foregrounding of transition over stability is particularly important in Durrell’s works, every one of which problematizes categorizations, opting instead for perpetual redefining or flux; in truth, this privileging of change informs the very model of his corpus. In 1945 Durrell wrote a letter to T. S. Eliot at Faber, outlining the expectations for what he called his “opus,” a grand plan for a unified, structured life work comprised of three smaller works, each independently accessible. The first of these three, *The Black Book* he had already written and published in 1938. The other two books, he hoped, would grow “like frogs’ eggs” and would outline a rite of passage following the structure of Greek tragedy:

¹James’ approach to change is markedly Eleatic, a tendency shared with Henri Bergson and other philosophers of the time.

ἄγων	πάθος	ἀναγνώρισις
agon	pathos	anagnorisis
<i>The Black Book</i>	<i>The Book of the Dead</i>	<i>The Book of Time</i>
the dislocation	the uniting	the acceptance and death ("Letters to Eliot" 354)

The arc, from "dislocation" in *The Black Book* through "uniting" in *The Book of the Dead* (eventually to become *The Alexandria Quartet*) and to "acceptance and death" in *The Book of Time* (later titled *The Avignon Quintet*), plots an unspecified development from conflict to closure. *The Revolt of Aphrodite*, Durrell later concedes, also fits into this larger outline, filling the space between *pathos* and *anagnorisis* as *sparagmos*, or ritualized loss of the hero (Pine 34), violent physical disembodiment providing an invasive moment of realization before acceptance.²

Durrell's model outlines a sort of rite of passage, a pre-established pattern of transition from conflict to resolution.³ Christopher LaLonde writes that in the rite of passage "order is transformed by transgression; the destruction of boundaries, followed by a reconstruction of a new order in light of indeterminacy, is at the rite's heart" (LaLonde 7), and Mihai Spariosu calls it a "game of disorder out of which new orders emerge" (Spariosu 33). For van Gennep, the rite of passage is an inescapable aspect of life, defining a cyclical patterning in the universe, "a periodicity which has repercussions on human life, with stages and transitions, movements forward, and periods of relative inactivity" (van Gennep 3). He divides all rites of passage into three stages: "the rites of separation from a previous world, *preliminal rites*, those executed during the transitional stage *liminal (or threshold) rites*, and the ceremonies of incorporation into the new world *postliminal rites*" (21). And following van Gennep, Turner identifies these three stages of the rite as "separation, margin (or *limen*), and aggregation" (Turner, "Betwixt" 94).

This thesis seeks to consider each of these parts *as* parts of a greater whole; particularly, I hope to provide a reading of the sense of instability and change in each of these four works—themselves comprised of twelve books—while also putting each work into the larger context of the opus. While there remains a small but vibrant corps of readers and critics of Durrell's writing, much remains to be explored. *The Alexandria Quartet*—comprised of *Justine* (1957), *Balthazar* (1958), *Mountolive* (1958), and *Clea* (1960) and published in a single omnibus edition in 1962—was his first widely-distributed work and is by far his best-received work; its single impact was so great

²Northrop Frye calls these four stages aspects of the "quest-myth" the "*agon* or conflict [...] the *pathos* or death [...] *sparagmos*] the disappearance of the hero [...] and finally, *anagnorisis*] the reappearance and recognition of the hero," noting in the end the tendency of the *anagnorisis* to signal the end of earlier troubles with the successful undertaking of a hero who rights the wrongs of the *agon* (Frye 192).

³Furthering this reading of his *opus* as a rite of passage, in a letter to Henry Miller in 1955, Durrell reminds him of his plan to write "3 *real* novels, youth, maturity, and old age" (*Durrell-Miller* 278–279).

that from its very introduction it elicited (unlikely) talk of securing for Durrell the Nobel Prize in Literature.⁴ The success of the *Quartet* eventually led to distribution of his earlier *The Black Book* (1938) in the US (1960) and the UK (1973), both markets in which its graphic sexual imagery had led to it previously being denied publication.⁵ The subsequent introduction of *The Revolt of Aphrodite*—comprised of *Tunc* (1968) and *Nunquam* (1970) and published in an omnibus edition in 1974—led to disappointment of his devotees, who hoped for more Alexandrian decadence.⁶ And the introduction of the first book of *The Avignon Quintet*—comprised of *Monsieur: or The Prince of Darkness* (1974), *Livia: or Buried Alive* (1978), *Constance: or Solitary Practices* (1983), *Sebastian: or Ruling Passions* (1983), and *Quinx: or The Ripper's Tale* (1985) and published in an omnibus edition in 1992—suggested a possible return to Durrell's tried-and-true Egyptian roots.

Still, despite *Monsieur* earning Durrell the James Tait Black Memorial Prize in 1974 and *Constance* being shortlisted for the Booker Prize in 1983, the *Quintet* remains largely unread—most strikingly by earlier scholars of Durrell's works, for whom the *Quintet* is “unreadable.”⁷ *The Black Book*, too, is more often collected among Durrell's earlier, immature works, his juvenilia comprised of the novels *Pied Piper of Lovers* (1935) and *Panic Spring* (1937).⁸ And *The Revolt of Aphrodite*, despite Durrell's own heralding of it as a successor to the *Quartet* (*Durrell-Miller* 436), is commonly considered one of Durrell's “less-serious” works, along the lines of other works he wrote more to earn money than to challenge literary expectations (“Letters to Eliot” 354;

⁴After reading only three of the *Quartet's* four parts, Miller declared Durrell worthy of the prize (*Durrell-Miller* 337). (See also Seymour, “Sensuous Empire.”)

⁵Whether *The Black Book* was actually banned is uncertain, as correspondence with Faber (and T. S. Eliot, specifically) suggests that publisher-hesitancy—more than outright governmental censorship—delayed the book's publication (“Letters to Eliot” 348, 351). The lack of British edition until 1973 was enough for Bolivar Le Franc to write in 1968 that the book was “still banned in England” (Franc 97), and Ray Morrison lists the book as banned as well (Morrison 270); nevertheless, the book's publication in the US made Durrell hopeful of a British release, and subsequent letters to Faber revisit the possibility of issuing *The Black Book* (“Letters to Eliot” 356).

⁶Reed Way Dasenbrock, in “Lawrence Durrell and the Modes of Modernism,” suggests that this fall in critical favor can be attributed to a nostalgia for the *Quartet's* modernist modes coupled with Durrell's shift to the *Revolt's* postmodernist style. I consider these possibilities further in Chapter 5.

⁷Richard Pine argues, in support of a favorable reading of the *Quintet*, that the books “oblige the reader to concentrate not on any sequence or series of events but on *the idea of thought itself*.” Thus, he argues, the *Quintet* “becomes unreadable [...] because, by placing too great a burden on the nature of a language which we have been taught to take for granted, it abandons us without signposts while we are still expecting to be conducted from start to finish by sequential narrative” (Pine 326).

⁸See, for example, Ian MacNiven's “Pied Piper of Death: Method and Theme in the Early Novels” and Ray Morrison's *A Smile in His Mind's Eye: A Study of the Early Works of Lawrence Durrell*.

Durrell-Miller 81).⁹

Additionally, Durrell's own position makes him particularly difficult to locate: a subject of the British Empire but denied citizenship (Ezard 5), he worked as an agent and representative of that empire in various colonial administrative positions during what Miranda Seymour calls "the British Empire's last gasp" (Seymour n. pag.).¹⁰ Though he writes books he claims are apolitical (*Bitter Lemons* 11), responses to them are anything but (MacNiven, "Introduction" 2–5).¹¹ And though poet by passion, he was a novelist by profession and a travel writer by sheer pecuniary necessity—though, in reading his novels, one cannot help being constantly reminded of Durrell's wide-ranging interest and unsettling familiarity with the theories of Einstein, Freud, Lacan, Barthes, and "Foucaulet," among others (Durrell, "Endpapers" 90). Generically, politically, colonially, geographically, 20th-centenarily: Durrell's position is problematic in its adamant refusal to conform.

For these reasons, I hope to restore the parts of the whole into the flux of the passage. While previous studies have considered the whole of Durrell's oeuvre,¹² such a consideration often obscures the project of the opus in the larger picture of Durrell's other novels, his poetry, his travel writing, and his biography. Similarly, other studies have limited their range to Durrell's later novels, but these fall foul of reading an agenda *into* Durrell's writing.¹³ In reading the liminal or the *becoming* of the whole collection of parts—finding the change stretching across and between each of the states, or novels—I hope to recognize in the passage of Durrell's opus (in the passage of youth, maturity, dying, and death) a symbol of a universe perpetually shifting.

⁹Among this former group of less-serious writing Durrell includes his travel books (on Corfu (*Prospero's Cell*, 1945), Rhodes (*Reflections on a Marine Venus*, 1953), Cyprus (the contentious *Bitter Lemons*, 1957, which won Durrell the Duff-Cooper Memorial Prize), Sicily (*Sicilian Carousel*, 1977), the islands of Greece (*The Greek Islands*, 1978), and Provence (*Caesar's Vast Ghost*, 1990)) his humorous stories (*Esprit de Corps* (1957), *Stiff Upper Lip* (1958), *Sauve Qui Peut* (1966), published collectively as *Antrobus Complete* (1985)) and two other novels (*White Eagles over Serbia* (1957) and *Dark Labyrinth* (1958)—originally published as *Cefalù* (1947)). Durrell's friends often implored him to abandon this two-tiered output, encouraging him to focus entirely on his serious novels and his poetry, but an ever-growing need to support his ever-growing family (comprised of children and an ever-growing list of ex-wives) made such a demand impossible. This study will be informed, in part, by these other works, but the focus will remain on his "opus."

¹⁰Dasenbrock underscores the significance of Durrell's inter-cultural positioning: "To call Lawrence Durrell Indian would be absurd given the enormous gap between him and Indians, but to call him English (without any further qualification) ignores a different gap" (Dasenbrock, "Novel" 89).

¹¹See also, among others, Roger Bowen's "Closing the 'Toybox'" for a consideration of the racial and cultural politics of Durrell's *Quartet*.

¹²Richard Pine's *Lawrence Durrell: The Mindscape* is a particularly impressive example.

¹³See, for example, Stefan Herbrechter's *Lawrence Durrell, Postmodernism, and the Ethics of Alterity*, which uses Durrell's work to expound a theory of postmodern alterity before ultimately coming to the conclusion that Durrell's work does not go as far as it ought to go (Herbrechter, *Ethics* 316).

Five Dimensions

Durrell's *Quartet* replicates the four dimensions (three of space and one of time) he understood to comprise physics after Einstein: *Justine* through *Mountolive* are designed as contemporaneous *siblings*, while *Clea* functions as a sequel in time (*Balthazar* 9). It is possible to consider Durrell's design very literally, considering *Justine* to present the first dimension: the interaction between two points on a line (the interaction between Darley and Justine as he writes a book about her). Thus, *Balthazar* introduces the second dimension, a plane, with a third point (his critique of Darley's manuscript), and *Mountolive* unfolds these two dimensions into a third with the detached perspective of an outsider looking down upon the whole of Alexandria and her "flora." With *Clea*, we get the true passage of time, the interaction of each of these three dimensions with a fourth.

Following Durrell's lead (and, at the same time, finding this method of limitation convenient), I have structured the first chapter of this thesis to consider the first dimension: the line between two points. (See Figure 1a.) As *Justine* plots the relationship between Darley and Justine, it also positions the character of Darley *as* a point: a subject, a self. His exploration from the distance of his Greek island of the time he spent in Alexandria and his emergence as an artist of merit is the construction of the separation of subject from object, self from other. Chapter One first considers the interplay between subject and object, self and other, from the perspective of the *construction* of the self from the other. Secondly, it considers the differentiation between subject and object and the prospect of *permeability* of the two fields. Finally, it considers the possibility of *connection* between subject and object, or subject and subject.

The second chapter adds the dimension of fiction to this construction of subject and object. As *Balthazar* problematizes Darley's perspective by forcing him to face the limitations of singularity, it also questions his treatment of *reality* as a *fiction*, in the end suggesting that the *imagination* might mediate between the two, making for a more accurate representation. Chapter Two considers this distance between reality and fiction (or reality and *belief*) and the means of travel from one to the other, particularly in the actions of *reading*—or, the filtering of reality into belief—and *writing*—or, the passing of belief into reality. Additionally, it takes into consideration Samuel Taylor Coleridge's constructions of the primary and secondary imaginations as fundamental in both of these actions. It then provides an understanding of Durrell's works, mapping respective author-protagonist's efforts to read and to write.

The third chapter considers the construction of a three-dimensional world in Durrell's novels: namely, it looks at Durrell's imaginative geography. Just as *Mountolive's*

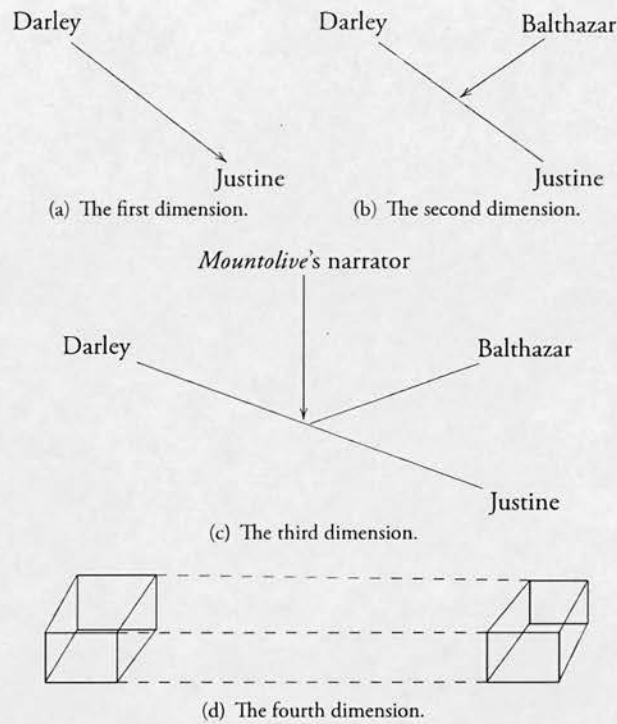


Figure 1: The four dimensions of *The Alexandria Quartet* showing the relationship of subject and object in *Justine* (a), the potentiality of multiple perspectives in *Balthazar* (b), the greater geographical problematization in *Mountolive* (c), and the extension of the first three dimensions through time in *Clea* (d).

troubles in the third book of the *Quartet* stem primarily from his inability to recognize the inconceivable difference between Western and Eastern cultures, this chapter also considers the constructions of the West and the East. The self/other considerations of Chapter One are revisited in Chapter Three as considerations of European/Non-European, ultimately reading Durrell's *Mediterranean*, the sea very much in the middle of Durrell's universe, as a hybridizing place affecting all the space around it.

The fourth chapter considers time more specifically. We can imagine the fourth dimension as a line resulting from dragging a cube in one direction—a line which we can call time. (See Figure 1d.) In this same sense is the three-dimensional space of Durrell's Alexandria dragged forward in time, the perspectival shift a temporal one, such that Darley's return in *Clea* leads to a sense of uncanny recognition: things are the same, but they have changed. Chapter Four considers three different approaches to time (Albert Einstein's all-time-at-once, Oswald Spengler's history, and Henri Bergson's *durée*), finally recognizing in each work's conclusion a sense of the Bergsonian *purity of the present*—a purity achieved only by virtue of arduous establishment of the context of one's own history.

Finally, much in the same manner that time can be represented as the straight line

of the first dimension, Chapter Five will consider a possible sort of fifth dimension as a branch similar to that of the second dimension¹⁴—an ostensible “break” from modernism to postmodernism. Chapter One considers the relationship of subject/object, and Chapter Two pluralizes that consideration into relationships of subjects and objects, projecting a field of positions that Chapter Three pluralizes further. Likewise, Chapter Four pluralizes the three-dimensional construction by considering a kind of motion along a line from past to future through the present. Chapter Five pluralizes this sense of time to consider a sense of times or eras or *periods* whose range extends, in this study, along the line from modernism to postmodernism—or modernisms to postmodernisms. The chapter first acknowledges Durrell’s own theoretical understanding of modernist literature to note the consciousness of Durrell’s *break* with such a tradition. The second section considers postmodernist readings of Durrell’s works to suggest an inability truly to read Durrell as a postmodernist writer. In the final section I hope to conclude by reaggregating previous arguments and recognizing the fuller scope of Durrell’s opus as a *passage* from *The Black Book* through *The Avignon Quintet*, each book presenting a stage as incapable of presenting its own position within the larger picture as is Zeno’s arrow—at each moment analyzed and recognized (within the bounds of that infinitely small moment) to be unmoving. In doing so, as might already have been made obvious by the particular bent of my thesis, I hope also to offer a stronger basis for considering the liminal positioning of Durrell as, in the words of Joan Pinkney, a “‘border’ intellectual and artist” straddling the realms of modernism and postmodernism (Pinkney 250), plotting a viable and prolific passage between the two—but residing comfortably in neither.

As James suggests is inevitable in any sense of understanding, I “have conceived of the whole world after the analogy of some particular feature of it which has particularly captivated [my] attention” (James, *Pluralistic* 7). Thus do we—and thus have I hoped to—“project order into the world by selecting objects and tracing relations so as to gratify our intellectual interests. We *carve out* order by leaving the disorderly parts out” (9). Durrell wrote in his *Key* that to lecture about reality is destructive as doing so involves stopping it, as one might stop a film, to consider the contents of each individual frame (*Key* 3). I am well aware of the makeup of this thesis as composed of frames, each of which positions itself as a miniature part of a larger whole. As a

¹⁴I borrow this modeling of the fourth and fifth dimensions as being represented in methods similar to those of the first and second dimensions from Rob Bryanton’s *Imagining the Tenth Dimension*.

cinematographer composes frame by frame, I hope in the end to put these components back in motion once more, plotting the arc of progression through a neutral zone whose inhabitation of the threshold is at times horrifying, at times imaginative, always hybrid, and ever immediately present in Durrell's works. In doing so, I hope, too, to bridge the gap of alterity, positioning Durrell's writing perpetually in a tension at the surface, positing a medium, a means of communication, betwixt and between otherwise ineffably different states. Only in this manner can Durrell's opus be recognized as a whole perpetually shifting, positioning itself in the marginal thirdness of liminality and transition.

CHAPTER 1

Liminal Personae

But the world that each of us feels most intimately at home with is that of beings with histories that play into our history, whom we can help in their vicissitudes even as they help us in ours.

(William James, *A Pluralistic Universe* 49)

I light a lamp and limp about, thinking of my friends—of Justine...

(*Quartet* 17)

The first book of *The Alexandria Quartet* and Darley's book of Alexandria, *Justine* represents the first dimension of Durrell's Alexandrian tetralogy. In it, Darley writes from the vantage of a Greek island, looking back onto the city from afar, establishing distance between himself and the object of his creation. "I have had to come so far away from it in order to understand it all," he writes (*Quartet* 17), explaining this distance as one of comprehension. By separating himself from the city, he believes he can make of it something discrete and whole; by separating himself from the city, he seeks to do the same for himself.

Traditionally, the first dimension is depicted as "any straight line joining two points" (Bryanton 7). While every dimension is composed of an infinite number of points, all of the points of a single dimension are situated along a straight line, which, when drawn, starts at one point and ends at another. If Darley's island is one of these two points, then Alexandria represents the other. Similarly, if the first of these points is Darley, the second is Justine or any one of the friends he thinks about while limping around his island cabin.

In both cases, the book represents the line drawn between the points: it connects Greece with Egypt just as it connects Darley with Justine, but at the same time it is that which comes between and separates—or marks the distinction between—the points. The book, written of Alexandria from the distance of Greece, plots the infinitude of points between the two positions, threatening with Eleatic insistence to deny the possibility of ever passing through all of the intermediate stages. At the same time, while *Justine* is presented as the memoir of the closeness of Darley and Justine, the chronicle of the intimacy between two lovers, that closeness—in the end as in the beginning—is lamented as irretrievably lost.

In his *Key to Modern Poetry*, Durrell writes of this distance between the subject and the object, describing the human as being trapped perpetually in a box, forever denied closeness or intimacy with anyone or anything. In light of the limitations set before us, he asks, "How to begin living, then?" (*Key* 5–6). The question is an important one to address before considering any of the others its anxiety must surely inspire. How does one begin living? How does one become, in a word, one, separating oneself from everything that is determined to be other-than-oneself?

Nevertheless, this line of questioning may be as problematic as it is primal. Durrell writes in his *Key*:

Einstein's theory joined up subject and object, in very much the same way as it joined up space and time. Now what is important to us here are not the equations—even if we understand them—but the symbolic act of joining what is separated. (26)

Durrell's understanding of Einstein as having connected subject and object suggests that we ought to find, in Durrell's writing, as equal a consideration for the closeness of self and other as for the distance between them.¹ The earlier questions of beginning living expand, then, to include the act of joining: How does one connect (or refuse to connect) to the world? What might keep subject distinct from object?

Finally, one must also consider the possibility of other subjects. William James writes of the world as comprised of other beings whose "histories [...] play into our history" (James, *Pluralistic* 49). How then do selves interplay in Durrell's writing? And how do subjects interact?

This chapter considers the subject/object, self/other relationship in Durrell's major works. The first section will consider the formation of the self-as-artistic-subject as a separation from the world, taking at its base the concept of the *Künstlerroman* and Lacanian theory. The second section will focus on the permeability of the subject/object divide, reflecting on the artistic creation as a corpse (along with the corporal remains of dead characters) as the intrusion of the Kristevan abject. The final section will concentrate on the connections between Durrellian characters—a connection whose logical conclusion leads to personal pluralities as Benveniste's subject-as-"I" gives way to a modified subject-as-"we."

I Writing Selves

The struggle is not to record experience but to record oneself. The book, then, does not properly exist. There is only my tissue, my guilt, transmuted by God knows what alchemy, into a few pints of green ink and handmade paper. Understand me well. This is the ideal being we call a book. It does not exist. (The Black Book 121)

¹For more on Durrell's interpretation of Einstein see the discussion from page 110.

Émile Benveniste writes that in spoken language, the subject is the one who says “I” (Benveniste, “Subjectivity” 224). By situating himself in the sentence he speaks, the subject orients the rest of his world, which forms his predicate. The written word is only slightly different. While Benveniste writes that “in saying ‘I,’ I cannot *not* be speaking of myself” (Benveniste, “Relationships” 197), the written “I” often operates as a proxy: the author creates a world in which a subject says “I,” declaring/asserting his subjectivity—though only by the grace of the author.

In novels in which the narrator also claims to be the writer of the work, another layer of complexity intercedes. In these works, the narrator’s ostensible creation is itself the ascendance to subjectivity. The author/narrator becomes the subject of the predicate implied in the physical object of the book. Lawrence Durrell’s major novels regularly foreground the writing process, and, thus, this ascension to subject-hood.² In *The Black Book*, novelist/narrator Lawrence Lucifer writes, “This is the day I have chosen to begin this writing” (*Black Book* 20); in *The Alexandria Quartet*, novelist/narrator Darley copes with and eventually dismisses expectations of factual exactitude in favor of artistic merit, finally writing “[w]ords which presage simply the old story of an artist coming to age” (*Quartet* 877); and *The Avignon Quintet* concentrates upon the collaborative project of novelist/protagonist Aubrey Blanford and his character Rob Sutcliffe in writing the novels that recount their efforts. Even in the *Revolt*, the novelist/narrator Felix Charlock outlines his writing method: “While I am writing one book, [...] I write another about it, then a third about *it*, and so on” (*Nunquam* 16). The creation of the work becomes a key element in each of the texts, a process often exposed by the in-text “author.”

Separation of the Artist

In one sense, these ostensible authors assert their subjectivity by having written a book. In another, the book is only an apparent symptom of such subjectivity; the act of writing is merely a necessary step in a longer sequence of asserting one’s artistry—a sequence whose success is far from guaranteed by the proof of having produced. In *The Black Book*, Lawrence Lucifer writes to overcome the creativity-sapping nature of “The English Death,” but in the end laments that he cannot “‘explain’ the new myth which I am undoubtedly on the point of creating [...] there are too many words, and too many things to put into words” (*Black Book* 242–43), finally conceding that “there is no more in here than the seven hectic elements can offer me” as he gives up: “This

²Matthew Escobar recognizes the affirmation of the individual self key to Durrell’s *Monsieur* (Escobar 52).

is how it ends" (244).³ Likewise, in *The Alexandria Quartet*, the growth of Darley into a novelist of worth happens after several failed creations—*Justine*, *Balthazar*, and possibly even *Mountolive*—before the artistic success written of at the end of *Clea*, the final creation. The robotic Aphrodite 'Iolanthe' is Charlock's creative masterpiece, but in the end 'she' malfunctions. *The Avignon Quintet* as a creation of Blanford seems to derail with the novelist's obsession with creating the first book, *Monsieur*, through the subsequent four parts, paradoxically ending in the fifth book with only the first book ever having been written.

Durrell's major works qualify as *Künstlerromane*. The *Künstlerroman* is a subset of the *Bildungsroman*, the story of a person coming of age, differing from the latter in that the subject is an artist arriving at his mastery of art. We see the opening of this inquiry in all of Durrell's works. As they do not follow the protagonists' lives from birth to adulthood Durrell's novels cannot be categorised as strict *Künstlerromane*; nevertheless, as Roberta Seret writes, the *Künstlerroman* does not necessarily need to begin with the birth of the protagonist-as-person, so much as protagonist-as-artist: "This specific genre traces the embryonic growth of the artist from the moment when he exhibits artistic talents and interests to the point when he actually creates" (Seret 3). Durrell's protagonists exhibit undeveloped artistic talents in the beginnings of each book. Defensively, Lawrence Lucifer writes of beginning to write, justifying his timing with the seasons (*Black Book* 20). In a similar manner, his alter ego Horace "Death" Gregory guiltily prolongs the silence before writing: "Really, I tell myself, really some day soon I shall be enticed into beginning it" (68). Correspondingly, Darley checks and revises his writing style before settling on the one Durrell made famous with the *Quartet* (*Quartet* 87–88). Charlock writes of the pain "in allowing the damned thing [an idea for an invention] to ferment, to form in the imagination" (*Tunc* 16). And Blanford—at the end of *Monsieur*, but in the relative beginning of *The Avignon Quintet*, nonetheless—harbours comparable doubts (*Quintet* 273). Each novel charts the challenge of its respective protagonist in mastering these limitations "to the point when he actually creates."

In each of these books, the failing is in the inability of words to contain the full plurality of lived experience. Darley's *Justine* begins "so far away from it in order to understand it all," but his mistake is in aiming at a stationary target: "what happened in the past" (*Quartet* 17). Balthazar's appearance in the second book of the *Quartet* brings to light many inaccuracies in Darley's version of events—inaccuracies mainly caused by his previous inability to understand what Balthazar explains to him: "We are all still real people [...] whatever you try and do to us" (214). More importantly, a

³In this regard, *The Black Book* embodies Ihab Hassan's sense of "literature of the self, a self in the world, self and world made into words" (Hassan, "Quest" 420).

mere book could never contain the whole of truth, “what most contradicts oneself in time” (216). There are too many words and too many things to put into words.

And yet, as Gregory says in *The Black Book*, the struggle is not in writing experience but in writing oneself. The problem is not in Darley denying the reality of his *characters* as much as it is in his denial of the fullness of his own reality. In any *Künstlerroman* wherein the narrator of a work is also allegedly its creator, the creation in the end is always of oneself (oneself-as-creator). Seret likens artistic maturation to a journey, writing that the artist-to-be must “voyage through several stages of development” to arrive at “art which becomes the creator’s homeland” (Seret 1). The *Künstlerroman* takes as its thesis both the definition of that homeland—both the development of the subject, Durrell’s “box labelled personality” (*Key* 5), as well as the recognition of the limits thereof—and the action of crossing over to it.

For each of these characters, the writing of a novel (or the creation not of an *Aphrodite* but of an Aphrodite who ultimately *Revolts*) is only part of the project. The creation of an art-work progresses problematically and has the potential, even in the end, of recording only artistic failure. Even still, this act requires a separation of the potential artist from the world, a separation necessary to maintain the illusion of containment Darley writes of desiring in the beginning of *Justine*. Lawrence Lucifer in *The Black Book* may never have obtained the understanding that needs this kind of separation, in the end writing that he has tried but failed, but Darley, despite intermittent intrusions by the world from which he tries to separate himself, is still able, in flashes, to achieve this separation.⁴ This fundamental separation is postponed until the end of the work, when the ultimacy of distance affords him an opportunity to transcend the physical bounds of the book,⁵ presumably only to attain the artistic mastery he dreams of. The *Revolt* and the *Quintet*, too, end with this sense of transcendence, artists growing beyond the bounds of their respective novels.⁶ At this point of separation, the artist begins his journey to the world of art he has desired, leading himself onward to construct the line between the two points which the separation has defined. Just as the artist is necessary to create the art, so too is the art necessary for the artist to create himself, as it is the only context in which he can establish this artistry.

⁴“Shall I reconstruct it—the scene I see so clearly [...]?” (*Quartet* 314)

⁵“I felt as if the whole universe had given me a nudge!” (877)

⁶The *Revolt* ends with the burning of a contractual archive and the prophetic pronouncement: “So it will be either/or once again; it will be now or never. [...] And we will keep on this way, dancing and dancing, even though Rome burn” (*Nunquam* 283). The *Quintet* ends as characters enter an explosive-filled cave, Blanford declaring that if he ever were to write “the scene he would say: ‘It was at this precise moment that reality prime rushed to the aid of fiction and the totally unpredictable began to take place!’” (*Quintet* 1367).

Separation of the Self

While Benveniste writes that the linguistic separation of subject from predicate is responsible for the creation of the ego,⁷ Jaques Lacan cites a different—though not incompatible—kind of splitting as the root of the formation of the subject. For Lacan, the birth of the subject is due partly to a pre-linguistic distinction drawn between the self and the world: the mirror stage, which he calls “*an identification*, in the full sense [...] namely, the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image” (Lacan, “Mirror” 2). Lacan’s mirror stage identifies an ideal self which becomes the calling card for all future instances of the spoken “I”—not only am I separated from the world, but “I” is also merely a pronoun that, as such, is also separated from the *Ideal-I* of which I speak. Lacan uses the German *Spaltung* to describe this split, identifying it as the distance between the spoken “I” and the idealized image of the self (Lacan, “Direction” 298). Just as the distinction of subject and object plots a space between the two, so too does the split between the subject *I* and the object *Ideal-I* or *me* plot space between the two of them, emphasizing the distance from one to the other—as well as the fragmented situation of being an *I* whose meaning is forever delayed.

The result of this split is a sense of alienation felt by every subject “by virtue of being a subject” (298); to use the words of Lawrence Lucifer in *The Black Book*, “the fantastic loneliness [...] tells me that I exist” (*Black Book* 153). This sense of loneliness is manifest as a sense of having lost some connection. Richard Boothby writes of this very sense:

For Lacan, human desire is forever haunted by the dream of ‘the thing,’ the dream of re-finding a primordially lost object, of recovering an original source of utter plenitude [...] an object that was in fact never possessed, an object that existed only as a mirage, indeed, that may have existed only as the shadow of a mirage. (Boothby 30–31)

For Lawrence Lucifer in *The Black Book*, fantastic loneliness has become a defining point of existence; loneliness implies some fuller state of union, but existence offers nothing beyond dissatisfaction.

For the robot ‘Iolanthe’ in *Revolt*, the fantastic element of this loneliness is only heightened by her own fantastical composition. The correct pronunciation of her name, as Charlock insists, is “‘I-O-lanthe!’ Note that the stress falls upon the second syllable not the third” (*Tunc* 29). The unusual capitalization of the second letter

⁷“It is in and through language that man constitutes himself as a *subject*, because language alone establishes the concept of ‘ego’ in reality, in *its* reality which is that of the being. [...] Language is possible only because each speaker sets himself up as a *subject* by referring to himself as *I* in his discourse. Because of this, *I* posits another person, the one who, being, as he is, completely exterior to ‘me,’ becomes my echo to whom I say *you* and who says *you* to me.” (Benveniste, “Subjectivity” 224–225)

raises it to the level of the first letter, the *I*, highlighting the very hollow nature of her construction. What is normally depicted as Signifier over signified—spoken “I” over idealized self—lacks, in the robotic Iolanthe’s construction, a true sense of idealized self: it is depicted as “I” over nothing, $\frac{I}{\emptyset}$, the very mathematical definition of an undefined situation. The ideal image of Iolanthe-the-screen-actress is itself merely an “illusion,” not even the “perfect illusion” Julian hopes for (*Nunquam* 140). Julian certainly recognizes the falsity of the robot, but to him she is “more real than reality itself is for most people.” He allows for the possibility of the Robotic version of Iolanthe to be “more real than most of the people we know” (140–141)—perhaps even *because* of the consciously fragmentary nature of her construction.⁸ In the end, Julian’s query—“will perhaps this creature of human habits one day, simply by acting as a human being, REALISE she is a dummy?” (141)—is answered in the affirmative for robo-Iolanthe, opening the door for other, “real people” to question their own constructions as dummies. Robo-Iolanthe’s flight is prompted by a recognition of this lack of “reality,” the delay of signification of her self precipitated by the very hyphen connecting—and keeping separate—the I and the O.

Iolanthe’s recognition of the shallowness of this assembly is also her recognition or unveiling of Boothby’s mirage—the illusion of a plenitude felt to be lacking in the world, the very illusion that feeds desire. For Lacan, desire is “neither the appetite for satisfaction, nor the demand for love, but the difference resulting from the subtraction of the first from the second, the very phenomenon of their splitting (*Spaltung*)” (Lacan, “Meaning” 125–126).⁹ He uses the same term, *Spaltung*, to describe this division of fulfillment-anticipation from demand as he does for the split of Symbolic signifier of spoken *I* from the Imaginary signified *self* of the mirror stage. To illustrate with what Lacan called “mathemes,”

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Desire} &= (\text{demand for love}) - (\text{appetite for satisfaction}) = \textit{Spaltung} \\ &= \frac{\text{“I”}}{\text{idealised self}} \approx \frac{S}{S' \rightarrow s} \\ &= \frac{\text{Symbolic}}{\text{Imaginary}} \end{aligned}$$

This idea of splitting, and its resultant feeling of having lost some sense of fullness, is fundamental in Lacan’s work. Because of this *Spaltung*, the feeling of desire Boothby writes of, $\frac{\text{Signifier}}{\text{signified}}$ is reduced to $\frac{\text{Symbolic}}{\text{Imaginary}}$, and desire’s fundamental *lack* is recognizable

⁸This fragmentation is made most obvious in Charlock’s first visit to the laboratory, where, despite the “illusion of completeness—a whole,” the bulk of her is “detached from context,” detached, as it were, from the mechanical frame of her body, which is as-yet incomplete (133).

⁹Freud, too, builds his model of desire upon an establishment of the separation between the subject and the “object” (Freud, “Sexual” 45–46).

in any formation of a linguistic, idealized self. Lawrence Lucifer's "fantastic loneliness" is indeed due to his existence, insofar as he speaks of his existence using the words "I exist." Likewise for Iolanthe, the *imago* of her *I* is merely the reflection of a reflection, the outline of the outline of the "veiled faces" of daily experience (Lacan, "Mirror" 3)—no more ridiculous than the situation of any "real" person, but all the more obvious because of the further remove.

The desire of the Other¹⁰—the reconciliation of demand for love with appetite for satisfaction—is equivalent to the desire for a whole self: the reconciliation of spoken *I* with idealized *self*. This reconciliation (an impossibility) or mending of the *Spaltung* is the Lacanian counterpart of Seret's voyage, the artist coming of age. The mastery of the Other inherent within the idea of the artist coming of age, however, is impossible without sacrificing the structuring system of the division between Self and Other. As the Other is never an obtainable destination of the self, the impulse of the artist to master his art-form is never a finished process; rather, the growth resulting from that impulse leads to the indiscrete distinction of "mastery." For the *Künstlerroman*, whose delineation depends upon the creation of an art-object—such as the completed novel in the hands of the reader—the illusion of "mastery" must be enough.

Rites of Passage

In the *Künstlerroman*, the action of crossing over into artistic mastery is one rife with elements of the rite of passage. Arnold van Gennep defines rites of passage as "rites which accompany every change of place, state, social position and age" (van Gennep 1). These transitions, found in "birth, social puberty, marriage, fatherhood, advancement to a higher class, occupational specialization, and death," are "implicit to the very act of existence" (3). Victor Turner, building upon van Gennep's work, writes that every rite of passage is marked by stages: separation, liminality, and reaggregation (Turner, "Betwixt" 94). In the first, the ritual subject is segregated somehow from traditional categorizations in order to enter the liminal zone, in which categorical properties are unstable. From there, the subject passes to the third stage of reincorporation into social fabric.

The separation of the artistic subject from the world of which he writes—the separation necessary in every defining of *subject* and *object*—describes the very space of the Lacanian lack. The desire to overcome this "fantastic loneliness" propels the artist

¹⁰I am using a double-variable replacement common to mathematics: "[T]he signifier of the desire of the Other" is symbolized by the Phallus (Lacan, "Meaning" 128), and the Phallus "is given to designate as a whole the effect of there being a signified" (124). The effect of there being a signified closes the gaps in language and introduces the possibility of demand-fulfilment. Therefore, "the desire of the Other," or, the Phallus, or, "the effect of there being a signified" instils a perceived stability within language.

forward to overcome and to re-attain that fuller state of existence. At the end—after the separation of the artist-as-subject from the world-as-object, and after the indeterminacy of the writing process—the artist is once again reconstructed into the fabric of the world, though his situation within that world has changed. The indeterminacy of that second stage is crucial to the reincorporation of a previous kind of order. Contrasted with the stable conditions of juvenilia and maturity, *the transition of life*, or, compared with the stabilities of artistic inexperience and understanding, *the transition of mastery*, or, even still, contrasted with the conditions of being and not being, *the development of self* represents the liminal stage. In this stage, “the characteristics of the ritual subject [...] are ambiguous” (Turner, “Liminality” 94).

Before art can become the homeland Seret calls it, it is merely an object of desire, marked by its distance from the interested dabbler. In this manner, the place of art is defined against the place of the aspiring artist before he or she begins the voyage to art. It is an intended destination, the arrival at which marks a simultaneous mastering thereof. Durrell reproduces this journey geographically in *The Alexandria Quartet* in Darley’s return to Alexandria (*Quartet* 666–672) and in *The Avignon Quintet* in Blanford’s parallel crossing to Alexandria (*Quintet* 618–621), journeys which mark a focusing of artistic ability in both.¹¹

The emergence of the artist-as-subject ultimately depends upon an entry into the liminal, the separation of the artist from the world. This sense of separation (and concomitant inhabitation of the liminal) is common among artists. “Prophets and artists,” Turner writes,

tend to be liminal and marginal people, “edgemen,” who strive with a passionate sincerity to rid themselves of the clichés associated with status incumbency and role-playing and to enter into vital relations with other men in fact or imagination. (Turner, “Liminality” 128)

At the same time, Spariosu calls “literary and artistic productions [...] liminal worlds” (Spariosu 32). The emergence of the artist-as-master, on the other hand, depends upon a reaggregation of the artist back into the world whose inherent subject-object differentiation he has overcome. Durrell’s (and, indeed, many) *Künstlerromane* notoriously end not at the emergence of artist-as-master, with the establishment of a new order of recognition of success at having traversed the perils of indeterminacy, but at

¹¹The Mediterranean delineates a “neutral ground” between the artistic asphyxiation of Europe and the extreme unknown otherness of Africa. For the length of the journey, they find themselves in a situation of neither-nor, or both-and. Van Gennep writes of neutral ground, “Whoever passes from one to the other finds himself physically and magico-religiously in a special situation for a certain length of time: he wavers between two worlds” (van Gennep 17–18). The magico-religious-ness of transition in the *Quartet* is even manifest in the good omen of the dolphin breaking twice at the ship’s bow (*Quartet* 666). For more on the Mediterranean as a liminal place, see Ch. 3. See also Clawson, “The Length and Greatness of its History.”

the emergence of the artist-as-subject, an establishment of separation of the artist from the object of his art. The nudge of the universe at the end of the *Quartet* establishes the influence of this indeterminacy, just as the rush of the “totally unpredictable” at the end of *Quintet* acknowledges the “total” limitlessness of the indeterminate. Existence offers nothing beyond dissatisfaction of the desire for reaggregation only because the (accurate) recognition of Durrell’s works as *Künstlerromane* is a recognition that, at the conclusion of each work, places Durrell’s artists in full flow of this liminal, at once no longer categorized and not yet categorized, looking back fondly upon a world in which the artist was once a part while simultaneously writing of feeling pregnant with the swelling artistic creation: “like some timid girl, scared of the birth of her first child” (*Quartet* 877). Fittingly, Turner writes that this aspect of not yet being classified “is often expressed in symbols modeled on processes of gestation and parturition” (Turner, “Betwixt” 96). The other aspect, of being no longer classified, will be considered in the next section of this chapter.

II The Art of Dying

Durrell considers the artist’s act of creation in a series of lectures he gave in Argentina in 1947–1948, published as the critical guide *A Key to Modern Poetry*: “Art describes the kind of reality which is already dead for the artist” (*Key* 39). Durrell shares this view with Otto Rank’s *Art and Artist*. Here Rank outlines the progression of the focus of art from the primitive through the classical and into the modern: primitive art immortalizes the abstract and removed notion of the art-object; classical art idealizes that model; “But modern art,” he continues,

neither starts from an abstract of the living nor aims at an ideal conservation of it, but its style-form consists in a vivifaction of the essence of the actual. This can, however, only be achieved at the cost of real life. (Rank 71)

The reification of “real life” into art, what Rank calls vivifaction, sacrifices the “essence of the actual” in the process of becoming. The objectification, a death-into-art, takes place at creation for the artist, who presents “the kind of reality which is already dead for the artist.” This vivifaction is only life-bestowing for the art-object in which it instills the essence of the actual. For “reality,” it is actually a process of objectification, a loss of immediacy, the “kind of reality” or model represented through art becoming distant or removed and marked as depersonalized to both artist and audience. The created/understood art-object displaces “reality” as such. Displacement is another transition, and Durrell’s self-begetting novels—between the “reality” of the novelist/narrator and objectified art, between that reality’s life and death—are the liminal

entities of that transition.

This model of objectification, which Durrell calls death and which Rank characterizes as vivifaction (though only for the resultant object-as-representation), has the same cost of the loss of reality, the depersonalization and hypostatization of effect for the artist and observers. The change from subject into object—for the subject of portrayal becoming an object of contemplation frozen in form and meaning—is, in a sense, a death. If art explains reality as it has been, then the reification of the art-object is a silencing and a stilling akin to what Durrell writes on lecturing about reality: to do so “is to stop it—as one might stop a film” (*Key* 3). Once lectured, explained, or “vivified” as art, that which is being taught, clarified, or shown loses ability to represent itself. Any autonomy or subjectivity is sacrificed for the clarity and limited immortality of the art-object.

Nevertheless, Durrell’s own works repeatedly challenge this sense of death-after-vivifaction; instead, there is a tendency of artistic worlds to confront the writer. Baltazar’s appearance on Darley’s island as some member of the ancient Greek pantheon stirs Darley to reconsider all he had written in *Justine* (*Quartet* 213). Similarly, the creation of ‘Iolanthe’ after the death of Iolanthe problematizes any notion of the reality of the art of her creation already being dead for the artists involved; in fact, it is *because* Julian refuses to acknowledge her death that she is constructed. Similarly, in *Livia Sutcliffe* confronts Blanford, his author, with the demand to bring him back to life, defying any notion of his reality—native only to the pages of the manuscript in the first book—buried within the cover of *Monsieur*.

But aside from the artistic objectification found in his creative work and described in his critical work, a more pressing kind of death permeates his novels—that of characters. If one aspect of liminality, the effect of being not yet categorized, is symbolized by gestation, Turner writes that the other aspect, that of being no longer categorized, is symbolized by death: “In so far as they are no longer classified, the symbols that represent them are, in many societies, drawn from the biology of death” (Turner, “Betwixt” 96). Imagery of death is prevalent in all of Durrell’s major works. Benedicta notes this pattern in *Nunquam*, saying “We tend to forget it, but people do have this awful tendency to die” (*Nunquam* 219); nevertheless, it is unlikely the reader would “tend to forget it.” Lawrence Lucifer’s specific note on *The Black Book* could be applied more generally to all of Durrell’s novels: “There is a lot about death in this; too much perhaps” (*Black Book* 232).¹² Normally, death is opposed to the process of creation, with creation marking the start, death marking the end—creation as a process, death

¹²Ian MacNiven notes both this propensity of characters to die and Durrell’s pseudo-necrophilia, writing, “Durrell deliberately blurs the distinction between life and death, and this remains an important theme” (MacNiven, “On Miracle Ground” 36).

as finality. Nevertheless, Durrell writes of death differently, lengthening it into an extended process, valuing it with so much significance that it becomes a liminal stage, and even reversing it so that death—somewhat paradoxically—is only one of many beginnings.

Among Durrell's many deaths are several dubious cases. Characters die and yet continue to affect the world of their respective novels after their deaths (*Pursewarden*). Others do not actually die; they are merely mis-represented as dead (*Capodistria*). And several others die but are suspended in a strange simulacrum of life: one commits suicide, but complains afterwards that he was forced into the act by his author (*Sutcliffe*); two die at least twice (*Pursewarden*, *Iolanthe*); two die to be born again (*Iolanthe*, *Clea*); and a host of characters can even claim a kind of immortality (*Affad*, *Scobie*, *Ludo*). Here is evidenced van Gennepe's neutral ground, in which characters, the *liminal personae* or threshold people, "waver between two worlds," the realm of Turner's un-dead, in which they are "neither living nor dead from one aspect, and both living and dead from another" (Turner, "Betwixt" 97).

In Durrell's works, liminal personae are not just those who exist uneasily between geographical locations or levels of artistic ability, but also those whose humanity is itself liminal. The questionably dead, for example, are people only liminally, for to be a person one must either be or have been alive—but never both at once. At the same time, the reified, fetishized, objectified subject, most obvious in *The Revolt of Aphrodite*, occupies a similar marginal, liminal role. Durrell replaces the dyad of Life and Death with a triad: Living, Dying, Nonliving—or, perhaps more accurately, Birth, Dying, Nonliving.¹³ The "edge" lost by captured reality is absorbed into this third, the stroke between the halves of Cause/Effect. This third creates space between the two in which to insert itself, plots that space within the subject/object relationship, and hence is a portrayal of the difference therein.

Subject, Object, Abject

Julia Kristeva identifies this third as abjection, an instability as problematic as Durrell's death-consciousness: "We may call it a border; abjection is above all ambiguity. [...] Abjection acknowledges [the subject] to be in perpetual danger" (Kristeva 9). The presence of abjection, that which defines the border between two structural categories, throws into relief those structuralizations, highlighting their permeability and emphasizing the possibility of one to change into the other. Whereas the subject

¹³Everyone spends a lifetime in dying: "Blanford [...] told himself that a human being might be described as simply a link between two breaths" (*Quintet* 1266), and time is merely a "measure of our death-consciousness" (*Key* 23).

is the speaking "I" and defines its object as everything it is not, the object "does not have, properly speaking, a definable object. [...] The object has only one quality of the object—that of being opposed to I" (1). Kristeva's prime example of the object is the corpse which confronts the living subject: "without makeup or masks, refuse and corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. [...] There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being. My body extricates itself, as being alive, from that border." By inhabiting that border between the living subject and the lifeless object, the corpse "is a border that has encroached upon everything." Doing so, it challenges the autonomy of the subject, the speaking "I" who defines the border: "It is no longer I who expel, 'I' is expelled. The border has become an object. How can I be without border?" Denied the border defining the "I," the subject, no longer able to construct the imagined distance between subject and object, witnesses the "breaking down of a world that has erased its borders" (3–4). Lawrence Lucifer laments this reversal of fortunes in *The Black Book*, complaining "I cannot live because the decomposing bodies of my ancestors dog me at every turn. They are not living in their myth, but dead, influencing my *dying*, not my life" (*Black Book* 157). The border defended by the abstract nobility of death is disrupted by the striking nearness of the corpse, the ambiguity of a border encroaching upon everything, placing the subject in perpetual danger of infection by the object.

This ambiguity afforded by the object is the same ambiguity of the liminal, of which Turner writes, "Their condition is one of ambiguity and paradox, a confusion of all the customary categories" (Turner, "Betwixt" 97). Both highlight the changeability of categorical constructions, disrupting the stability of the categories against which they are measured by inhabiting that betwixt third position, shortening the distance between two otherwise completely different constructions. The process of Rank's "vivification of the essence of the actual" and Seret's artistic voyage likewise marginalize that difference, describing the space between the modeled reality and the artwork. Reality / Artwork, or Life / Death, or Subject / Object, becomes Reality / Creation / Artwork, or Reality / Understanding / Artwork, or Birth / Dying / Death, or Subject / Object / Object. The extent of the incomplete, aborted transition of Life into a state of Inanimacy marks the degree of the failure of the *Künstlerroman* model to describe the development of artistic drive in Durrell's works—none of which end with the artist safely in the homeland of his art.

Lawrence Lucifer is aware of the openings offered by death; he admits as much in *The Black Book*, beginning the book with, "The *agon*, then. It begins" (*Black Book* 19). His *agon* is one mirrored in the weather of a Corfiot winter, with depressing mud "in a solid tawny line across the bay," rain which "bubbles in along the chinks of the windows," and wind, "musty with the smell of [...] the fine dust of the desert

tombs—the Arabic idiom of death” (19–20). The agon he writes is one admittedly “for the dead,” and the depressing winter is only fitting because it allows “the correspondence of deadness with deadness [to be] complete” (20). Durrell is clear, though, that the thanatological imagery he uses to describe the weather is not as significant as the human factor of death: “No mummies, chunks of tissue latched to bone; no pillars of salt, no cadavers, have ever been half so dead as we are today” (21). Here, the use of images such as tombs, mummies, and cadavers is merely an introduction to the practice continued throughout the book, in which sleeping people are compared to corpses (29), marriage is associated with death (36), pale people are described as resembling corpses (43), “death is merely the aesthetic convention which the sardonic playwright bows to” (75), to be English is to be dead (137), jailers are likened to mummies (174), and friends are described having “the terrific face of death” (205).

Moreover, Lawrence Lucifer’s prose is often interrupted by excerpts from the diary of a former tenant of the narrator’s room, Herbert Gregory, whose history remains unknown; Lawrence Lucifer speculates simply that “he vanished” (31). Strangely, Gregory signs his journal “Death,” further glorifying his desired name by calling it “part of the little charade I construct around myself to make my days tolerable” (38). Death, for Gregory and the more immediate narrator Lawrence Lucifer, is an escape from the living “English death” (243), the “mummy wrappings [...and] cultural swaddling clothes” (9) of the repressive English climate, of which *The Black Book* is a chronicle (243). The English death is a kind of zombie-like stage of living death, what MacNiven calls “a limbolike passive state” tied up to what Durrell saw as the English predilection to repression (MacNiven, “On Miracle Ground” 27). *The Black Book* is his attempt to master the English death and break through it, but the novel is really a testament to the inescapability of that cultural repression—“I wanted to break free” (*Black Book* 9), “But I can’t. [...] I was on the point of discovering, I think, but am not sure” (242). The limbolike passive state of living English death is absolute.

Another of the many examples of the aborted transition from Death into Inanimacy in Durrell’s works is that of the novelist Pursewarden in *The Alexandria Quartet*. Darley’s more successful literary rival, he commits suicide in the first book, but it is not until the fourth book that the complete picture is painted. Darley speculates that the meaning of Pursewarden’s death lies in his success as a novelist (*Quartet* 96–99). In *Balthazar*, we are treated to a different scene altogether. The doctor on call arrives at the scene to find Nessim emptying drawers and overturning papers throughout the room, explaining, “There must be nothing for the Egyptian Police to find” (312). What Darley in the first book of the quartet dismissed as “not mysterious” (99) suddenly turns into the very heart of a mystery.

It is Melissa who prompts Pursewarden to action in the version of the mystery explained in *Mountolive*, predicting “death very close. [...] Yes, very close. You will hear about it in a matter of hours” (531–532). She confides in him political secrets, unwittingly prompting Pursewarden to kill himself, as predicted, “in a matter of hours,” an act for which he cites in his suicide note the fact that he is “not equal to facing the simpler moral implications raised by this discovery” (540). Pursewarden may have killed himself two books prior, but he has yet to die.

In *Clea*, the last book and only “true sequel” to the Quartet, Darley returns to Alexandria where Pursewarden’s blind sister Liza reveals the incestuous affair she had with her brother, an affair that ends when Liza falls in love with someone else. Pursewarden kills himself to free her for *Mountolive*, offering his death as “the completest gift I can offer you as a wedding present! And if you look beyond the immediate pain you will see how perfect the logic of love seems to one who is ready to die for it” (787). We are given what seems to be a final version of Pursewarden’s reasoning for killing himself: a combination of his grief and generosity in response to his sister’s love for *Mountolive*. Later in *Clea*, Liza shares with Darley her cache of letters from Pursewarden, and together they burn the pile. It is also at this moment that Pursewarden’s figurative ghost stops haunting Darley, who had a disquieting habit of quoting his literary rival. Yet even still, Pursewarden’s death is problematic. In the original multi-volume edition of the *Quartet*, one might be excused assuming his death is final, but in the single volume edition of the series, Pursewarden is listed as an editor for the fourth book, *Clea*, two years after it is first published and five years after he first dies with the publication of *Justine* (879).

Pursewarden, however, is not the only near-immortal character from the *Quartet*. Scobie, for example, lives long past his death, attaining what Friedman calls “a two-fold immortality” (Friedman, *Fictional Death* 255). His parrot learns to emulate the old man’s voice and speech patterns, and he often reproduces them, to the surprise of Clea, who adopts the bird. “Do you think one’s soul could enter the body of a green Amazon parrot to carry the memory of one forward a little way into Time?” asks Balthazar (*Quartet* 333). And later in *Clea*, Darley learns of Scobie’s canonization as El Scob, a saint of his neighborhood.¹⁴ Another character from the *Quartet* endowed

¹⁴Scobie’s liminal personhood expands far beyond that of his undeath: as seasoned sailor, he represents the seas between Britain and her empire; as spy, he inhabits the unsteady ground between the British administration and the fledgling Egyptian government; as transvestite and homosexual, he violates heteronormative sexual and gender expectations. Scobie’s traversal across sexual categorizations seem endemic to the setting; Balthazar, Clea, Justine, Pombal, and even Darley refuse to conform to sexual norms. For more on Scobie, see Michael Pharand’s “Eros Agonistes,” in which he calls Scobie a “secret agent and closet queen” (Pharand 68).

with abnormal mortality is Capodistria, or Da Capo, as his friends call him. Accidentally shot while on a duck hunt, Da Capo's death taints the afternoon for his friends: his death "hangs in the still air like a bad smell, like a bad joke" (*Quartet* 176). It is, in fact, a bad joke: Da Capo, Italian for "from the head," signals for music to repeat from the beginning. In the *Quartet*, Capodistria is given a chance to repeat the act of living: rather, he is never dead in the first place. His epitaph, "Not Lost But Gone Before," sets the stage for the annual visit when his friends pay birthday respects to their "gone before" friend, laying on his grave flowers he buys for himself and reading aloud his latest letter (807).

Also in the *Quartet* are Balthazar's and Clea's returns to life: the first from a miscarried suicide attempt; the second from an accident swimming near the underwater remains of seven mummies. The artifacts of Balthazar's near death offer a contrast to the life in which he finds himself in convalescence upon Darley's visit. The grey (dying) hair, bandaged (all-but abject) hands, and false (non-living) teeth signify his negotiation with mortality. When he is talking with Darley, he keeps glancing at the teeth in the glass next to his bed, "a sulky furious look" (705). They are even used to juxtapose Balthazar's fallen station with Darley's newly found vivacity when the novelist (for no reason given in the text) bites into an apple during their conversation (708). The hands, too, are compared to the white boxing gloves of a "champion" (707), and the hair is labeled a sign of youthful vanity (709). Similarly, Clea's brush with death in the harbor takes place in a liminal world, in which the dead stand "upright, like chess pieces of human size," "friendly and appropriate symbols of the place" (834). Darley explains that "the dead are everywhere" and that they can "invade" our world (833). Clea seems to be one such invasion. Indeed, when Clea is shot with the harpoon gun, she is pinned to an underwater ship wreck, the vessel of the dead, perhaps the very ship that once carried the macabre chess-piece symbols of the place (848–849). Clea's return to the living is through her violent resuscitation by Darley in "a pitiful simulacrum of the sexual act" (851) which Darley likens to a "forcible rebirth" (852), saying it must have been as painful as a baby's first breath.

In the case of Da Capo, Balthazar, and Clea, the extreme opposites meet in their respective "deaths": for Capodistria, the celebration of his birthday (the beginning of his life) is held at his empty gravesite; for Balthazar, the symbols of his failed suicide are contrasted with the description of a lively boxing champion; for Clea, her transition into the realm of the Living is described with sexual and reproductive imagery. Pursewarden and Scobie, too, dwell in the space of Between, residing comfortably with neither the fully Nonliving—such as Narouz, whose death is final—nor the Living—such as Darley, whose life at the end of the *Quartet* is absolute. There is a sense in the case of all of these characters that subjects can never fully die into objects: there

remains some subjectivity even in objects, thereby delaying the reaggregation of the subject into the world of objects.

The altered mutability between Living and Nonliving is noticeable even more in the character Iolanthe, of *The Revolt of Aphrodite*. The very pronunciation of her name, “I-O-lanthe,” with the accent on the second syllable and often shortened merely to I-O, stresses the computerized and fluid mortality of the prostitute/actress, “1” and “0” being the symbols for on and off in binary code. The letters “I” and “O” also represent the flow of data, standing for Input and Output, respectively. Iolanthe’s true nature, On/Off, Living/Nonliving, Mind/Body, is manifest especially in her posthumous reification as a robot, fashioned and owned by the firm Merlin’s, product of Charlock’s AI components and Marchant’s textile expertise. When Charlock first visits the lab, the way in which Marchant teasingly reveals her piece by piece—pulling back the silk to reveal her face, covering the face and pulling back the other side to reveal a leg “of positively Botticellian elegance,” recovering the leg and drawing back another section to reveal “the vagina, the real treasure” (*Nunquam* 133–34)—reifies her form, questioning any association to human-ness or subject-ness. Charlock is understandably disturbed by the marginality of her object-hood: “It was really quite devastating the extent of the human condition—if you can just simply imagine an object called ‘self’ operating with a frame of memory, habit, impulse, inhibition and so on” (148). Iolanthe the robot is such an object: a collection of memories, habits, and impulses of Iolanthe the actress. She is the corpse, the abject thrust upon the living.

After she absconds, the firm chases her, finally finding her to be something quite far from Julian’s “perfect illusion”:

She looked flushed, as if she had been drinking, or had had some strange inner revelation. Her wig wasn’t quite snug, and looked badly in need of cleaning, as indeed did her whole person. The heels of her shoes were worn down to stumps. A torn raincoat. There was a small gash in her left calf which had been mended with a piece of surgical tape. She limped. (279).

Her half-loose wig, unnatural skin, and surgically-taped leg juxtaposed with her volition and voice, the remaining scraps of the real Iolanthe, call attention to the nearness of the robot to the original model, to what was once the Living. Together, her patched body shell and her fully functional mind cause her to be branded as un-dead, an aborted fetus, rejected as Nonliving—or rather, thrust back into the world of the Living. The limits of her mechanical mind—1 or 0, all or nothing—cannot cope with the true liminality of her existence: I over 0. Is she living? Nonliving? Had she died, but is she now alive? Was she alive, but is she now dead? The incompatibility of liminality destroys the machine-balance, and she goes insane (if such an option is available

to robots). Iolanthe's death is a transition denied finality, leaving her uncomfortably in a position Between.

The Avignon Quintet has death as important to its central form,¹⁵ and in fact begins with the death of Piers Nogaret, the friend of the apparent narrator, Bruce Drexel. But another death, that of the novelist Rob Sutcliffe, warrants more attention, as Bruce and Piers are "vivified" in one of Sutcliffe's novels, and as Sutcliffe commits suicide at the directive of *his* novelist-creator, Blanford. Blanford, the "realer" protagonist of the story of the *Quintet* puzzles over his choice to kill Sutcliffe, wondering after finishing the manuscript (of which the first 273 pages of *Monsieur* are a part), "The suicide—was that right?" (*Quintet* 274). Five pages later, he receives a telegram from his now-dead character: "Refuse to be rushed off the planet in this clumsy and ignominious [sic] fashion. Kindly arrange to have me die by less theatrical means. Rob" (278–279). In the second book of the *Quintet*, the phone rings, and it is Sutcliffe, as Blanford expects. "You are dead, Robin," Blanford reminds him, "Remember the end of *Monsieur*?" Nevertheless, Sutcliffe will not accept the finality of his demise: "Bring me back then," said Sutcliffe on a heroic note, 'and we shall see'" (304). In *Quinx*, Blanford admits to planning Sutcliffe's death to be a mystery—almost at the level as that of Pursewarden: "When I killed you in the novel I intended to leave some ambiguity about the matter. [...]he dental imprints on your washed-up body did not coincide with the records of your London dentist. A pretty mystery!" (1215). Sutcliffe's death, though never one which relegates him to novel silence, is afforded an extra dimension in its very inception.

Constance's death, once problematized, remains troublesome the length of the *Quintet*. She dies long before the end of the first book; the nine-page dinner conversation Blanford shares with her is merely played out in his mind (293). Nevertheless, she dies again in the beginning of the second book (chronologically later than the first) and continues on living after that. The lives and deaths of Affad, Piers, Sabine, and others in a Gnostic "suicide club" are equally repetitive, as at any time the council may draw one of their names from the lot as the next to be killed. At the same time, the tradition links them inextricably to the cycle of all those of their group killed in the past, the next to be killed representing merely the transition from past to future: "The man behind me represents the past and the man in front the future. In between those two poles I can say that I exist, only there, only in that *Now*" (1119). This cyclical living/dying recurs also in the lives of Ludo in the *Quintet* and Melissa in the

¹⁵Thomas Browne and Alan Warren Friedman write that the "quincunx of novels" described by Blanford borrows its shape from "the sacred letter χ [chi]" (Browne qtd. in Friedman, *Fictional Death* 262), which "may be rotated to produce a circle [...] with a dot (or tree) at its center" to arrive at the Greek letter θ, theta, "the first letter of thanatopsis," representing death (262). See also Godshalk's "Lawrence Durrell's Game in *The Avignon Quintet*."

Quartet, both of whom have a child.¹⁶ Typically in Durrell's writing, "In affairs of this sort there is always a missing child. In this way history manages to perpetuate itself" (942). These children, as in the cyclical suicide club, represent the next link in a chain of death.

Though death is rarely fatal, it is almost always forceful—whether caused by suicide, murder, accident, or even sickness. The intensity of the transformation accentuates the border *itself* between living and nonliving. The transition or border, "neutral ground," becomes an unstable state of existence in Durrell's novels, evident in unsolved mysteries, such as the deaths of Pursewarden, Piers, Sutcliffe, and Constance, recurring deaths, such as those of Affad, Piers, Ludo, and Melissa, reversible deaths, such as Clea and Iolanthe, merely mis-represented deaths, such as Capodistria, and perpetuated lives, such as Scobie. In none of these deaths is *death* the final word or act; in many it is the beginning of a chain of other events without immediate end, a stage of development pushed to the forefront.

In all of them, the focus on the abject, denial of final transition, is also a denial of the final stage of the rite of passage, the reaggregation into the world: if the subject is formed from a separation from the world (as Edenic Adam formed from dust), death represents the objectification and return to the world: a return to the earth, dust to dust. In Durrell's works, on the other hand, there is no final objectification or return to the voiceless object: subjects are endowed with a subjectivity far richer than that typically reserved for either of Balthazar's categories, "as *real* people or as 'characters'" (*Quartet* 213). The next section of this chapter considers the extent of this subjectivity and the collected, shared identity of Durrell's liminal personae.

III Spare Parts

While the works certainly have instances of creating selves or un-creating selves (describing and acting upon the permeability of subject to turn into object), far more often are there instances between these extremes: lives made up of interstructural situations *between* the birth of and the death of the subject. In Durrell's writing this "simple" act of living is never so simple, though the subtleties thereof might be less obvious than his depictions of the subject in both its formation and its death. As the

¹⁶Ludo, known for his designer honeys he sells from his caravan, is unluckily killed in a raid by the French Resistance, and his mutilated corpse is lent a "fictitious life" by a "sleepy carpet of bees which covered his bloodstained frame in its tattered shirt" (941–942). The Honey Man, he is connected to Melissa, an earlier fatality of *The Alexandria Quartet*, through her link by name and profession to the nymph in Greek mythology who taught humans the use of honey. Ludo, as his name might imply, is the victim of luck, for had he not been on the road at the time (a necessary risk for his livelihood), he would not have been killed. Melissa, vendor of a different kind of nectar, also dies from the hazards of her job: an incurable STD ravages her health throughout her final years.

corpse problematizes the stability of life by showing its connection to death—at the same time disputing the boundary between living subject and dead object—these subtleties challenge the autonomy of subjects by showing the connections between them; or, they offer an alternative to the limitations of separation by depicting a different kind of construction.

If the process of writing the ostensibly autobiographical account of one's accession to art is also a process of writing oneself and extracting one's subjectivity from the world, then the dying of a subject is a re-entry into that world, a transition of subject into object. These processes describe and delineate a duality of subject / object, a duality that assumes pureness of function of the subject and the object. Lacan writes of the formation of the self that the "I" is formed "before it is objectified in the dialectic of identification with the other, and before language restores to it [...] its function as subject" (Lacan, *Écrits* 2). Émile Benveniste elaborates, writing of the formation of the subject that it is "in and through language that man constitutes himself as a *subject*, because language alone establishes the concept of 'ego' [...] 'Ego' is he who *says* 'ego.'" (Benveniste, "Subjectivity" 224).

The act of the writer writing the novel in which he describes the act of writing the novel (Durrell describes *Justine* as a "novel about the actual process of writing" (qtd. in Alyn 62)) is the very constitution of the writer as a subject, the writer using language to establish his authorial voice just as he uses the completion of the novel to establish his artistic value. As Darley writes of Alexandria, he uses the first person form, *I*, to set himself up as a subject, constructing the same twofold linearity that is reversed by Balthazar's surprising of Darley in *Balthazar*. Balthazar's subjecthood seems assured by his voice and the manner he addresses Darley "you" just as he uses "I" to describe himself. "I am real!" he exclaims, asserting his subject in the first before continuing: "We are all still real people [...] whatever *you* try and do to us" (*Quartet* 213).

If "I" and "you" present what Benveniste calls a "*correlation of subjectivity*" (Benveniste, "Relationships" 201), the third person, on the other hand, describes a lack of subjectivity; it describes an object and "is the only one by which a *thing* is predicated verbally" (199). Benveniste questions the terminology of the third person form, suggesting that it is a "non-person" form altogether:

When I get out of "myself" in order to establish a living relationship with a being, of necessity I encounter or I posit a "you," who is the only imaginable "person" outside of me. These qualities of internality and transcendence properly belong to "I" and are reversed in "you." One could thus define "you" as the *non-subjective person*, in contrast to the *subjective person* that "I" represents; and these two "persons" are together opposed to the "non-person" form (= he). (201)

The third-person narration of *Mountolive*, then, is non-personal in its anonymity, just

as that narrator's relationship to the spoken-of is uncertain: as pure object, the already-dead work of art, the events of *Mountolive* transpire beyond the questionability of any narrator.

And yet, the third person construction in the beginning of the *Quintet* projects a different sort of subjectivity and personhood altogether. *Monsieur* begins with Bruce on a southbound train, a journey familiar to him, because it is "the one we had always taken"—one he had always taken with friends. As he travels, the style of the narration shifts noticeably between persons, vacillating between the first and third: "How well I remembered, how well he remembered! The Bruce that I was, and the Bruce I become" (*Quintet* 5). The shift itself is jarring for the reader who expects a modicum of distance between first and third persons; as Benveniste writes, "in the third person a predicate is really stated, only it is outside 'I-you'" (Benveniste, "Relationships" 197). As one paragraph ends berating the perpetual lateness of "our train," the next begins, explaining narratively that "These were the reflections of the lone traveller in the lighted third-class compartment at the rear of the train." Bruce separates his perspective from his body, detaching linguistic subject from physical object, describing how "In the tarnished mirror this man is watching himself." Authorial distance weaves and wavers between narratorial person and non-person, between subject and object, describing in one line that "The late traveller was myself" before speculating in the next that "He must be trying to objectify his thoughts and emotions by treating them as one would in a novel" (*Quintet* 5-6).

A Train Subject

The intimacy suggested between these first and third persons describes a construct at odds with Benveniste's description of the third as a non-person form; "the Bruce that I was" is very much implicated in both "the Bruce that I become" and the Bruce that "I" is. The uncertainty of distance between narrative subject and object of narration describes a different kind of subjectivity. On the unreliability of his transportation, Bruce explains that his is "A train subject to unexpected halts, unexplained delays," nevertheless offering a vehicle for transition from "a northern winter into a nascent spring" (*Quintet* 5). Bruce himself is "a train subject," traveling among identities all connected at multiple stops. The construction is not unusual in Durrell's writing, which delights in relationships among subjects and their alter egos, between real and fictional counterparts, the blurring of authenticity with robotic artificiality, and the play among imaginary friends whose lives mutually interpenetrate different ontological levels. The plurality of Balthazar's declaration, "We are all still real people," presents

a network of collected subject(s), disclosing the possibility of plurality inherent in every singular.

In *The Black Book*, Gregory describes a similar duality in the “presence of oneself”:

The eternal consciousness of oneself in substance and in psyche. The eternal consciousness of that shadow which hangs behind my shoulder, watching me flourish my ink on this nude paper. What a recipe for immortality! The one self and the other, like twin generals divided in policy, bungling a war. The eternal, abhorrent presence of oneself. (*Black Book* 31)

Like Bruce, Gregory writes of himself in a kind of third person, distancing his perspective from “that shadow which hangs behind my shoulder.” Unlike Bruce, he is not very clear to whom this shadow belongs, though he, too, seems to imply a differentiation between physical and psychological selves. To a reader, this shadow hanging behind his shoulder is reminiscent of Lawrence Lucifer, the narrator and ostensible author of *The Black Book*, who includes long extracts from Gregory’s diary. Between these extracts, Lawrence Lucifer provides commentary, questioning and speculating on Gregory’s motives:

I am pondering on Gregory and Grace and the curious design he made of them both in the little green handwriting. Gregory is a sort of chessman, like a green bishop, entangled in his pawn, and writing with the quiet venom of a player who has forgotten the rules. (31)

Lawrence Lucifer entangles the various modes of Gregory: he is a bishop and a pawn, both chessman and player. The “curious design *he* made” (my emphasis) suggests a sense of autonomy in Gregory’s account, but the Gregory who as a player “has forgotten the rules” may be a mere pawn of Lawrence Lucifer’s construction. Which *he*—Gregory or Lawrence Lucifer—is responsible for the curious design of Gregory and Gracie?

The first long extract of Gregory’s diary sets out these problems, identifying that the central concern is “the question of the ego, the little me. The I, sitting here” (32). For Lawrence Lucifer, too, the question is of identity: “Who Gregory *was*, I have not properly discovered yet” (32). Later, though, he writes of extracts from Gregory’s diary, describing them as “the tender id of this book” and in part implicating Gregory as “the other me” (55). This intimacy between the id and the ego, between Lawrence Lucifer and his alter ego, provides an antidote to the “isolation,” the “loneliness,” the “forbidden territory which lies between us” (39, 53, 58).¹⁷ Gregory describes

¹⁷Durrell’s motif of loneliness in *The Black Book* can be read alongside that of Henry Miller in *The Tropic of Cancer*. Acknowledging his artistic debt to Miller, Durrell sent him an early manuscript of *The Black Book* (“I am going to send it to you to read first when it’s done, because technically it’s very influenced by you” (*Durrell-Miller* 55)), hoping to breach that forbidden territory between two strangers (“you can imagine how flattering your curiosity was” (*Durrell and Miller* 4)); finding himself successful, he also found, in Miller, a literary mentor and lifelong friend. For more on the literary

the despair of loneliness and his hopefulness for connection in a manner remarkably similar to Bruce's *train* subject:

It is a fancy of mine that each of us contains many lives [...]. They are laid up inside us, shall we say, like so many rows of shining metals—railway lines. Riding along one set toward the terminus, we can be aware of those other lines, alongside us, on which we might have travelled—on which we might yet travel if only we had the strength to change. You yawn? This is simply my way of saying I am lonely. (*Black Book* 37–38)

Gregory's fancy of the potentially many lives of everyone—and the possibility of changing tracks and drawing nearer to others which had before seemed parallel, and thus ever distant—bespeaks his desire to draw closer to others to combat perpetual loneliness. As every track leads toward the terminus, every track also radiates out from it, suggesting both the inevitability and the originality of a state of human connection.

The Alexandria Quartet describes a persistence of characters whose identities as they are described ought to be mutually exclusive. The eponymous Justine of the first book, whom Darley writes as being in love with him, cannot be the Justine of the second book, the Justine whom Balthazar lists among the “Fallacies and Misapprehensions” of Darley's first novel: “Number 4. That Justine ‘loved’ you” (*Quartet* 216). The singular picture Darley paints of characters in *Justine* may be at odds with the complexity of personhood, putting them, as Clea writes, “in a very special position” (378). That the first three books of the *Quartet* are called “siblings” which “interlap, interweave, in a purely spatial relation” (*Balthazar* 9) implies that, if nothing else, these spatial boundaries will be respected, but the way in which *Balthazar* presents a set of characters incompatible with those from *Justine*—albeit basing that incompatibility on the limits of any one perspective—yet ties these selected fictions *inextricably*, makes a greater gesture to the use of alter egos elsewhere in Durrell's work.

In *The Revolt of Aphrodite*, Charlock, like *The Black Book*'s Gregory, describes a disassociation with himself. Waking in an asylum in *Nunquam*, he wonders “April to October, but where were those vanished weeks, and where was he? I would give anything to know.” Like Bruce, he slips between third person and first person. Like Bruce, he uses the mirror to hinge his perspective outward, recognizing externally what he cannot know internally, the recognition of the sameness of “he” and “I,” but unlike Bruce he also assumes the position of the second person in the process: “Nothing of all this did you notice until the image in the mirror one day burst into tears. [...] The pain of regained identity. Ahhhh!” Finally, he is able to reconcile the two persons in

relationship of Durrell and Miller, see also James Gifford, “‘The unknown is constant’: The Fiction and Literary Relationship of Lawrence Durrell and Henry Miller.”

one in a moment of synchronized knowledge, as “I know it now, and the other knows it too—we slide into one identity once more, as slick as smoke” (*Nunquam* 12).

Describing his interactions with the doctors and nurses on the ward, he calls himself schizophrenic, wielding the word as a weapon: “doctors are scared of schizophrenes because they can read minds, they can plot and plan. They pretend to pretend” (13). Schizophrenia here describes Charlock’s state of having multiple personalities vying for control; if Charlock is at once “I,” “you,” and “he,” mind-reading is little more than a shift in perspective.¹⁸ Using the work of Fredric Jameson, Donald Kaczvinsky describes schizophrenia in the *Revolt* as “the loss of the sense of history on the individual and cultural level,” particularly as found in postmodern societies (Kaczvinsky, “Postmodern Society” 65). For the sufferer of schizophrenia, then, he writes that “life is a series of disconnected presents” (66). In the *Revolt*, however, this loss of individual history opens up to him the possibility of transcending the bounds of the individual. In sorting through Caradoc’s transcriptions, Charlock notices similarities with those of others and speculates on the construction of human identity:

is everyone built on this pattern?—like a club sandwich, I suppose. But here for example is a vein which would be more suitable to Koepgen—perhaps it is the part of Caradoc which *is* Koepgen, or vice versa. I mean *alchemy*, the great night express which jumps the points and hurtles out of the causal field, carrying everything with it. Alchemy with all its paradoxes—I would have logged that as Koepgen’s private territory. But no. The vein is there in Caradoc, under the fooling. (*Nunquam* 17)

This club-sandwich patterning of personality is an interleaving of different fields. What Charlock calls “Caradoc” and what he calls “Koepgen” are not so neatly divided; they are parts of one another. He applies the metaphor of alchemy, the transmutation of one element into another, to describe the migration of identity among parts. In *The Revolt of Aphrodite*, Gregory’s tracks no longer delimit the path a person might take. For Charlock, Bruce’s train jumps the tracks, carrying “everything”—the singularity of personality, the dualities of subject/object and cause/effect—with it. Charlock’s fight in *Tunc* to separate himself from the undifferentiated mass of the firm makes way in *Nunquam* for his acquiescence of the firm’s control. Iolanthe the actress, whose identity in death is assumed by the firm in the manifestation of ‘Iolanthe’ the robot, is the only character of the *Revolt* capable of—or, in the end, even interested in—revolting

¹⁸Schizophrenia, from the Greek ‘split mind,’ used clinically describes a series of symptoms associated with disorganized thinking. Used popularly, it describes a “split personality,” or the state of having multiple personalities at hand. This second, clinically incorrect meaning is very common, even in the early twentieth century; in an article written in 1933, for example, T. S. Eliot equates schizophrenia with the possibility of being “virtually two men” (Eliot qtd. in McNally 75). It is unlikely that Charlock as a schizophrenic would be asked to impose order among Caradoc’s transcriptions if Durrell is using the clinically correct (but popularly unknown) meaning of the word. See Kieran McNally’s “Schizophrenia as Split Personality” for further information on the word’s usage.

from this corporate identity. And Charlock's act of destruction of the firm's archives at the end of *Nunquam* can be read as an act of destroying the possibility of differentiation in an increasingly schizophrenic world—a world in need of a physical archive to provide it with a sense of history.

Alter Egos

While Bruce presents the first instance of plurality of subject in *Quintet*, he is far from the only example of this kind of a traveling subject, halting and delaying while at the same time shifting position. In *Constance*, the meeting between Blanford and Sutcliffe, the latter supposedly being a character created by the former, is described as a meeting between “several different versions of a self” (*Quintet* 921). They present the most obvious example of the split in subjectivity, later explicitly equated with the split between body and soul:

SUT AND BLAN
SOUL AND BODY
(1187)

Furthermore, when Blanford asks “How much longer have we got together?” Sutcliffe makes explicit the connection between the two: “his alter ego replied: ‘One more book, one more river. The body and soul must end their association. I know’” (1187).

This connection between Blanford and Sutcliffe, and indeed the connection between—and the plurality *within*—many characters in Durrell's work, describes a situation different from the well-defined subjectivity Benveniste describes in the linguistic formation of subject, the saying of “ego.” The sense of “myself” that Benveniste writes of transcending to form relationships (“I get out of ‘myself’ in order to establish a living relationship with a being”) in Durrell is not a stable self comprised of an impermeable internality of “I” (a sense of *subject*) and an accessible externality of “you” (the not-self, the *object* of “I”). Instead, the subject in Durrell's works comprise a strange plurality, a joining of “I” and “not-I.” Benveniste writes that “the oneness and the subjectivity inherent in ‘I’ contradict the possibility of a pluralization”; nevertheless Durrell's subjects themselves contradict any sense of this oneness. They present “a *junction* between ‘I’ and the ‘non-I’”; their “I” is a “we,” comprised of something other than “a multiplication of identical objects”; rather, they present a junction of disparity that, taken at once, “forms a new totality which is of a very special type” (Benveniste, “Relationships” 202).

Of the sense of “we,” Benveniste describes something very similar to Turner's sense of the “liminal group” composed as a “community or comity of comrades and not a structure of hierarchically arrayed positions” (Turner, “Betwixt” 100). Benveniste's we

“is not a quantified or multiplied ‘I’; it is an ‘I’ expanded beyond the strict limits of the person, enlarged and at the same time amorphous” (Benveniste, “Relationships” 203). Blanford and Sutcliffe as constructions expand beyond the strict limits of the person, and while Blanford claims to be Sutcliffe’s creator, he holds no structurally superior position. Similarly, Constance is the double of Constanza (*Quintet* 1270), Egon von Esslin’s twin sister, just as she is also to a degree the double of Pia, Sutcliffe’s wife-turned-lesbian (185). And Trash is a multiple of Thrush, as Sylvie is of Sylvaine and Sabine, the de Nogarets are of the Ogres, and the many queer sexual triads (Piers-Bruce-Sylvie, Hilary-Livia-Constance, Pia-Sutcliffe-Trash, Sylvie-Livia-Blanford) are of one another.¹⁹ This joining together of aspects of different characters under the banner of singularity evidences Sutcliffe’s vision of the novel he is writing: “After all, why not a book full of spare parts of other books, of characters left over from other lives, all circulating in each other’s bloodstreams—yet all fresh, nothing second-hand, twice chewed, twice breathed” (693).

This *we* of the train subject, most noteworthy in the *Quintet*’s alter egos and alter personae,²⁰ abounds in all of Durrell’s depictions of subjects, growing only more obvious in his later works. Moreover, it underscores the inability of the subject, once written or lived, to truly ever die into a state of voiceless object-hood: the Pursewarden whose death in *Clea* seems a finality will always eventually have come to be the editor of that very book. Though the construction of the self as subject begins the very moment Lawrence Lucifer, Gregory, Darley, Charlock, Sutcliffe, or Blanford write (or *say*) “I,” their respective constructions as *artists* reside beyond the limitations allowed by language. The entry into that beyond, the liminal edge of subjective artistry, lends the power to characters in those novels to follow Sutcliffe’s diktat, which he enacts by delivering: “Be ye members of one another” (693).

Benveniste writes that “the verbal person in the plural expresses a diffused and amplified person. ‘We’ annexes an indistinct mass of other persons” (Benveniste, “Relationships” 203). The construction of *we* lacks any inherent structuring to it; it democratically conjoins a group of “I” and “not-I,” blurring, as Benveniste writes, “the too sharp assertion of ‘I’ into a broader and more diffuse expression” before offering, in the end, access to “the ‘we’ of the author or orator” (203). This ascendance to an authorial “we” is considered further in the next chapter.

¹⁹Marie-Christine Veldeman further explores the threesomes in the *Quintet* in “Love at Verfeuille: Duality of a Trinity.”

²⁰See, especially, Melody L. Enscoe’s “Systemic Imagery in Durrell’s *Avignon Quintet*.”

CHAPTER 2

Selected Fictions

If we were readers only of the cosmic novel, things would be different: we should then share the author's point of view and recognize villains to be as essential as heroes in the plot. But we are not the readers but the very personages of the world-drama. In your own eyes each of you here is its hero, and the villains are your respective friends or enemies. The tale which the absolute reader finds so perfect, we spoil for one another through our several vital identifications with the destinies of the particular personages involved. (A Pluralistic Universe 48–49)

It is impossible to describe with what emotion I read his words—sometimes so detailed and sometimes so briefly curt—as for example in the list he had headed “Some Fallacies and Misapprehensions” where he said coldly: “Number 4. That Justine ‘loved’ you.” (Balthazar 22)

If Darley's literary reification of Alexandria in *Justine* represents the first dimension—length—in Durrell's *Quartet*, then the introduction in *Balthazar* of another perspective represents the second: width. With the presentation of Balthazar's “Interlinear,” the *linear* consideration of Darley is problematized to become planar, opening it up democratically for the consideration of everyone in the *Quartet*—who are not merely *characters* of Darley, but are *subjects* in their own rights. Thus, for the purposes of this study, the second dimension of “width” is actually a dimension offering the possibility of plurality of treatment of an artistic object. Darley's depiction of Alexandria is exposed as being not a depiction of the true history of their shared Alexandrian experience, but rather a depiction of the story as he has internalized it, a selected fiction based on his experiences in and interaction with a world he can only imagine to be anything but fictional.

This interplay of a kind of second dimension, a relation of fictionality to “reality,” is fundamental to all of Durrell's major fiction. The idea is explored elsewhere in the *Quartet*, for example in *Justine*'s note that “Only the city is real” (*Justine* 9) or in *Balthazar*'s note that, while “The characters and situations in this novel [...] are entirely imaginary [...]. Nor could the city be less unreal” (*Balthazar* 9). In *The Revolt of Aphrodite*, too, the robot ‘Iolanthe’ is “so damn true to life” that she is “more real than the reality itself” (*Nunquam* 174, 140). And *The Black Book*'s ontological levels of Lawrence Lucifer, a novelist writing about his housemates—as well as about Gregory, another former diarist and inhabitant of the Regina Hotel, who also writes about

their common housemates—describes a similarly dizzying relationship of characters to author.

But of Durrell's works, *The Avignon Quintet* offers perhaps the most pressing example of the interplay between fiction and reality—the presentation of a reality which, itself, cannot be anything but fictional. For example, Sutcliffe, a major character of the novel, is actually a creation of Blanford, the novel's protagonist. At the end of *Monsieur*, Blanford receives a mysterious telegram from his character (*Quintet* 279) and writes about “suing himself for libel” (273) in light of Sutcliffe's jokes at his expense. And Blanford questions his own sense of being, wondering if he might be perhaps “an invention of someone like old D—the devil at large,” before placing “D” (the devil? Durrell?) as the ultimate begetter of the characters in a faux lineage of the novel (279, 294). And the novel ends in the middle of Blanford's epiphany on the relationship of fiction to reality, cut off by the intrusion (in the material world) of the book's back cover—the 1992 edition of which extols the virtues of Durrell's treatment of his “prime themes of ‘fiction’ and ‘reality.’”

His travel narratives, too, though destined to be read as “truer” to reality than his works of fiction, often confuse the real with the imagined. In the acknowledgments to *Sicilian Carousel*, for example, he calls “the characters” of the travel narrative “imaginary” (*Sicilian* 9). In *Bitter Lemons*, too, he denies the political overtones of that book in favour of placement as “a somewhat impressionistic study” (*Bitter Lemons* 11). He does much of the same thing in his other books, *Reflections on a Marine Venus* and *Prospero's Cell*, denying the authenticity of his characterization, preferring instead for the people of his books to be considered naturalized citizens of his imagination.

Despite—or perhaps because of—all these juxtapositions of fiction and reality, there remains a lot to explore regarding the two terms, though much critical attention has been paid already. Lee Lemon opens the confusion between the two to the world of the reader, writing that Durrell is noteworthy particularly for “his ability to persuade his readers to accept [...] the intricacy and the mystery of the world we habitually simplify in order to understand” (Lemon, “Imagination of Reality” 37). W. L. Godshalk, too, confronts the problem of confused reality and fiction in Durrell's writing, resorting to coining the confusing (but useful) terms “fictively fictive” and “fictively real” (Godshalk, “Death” 105). Nevertheless, this concession seems to sidestep the real issues in Durrell's writing—namely, the nature of these nested fictions, the interplay of fiction and reality, and the very “real” blurring between the two which challenges this tidy separability. What is it one writes about when writing about fiction? What does one mean by reality? And are the two mutually unintelligible, or is communication between the realms possible? In this chapter, I will examine the ideas

of fiction and reality, considering the constructs alongside existing explorations of reality, imagination, metafiction, structuralism, narratology, and the acts of reading and writing, before applying the concepts in a progressive analysis of Durrell's novels. In the first section (beginning on page 45), I will examine Darley's approach to reality in the *Quartet*; in the second (from page 53), I will consider that of Charlock in *Revolt*; and in the final section (from page 59), I will focus on Blanford in the *Quintet* before bringing these readings together with further consideration of *The Black Book* as well. Before these considerations, however, I will explain my theoretical approach.

Between Fiction and Reality

Man is simply a box labelled personality. He peers out of the box through five slits, the senses. On this earth he is permitted access to three dimensions of space and one of time. Only in his imagination can he inhabit the whole—a reality which is beyond the reach of intellectual qualification: a reality which even the greatest art is incapable of rendering in its full grandeur.

(*Key to Modern Poetry* 5)

In *Key to Modern Poetry*, quoted above, Durrell establishes a tripartite ontology of selfhood in relation to the world: there is something like humankind, there is reality (the world which is segregated from and beyond the understanding of humankind), and there is the third, intervening and communicative realm of imagination. The first is limited by the ability of the senses to comprehend data accurately; moreover, the whole of reality cannot be entertained in the mind at one time, as it is experienced in fifths (the senses), fourths (the dimensions), or twenty differing combinations thereof (*Key* 5).

To complicate matters, the second aspect, reality, is “beyond the reach of intellectual qualification” (5). It is not a matter of sight or touch needing greater resolution; neither is it the dogged aspect of time slowing human understanding of reality. Rather, Durrell tells us, reality is complicated by design. In describing reality as beyond the faithful rendering of art, Durrell equates art to an extension of this *human* drive to understand reality—a drive that can never be satisfied.

Reality is similar to those other “great conceptual abstractions like ‘truth’, ‘beauty’ and ‘eternity’,” in that we can hold no reasonable expectation to reduce it in any easily comprehensible manner. They are all “irreducible qualities”: “The materials we use for thinking are so unstable that it is unlikely we shall ever reach a final definition, a final judgment upon them” (3). Reality, as something transcending experience, is something humans cannot expect to fully touch upon in any explanation. Charles Saunders Peirce writes that all we can know of reality is based on opinion (Peirce, “Of Reality” 57). Somewhere after our observations lie the subjective elements of our *understanding* of reality.

In Durrell's model, imagination is the keystone. Imagination allows for "provisional truths, our short-range raids on this greater territory which permeates our inner lives" (*Key* 5). It allows for seams to appear seamless, smoothing deficiencies in understanding so that the one (reality—or the human recognition of our inefficiency in understanding it) does not render the other (human) unable to act. Robert Scholes, drawing inspiration from Peirce, further explains: "In life, we do not attain the real. What we reach is a notion of the real which contents us enough so that we can found our behaviour upon it. In a word, we arrive at belief" (Scholes, *Fabulation* 7). Peirce calls this belief "the demi-cadence which closes a musical phrase in the symphony of our intellectual life" (qtd. in 7). Durrell's understanding of reality being beyond intellectual qualification seems to be compatible with the pragmatic model espoused by Peirce.¹ Durrell's *imagination*, that which allows us to compromise a provisional understanding of the world we otherwise have no chance of ever fully knowing, leads humanity to an understanding of the world that matches evenly with Peirce's *belief*. Because of the simplifying work of our *imaginings*, we *believe* we can comprehend *reality*.²

In his *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge describes two different varieties of imagination, further expanding the vocabulary we have to talk about imagination, belief, and reality.³ The first of these, the primary imagination, corresponds directly with Durrell's notions of imagination as the encapsulating element of reality: "The primary IMAGINATION I hold to be the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM" (Coleridge 175). Coleridge's primary imagination is what collates the disparate fragments of human perception into the semblance of a whole. Primary imagination allows for a finite reduction of the infinite world, a simplifying understanding not unlike the act that for Peirce culminates in belief.

Coleridge's secondary imagination, on the other hand, is a more creative mode of imagination:

It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify. It is essentially *vital*, even as all objects (*as* objects) are essentially fixed and dead. (175)

¹In *The Avignon Quintet* the psychoanalyst Schwarz (in conversation with Constance) champions pragmatism as the best way to view reality: "Pessimist!" "No, realist. Pragmatist!" (*Quintet* 1148).

²It is important to note that the effect of this process of privileging imagination makes it transcendent (in this model) to the reality it ultimately constructs. See the inverted model of "Histoire," "narrating," and "Récit" enclosed by parentheses at the left side of Figure 2 on page 45.

³The choice of Coleridge here to explain Durrell's model of the imagination is an informed one, as he admired the Romantics for their treatment of imagination. When asked in an interview if he identified with Romantic values, he replied, "Romantic values? Yes, if you wish; in the sense that what I call life I see as an act of the imagination, a poem." (Durrell, "Persuading the World" 71)

Secondary imagination is responsible for projecting a reality that is not true. The primary imagination, in forming an understanding of the world perceived by the senses, builds a model for the secondary imagination to dissolve into constituent parts, recreating aspects of that reality. In idealizing and unifying, the secondary imagination etches into belief a secondary reality, based upon but differing from that primary one collected by the primary imagination. It recognizes the compromised perspective on which belief is based and uses the limits thereof to describe something different.

Elsewhere in Durrell's writing, this compromised perspective of *belief* is equated with *fiction*. In *The Alexandria Quartet*, for example, Darley's mistaken assumptions about the lives of his friends lead him to compose a fiction roughly corresponding to his time spent in Alexandria; the single-volume Penguin editions of those books even carry a strongly worded note from the publisher, indicating that the books are, in fact, works of fiction.⁴ Subsequently, we can summarize Durrell's model as one of *imagination* intervening between *fiction* and *reality*, filtering and opening access from one to the other.

G rard Genette describes a similar system to codify a language of narratology, drawing distinctions between *histoire*, ('story'), *narration* ('narrating'), and *rcit* ('narrative').⁵ The *histoire* is the "signified or narrative content," including plot elements and actions, and the *rcit* is the "signifier, statement, discourse or narrative text itself." Narrating, meanwhile, is "the producing narrative action and, by extension, the whole of the real or fictional situation in which that action takes place" (Genette 27). Genette's model of narratology corresponds well with Durrell's ontology: *histoire* corresponds to the fiction the author holds of the world, in that it is often based on (and derivative of) it;⁶ *rcit* corresponds to reality, because the *rcit* is represented, in part, by the physical aspect of the book or text in the world; moreover, narrating resembles imagination, because just as imagination is the encapsulation of reality into belief, narrating is the sublimation of the *histoire* into the *rcit*.⁷

Umberto Eco summarises Hjelmslev's model of the sign function as a "Theory of Communicational Acts," which he breaks down into *sender*, *message*, and *addressee*

⁴The standard disclaimer, on the copyright page of each of the four books, goes further than Durrell's "Only the city is real" in suggesting that Alexandria itself is fabricated: "This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events, or locales is entirely coincidental."

⁵In order to avoid confusion, when I refer to these terms as Genette uses them, I will use the French terms *histoire* and *rcit* with the English *narrating*, as "story," "narrative," and "narration" are too similar in their English meanings.

⁶Eco writes that when reading, the reader "assigns those subjects to a possible world [...] between this world and the world of his experience" (Eco, *Role* 17).

⁷Nevertheless, as we shall see later, the *histoire* of a novelist like Darley in *Justine*, while corresponding to the fiction he holds of the world, is one he mistakes to be the *histoire* of the reality he cannot actually access.

(Eco, *Semiotics* 53). The sender is the author (fictional or otherwise), the message is that text which is being sent, and the addressee is the reader (fictional or otherwise).⁸ Just as Durrellian fiction is an aspect of one person's place in the world, and just as *histoire* represents one idea transcendental to a text, so is sender dependent upon the placement of a single person and transcendental to the idea of something being sent. The message corresponds to the narrating (which describes the act of broadcasting) and the imagination (responsible for the ideation of reality into belief or fiction). And the addressee, or reader, has immediate access only to the *récit*, the text, and resides in the world of reality external to the *histoire* or fiction.

While Coleridge writes of perception and creation, the models of Genette and Hjelmslev focus more on the creation and transmission of a *récit* than they do on the act of interpretation of that text; Wolfgang Iser, on the other hand, takes up the perspective of the reader, considering the act of interpretation in a model similar to that detailed in Eco. His three components are the *text*, the *work*, and the *reader*, which both correspond to and problematize the other models. Unlike Genette's narrating, Durrell's imagination, and Hjelmslev's message, Iser's work operates on an implicit level:

If the virtual position of the work is between text and reader, its actualization is clearly the result of an interaction between the two [...]. This is not to deny the vital importance of each of the two poles—it is simply that if one loses sight of the relationship, one loses sight of the virtual work. (Iser, "Interaction" 21)

In Iser's model, the text represents the words written by the author. The reader reads the text, idealizing it as the work, an interpretation of the words of the author. But Iser's model can also be seen as an inversion of the model proposed by Genette and Durrell, with the author- or narrator-as-subject replaced by the reader-as-subject. Furthermore, the work is something fashioned in the act of reading. In this sense, *reading*, as the explication of the *histoire* from the *récit*, corresponds to (and is complicit with) Genette's *narrating*, as the sublimation of the *histoire* into the *récit*. Just as for Genette the *histoire* is what a narrator puts into a *récit*, so too is Iser's work what the reader "gets out of" a text.

Reading, Writing, and Imagination

These concepts of reading and writing (or narrating) are natural cognates to Barthes' terms *scriptible* and *lisible*, translated as "writerly" and "readerly," respectively. For Barthes, readerly describes "classic texts" that are "negative, reactive value: what can

⁸Eco finds Hjelmslev's model to be too simple to describe accurately the act of communication; nevertheless, the model is convenient enough for the limited needs of this study.

be read, but not written.” They constitute a lack of choice on the part of the reader, allowing him only to accept or reject the propositions of the text (Barthes 4). They depend especially on the condition of a text being straightforward. Most readings of *Justine* out of the context of the rest of *The Alexandria Quartet* would describe a more readerly text, one whose meanings are straightforward and one offering the reader only the option of accepting or rejecting the propositions therein. The reader of such a text must either accept the entire set of propositions or accept none of it.⁹ At times, however, a text is not so candid with its meaning. In *The Avignon Quintet*, for example, Blanford is frustrated when his character Sutcliffe calls on the telephone, not because Sutcliffe represents a fiction, but because in that fiction Sutcliffe is supposed to be dead: “‘You are dead, Robin,’ said Blanford. ‘Remember the end of *Monsieur?*’” Sutcliffe is not so easily shaken off: “‘Bring me back then,’ said Sutcliffe on a heroic note, ‘and we shall see’” (*Quintet* 304). Later Sutcliffe, flirting with Blanford’s love interest Constance, sends Freud’s couch to her in the mail. In this example, there are three different levels of intermingling reality and fiction: that of Sutcliffe (creation of the narrator), that of Constance (fellow inhabitant of the world of the narrator), and that of Freud (inhabitant of both the world depicted in the text and the world of the reader).

This kind of text presents a challenge to the reader because the grammar of the *récit* is hard to follow. According to Iser, “In literary works, [...] the message is transmitted in two ways, in that the reader ‘receives’ it by composing it” (Iser, “Interaction” 21). The Reader “reads” by bridging gaps in the text. These gaps have been laid out by the writer with purpose for the reader to be guided through a text, and they are formed by “mark[ing] off schemata and textual perspectives from one another” (24). In reading, the reader effaces this blank between the schemata and text. Barthes’ writerly text, however, represents an open system with no pre-established schema to transverse:

The writerly text is a perpetual present, [...] *ourselves writing*, before the infinite play of the world (the world as function) is traversed, intersected, stopped, plasticized by some singular system (Ideology, Genus, Criticism) which reduces the plurality of entrances, the opening of networks, the infinity of languages. (Barthes 5)

Unlike the readerly, the writerly text introduces multiplicity. It is “novelistic without

⁹Some possible propositions might be those included in the following set: “Darley loved Justine” and “Justine loved Darley” and “Nessim’s bizarre behaviour was a result of his despondency over his wife’s cheating on him” and “Justine fled Nessim’s murderous rage at the end of the novel.” The reader of *Justine* who has not also read the other works of the *Quartet* does not know of the other possibilities introduced in those books that challenge the set-nature of these propositions established in *Justine*. For example, while Darley *did* love Justine, Justine’s love of Darley is less sure and the cause of Nessim’s bizarre behaviour is most certainly *not* Justine’s acts of adultery—which he himself (may have) sanctioned.

the novel, poetry without the poem, the essay without the dissertation, writing without style, production without product, structuration without structure"; conversely, readerly texts are "products (and not productions)" (5).¹⁰

In both, the reader has to traverse the minefield laid out by the author in preparing a *récit*. While the readerly text has a pathway cut through to the end, the "correct" answer to a motivating question, or the *histoire*, the writerly text offers no such help. This minefield is what Barthes would call "a galaxy of signifiers, not a structure of signifieds" (5). This plurality of pointers mobilizes the *récit*, opening "access to it by several entrances, none of which can be authoritatively declared to be the main one" (5). Whereas the readerly text's grammar is apparent, that of the writerly text is nonexistent or misleading (6). To consider the propositions of *Justine* in light of the rest of the *Quartet*, the reader is forced to consider between different units of different sets, none of which seem "more" correct than others. *The Alexandria Quartet* presents an unclear grammar to the reader who is used to the tendency for the text to present surmountable gaps for the reader to bridge; instead, the gaps in the *Quartet* overwhelm the reader in the middle of the process of "receiving" the text, in the production of a text before it can be said to be a product.

The writerly text, then, is one in which the reader is free to take on the lack of structuring grammar in a text and bend it to his or her free will. The more readerly text presents an exercise of Coleridge's primary imagination; texts that are more open or more writerly, on the other hand, challenge the secondary imagination. In confronting a readerly text, the reader merely understands the reality of the text that is presented. The reader is not transgressing his or her placement as reader, addressee, or mere informed member of the reality external to a particular narrator's boxed-in personality. The reader of a closed text uses imagination as an agent of perception, corroborating sensory data. In reading an open text, on the other hand, the reader must re-create, idealize, and unify, using imagination to decide and project. Reading a writerly text involves making choices, in effect writing a *histoire*, sublimating fiction into reality, acting as both sender and addressee of the message the reader creates.

I shall call *reading* the act of Coleridge's primary imagination. In repeating within the finite mind the infinite act of creation, it is necessary that some elements be discarded, whether purposefully or negligently. Thus, reading is perceiving and interpreting while at the same time reducing and simplifying. I shall call *writing*, on the other hand, the act of the secondary imagination. In dissolving, diffusing, and dissipating that infinitude which has been *read*, the secondary imagination is then able to re-unify the constituent parts creatively, to re-create and to idealize new creations. Thus,

¹⁰This very nature of the writerly text makes it an ideal, "not a thing," something "we would have a hard time finding [...] in a bookstore" (5).

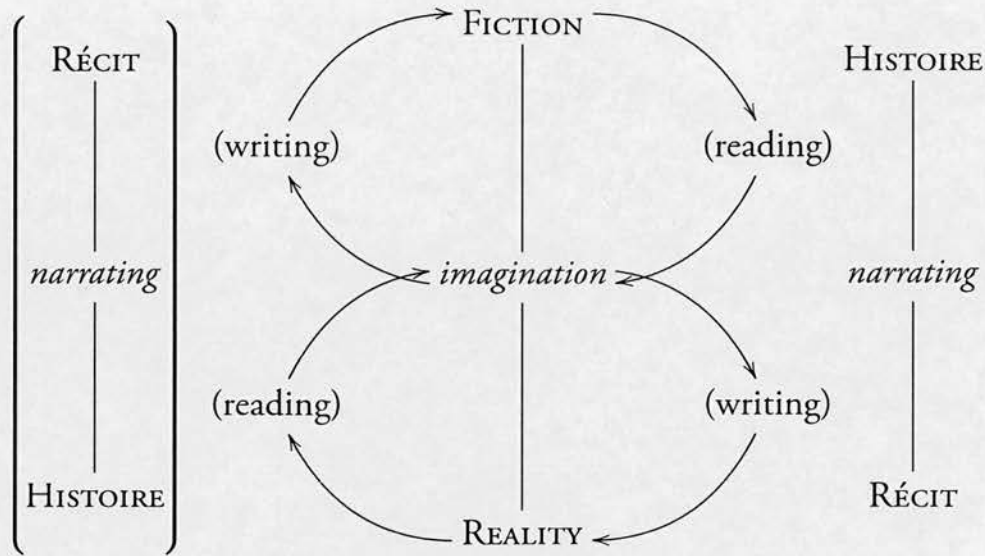


Figure 2: The limited interaction of a subject with reality through imagination (which recreates a fictional reduction of that reality). Durrell's model of Fiction/Imagination/Reality is shown in the middle, flanked by Genette's model of narrative discourse (on the right, as he explains the act of writing a text, and on the left, as I use it to explain the act of reading the world). The arrows connecting Durrell's Fiction, Imagination, and Reality show the connective tissue of Coleridge's imagination: *reading* represents an act of the primary imagination, and *writing* an act of the secondary imagination. As the *récit* resulting from an author's act of writing is a text existing in "reality," its *histoire*, too, is a product of the author's internalized "fiction" of that reality. The more readerly text elides the upper half of the figure, implying a connection from the lower-right *récit* to the lower-left *histoire*, while the more writerly text emphasizes the vertical complications (nevertheless existent) in every text.

writing is creating and projecting while at the same time complicating and opening outwards the worlds which are created. (See Figure 2.)

Generally, *imagination*, then, is responsible for both reading and writing: for comprehending and creating, for moving a simplified understanding of reality inward and for projecting an alternate version of reality outward. The imagination is the realm between fiction and reality, between the *histoire* and the *récit*, between the finite and the infinite. The readerly and the writerly are complementary aspects of one idea, respectively represented by the ebbing and flowing complementary performances of reading and writing. In this chapter, I will explore these corresponding aspects of imagination in Durrell's novels, identifying which, if either, plays a primal role.

I Rendering in its Full Grandeur

Fredric Jameson tells us that "texts come before us as the always-already-read." Reading texts (and the act of interpretation in general) is fundamentally conditioned by the cultural filters through which we do the reading or interpreting:

we apprehend them through sedimented layers of previous interpretations, or—if the text is brand-new—through the sedimented reading habits and categories developed by those inherited interpretive traditions. (Jameson, *Unconscious* 9)

He continues, describing interpretation as “an essentially allegorical act, which consists in rewriting a given text in terms of a particular interpretive master code.” This “master code” is something we cannot escape; we can, however, identify these codes through a process that “will then lead to an evaluation of such codes,” which is essential to any act of interpretation (10).¹¹ In this section, I will consider the consequences of Jameson’s understanding with regard to the *Quartet*, reading in it Darley’s own act of reading the world before considering his treatment of it in writing.

Reading

In a scene in *Justine*, Darley describes lying on the beach with Justine: “I lay with half-shut eyes while Justine (how clearly I see her!) was up on one elbow, shading her eyes with the palm of one hand and watching my face” (*Quartet* 44). The parenthetical interruption of Darley’s narratorial past-tense description of the events on the beach—what Genette would call an analepsis (“any evocation after the fact of an event that took place earlier than the point in the story where we are at any given moment”)—with the present tense of the first narrative (“the temporal level of narrative”) problematizes any simple reading (Genette 40, 48).¹² This sentence could be read any one of three ways: eyes half-shut on the beach, seeing Justine clearly while narrating; eyes half-shut on the beach, seeing Justine on the beach clearly despite eyes being (half) shut; or eyes half-shut while narrating, seeing Justine clearly while narrating.

Jameson’s “sedimented layers” of interpretations shield from us all but the first reading: Darley sees Justine clearly at the time of narrating, and at the time of the *histoire* his eyes had been half shut. In this circumstance, the present tense of his narrating self—the primary imagination that interprets Darley’s perspective of the world, simplifying it into belief—bleeds through his analepsis, infecting his perspective with a corrupt vantage. In this reading, the extent of the analepsis is considered *mixed*—a term used by Genette to describe analepses “whose reach goes back to a point earlier and whose extent arrives at a point later than the beginning of the first narrative”

¹¹Jameson also writes that “[t]he literary or aesthetic act [...] always entertains some active relationship with the Real [...] by drawing] the Real into its own texture” (81). Based on the Lacanian myth of a pre-*Spaltung* existence, what Jameson calls Real is as worthy of skepticism as Durrell’s sense of “Reality,” but it is at least overtly aware of the implicit reduction before any act of writing, the parenthetical left side of my Figure 2.

¹²It is possible, even, to read the parenthetical interjection as prolepsis (“any narrative maneuver that consists of narrating or evoking in advance an event that will take place later” (40)), looking *forward* to the moment of narrating from the temporal position of the beach.

(49)—as the analepsis includes description concurrent with the “*Erzählzeit* (narrative time)” (33). He writes about having his eyes shut, but he cannot help acknowledging within the act of narrating the clarity of his sight. In such an interpretation, he narrates the *histoire* as a digested bolus of what had been his reality; in short he acknowledges that he is *reading*, exercising his primary imagination to reduce the fully incomprehensible truth of reality into an easily presented belief.

Nevertheless, the passage is not unambiguous; it is also possible he is claiming to have seen her clearly on the beach in spite of his half-shut eyes. In this interpretation, the extent of his analepsis is external, the “entire extent remains external to the extent of the first narrative” (49), though the tense slips parenthetically into that of the scene instead of remaining loyal to the act of narrating. Here, the past-tense distance of “*erzählte Zeit* (story time)” is effaced in favor of the immediacy of the present-tense *récit* time (33), lending a primacy to the *histoire* over the *récit*. This interpretation lends an emotional intensity to Darley’s recollection: he is so moved by the memory of Justine and the beach that he loses his narrating self in the fullness of the recollection of the *histoire*. The *histoire* outgrows the narrating, forcing the latter to defer; however, in refusing to recognize the act of narrating, the *histoire* sets itself up as a primary reality rather than a reduced belief, standing in for that “which even the greatest art is incapable of rendering in its full grandeur” (*Key* 5). This appraisal fits well with Darley’s misunderstanding of his position in the novel, and it (like Darley) is undermined in the novel’s progression beyond *Justine*—especially in *Balthazar*, in which Darley learns that his perspective of Justine is far from accurate. Darley’s misrecognition of belief as reality, the already-read for the freshly interpreted, is indicative of his troubled position throughout *The Alexandria Quartet* and suggests that, though he may be engaged in an act of reading rather than that of writing, he is unaware of the distinction.

There remains yet a third understanding of the parenthetical exclamation: Darley might be attributing the clarity of his sight in part to the half-shut nature of his eyes in the time of the narrating. In this interpretation, Darley’s description of the beach is no analepsis at all, as the primacy of the narrating act is never fully disregarded; rather, the present-tense narrating act *is* the *histoire*. Darley’s half-shut eyes magnify the distance from which he is describing this scene, granting it unusual fullness in its scope as he thinks of her and creates her in his mind. He reads the scene, using his primary imagination to simplify and understand the moment he describes, but it is a fictional moment, created by the secondary imagination, by an act of writing. He is reading the already-read text of the relationship he (believes he) had with Justine; the text is already-read because it is one he had already written. In writing from the distance of his solitary island life, Darley profits from leaving his eyes half-shut in an

effort to focus on the fiction he prefers. Nevertheless, he mistakes his fiction for the reality upon which it is based.

Justine is largely an exploration of that fiction. In *Balthazar*, Darley learns that the manuscript of the earlier book is riddled with errors about which Balthazar feels necessary to correct him in his Interlinear. Balthazar says to him "We are all still real people [...] whatever *you* try and do to us" (*Quartet* 214), refusing to accept the simplified fictions of Darley's manuscript. Thus prompted, Darley declares, "I must set it all down in cold black and white, until such time as the memory and impulse of it is spent" (217). He must write (sublimating fiction into reality, transcribing *histoire* into *récit*) until memory (and the fictive element thereof) is spent, until it passes fully into the "cold black and white" realm of reality, leaving behind nothing more than reality.

He begins this quest in the second chapter by introducing many mirrors and much overt mimicry: "parlour of Mnemjian, with its mirrors [...] and the delicious mimicry," "Briefly we met [...] in the mirrors," "I have [...] a faded] photograph of this morning ritual [...]. It is a speaking likeness," "Keats's photograph traps him" (218). These broken images, like shards of a shattered mirror reflecting different scenes, flicker back and forth before resting on the last, the object trapped in Keats' photograph: Toto de Brunel. In the span of a page, he is conflictingly described as trapped in a photograph, as "an *original*," and as "a Gentleman of the Second Declension," (218–219). Toto is, at once, a representation or derivative and an example of originality. The Technicolor warmth of Darley's fiction never truly gives way to reality's grey-scale sang-froid. In fact, in the description of Toto that follows, the authority of language (and text) are immediately undermined:

[Toto] spoke indifferent English and French, but whenever at a loss for a word he would put in one whose meaning he did not know and the grotesque situation was often delightful. This became his standard mannerism. In it, he almost reached poetry [...]. He could do this in three languages. It excused him from learning them. He spoke a Toto-tongue of his own. (219)

Toto's inability to communicate effectively suggests that the impulse to "set it all down in cold black and white" is to engage in a losing battle. As the first exercise in Darley's newfound matter-of-fact style, he embodies the impossibility of effective expression and the perpetual distance between meaning and representation.

Nevertheless, Darley recognizes his "mania to perpetuate, to record, to photograph everything" as a "haunting fear of missing a fragment of reality" (219–220). Darley's slavish desire to understand and absorb as much as he can of reality is ultimately a desire he cannot satisfy. In the end, all he can do is succumb to the simplified nature of his belief and begin writing his selected fictions. He seems to have come

to terms with his exercise being an artistic undertaking in the third chapter, where he punctuates a paragraph of poetic description with a parenthetical and authorial aside, "(Fine writing!)" (234), but such artistic abandon is short lived when, only a few pages later, he wonders, "how am I to make comprehensible scenes which I myself see only with such difficulty [...]?" His intentions to faithfully represent reality become clear when he laments the lack of clarity in his subject matter: "It is hard to compose them in a stable colour so that the outlines are not blurred" (239). Despite recognizing the limitations of his perspective, Darley is determined to follow (the unrecognized shortcomings of) his primary imagination in creating a faithful rendition of reality.

Writing

Balthazar's intervention, through notes left in his Interlinear, eventually spur Darley to abandon *reading* for *writing*. "To imagine is not necessarily to invent," Balthazar tells him, encouraging him to "cement these apparent gaps in our actions with interpretations of his own to bind them together" (275), describing the process in terms very similar to those of Iser. Finally, in the seventh chapter, Darley ends the process of reading and begins the process of writing. "Shall I reconstruct it," he asks, "the scene I see so clearly, and which his few crabbed words in green ink have detonated in my imagination?" (314). In abandoning the primacy of his simplified belief, Darley begins to exercise his secondary imagination, creating an equally viable set of possibilities. He quotes Pursewarden—"There are only as many realities as you care to imagine" (315)—and describes scenes he could never have known about (315–328), surprised to find his own cameo appearance as an extraneous character (326).

At the end of *Balthazar*, Darley recognizes that in revising his manuscript he has stumbled upon something different from that which he had originally begun. His "objective 'truth to life'" becomes instead a truth "to fiction" (338) as he considers the implications of extending "the frontiers of original truth" (339). His focus has shifted from the primary imagination of reading the world to a secondary imagination of writing a new one.

Mountolive continues the movement toward the secondary imagination, presenting what outside the context of the *Quartet* would be a closed text. This third book is unusual in the *Quartet* because it is not written in the voice of a character; instead, it is written from a perspective of detached omniscience. Focusing on the diplomatic career of Mountolive, the novel spans decades, beginning with Mountolive's arrival in Alexandria and a description of the Hosnani household when Nessim and Narouz are young (earlier than the extent of *Justine* or *Balthazar*), and ending with Narouz's death, for which Mountolive is partly responsible. It consists of no obvious analepses

or prolepses (and those that are in the text are almost entirely internal), and any correlation of reality and fiction is minimized; nevertheless, there are moments in the text when the narrating act supersedes its ostensibly final product, and the duality of fiction and reality prevails.

The text opens describing the circumstances of Mountolive's visit to Alexandria. No first-person present-tense voice of a narrator introduces Mountolive or his thoughts. Instead, a third-person, past-perfect vantage informs the reader that Mountolive "had been sent to Egypt," that he "had forgotten," and that a letter of introduction "had brought him to the Hosnani lands" (397). The combined circumstances of the young Mountolive's introduction into a setting he has previously not known, in conjunction with the unwieldy tense of the text, distances the reader from Mountolive's experience. There is no illusion that Mountolive's activities are recorded by him or that they are transcribed as they happen; the *Erzählzeit* (*récit*, or narrative, time) is much later than the *erzählte Zeit* (*histoire*, or story, time). But more than this temporal distance signaled in the *récit*, the ending of the second paragraph serves to disrupt and distance the *histoire* from the narrating. The fourth and final sentence of that second paragraph is the single word, "Yes," incomplete in its grammar and confusing in its meaning. The word signals agreement or complicity with some aspect of the *récit*, but in doing so, it also establishes a distance from that text. Though *Mountolive* is unique in the *Quartet* for its lack of authorial *I*, the "Yes" of the second paragraph is not unlike the parenthetical exclamation "(Fine writing!)" of *Balthazar*, implying that there is someone external to the texts, finding them agreeable (and bearing witness to the state of every text, ultimately, having been narrated however covertly).

More than that, the themes of reality and fiction, recurring often in the first two books, return in *Mountolive*, though under different guises. While the subject matter of *Justine* centers on the recollection and reclaiming of Alexandria, and *Balthazar* focuses on the discrepancy between that recollection and Balthazar's perspective, *Mountolive* concentrates on the inconsistency between the imagined and real forms of East and West—two qualities as irreducible as fiction, truth, and beauty. For Mountolive, being in Egypt is likened to being "inside the canvas his own imagination had painted," and the act of perceiving elements of the countryside is described as "transplanting a whole huge intact world from his imagination into the soil of his new life" (406). For Leila, Mountolive was the confirmation of the "prototype of a nation which existed now only in her imagination" (412). In meeting him, she recognized the fulfillment of the "absurd book-fed dream" she had "discovered and translated [...] as if her absurd thoughts were reducing the whole thing, diminishing the scale of it to something [...] shadowy and unreal" (412). But Leila is not alone in constructing expectations from

books. Mountolive experiences “a kind of ecstasy to find a sort of poetic correspondence between the reality and the dream-picture of the East which he had constructed from his reading” (414). And later, when Mountolive returns to Egypt by plane, the ground “rose to meet them,” pinpricks of recognizable landmarks (“nipped minarets and towers of the famous tombs; the Moquattam hills [...]”) fading into clarity, the whole effect is described “as if the whole of Egypt were settling softly into an inkwell” (496).¹³

Just as, for Darley, reality is displaced by the reduced effect of his belief, so too is the reality of Egypt and England reduced into belief for Mountolive and Leila. Mountolive mistakes the canvas his imagination has painted for the reality he is in, and instead of reading the *histoire* of Egypt, he reads the *already-read, already-written* text of his belief, “transplanting” his imagination into the fertile soils on the banks of the Nile. Leila, too, mis-recognizes the reduced, removed, already-read notion of Englishness in Mountolive. Both Mountolive and Leila displace reality with fiction, mistaking one for the other, recognizing a discrepancy between the two only too late. For Mountolive, Leila was “something like a second, almost mythical image of the reality which he was experiencing.” It is all he can do to try to “marry the twin images in a camera periscope in order to lay his lens in true focus” (510), but the images are nothing more than “two dreams overlapping, displacing one another” (619). So long in the habit of reading and reducing, they are unable to write and create; nevertheless, they recognize the problems of not trying. Leila describes how she has “been living with you [Mountolive] so long in my imagination” that she “must almost reinvent you to bring you back to life” (507)—she must almost write or create a new reality of Mountolive to reside outside of her imagination.

Curiously enough, just as the unnamed author of *Mountolive* describes these reductions of reality into belief, he is also expanding and exploding his fiction into reality, transcribing *histoire* into *récit*. In doing so, he cannot curb his desire to peek out from behind the curtain to exclaim his happiness at the product, and he describes the whole of Egypt settling into an inkwell to be written out on the paper of the manuscript. The themes of primary and secondary imagination, though focalized through no obvious author-protagonist, still find purchase in the textual explorations of *Mountolive*.

In the final book of the *Quartet*, Darley reads Pursewarden’s “Conversations with Brother Ass,” his fictionalized dialogues on the purpose of writing. The biggest thing to come out of it, though, is Pursewarden’s declaration on the fictionality of living. “Brother Ass, the so-called act of living is really an act of the imagination,” he writes:

¹³In Chapter 3, I will consider the larger-scale implications of Mountolive’s *reading* of Egypt as Orientalist, a converging of the imaginative with the geographical—a converging of the second and third dimensions of this study. See the discussion from page 83.



The world—which we always visualise as “the outside” World—yields only to self-exploration! Faced by this cruel, yet necessary paradox, the poet finds himself growing gills and a tail, the better to swim against the currents of unenlightenment. [...] If he were to abandon his rôle all hope of gaining a purchase on the slippery surface of reality would be lost, and everything in nature would disappear! (772)

Pursewarden affords writers the unique perspective of recognizing the everyday use of imagination in understanding the world. To the writer—who through writing is well practiced in the use of imagination—the continuous act of reading to interact with the world is very obvious. Limited as humankind is by its inability to step outside of the box labeled personality, it copes by standing the simplified belief in for the real thing. The writer’s privileged position of understanding allows him or her the equal responsibility to write, gifting the internal world (misinterpreted as “the outside’ World”) with something new to challenge the “currents of unenlightenment”—the simplifying current of the primary imagination.

In reading Pursewarden’s letters to Liza, Darley happens upon further understanding to much of the matters he had been considering earlier in the *Quartet*, namely that his early project, to understand or to fully record the truth of his time in Alexandria, could never have been realized. He writes, “There *was* no answer to the questions I had raised in very truth” (791), recognizing the feebleness of any attempt to arrive at the truth from which any act of interpretation derives. More than that, he begins to see fiction in the version of reality he believed he could capture, acknowledging at last the true penetration of invention:

I began to see too that the real “fiction” lay neither in Arnauti’s pages nor Pursewarden’s—nor even my own. It was life itself that was a fiction—we were all saying it in our different ways, each understanding it according to his nature and gift. (792)

The same idea is expressed in *Balthazar* in the words of Pursewarden, who “somewhere” writes, “We live [...] lives based upon selected fictions” (210). We select from truth the fictions we want to work with and can only have access to those selected fictions. Our lives, then, are based on those simplified beliefs.

Darley’s project in the *Quartet*—shifting from his original aim in *Justine* (to record everything as he remembers it) to that of *Balthazar* (to understand the truth behind what happened), *Mountolive* (assuming Darley is the author, to describe a possible world), and *Clea* (to understand the problems of the creation of a possible world)—is always an exercise of Jameson’s allegorical act of interpretation. Darley’s readings of Alexandria and Alexandrians are always filtered through the sedimented layers of his expectations, which themselves are based upon the simplified version of reality in which he lives. The inaccessible reality of Darley’s time in Alexandria acts as Jameson’s

“master code” which guides the allegorical acts of interpretation and creation. Over the course of the *Quartet*, he abandons the primary imagination, the act of reading that which has already been read, for a version of the secondary imagination, the act of writing, re-appropriating the units of the primary imagination to re-figure them in a new creation.

II Writing and Unwriting

Just as Darley represents the author of *The Alexandria Quartet*, narrating the coming-to-being of the *récit* while learning about the joined limitations of reading and writing, Felix Charlock represents the author of *The Revolt of Aphrodite*, Durrell’s two-part novel comprised of *Tunc* and *Nunquam*. A displaced scientist on an artistic binge, Charlock records the happenings of his life from the time he leaves Athens as a hobbyist inventor until the time he gains control over Merlin’s, the multi-national firm owning much of the world.

Though he writes of his childhood, his parents, and even his genetic sequence, he determines the beginning of his life to be at a slightly later date: “I could date my existence from the moment when, with a ball of thin twine and two empty cigarette tins, I managed to make an imitation of the telephone” (*Tunc* 16). In imbuing this moment with such importance, Charlock’s imitation of the telephone—itsself an imitation of the reality of the voice, which is, further, the metonymic reduction of human—reveals a mania for recording and for simplified belief not unlike that of Darley in the *Quartet*.

Running Ink

Not unlike Darley, Charlock manifests this mania by writing—what he calls “occupational therapy [...] in the form of these autobiographical notes” (16). And not unlike the writings of Darley, these autobiographical notes purport to comprise the content of the books authored by Durrell and offered as *The Alexandria Quartet* and *The Revolt of Aphrodite*, respectively.

Early in *The Revolt of Aphrodite* the novel’s narrator Charlock describes the machine he uses to write the books *Tunc* and *Nunquam*:

The dactyl was designed for those who talk endlessly to themselves, for Everyman that is. Also for a lazy man, such a one as myself who has an abhorrence for ink and paper. You speak and she records: more than that, she transcribes. The low feminine voice (the frequency dictated my choice) encodes the words and a tiny phonetic alphabet, no larger than a lama’s prayer wheel, begins to purr. From the snout marked A the tip of

the foolscap protrudes, and goes on slowly extending until with a sniff the whole page is evacuated, faultlessly typed. (15)

The construction of Charlock's books is automatic, happening simultaneously as he recalls various circumstances. The dactyls themselves he alleges to have designed for the Everyman, the universal human being who has need of effortlessly collecting and recording an otherwise exhausting amount of data. Charlock himself stands in for this Everyman; like Darley, he has an insatiable desire to record and to collect everything that happens to him. Moreover, as Everyman, his position within the novel is one that is presented as unmitigated by position in space and time: he is everyman and (as author) is everywhere.

The first section of the book, in which he describes some of his past and introduces the idea of the dactyls, is broken up into multiple scenes. These scenes themselves are separated by rows of asterisks, marking change. On page 15, however, Charlock mentions that his dactyls are so exact, there are "code-tones" to turn them on or off like a switch. Once the machine has sensitized "to an individual voice to such a degree," the transcription and dictation should be both flawless and automatic. On the next page, Charlock mentions his code-tones: "'Konx' will set her off, while 'Om' will cut her out" (16). It is almost as if, in mentioning this fact, Charlock sensitizes the reader to his voice: the scenes now end with the code-tone "Om" at the end of every dictation, before the separating asterisks.

Unlike the sensitized dactyl (writer), which through code-tones automates the process of writing while also narrowing the distance between written (text) and dictation (what is being told),¹⁴ for the sensitized reader these same code-tones interrupt the narrative, introducing more gaps in the text and making more apparent all the individual processes of reading (and writing). In knowing that Charlock is writing the story, it is difficult to ignore that it is written. For Charlock, an inventor, the whole process of inventing ("I gradually came to equate invention with creation") resides in letting oneself go, in "allowing the damned thing to ferment, to form in the imagination" (16). The "damned thing," of course, is the correspondent product of Coleridge's secondary imagination. Charlock's code tones, his action of "letting go," creates for the reader a stumbling block in signification, creating still further distance between the narrative and the story that it contains.

¹⁴I am expanding Charlock's act of narrating to find within it multiple steps: while the words he speaks are the *récit* of his *histoire*, they are also the only *histoire* (the signified) of the dactyl's *récit*—the resulting physical text which is a *signifier* for Charlock's act of speech. These multiple steps present multiple potentials of error, thereby further emphasizing the act of narrating, especially in the inclusion of the dactyl's code tones, which—when using a "sensitized" dactyl, at least—should never be transcribed.

Thinking Weed

If Charlock's modified system of creation consists of letting himself go, it is important to consider what exactly it is that comprises Charlock. Etymologically, his name is interesting for what it says about his character. "Charlock," as he tells us early enough in *Tunc*, is a kind of weed. As the "thinking weed," he embodies the dual uncultivated and hardy characteristics of the weed while at the same time offering the intellectual rigors of a natural scientist. "Felix," on the other hand, signifies his artistic side. Deriving from the same root as "felicity" or "felicitous," on one hand "Felix" signifies happiness; at the same time, though, it carries with it the implication of "the ability to find appropriate expression for one's thoughts." By virtue of his privileged position as author of the books he writes, his means of expression can never be anything but apt—or at least his expression can never accurately signify its own limitations. At the same time, these words associated with "Felix" carry with them the meaning of "a particularly effective feature of a work of literature or art" ("Felicity" def. 2a, 2b). Again, as author, he is an effective feature of the books he writes; he is *the* effective feature of the work of literature, as the only particular feature to *effect* anything.

As author, he is an effective feature of a work of literature; equally so as inventor, he is the effective author of many inventions. These two halves of Felix Charlock, the literarily effective natural scientist, complement each other. His ability to find appropriate expression for his thoughts (via his dactyls) is dependent upon his ability to effect works of art (*techne*), just as his ability to effect works of art (his books) is dependent upon his ability to find appropriate expression for his thoughts. As the text progresses, Charlock's felicity grows. His abilities become more finely tuned just as his writing style gains new clarity—most obviously in the second book.

In the beginning of *Nunquam*, Charlock awakes to find himself in an asylum where he is being treated for acting on the impulses he describes in the beginning of *Tunc*. In that first book, he details the problems of expression, lamenting the immediate accessibility of trivia: "the more superficial being self-evident, but the more profoundly buried inexpressibly difficult to expose, despite my relative experience with words" (*Tunc* 16). This inexpressibility is immediately obvious in *Nunquam*'s opening onslaught of questions and focalizing of Charlock through a third-person "manifestation of myself so vaguely realised that it is hard to believe in him" (*Nunquam* 11). He does not recognize where he is ("Well, where am I, then? In what city, what country?" (11)) and searches his surroundings in order to "establish himself in the so-called reality which depends [...] on memory" (11), but wherever he looks, he meets resistance: his clothes have no markings, an unseen radio plays indistinguishable music, and the diary he finds has been expurgated (11). The so-called reality, which depends

on memory, is nowhere in sight. Even a copy of the Bible chained beside his bed conspires against him typographically, joining Charlock's fictional confusion to a physical reality which resonates in a particular way for the reader, for "it is quite illegible, the ink has run" (11). Despite Charlock's relative experience with words, reality remains illegible; the ink of memory, responsible for simplifying reality into belief, is smudged, delaying the transmission of the message of reality to fiction at the same time it delays the transmission of fiction to reality. Instead of a real book of fiction, a *récit* which is readable (*lisible*) to interpret a *histoire*, Charlock (and the reader) is left with a book whose very consciousness of construction effaces its meaning.

The Vital Technique

Nevertheless, where Charlock in the *Revolt* differs from Darley in the *Quartet* is significant. Darley's impression—shifting as it does—of events in Alexandria informs the *Quartet's* structure and plot and reinforces the reader's expectation of his having written it (even if only fictionally); the reader can only surmise that the book he writes throughout the length of the tetralogy is the *Quartet*. Charlock, on the other hand, confesses to writing something else entirely from the writings of his dactyl, the writings which comprise the *Revolt*: "As for these scribblings which emerge from my copying machines, the dactyls, these are not part of the book I was talking about, no. [...] While I am writing one book, [...] I write another about it, then a third about it, and so on" (16).

The books of *Tunc* and *Nunquam*, then, are nothing more than records that exist beside other, real artistic projects. The "book I was talking about," for example, is one such project. Other works of art (*techne*) include his many inventions, which (corresponding well to Charlock's interpretation of reality as dependent upon memory) are largely aids of the primary imagination, helping it to perceive (hearing aids) and to record (dactyls). Even Abel, despite the relative increase of its intricacy compared to that of Charlock's other inventions, is an extension of the primary imagination, offering super-human perception to recognize trends in personal histories. These inventions allow for the finite reduction which corresponds to Peirce's belief, though the term lacks the same semantic potency when speaking of mechanical objects; this finite reduction is manifest in the pages typed out by Charlock's dactyl, the spooled tapes of recordings of conversations, and the report of Abel blazing "blue, topaz, green, white" on the fascia of its "photoelectric eye" (*Tunc* 12). These reductions are the "objects (*as* objects)" Coleridge calls "essentially fixed and dead," when compared to the products of the "essentially *vital*" secondary imagination (Coleridge 175).

Of all of Charlock's inventions, though, that of the robot 'Iolanthe' is undoubtedly the most ambitious. Indeed, the very choice of Iolanthe as a model for the robot reveals the influence of the themes of reality and fiction that are prevalent throughout the rest of the novel. In her life, Iolanthe represents a dual reduction of reality. As she is an actress, she always presents the simplified reality of the characters she portrays, whether they "swim up out of the screen" (*Tunc* 195) or are prostitutes with bad wigs; the images always lack a third dimension. Moreover, the reality of Iolanthe-the-person is sublimated by the easily digestible version of Iolanthe-the-persona, the simplified belief that stands in for the infinitude of that reality. Like any screen star, she attracts a plenitude of fans (not least being Julian himself), many of whom mispronounce her name by placing the accent on the third syllable (29). In time, the two pronunciations represent two different things: one being the uncomplicated Iolanthe of Charlock's Athenian, pre-Merlin love; and the other being the screen goddess able to captivate and command a panoply of press agents by walking into a room. In public, Iolanthe grooms this persona of mispronunciation, posing for posters and product placements to feed into her image of international beauty. In the end, her grooming of this act of simplified perception and false recognition (in undergoing a shoddy operation to inject her breasts with paraffin in order to maintain an image) leads to her death.

After death, that simplified belief is replaced by another, the figure of Iolanthe-the-robot which comes to signify the reality of Iolanthe's life and which, relative to it, cannot forestall its own subordination. As designed by Charlock and Marchant, 'Iolanthe' the robot continues this tradition of inventions acting as agents of perception. In embedding the memories (and, thus, personal reality) of Iolanthe into the memory banks of a modified Abel, Charlock expects Robo-Iolanthe to play the role of reduction of Iolanthe-of-reality. Like the typed pages of the dactyl, Robo-Iolanthe is a finite physical manifestation of the infinite reality; she performs the "predictions" of Abel—which are really just readings (and thus reductions) of something which is already there—in the same sense that the dactyl, upon hearing the code-tone "Konx," performs the reduction of Charlock's speech into recognizable units of letters, words, and sentences. In this sense, Robo-Iolanthe's intended design is of an object as object, fixed and dead.¹⁵

As Robo-Iolanthe develops, however, she proves to be much more than the agent of perception, the simple refiguring of Abel that Charlock and Marchant had assumed she would be. Instead, she is "so damn true to life" that she is "more real than the reality itself" (*Nunquam* 140–141). She begins to act "essentially vital," freeing herself from the watch of Henniker, projecting new situations unforeseen by her captors /

¹⁵The limitations of what ought to be available to Robo-Iolanthe in many cases are symptomatic of the reified art-object, vivified in its creation, as noted in Chapter 1 on page 20.

creators, and complicating the simplified version of reality on which she has been initially based. The fatalistic and almost-acquiescent predictions of Abel give rise to a new efficacy; unlike the earlier pogonometric processor on which she is based,¹⁶ Robo-Iolanthe enjoys a newfound *ability* and agency noticeably lacking in the former. Newly empowered, the goddess of love, so knowledgeable in the many ways she can play her part, rebels.

The revolt in *The Revolt of Aphrodite* represents more than the revolt of the love-goddess (the roboticized form of Iolanthe as frighteningly perfect in her function as the real Iolanthe is in her form); it also signifies Charlock's revolt from the expectations of the novel. Though he spends much of the book dictating to his dactyls, "writing" the book itself, he admits that the writing process itself is not to any goal. His narrating reveals that there is no contained *histoire* he plans to relate; indeed, the *récit* seems to end unresolved, apocalyptically aborted mid-dance.¹⁷ Moreover, in the course of the novel, the natures of both Iolanthes shift from perceiving, simplifying, and reading to acting, complicating, and writing. Each of Robo-Iolanthe's actions opens a new world of pogonometric possibility for Abel to decipher and write out upon the electronic membrane of her ersatz free will. Equally so, each action of Charlock, Julian, Jocas, and the firm represents new material on which Zeno's disturbingly accurate predictions can be based. The characters read their expectations and react to them, rebelling or complying as the case may be, at the same time writing fuller versions of "the reality." These versions are eventually discarded too, though—by the loss of Abel, the death of Mark, the electronic fault of Robo-Iolanthe in St Peter's Basilica, and in the fire Charlock starts in Merlin's archive—in favor of the unread and unwritten version of reality that lies "beyond the greatest intellectual understanding," interrupting the message mid-transmission where it wavers between the two worlds of fiction and reality. At the end of the novels, the characters find themselves at a curious impasse, when they cannot know what will happen next. At the end of the *Revolt*, all that has been written has been unwritten, too; there is nothing left to read. Charlock has no choice but to start afresh, creating new fictions to fill the void left by the old belief.

¹⁶"It is deduction based on the pogon (πόγον) a word which does not exist. It is the smallest conceivable unit of meaning in speech; a million pogons make up the millionth part of a phoneme. Give Abel a sigh or the birthcry of a baby and he can tell you everything." (*Time* 11)

¹⁷In touching on the themes and hopes of the book as well as problems in its creation, the true ending of the book, the postface, emphasizes the primacy of the open act of narrating over the closed nature of his *histoire*.

III The Kingdom of the Imagination

Our analysis leads us full circle, to Durrell's *The Avignon Quintet*, that original tome that served as an exemplar of our "prime themes." The *récit's* very structure, five books, represents the elusive quincunx hunted by many characters in the book—from Felix Chatto to Adolph Hitler and Egyptian royalty. Arrival at the quincunx marks the end of the novel and the point at which "reality prime rushed to the aid of fiction and the totally unpredictable began to take place!" (*Quintet* 1367). Furthermore, the last book is called *Quinx*, signifying five and ostensibly named after "the Ripper" Mnemidis whose tale it is meant to tell. Mnemidis' accidental murder of Sebastian (in *Sebastian*) frees Constance to love Blanford, the happiness of which couple marks Blanford's arrival at a new kind of fullness—thereby also marking the end of development within this *Künstlerroman*.

Laminated Pages

Nevertheless, the tidiness of this structure veils much that is untidy about the *histoire*; in the end, the novel is less about Blanford's relationship to Bruce, Sutcliffe, and Constance and more about the composition of reality and the creation of a world that Eco might argue is not logically "possible" (Eco, *Role* 221–224). Inge Siegumfeldt writes that the *Quintet* is "designed to produce a disorientation of the reader in almost all respects" (Siegumfeldt 117). Blanford's manifesto of "a new discrete image of fiction [...where] All events are the same event from a different angle" and in which "The work becomes a palimpsest with a laying out of superposed profiles" (*Quintet* 1217) describes a fiction that, in the words of Siegumfeldt, moves "back and forth across all boundaries conventionally distinguishing one category from another" (Siegumfeldt 118).

To wit, the relation of Blanford to Bruce is one best described via a consideration of Blanford's relation to Sutcliffe (the relation of author to character) and Sutcliffe's relation to Bruce (again, the relation of author to character). Sutcliffe represents a reality written into being by Blanford in the same sense that Bruce is an inhabitant of the reality written by Sutcliffe; both are projections of the secondary imaginations of their respective authors, making Bruce a creation of a creation of Blanford. Complicating things, Blanford recognizes Bloshford, another of Sutcliffe's creations, to be a caricature of Blanford himself. Bloshford represents a troubling of the separation of reality from fiction, as he is ultimately a product both of Blanford's primary imagination (which simplifies to understand the "reality" he lives in) and of his secondary imagination (which creates a fiction based partly on the rules of reality). Through Bloshford, who represents him in his fictive world, Blanford partly exists on the same

narrative level as Bruce. This already complicated structure is complicated further by the act of Bruce sorting through the posthumous effects of Sutcliffe and (in an extreme example) by virtue of his medical intervention that saves the life of Blanford himself, thereby existing autonomously from at least two of his authors.

It is tempting to consider logical possibilities that might explain how Bruce might be able to oversee the lives of his nested creators, how we might interpret the world of the *Quintet* in a way that would satisfy Eco's requirements for a "possible" world. One such interpretation is one in which there are multiple characters—very similar to each other in career and deportment—named Bruce whose plurality we as readers simply fail to recognize. The notion makes sense considering the rest of the *Quintet's* dramatis personae, comprised of Affad and Akkad (who seem, at least, very similar to each other and to another named Sebastian), Trash and Thrush (who seem, at least, very similar to each other in their shared southern-American twangs, the shared exoticism of their dark skin, and their shared lesbianism and promiscuity), Sylvie and Sylvaine (who seem, at least, strikingly similar to one another in the nature they are both caught in a love triangle with their brothers and husbands), and Pia and Livia (who seem, to a lesser degree, oddly peculiar in the similarity of their marriages, the particularly taboo natures of their extra-marital sexual affairs to Trash and Thrush, respectively, and their violently premature deaths). But this reading glosses over other problematic constructions in the novel. Affad and Akkad and Sebastian, for example, are not merely similar to one another: they really are the same person. Sylvie and Sylvaine, on the other hand, represent a creation of Blanford and a figure in a painting, respectively; even so, Sylvie, the character of the fiction created by Blanford, is also depicted in a painting and has an affair with Constance, whom Blanford himself loves. And Sutcliffe, too, presents supreme challenges to the structures of fiction and reality when he telephones Blanford, sends Freud's couch to Constance, and helps nurse Blanford back to health—not to mention the journey he takes with everyone to the festival for the Saints Sarah, where he rekindles his old love affair with Sabine, the beginning of which had been the content of Blanford's novel of him.

On a macroscopic level, too, the characters seem in part to play *types*, interchangeable with one another. The "three-cornered love" of Bruce, Piers, and Sylvie, for example, is reflected in the troubled love of Trash, Pia, and Sutcliff, further refracted through the love of Thrush, Livia, and Blanford, mirrored again in Livia's incestuous relationship with her brother Hilary, who wanted only to sleep with their other sister, Constance. Sutcliffe's cuckolding by Trash, is partly undermined by the sexual desire he feels toward her, in the same manner that Blanford's cuckolding by Thrush is partly undermined by the true motives of his marriage to Livia: to be closer, through her, to Constance, whom he really desired, a compromise not dissimilar to the one taken by

Hillary. Like the rest of the novel, it is, as Blanford describes it, “a case of transposed heads” (*Quintet* 365), the significance of each sacrificed in favor of the effect of the whole.

These transposed heads resonate throughout the *Quintet*, but most notably in the portraits of Piers, Sylvie, and Bruce hanging in Constance’s house: “the three heads!” (361). These particular heads represent a trio unknown at the time to Constance, Blanford, and the others, for the analepsis of the summer spent languidly lounging by the pond happens much earlier than their meeting one another. More than that, though, this particular trio represents an *idea* of the other Piers, Sylvie, and Bruce; the unmistakable antiquity (much older than the Piers, Sylvie, and Bruce who eventually meet Constance, Blanford, and the others) of the portraits clouds the three in mystery more puzzling than identification:

three smoky heads printed in the typical ancestor-style of safe academicians of the last century. And now almost obliterated by corruptions in the pigment. The names too were hardly readable, though one could make out the word Piers [...] and the word Sylvie [...] who might well have been his sister. The third picture had fared worse and it was literally not possible to tell whether the subject was a man or a woman [...]. All three portraits were draped with black velvet, which created a singular impression on the beholder, who could not help wondering why. [...] Who were they? We were unable to find out. (362)

The mystery of the three captivates Felix Chatto, who “spent a lot of time and energy” trying to understand the painting. The only clue is an inscription on the back of one painting: “Chateau de Bravedent” (362). Felix focuses his energy on the possible meaning of that clue, eventually conceding, “I swear there is no such place in Provence [...] though of course one day it might surface again as the lost medieval name for a place” (362). The mystery vexes Blanford, too, who recognizes the three as “obstinate symbols of something to which the key had been lost,” lamenting further, “If only I believed in the novel as a *device* I would incorporate their story in a book which had nothing to do with real life. Bravedent!” (363).

The comparison of the meaning behind the three to a key to something that had been lost recalls for the reader the account of the key to the Templar treasure (247). Blanford’s consideration of the three as fodder for a novel recalls, too, Sutcliffe’s description of the impossibility of ever finding such a treasure: “It was all part of the Provençal image, the story of a land which from ancient times had given itself up to dreaming, to fabulating, to tale-telling, with the firm belief that stories should have no ending” (247). The search for the treasure, the possible finding of which ends the novel, focuses on the search for a quincunx, which one could argue is found in the completion of the *Quintet*. In the same sense that Felix’s search for answers centers

around Chateau de Bravedent, the fate of the Templar treasure centers around Verfeuille, the Nogaret family home, the ownership of which corresponds with the ownership of the Templar key. Just as characters are comprised of transposed heads which might stand in for one another freely, so too do their respective homes become mutually indistinguishable except by establishment of name or inhabitants. The homes Tu Duc (peopled by (fictively real) Constance, Livia, and Hillary), Chateau de Bravedent (peopled, perhaps, by the artistic rendering of (fictively fictive) Piers, Sylvie, and Bruce), and Verfeuille (peopled by the “real” (fictively fictively real) Piers, Sylvie, and Bruce) transpose themselves upon one another, conferring meaning through the overlap of their respective significations. Though Felix spends “a lot of time and energy trying to find out the meaning of this laconic inscription” (362), we might fare a little better in trying to find the meaning of Verfeuille, another house whose fictional naming could keep one guessing.

Organically, Verfeuille might mean “green leaf.” At the same time, the suffix *-feuille* could come from the archaic meaning of *feu* as “house” or “homestead.”¹⁸ And *ver-* shares at its root the Latin word for “truth,” so *Verfeuille* might mean “true house.” The various houses in *The Avignon Quintet*, then, which are all easily confused with one another, are in a sense shades of Verfeuille, the “true house.” But interesting things come into play upon considering other meanings of the name. *Feuille*, for example, also means “sheet (of paper).” Taking into consideration *ver*, ‘worm,’ *Verfeuille* might mean “bookworm.” Or the Latin root *ver* proposes “true page.” The French *vers*, ‘toward,’ suggests “toward the page,” while *verre*, ‘glass,’ lends the meaning “glass page,” letting the reader see through the book to the characters or the telling of the various layers of the book.

The combination together hints at the phrase *verre feuilleté*, ‘laminated glass,’ further opening, in the English *laminated*, a possibility of meanings. As a verb, “to laminate” means, variously, to “overlay (a flat surface, esp. paper) with a layer of plastic or some other protective material,” to “manufacture by placing layer on layer,” or to “split into layers or leaves” (“Laminate” 1a, 1b, 1c). A novel that has been “laminated” is one that is written by layers or one that is read by splitting it into multiple layers. As a noun, “laminated” means “a laminated structure or material, esp. one made of layers fixed together to form a hard, flat, or flexible material” (2). In this meaning, *Verfeuille*, the de Nogaret family home, suggests the layered structure of the novel, resonating the novel’s peculiar fascination with the creation of fiction and the concatenation and interpolation of truth with transparency. Felix Chatto’s (Felix *Chateau*’s?) fascination with the mystery of Chateau de Bravedent (the ‘noble tooth’ penetrating everything?)

¹⁸French-to-English translations are from *Harrap’s Unabridged Dictionary Dictionnaire*.

and the ghostly hauntings of Tu Duc, with its “dense” anticipation of materialization (*Quintet* 360–361), suggest the interchangeability of these family houses whose singular identities are displaced by the primacy of their uncanny (*unheimlich*) compositions.

Immediately we can recognize a departure from the models of reading and writing—at least as productive descriptions of activity. The interchangeability of characters and chateaus, creators and creations, suggests a stirring movement in general, but a movement in no specific direction. The fictions of Bruce and Sutcliffe and Verfeuille are written by Blanford (and Sutcliffe), writing these fictions to life and transposing them into reality by transcribing them into notebooks. At the same time, however, these fictional “characters” challenge the authority of Blanford by suggesting the fictional characteristics of his own composition, in turn bringing him back to life (661) and nursing him back to health (921).

Blanford’s authorial hegemony is threatened, too, by the way in which his creations exercise varying levels of free will. In a letter to Blanford, Constance writes that she had thought Sutcliffe to be “imaginary, but I find he is all too real. What could you have meant by that?” (663). Despite Blanford’s determination to remain in control of his creations, they often get the best of him. Reacting to Sutcliffe’s initial unwillingness to meet him in Geneva, Blanford complains:

I am annoyed because my power is not absolute over him—he is after all my creation; but he can sometimes break loose and show traces of free will. My domination is incomplete, damn him. I told him to come to the airport. He mutinied. He must be punished! (901)

Blanford’s authority is only partial; while Sutcliffe has the ability to decide against the actions Blanford prescribes for him, he is unable to escape Blanford fully. The punishment Blanford speaks of comes, in fact, by way of a correct prophecy, that the woman with whom his wife had an affair, Trash, will visit him, “a dark woman of unexpected force and glory with whom he will be forced to couple” (901). Trash, possessing none of Sutcliffe’s free will, complies, explaining to him the only truth she knows: “I jest had to see you Robin, honey” (905).

Sutcliffe’s free will displays itself in more ways than just controlling decisions he makes; he is also able to come to artistic conclusions separately from Blanford, describing “the titanic do-it-yourself kit, *le roman appareil* [...] full of spare parts of other books, of characters left over from other lives, all circulating in each other’s bloodstreams—[...] fresh, nothing second-hand, twice chewed, twice breathed,” commanding at last for the objects of his creation to commingle: “Be ye members of one another” (692–693). He develops his idea further, describing a book very much like *The Avignon Quintet*:

I dream of such a book, full of not completely discrete characters, of ancestors and descendants all mixed up—could such people walk in and out of each other's lives without damaging the quiddity of each other? Hum. And the whole book arranged in diminished fifths from the point of view of orchestration. A big switchy book, all points and sidings. A Golgotha of a book. I must talk to Aubrey [Blanford] about it. (293)

He ends this mental monologue with an acknowledgement of the applause of an "imaginary audience" (293), which distinguishes the boundary of the work of art, drawing the line separating internal and external with thick strokes that are immediately effaced when he does eventually "talk to Aubrey about it."

Talking to Blanford over the phone to complain of Trash raping him "very enjoyably but against my will," Sutcliffe is told again that he is a fiction, possessing only "contexts, but no future and no past" (910). Sutcliffe disagrees, preferring instead to think of their relationship as comprised of "versions of one another set upon differing time-tracks," continuing to complain that "Reality is very fatiguing" (911). Their conversation eventually comes to a head when Blanford insists "You must manifest at last," citing the need to "exchange versions" of the books they have been writing (911–912).

Contingent Realities

In composing his version of the *Quintet*, Sutcliffe recognizes the discrepancy between fiction and reality, claiming that his book "corresponds to the reality" (912), raising yet another question: which reality? The goal of the *Quintet* seems to be to problematize any model that would reference reality by a definite article without qualifying that singular reality through a particular perspective. Sutcliffe himself recognizes the limits of using reality as inspiration, writing that "Reality is too old-fashioned nowadays for the writer's uses. We must count upon art to revive it and bring it up to date" (7).¹⁹ Furthermore, his manifesto on the art of fiction challenges the primacy or singularity of any depiction of reality:

To commingle and intersperse contingent realities—that's the game! After all, how few are the options open to us—few varieties of human shape, mental dispositions, scales of behaviour [...]. How many coats of reality does it take to get a nice clean surface to the apprehension? (693)

The plurality of *realities* here challenges any finality of "the reality," as such; moreover, the contingent nature of the realities portrayed in the two versions of the *Quintet* draws

¹⁹This inescapable primacy of the textual (in favor of something transcendental to the text) is increasingly common in writing of the late twentieth century. I will further consider this notion of new kinds of art for a new kind of reality—especially as it relates to emergent, potentially postmodern styles in Durrell's own writing, placed within its relevant literary-historical context—in Chapter 5.

closer the discrepancies among any “realities.” Reality as considered here by Sutcliffe is not the infinitely large abstraction considered by Peirce; instead, it is a subset of that infinity containing only a selection of available shapes, dispositions, and behavior. Nevertheless, that reality is still somewhere superior to fiction, the secondary reality of a *récit* that is written into being by an author, and Sutcliffe stops short of dispensing with it altogether, as varying layers of it are necessary for “a nice clean surface.”

Sutcliffe’s model of reality is somewhere between the abstractions of “fiction” and “reality”—or, at the same time, somewhere between “*histoire*” and “*récit*.” In Durrell’s own ontology and Genette’s narratology, Sutcliffe’s multiple realities coincide with “imagination” and “narrating,” respectively. Sutcliffe’s “contingent realities,” the intervening factor filtering the infinite Reality to be accessible to the finite Fiction, are matters of creation, the liminal moment shared by writing and reading corresponding, too, to Coleridge’s primary and secondary imaginations. Bruce muses on the intermingled actions in Sutcliffe’s writing, wondering “how to splice the real and the imagined—when I read his book” (7). The real and the imagined, the Real and the Fictional concatenated through this model of contingent realities, beliefs dependent and respondent to one another, intermingled internal and external creations and simplifications, meet in Sutcliffe’s writerly text *Monsieur* to which we as readers of Blanford’s novel *The Dark Prince* never gain access.

Peirce understands reality to be something transcendental toward which we can only direct ourselves for partial comprehension; only an infinite set of data points, something like omniscience, can bring us to something we can call an understanding of reality (Peirce, “[on Reality]” 31). Blanford recognizes the limitations of living in belief, saying to Sutcliffe, “My vision, like yours, is not absolutely panoramic yet. it’s [sic] selective: so there is always the blind spot.” And later, in a drug-induced melancholy, Blanford considers the implications of infinite comprehension: “Suppose one wrote a book in which all the characters were omniscient, were God? What then? One would have to compose it in a death-mood, as if dawn would bring with it the firing-squad. But this is what the artist *does!*” (*Quintet* 929).

Sutcliffe offers his perspective to fill in gaps in the *récit*, recognizing Blanford’s blind spot as “the point where Monsieur intrudes on the cosmic scheme” (922). Overlaying the transposed heads of Blanford and Sutcliffe, body and soul, to combine their respective perspectives results in a single omniscient character through which we gain access to the “absolutely panoramic” view of the *Quintet*. But more pressing than either the plurality or contingency of reality or realities or the omniscient perspectives of particular characters is the question of placement of those characters within an existing model.

When Blanford and Sutcliffe finally meet one another in person, they realize they have had mental images of one another that fail to match up things as they really are:

They both burst out laughing as they eyed each other. "I imagined you as much fatter," said one, and the other replied, "And I much thinner." Well, they would have to make do with reality—it was all they had to work on; it's boring, this question of there being several different versions of a self, so to speak, no? (921)

The secondary imaginations of each have produced visualizations that contradict reality, which is "all they had to work on." The divergence of Blanford's appearance from Sutcliffe's mental image is to be expected, as Blanford, in writing Sutcliffe, never had need of describing himself (the author) in his *récit*. The relation of Sutcliffe to Blanford is one of *reading*, and the discrepancy between real and imagined appearance represents a lack of text to read. The divergence of Sutcliffe's appearance from Blanford's mental image, on the other hand, represents a breakdown in *writing*, the opening up of the secondary imagination that reifies the simplified fiction/belief of Blanford's internal mind into something of external reality—manifest most usually in the physicality of a book. Moreover, the introduction of a plural third-person voice alongside the playful tone of the second-person question ending the quotation—asking, in effect, "reality is boring, isn't it?"—belies a complicity between the reader and the author; the revelation of second- and third-person perspectives hints at and signifies in its absence the third part of the trinity, the first-person act of narrating, the authority of which overlies the entire scene.

This invasion or acknowledgement of the nature of the authorial "I"-as-sender and reader-as-addressee as unveiled in the textual aside leaves for Sutcliffe, Blanford, and company the position of "message." This condition is not unusual; what is unique, however, is the explicit nature in which *The Avignon Quintet* acknowledges this situation of audience and author, fiction and reality, *histoire* and *récit*, internal and external, bringing the halves together in a shared third to which they cleave and with which they interweave: message, imagination, narration, the book. Blanford's writing of his book in the end resembles the act of lamination hinted at in the name of Verfeuille: he tears apart his notebook, only to have the pages sold back to him by gipsy children later, whereupon he collects them back into the form of a book (1319). And at the end of the novel, the point at which the *histoire* itself is ultimately finished, reality meets fiction at the close of the intervening third:

The lovers gave a shiver of premonition and Blanford thought that if ever he wrote the scene he would say: "It was at this precise moment that reality prime rushed to the aid of fiction and the totally unpredictable began to take place!" (1367)

As the fiction of the novel spills into the external world of the reader, reality prime intervenes, measuring the dosage of the fiction and cutting it off with the book's back cover—itsself discussing the novel's themes of fiction and reality and opening more entrances to the text at the same time it closes the text off.

Reading and Writing: The Primal Duality

In Durrell's model outlined in the *Key*, the imagination offers a chance to understand reality, if only in a limited manner. The marriage of fiction and reality found in *The Avignon Quintet* corresponds roughly to what Patricia Waugh calls metafiction: "fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality" (Waugh 2).²⁰ Waugh traces the beginnings of the trend of metafiction to the likes of Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* and Joyce's *Ulysses* because they signal the novel's awareness of its own "fictitiousness" (Waugh 6).²¹

Robert Scholes sees metafiction as an extension of fabulation: "Fabulation [...] means a return to a more verbal kind of fiction. It also means a return to a more fictional kind" (Scholes, *Fabulators* 12). For Scholes, certain devices emphasize this "fictitiousness" of fabulation: the *form* of a fabulation, for example, is often complex, lending a certain aesthetic to the work while also emphasizing the authorial role in its creation (Scholes, *Fabulation* 2). Such texts, according to Pfeifer, espouse "a sense that any attempt to represent reality could only produce selective perspectives, fictions, that is, in an epistemological, not merely in the conventional literary, sense" (Pfeifer qtd. in Waugh 7), an idea expressed in almost identical terms in the *Quartet's* "selected fictions."

The Alexandria Quartet's liberal play with the concepts of reality and fiction leads Scholes to identify it as a prime example of fabulation. Scholes' "more fictional" fiction is "a less realistic and more artistic kind of narrative: more shapely, more evocative; more concerned with ideas and ideals, less concerned with things" (Scholes, *Fabulators* 12). In such a fiction,

The structure also, by its very shapeliness, asserts the authority of the shaper, the fabulator behind the fable. [...] The authority of the fabulator over his fable is not only asserted by the ingenuity of the fabulation,

²⁰David Lowenkron numbers Durrell's *Quartet* among prominent *metanovels*—what he describes as a subgenre of metafiction comprised of *mise en abyme*: "a work in which an inner fiction, narrated by an inner persona, is intercalated in an outer one" (Lowenkron 343).

²¹Waugh recognizes earlier metafictional works, like *Tristram Shandy*, but draws a distinction between anomalous texts and literary trends. Nevertheless, one might trace a tradition of the style back as far.

however; this authority is reinforced by the relations among the characters in the [...] outer tales. (10)

To be precise, the fabulation will often consist of a series of layers, with each inner layer relating in some way to the outermost layers that encapsulate their creation. Durrell's *Quartet* showcases this very shapeliness of structure in its nested texts, the stories about stories (Arnauti's *Moeurs*, letters to and from Clea, Pursewarden's notebook, Nessim's diary, Balthazar's Interlinear). The inclusion of these multiple layers indicates an awareness of fictionality often characteristic of metafictional texts. The reader of such a text must take into consideration the text's awareness of its own fictional status. In order to read, the reader must also be willing to write, to acknowledge the possibilities and problems of representing reality in fiction at the same time he or she recognizes those possibilities and problems of representing fiction in reality.

The metafictional text approaches the writerly in that it requires the reader to acknowledge its status and to be able to recognize its place in the creative oeuvre of other novels. In the case of the *Quartet*, this approach of the writerly is most apparent in the novel's recognition of outer layers external to its own, referring to its own condition of creation as the novel ends with Darley writing "Once upon a time" (*Quartet* 877). These four words are not the same four words that begin the *Quartet*; nevertheless, they signal the beginning of its writing and the end of Darley's struggle with reality and fictionality, in which he finally accedes to acknowledge the potential of the latter. As Scholes writes:

In reading the passage we feel very strongly a kind of duality which pervades Durrell's work: we are pulled toward the primitive by those four magical words and by the description of the artist as a mere story-teller; we are pulled toward the sophisticated by the preoccupation of the passage with the art of story-telling.

This duality corresponds roughly to the duality of readerly and writerly: the readerly is the kind of fiction which exercises in the reader the primitive, primary imagination's "repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation"; the (elusive) writerly text evokes the sophisticated (and intertextual) secondary imagination's essential vitality, its coeval acts of creation and re-creation. The idea of the primitive (/ primary imagination / readerly) resonates with the *Quartet* as "a portrait of the artist, a *Künstlerroman*, about a character in a book who is writing a book in which he is a character" (Scholes, *Fabulators* 18). Scholes' "primitive" is primal only as it stands for the act of reading and the projected immediacy of the *histoire*. The idea of the sophisticated (/ secondary imagination / writerly) resonates in the novel "the shades of Proust and Gide, among others, [that] hover between our eyes and the page" (18). Scholes' "sophisticated" is less primitive in that the act of reading is subverted by Genette's narrating, the *récit*'s

processes which struggle to assert themselves, the *récit*'s preoccupation with "ideas and ideals." Yet Scholes acknowledges that, alone, these characteristics are not unique to Durrell: "What is new [...] is his peculiar combination of the two" (18).

The Black Book represents an act of reading, in the direct re-presentation of the diaries of "Death" Gregory. Lawrence Lucifer, the narrator/author of *The Black Book*, includes the extracts with separated text introduced by "Here begins an extract from Gregory's diary" (*Black Book* 32), ending them with "Here ends the extract from Gregory's diary" (54). Lucifer presents the extracts as whole truths, not wanting to interpret them further: "I do not pretend to interpret. It would be too much to expect of the interrogative ego, the other me, whose function is simply to take a sort of hieroglyphic dictation from space, and annotate it, punctuate, edit" (55). As such, Lucifer's book asserts itself as an act of the primary imagination, perceiving and simplifying the whole, choosing extracts from it, parts to represent the sum. It is, as he writes, "transcription purely" (243). Consequently, the novel ends soon after the finishing of the diary, Lucifer book-ending the final extract with the intonation "Here ends Gregory" (213).

The end of his diary corresponds to the end of Gregory—nothing exists beyond the perceived. Lucifer highlights the futility of life in the face of *The Black Book*'s central theme of "the English death" by explaining that "It is all the same, for this is a piece out of another book" (236). And while in Durrell's later novels, the putting of words onto the page, the act of *writing* a novel is an exercise of the secondary imagination in which worlds are given detail and ontological significance, for Lucifer in *The Black Book*, the act of writing is merely an act of transcription, lifting reality in its simplified form to record a piece of it for posterity:

A little frightening. What am I doing with this noisy machine and these sheets of linen paper? It is a kind of trap from which I cannot escape, not even by shooting myself dead with words as Gregory did, or said he did. When I think this I am too afraid to continue writing. (239)

In presenting the words of Gregory, the words of another's reality, Lucifer is denied the ability to act.

In the continuum of reading to writing, *The Alexandria Quartet* begins where *The Black Book* left off, with Darley *reading* the events of his time in Alexandria and trying to the best of his ability to present them as true to his perception as possible. Eventually, though, he recognizes the flaws in his perception—and the constituent inability to see reality in its finality at all costs—and decides instead to *write* into being the reality of his book. The *Quartet*, then, is a *récit* whose subject matter encompasses both reading and writing. Darley's position regarding reality in the novel shifts from

reading it (reducing it to the level of belief or fiction), to writing it (projecting a reality from the reduction of fiction). He abandons reading for writing, choosing instead the opening outward of *histoire* into *récit* made possible by the secondary imagination. *The Revolt of Aphrodite* follows after the *Quartet* as an act of writing. Unlike the product of Darley's writing in the *Quartet*, however, Charlock's *récit* lacks the primitive "magic" of the tradition of storytelling. It is metafictional to a degree, in that it is "fictional writing" that "draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality." The *Revolt* differs from the *Quartet*, though, in denying the authenticity of the text to which the reader has access. The artefact of Charlock's sessions with his dactyl certainly raises questions about the relationship between fiction and reality, but its status as writing that is *fictional* is something Charlock himself might challenge. His *récit*, like many of his creations, rebels against its creator, eventually becoming an act of un-writing, stalling in imagination and promising no end. If reading is movement away from reality (*récit* / addressee) to fiction (*histoire* / sender) and if writing is movement away from fiction (*histoire* / sender) to reality (*récit* / addressee), *The Avignon Quintet* is defined by neither of these actions, settling instead on a narrow stasis between the fictive and the real. The *histoire* is never complete, and therefore the *récit* is also never complete. Likewise, the sender is always in two parts and the addressee is never found. Reading is certainly deprecated before writing, but in the end even the finalization of writing is undone. While *The Black Book* and *The Alexandria Quartet* depict what Godshalk might call (fictionally) real fictions—fiction within the reality of a book—*The Revolt of Aphrodite* and *The Avignon Quintet* portray (fictionally) fictional realities—realities within the fiction of a book, realities beyond and larger than the book we read. *The Black Book's* act of reading is negated in the *Quartet* to be replaced by writing, which is itself taken up by the *Revolt*. By the end of the *Revolt*, writing, too, is negated. The *Quintet's* focus on writing is unlike the writing of the other novels in that nothing is ever actually produced; instead, the pages of Blanford's notebook blow around France, following the peregrinations of the characters they describe and referenced obscurely in chapter titles ("The Falling Leaves, Inklings," *Quinx*).

While *The Black Book's* ending is resolute in its finitude ("This is how it ends" (244)) and *The Alexandria Quartet* hints at an optimistic future that at the very least consists of the finishing of the *Quartet* itself, *The Revolt of Aphrodite* and *The Avignon Quintet* deliver the reader through the gaps in the *récit* to the *récit's* ending in a final gap, in which the acts of reading (in the case of the *Revolt*) and writing (in the case of the *Quintet*) are no longer tenable options, replaced instead by the wavering "either/or" (*Nunquam* 282) and "the totally unpredictable" (*Quintet* 1367). Where earlier texts represent a coming-to-terms with aspects of reading or writing as movements to or

from reality and fiction, the *Revolt* and the *Quintet* portray a coming-to-terms with the insufficiencies of those constructs. *The Revolt of Aphrodite* subsists in negating the acts of reading and writing in favor of betwixt uncertainty; *The Avignon Quintet*, on the other hand, fully inhabits Darley's "kingdom" of the imagination, the world between reality prime and fiction in which Blanford is able, finally, to "inhabit the whole." The next chapter will consider the *geophysical* whole of Durrell's kingdom: the betwixt and between Mediterranean.

CHAPTER 3

The Spirit of Landscapes and Characters

Pluralism, in exorcising the absolute, exorcises the great de-realizer of the only life we are at home in, and thus redeems the nature of reality from essential foreignness. Every end, reason, motive, object of desire or aversion, ground of sorrow or joy that we feel is in the world of finite multifariousness, for only in that world does anything really happen, only there do events come to pass. (Pluralistic Universe 49–50)

The punt which now carried him, thrust by slow thrust across the turbid water, was turning slowly eastward to take up its position... (Mountolive 11)

The third book of *The Alexandria Quartet*, *Mountolive* presents a departure from the methods of *Justine* and *Balthazar*. Told from an omniscient, third-person perspective, it presents the same story as the first two books with an added distance, as if looking down on everything from a great height. The introduction of the third dimension in the *Quartet* also introduces with it an enlarged awareness of the three-dimensional world in which it is set. Following the development of ambassador-to-be Mountolive, it traces his diplomatic career, plotting the changing political climate of the early twentieth century.

If *Justine's* treatment of the first dimension represents the relationship between subject and object and *Balthazar's* of the second signifies that of reality and fiction, *Mountolive's* third dimension represents a placement in a specific construction of the world, a privileging of place over all else in a geopolitical world divided by the *imaginary* boundaries of the West and the East. In "Landscape and Character," an essay describing his "spirit of place," a "private notion about the importance of landscape," Durrell admits to favoring location over characters—which he calls "functions of a landscape"—even to the point that his books are about the places in which things happen, rather than the people who effect these happenings ("Landscape" 156). The idea is not unusual to readers of *The Alexandria Quartet*, who might recognize the subordinate relation of characters to landscape in Darley's description of the city that "used us as its flora—precipitated in us conflicts which were hers and which we mistook for our own" (*Quartet* 17). The reader familiar with *The Revolt of Aphrodite* might relate the notion to Benedicta's and Julian's childhood, of which Charlock writes, "It was much

more than the facts which mattered, which had shaped their peculiar destinies; it was also place" (*Nunquam* 33). Similarly, a reader of *The Avignon Quintet* might associate the idea with the de Nogaret-family home, Verfeuille, which "reclaims" its inhabitants after every absence and which is inextricably tied up with "the most decisive part of our lives" (*Quintet* 13).

But it is in Durrell's books on places that his idea of the spirit of place is most unapologetically given voice.¹ In his essay he describes the spirit of place as an irrefutable tendency for "culture-productions [to] bear the unmistakable signature of the place" rather than maintaining a fragile susceptibility to a "historic pattern dictated by the human will." For this reason, he writes that although there "are no original Greeks left," there remains a "curious constant factor that we discern behind the word 'Greekness'" ("Landscape" 156–157). This Greekness comes out in the shadow play of Karaghiosis which captures "All Greece" in one scene (*Prospero* 53), in the "phosphorescent" light of Corfu, the hospitality of Crete, and the beauty of Coan women (*Greek Islands* 18, 60, 152), and in the statue of the Marine Venus on Rhodes, through whom "the whole idea of Greece glows sadly, like some broken capital, like the shattered pieces of a graceful jar, like the torso of a statue to hope" (*Reflections* 38). Each of these places embodies a spirit or essence to which it is reduced in order for Durrell to speak on a more algebraic level about the concepts contained therein.

Similarly, other locations in his novels—his Avignon, Alexandria, Athens, Istanbul, London—are imbued with the spirits of those places which form inhabitants as functions of the landscape; they are endowed with the essences of the fixed locations of France, Egypt, Greece, Turkey, and England. As Durrell believes that culture is a product of place, then it is necessary also to identify the production of place in Durrell's novels. In the first section of this chapter, I will use Martin Heidegger's idea of place and theories of spatiality to understand the significance of place and the process of it coming into being.² I will identify key places in Durrell's works, and, coupled with Said's notion of the Orient as a *topos*, I will map a real and imagined geography of absolute places in Durrell's world. In the second section of the chapter, I will consider the areas of the Mediterranean and the Sahara as intervening Heideggerian *spatia* or

¹It is best to describe his island books not as travel writing, as Durrell rejects the mantle of "travel-writer" in favor of "residence-writer": "My books are always about living in places, not just rushing through them" ("Landscape" 156). Jane Keller even calls the books "anti-travel books" (Keller 230).

²Heidegger's theories of spatiality and place are not without their problems, but then certainty of meaning when discussing the idea of place is a premium. (See J. E. Malpas' "The Obscurity of Place," *Place and Experience*, for an in-depth analysis of the historical and philosophical problems plaguing the discussion of place.) The choice of Heidegger is one based primarily on the almost-scientific precision in which he defines the constituent parts of the construction of place, his theories' relative longevity in the discussion of the topic, and the obvious metaphysical connections his ideas share with those of Durrell.

extensii betwixt and between the significant places of Durrell's cities, a betweenness that is itself more defining of Durrell's oeuvre than the places themselves. In these neutral zones, characteristics of Durrell's cities and of the imagined *topoi* of East and West bleed outward beyond their defined boundaries. In the third section, I will consider a revised notion of hybrid place in light of the cultural palimpsests of the sea and the desert. I will then employ this revised spirit of (hybrid) place to analyze in-between cities—Alexandria, Athens, and Istanbul—and in-between and wandering peoples—Jews and gypsies.

I Giving Place, Building Dwellings

Inward Motion

Durrell's notion of static landscape defining the culture of a place is slightly different from Heidegger's notions of place formed by constituent parts. As described in his essay "Building Dwelling Thinking," Heidegger's place, rather than being situated by the ground, is located by the *thing* (what he calls *das Ding*) that brings together the earth, sky, gods, and mortals (what he collectively calls the fourfold). The event of these four coming together and gathered up by the *thing* is called *Ereignis*, variously translated as 'event' or 'appropriation' (Bruns 79, 96). The *thing* that establishes a particular place is unlike other *things* because the place-making *thing* also "grants stead" to this fourfold in the form of something like a dwelling, which preserves the co-mingling of the four aspects in a location: "dwelling occurs as the fourfold preservation of the fourfold" (Heidegger 151). Just as the *Ereignis* (event) of the formation of thing is at times known as the *thinging* of the *thing*, the *Ereignis* or coming into being of place is sometimes known as the *worlding* of the world (Bruns 79). The place becomes known by the *thing* that assembles the fourfold, but it is also known through the fourfold, to which Vincent Vycinas explains place belongs "organically" (Vycinas 39). The fourfold then become inseparable from place because it defines them as much as they collaborate to form it. Whereas Durrell's spirit of place shapes its inhabitants irrespective of whatever character may be pre-existing in those inhabitants, Heidegger's place is made of equal parts landscape (earth) and inhabitants (mortals)—as well as respective parts of sky and gods.

Place comes into being for Heidegger on the conception of the *thing* that grants dwelling to the fourfold. Heidegger's favorite example of place coming into being is of a bridge over a river:

The <place> is not already there before the bridge is. [...T]he bridge does not first come to a <place> to stand in it; rather, a <place> comes into

existence only by virtue of the bridge.³ (Heidegger 154)

The bridge geo-physically locates the river: it “gathers the earth as landscape around the stream” and “holds its flow up to the sky by taking it for a moment under the vaulted gateway.” Moreover, it “escorts the lingering and hastening ways of [...] mortals, to the other side,” leading them on “to the last bridge” where they must “bring themselves before the haleness of the divinities” (152–153). In this way, the bridge assembles and grants a site to the earth, sky, mortals, and gods. By assembling the fourfold in this way, the bridge does not create a mathematical position, but it does create a reference within experience to that position. In doing so, the bridge introduces the concepts of spatiality and distance—“The space allowed by the bridge contains many places variously near or far from the bridge” (155)—thereby allowing for neighborhoods, districts, cities, counties, and other broadly defined locations (what Heidegger calls *extensio*), and also allowing for the intervening space between places (what he calls *spatium*) (155).

Place, as the encapsulation of humans, gods, earth, and sky, mediates human interaction with the environment, allowing us to actualize geometrical space in geographical terms. By building a bridge or another such structure, the founders of a city define the terms by which the entirety of the city will be considered; Durrell, too, introduces a city by the key components that determine the character and geophysical relationships of its inhabitants and its environs. In fact, the last books he wrote, *The Avignon Quintet*, offer a convenient introduction to a Heideggerian analysis of Durrell’s methods of place-making. In *Monsieur*, the first book of the *Quintet*, Durrell affords us the earliest glimpse of Avignon when Bruce arrives at the city to the south by rail and takes a horse-drawn carriage to his hotel. En route, he is moved to point his driver toward the river, explaining his “sudden desire” as a need to verify the Avignon-as-place he once knew: “its existence seemed to confirm so many things, the old river-God of our youth.” The impenetrable night allows Bruce only patches of sight: “trees [arch] overhead” and the grey water is “inky, swollen and curdled with blocks of ice.” Unable to see well in the darkness, Bruce relies upon his sense of hearing to imagine these blocks of ice “thump[ing] and tinkl[ing] along the banks,” but even his hearing is fallible as the mingling of the sounds of the river and the wind can

³Albert Hofstadter’s translation of Heidegger (the standard translation) uses “location” and “place,” while most critical material on Heidegger presents the same passages with the English equivalents in opposite positions. To simplify issues, I have chosen the translations of Heidegger used in these secondary critical works, substituting “location” with “<place>” whenever I come across it in the Hofstadter. Similarly, I present “place” as “<location>” whenever the former is in this translation.

be misrecognized as the sound of “cats making love” (*Quintet* 12).⁴

In the darkness, features of the city are lost, leading Bruce to tell how “[y]ou might have thought yourself in central Asia—the cloudy sky in close link like chain-mail and the fading stabs of moonlight,” and he describes a particular landmark of the city, Pont St. Bénézet, simply as “the famous broken bridge” and Chapel St. Nicolas as “the chapel.” The bridge, a “broken and renowned relic of man’s belief, pointing its amputated fingers of masonry westward,” compels Bruce to think of Piers (his brother-in-law and lover), whose funeral has driven him back to the city. Avignon Bridge and its little chapel—introduced with the direct article both anonymously and familiarly—represent the city which “had been all Christendom,” but once broken and merely a “relic of man’s belief” pointing west as dawn cuts into the eastern sky, they represent something else. For Bruce, the bridge seems to represent the “collective image of the past—all the temporal selves which have been present in a serial form focused together now in an instant of perfect attention, of crystal-clear apprehension.” Through this collective image of the past, he remembers time spent with Piers and Sylvie, his wife. But the “amputated fingers of masonry [pointing] westward” also point to the end of this collective image, Akkad’s lesson on dying that Piers explains to Bruce. Not only has the bridge broken and the papal age of Avignon passed, but so must the age of Bruce, Piers, and Sylvie also pass (12–13).

The bridge here in Avignon is a helpful cognate to Heidegger’s bridge. Vycinas writes that “[w]hen a bridge is built, the place on the river becomes a place. Previously it has not been a place. It merely was one of the many spots along the river for a possible bridge” (Vycinas 252). The bridge as a *thing* calls forth the foursome, appropriating them in an event, *Ereignis*, and at the same time, it participates in the *worlding* of a place by granting the fourfold stead (dwelling, or physical location of reference). The bridge in Avignon does the same for Bruce. Its masonry rests on the bank of the earth and thrusts out over the river into the sky, providing a crossroads for

⁴Durrell may have been making a more explicit reference to the city itself here: Avignon comes from the Latin name for the city *Avenio*, which means either “town of violent winds” or “town of the river.” Alternatively, Durrell may have been borrowing from his own “The River Rhône,” an article first published in the magazine *Holiday* in 1960, in which he approaches the city from the river. He describes Avignon as “the heart” of Provence and defined by “machicolated towers” around which a mistral often blows (“The River Rhône” 331; much of these descriptions are unreferenced from Augustus Hare’s *South-Eastern France* (1890), page 361). In the article, he emphasizes the importance of the wind by inserting an ancient verse about the city:

<i>Avenio ventosa</i>	[Windy Avignon
<i>Cum vento fastidiosa</i>	With wind, annoying,
<i>Sine vente venenosa.</i> (331)	Without wind, pest-ridden.]
[Here “ <i>vente</i> ” seems mis-transcribed from Hare’s “ <i>vento</i> ” (Hare 361).]	

From the river, the city is characterized by the wind. Thus, both etymologically and intertextually, the river and the wind really do couple, “like cats making love,” to form the city.

travelers mortal and divine in the little chapel and as the literal crossroad of mortals over the imaginative “river-God.” The bridge places Avignon—*Avenio*, the town of the river—on the Rhône, and yet the fractured expanse made famous in song (“*Sur le pont d’Avignon / on y danse, tous en ronde*” ‘On the Avignon bridge / we dance, everyone in a circle’) represents what is in effect a missing sum.⁵ The bridge is broken, the circle of dancers is interrupted, and “the collective image of the past” dies. Pont St. Bénédet represents Avignon, but as a symbol, it also functions as an open invitation to discover that which it partially conceals: the city itself.

Durrell often characterizes his key cities in this manner, using particular landmarks to center his literary constructions and even lend qualities to those who people them. The figure of the Bridge in Avignon, for instance, returns throughout *The Avignon Quintet*, sometimes as the Pont St. Bénédet and at other times as the Pont du Gard. In other books, the chosen landmark is not always so easily identified. Darley’s opening description of Alexandria, for example, seems to revel in the city’s eclecticism. He answers the question “what is this city of ours?” with vagueness: “In a flash my mind’s eye shows me a thousand dust-tormented streets. Flies and beggars own it today—and those who enjoy an intermediate existence between either” (*Quartet* 17). These dust-tormented streets, flies, and beggars are more anonymous than “the bridge” and “the chapel” of Avignon, for they barely even assemble the foursome, let alone steady it. Darley also identifies the city through its “[f]ive races, five languages, a dozen creeds[, ...] five fleets turning through their greasy reflections behind the harbour bar[, ...and] more than five sexes” (17), but this teeming mass of identifiers serves only to confuse the identity of Alexandria further. The city is “something subtly androgynous, inverted upon itself,” and it seems Darley can describe it only through its “landscape-tones”: “Long sequences of tempera. Light filtered through the essence of lemons. An air full of brick-dust—sweet-smelling brick dust and the odour of hot pavements slaked with water” (18). Then, however, he inches into the history of the city, finding something slightly more lasting than light and dust in a reference to Cleopatra’s Anthony (18).

Like Bruce with Avignon, Darley struggles to pinpoint the defining essence of Alexandria. Not until twenty pages later does he finally strike a chord of the true (and literal) assembling point of the city when he writes of Alexander the Great, “the soldier-God in his glass coffin, the youthful body lapped in silver” (38). Alexander’s burial plot, misplaced at some point in time, represents a mortal/divine (soldier/God) celestial/terrestrial (public/intimate coffin) wedlock. The founder of the city, he whose

⁵From its crumbling remains, it is difficult to ascertain that the bridge could never have been the scene from the song: it is too narrow for a group to dance in a circle. More accurately, the song should be remembered as “*Sur le Pont d’Avignon / Tout le monde y passe*” ‘Over the Avignon bridge / the whole world crosses’ (Rhône 332; also in Hare 371), equally notable for its failure to deliver a bridge over which the world might pass.

body is “returned” upon his death, Alexander does not only represent the assembling of the foursome; he also idealizes the conception of Alexandria as a place. That the coffin has been lost is of no matter to Darley, who acknowledges the city’s aloofness:

It is as if the preoccupations of this landscape were centred somewhere out of reach of the average inhabitant—in a region where the flesh, stripped by over-indulgence of its final reticences, must yield to a preoccupation vastly more comprehensive: or perish in the kind of exhaustion represented by the works of the Mouseion [...]. (38)

This out-of-reach-ness of Alexander’s burial site (an actual, physical location in the city despite its misplacement) lends the city a noticeable lack similar to that given by Pont St. Bénézet to Avignon: Alexander’s City is a city he never saw and in which he can now never be seen—despite his theatrical glass coffin. Still, Darley acknowledges the Soma, “where the confused young soldier’s body lay in its borrowed Godhead,” as the spiritual center of the city (38–39). To this spiritual center, Darley adds the “temporal site” of the Brokers’ Club where businessmen admire the womanizing exploits of Capodistria “as people upon a river-bank will watch the progress of a fisherman or an artist” (39). This temporal district’s sexually driven nature emphasizes the very temporality of mortality. Combined, these spiritual and temporal centers present a further overlapping of the city’s celestial, terrestrial, divine, and mortal interests. Through these centers, Justine wanders, “searching with such frightening singleness of mind for the integrating spark which might lift her into a new perspective of herself” (39) and through which she might attain something greater than mortality. The centers of the city entice her to seek something more. Avignon’s broken bridge presents the image of a fuller expanse than was ever there; similarly, Alexandria—betokened both in name and by the (merely supposed) presence of the soldier’s corpse—presents a larger-than-life image of itself as Alexander’s City. The “temporal” red-light district, with its superficial coupling of the earthy with the spiritual, merely reinforces this inflation.

Whereas Bruce groped through the dark by the riverside before landing at the base of the broken bridge and Darley struggled for twenty pages before alighting upon serviceable centers at the Soma and the Brokers’ Club, Felix Charlock opens the second chapter of *Tunc* with the bold declaration of the Parthenon to be “the last serviceable molar in some poor widow’s gum” (*Tunc* 29).⁶ Moreover, the “monumental intimacy” of the Acropolis is like a back garden for Felix and Iolanthe, for whom there is “hardly a corner of it where we didn’t make love” and from which one could wave to the

⁶The comparison of the Parthenon to a molar is similar to the plumber Raoul’s description of Pont St. Bénézet in “Laura, a Portrait of Avignon,” an article first published in *Holiday* in 1961: “There she [Avignon] is. And the famous Pont d’Avignon. It looks silly all broken off like a tooth” (Durrell, “Laura” 342).

other “while she walked the Plaka streets below” (*Tunc* 29). Quite unequivocally, the Acropolis—more specifically, the Parthenon—serves as the reference point of Athens for Charlock.

In Istanbul, Charlock strains to characterize the city, first choosing the “coaxing palms [and] penis-turreted domes,” later mentioning “the choicer monuments” (though not by name) and listing the “honeyed gloom of the covered bazaars [...and] sunbaked mosques.” Then he recognizes the graveyards:

The tombs are sown broadcast, not gathered together in formalized squares and rectangles. [...H]ere death seemed to be broadcast wholesale in quite arbitrary fashion. A heavy melancholy, a heavy depression seemed to hang over these beautiful monuments. Turkey takes time to know. (102)

Moved by the frequency of these tombstones dotting Istanbul, Charlock calls the city “an immense graveyard” (102).⁷ While the overwhelming number of these gravestones lends a dizzying anonymity to the lives they commemorate, one tomb in particular stands out for Charlock. After a day of sightseeing, Charlock’s fiancée, Benedicta, takes him to one “set in a small grilled enclosure of its own” inscribed with her name, Benedicta Merlin. She turns away wordlessly, remaining silent when Charlock asks about it (*Tunc* 155–156).⁸ Benedicta’s grave serves as an interesting relation to that of Alexander: Alexander’s body lies marker-less; Benedicta’s marker lies body-less.

It is not difficult to recognize the Heideggerian fourfold in the Parthenon and in the “immense graveyard” of Istanbul. The Parthenon stands over Athens on the rocky citadel of the Acropolis, drawing the earth upwards into the sky. It is, further, the meeting point of gods and mortals, the mutual dwelling of Athena (who protects and names the polis) and of her priestesses. The tombs of Istanbul, too, represent the connection between mortal life and immortal afterlife. They acknowledge the mortals’ crossing over of that “last bridge” before bringing themselves before “the haleness of the divinities.” Just as in life the soul is embodied within its dwelling place, the matter of the mortal, so too in death is the corpse entombed within the flesh of the earth; thus the physical body connects the sky with the earth. Parthenon as spiritual temple, fleshly tomb, and civilization’s womb⁹; graveyard of Istanbul as acknowledgment of mortality, appraisal of perpetuity, and inter-penetrability of earth and sky: these symbols of respective cities suggest a reading of the present through their pasts.

Although Athens is immediately knowable by the toothy Acropolis and Istanbul

⁷Later in *Nunquam*, Caradoc says that Turkey has a “heavy death-propelled wavelength” and that it is influenced by Egypt, “the one country above all which specialised in death” (*Nunquam* 234).

⁸Charlock later learns that the grave is that of her mother (*Nunquam* 32).

⁹See Caradoc’s speech on the Acropolis (*Tunc* 67–78).

“takes time to know,”¹⁰ they are similar to Alexandria and Avignon in that they are knowable only through their pasts. These cities are in sharp contrast with London, described breathlessly by Charlock as “the brave new chrysadamantine world of [...] nuptial London,” with the city’s mysteries and “great achievements” listed next to expensive cars and fancy clothing. The house in the city he is to share with Benedicta is “beautiful” and filled with “sumptuous impersonal furniture” (*Tunc* 173–174). Moreover, the clothing he used to wear—the clothing of Athens—is considered the “pre-historic [...] uniform of [a] poor sage” (180); it is not the uniform of someone who has adopted “the condescending wave of an umbrella which somehow goes with city clothes” (181). The true assembling points of London for Charlock, however, are his country house and St. Paul’s cathedral.

Upon their marriage, Charlock and Benedicta move to their country house, significantly named Cathay, a “preposterous, gloomy” compound composed of “turrets and fishponds” (187). The house itself serves as a kind of nowhere, an architectural anthology, reminding Charlock of many other places and buildings: “the rococo musicians’ gallery with its mouldy Burne-Jones flavour” competes with “preposterous Edwardian rooms leading with an air of ever greater futility into each other,” “spectral Venetian lustres,” and “[s]hades of Baden and Pau.” Additionally, the total effect of the house, “copied and recopied, criss-crossed with mirrors set in tarnished mouldings,” calls to mind for Charlock yet another place—Istanbul’s “rotting palaces in *style pompier*”—reminding him how “foreign” Benedicta is (188). Moreover, when Charlock reads his telegrams of marital congratulations, the empty (save the army of servants) mansion channels the distant voices of his friends “from the lost world of Athens and Stamboul.” And perhaps most notably, the library, the “huge and beautifully arranged room with its galleries and moulded squinches, its sea-green dome, its furnishings of globes, atlases, astrolabes, gazetteers” and its extensive collection of books—“one would have imagined the room to contain virtually the sum total of European culture”—presents an exhaustive European encapsulation of the world, not least obviously in the physical inversion of the globe (earth) upon the ceiling (sky). The implication, of course, is that European culture, with its gods of philosophy and science—“Descartes, Nietzsche, Leibniz...[sic]”—not only decodes the natural world, but dominates the mortal world as well. Though these books are in truth fake (“all the books in it were empty dummies!”), a fact that mocks the earnestness of the display, the implication remains the same (189).

¹⁰Athens and Istanbul also take on another sort of identification with the consideration of Charlock’s loves, for as “Io owns Athens,” so does “Benedicta’s face [appear] superimposed upon” Istanbul in Charlock’s mind (155). Even later, Charlock imagines himself looking upon Turkey’s coastline when he lies with Benedicta (*Nunquam* 31).

Unlike Cathay, with its melange of influence, St. Paul's cathedral is clearly delineated in the text: Charlock buys a guidebook and learns the exact dimensions of the building (41' x 515' x 300') (*Nunquam* 278). Furthermore, as a cathedral it defines London in the old definition of city: it is the "old petrifact which crowned London town" (277). Notwithstanding the sincerity of the building's designation and description, a degree of artifice like that of Cathay taints the scene: the painting of St. Paul above the Whispering Gallery is a "gamboge cartoon," the house of Paul is transliterated as Paulhaus (the name of Benedicta's asylum in Geneva), and Charlock's prayer mocks God and calls for his resignation (278).¹¹ Moreover, Iolanthe's flight to the Whispering Gallery where she prays beneath the pictures of St. Paul, hearkens back to the flight of her namesake Io who prays to Prometheus. In contrast to Io, Iolanthe hears no answer for her pleas and commits suicide; whereas Prometheus is able to dissuade Io, St. Paul is just a cartoon figure (Clawson 159–160).

In St Paul's cathedral, the elements of the fourfold are still apparent, but it should be obvious that Durrell problematizes any delicate balance they might have among each other. Although the elements of the earth and the sky are available in the building's construction of stone, its physical mass, its towering height in the city, and the access it provides to the skies via variously leveled galleries, the elements of gods and mortals are unstable. It is ostensibly an extension of the Catholicism's Roman base of St. Peter's Basilica, yet it is "not a dream of godhead" but of mathematical and Enlightenment principles: in the architectural favoring of the building's mathematical principles over its importance as a spiritual refuge, it is resultantly "much less aesthetically beautiful" than any other cathedral (*Nunquam* 194). Moreover, in its very earthly location it has been situated on a spot of (implied pagan) magnetic importance, undermining the notion of mere potentiality of pre-cathedral space: the magnetic fields are independent of the *thing* of the church and originate in the earth, the landscape.¹² The cathedral unites sky with earth and mortals with gods, but it does so in a way that equates and confuses the values of these variables: the differentiation between sacred and profane is now merely nominal, and the latter even mocks the former.

¹¹While Charlock says of his wedding that it will be civil ("No church-bells for Charlock" (*Tunc* 187)) and that the ceremony, which none of his friends attends, in the library is itself "perhaps a trifle funereal" (188), this depiction contrasts with Jocas' funeral in St. Paul's cathedral, the scene of which opens with the sound of the bells ringing (*Nunquam* 277), and which is filled with the bulk of Charlock's friends.

¹²Oddly enough, the Stonehenge-like geo-magnetic fields on which the church is built are concentrated in the very spot where Robo-Iolanthe is later killed.

Outward Motion

Herein lies the difference between the Durrellian and Heideggerian notions of place: Heidegger's intimate examinations of the interplay between his fourfold demand that these four be of like importance, but Durrell's macroscopic isolation of "the germ of the people which is expressed by their landscape" ("Landscape" 156) institutes a clear hierarchy among the constituent parts. The two correspond to dual inward and outward motions, a pair which Roger Porter suggests is inherent in travel writing: the outward motion of new experiences and gained knowledge is always coupled with a motion of returning back home, both actual and in the figurative sense of regaining something lost or claiming an unconscious desire (Porter 51). Durrell acknowledges these motions, writing that the first, outward motion for the travel writer has as its aim the discovery of that spirit of place. But this outward discovery is less important than the one which the traveller makes about him- or herself in the second, inward motion of travel, all passage being nothing more than "a sort of metaphorical journey—an outward symbol of an inward march upon reality" (*Labyrinth* 59). The journey home is really a journey within, what Stefan Herbrechter calls "an antidote against exile," or a re-figuring of the quest for the island, "the disconnected land whole to itself" (Herbrechter, *Ethics* 257, 260).

A straightforward Heideggerian analysis of the dwelling places of the Avignon Bridge, the Soma of Alexandria, the Parthenon, the tombs of Istanbul, and of Cathay conforms to this notion of a "land whole to itself": the uniting of the fourfold is the fulfilling of place. What is more, the metaphorical journey reveals an inner reality of the interplay between these constituent parts. But Durrell, interested also in the outward motion of experience, troubles these whole lands and places of balanced parts, as is most obvious in his portrayal of St. Paul's. In describing these dwelling places with the inward motion of intimate description, Durrell is also making gestures to the larger, symbolic, outward motion necessary to recognize the implications of his spirit of place.

Gregory Dickson writes that location in *The Revolt of Aphrodite* is polar: from the mechanical, rational England and Europe in the West to the holistic, simplistic Turkey and Asia in the East (Dickson 528).¹³ Extending Dickson's thread to consider the

¹³To be sure, he allows for geographical "grey areas" of Greece and Switzerland, but Switzerland is (perhaps too) easily overlooked as a temporary stopover during the mental illnesses of Charlock and Benedicta, a quiet asylum set beside a "melancholy lake which mirrors mostly nothingness because the sky is so low and as toneless as tired fur" (*Nunquam* 18). Greece is a dwelling of the characters, and thus it fits within the continuum from West to East. In the *Revolt* Switzerland is not a dwelling, *per se*, but it too fits acceptably along the line drawn from England to Turkey. In the *Quintet*, however, it is a more significant dwelling; nevertheless, the characters reside in Switzerland only in order to sit out the war, making of it a kind of waiting room or the ship in which they make their passage through

Alexandria of the *Quartet* and the Avignon of the *Quintet* does little to distort his model, and in truth emphasizes another dimension overlooked in his study: that of time. If London is mechanical and rational, it is also characterized by its novelty, represented in the innovation and invention that demarcate Charlock's life there. Conversely, Alexandria and Istanbul are characterized by the absolute remoteness of their pasts, represented in respective tombs either implied (and inaccessible) or real (and only slightly more accessible). Between the extremes, Athens is also represented by its past, albeit a past that is not only read-able but also relatively write-able: Caradoc compares the Parthenon to a tomb *and* a womb in his speech on the Acropolis (*Tunc* 67–78), signaling a future made possible by works of the past.¹⁴ Avignon, too, in Pont St. Bénédet recalls the city's inheritance as the seat of "all Christendom," but the broken bridge represents a break with the past, and the amputated finger pointing westward at dawn is more concerned with future than with history.

Alexandria, then, with its imagined gravesite, represents the extreme inaccessibility of the East in Durrell's world. From Alexandria, the thread curves through Istanbul, Athens, and Avignon, each city becoming more comprehensible and immediate than the previous, before ending in London, the city whose immediacy leads to Charlock's mental illness. Somewhere between Alexandria and London, this thread traverses the boundary from East to West, from Orient to Occident, but it is difficult to know the point of transition. Istanbul and Alexandria are certainly Oriental, but Athens and even Avignon are too problematic to categorize. Edward Said writes, "The Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; [...] In addition, the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience" (Said, *Orientalism* 1–2). So too, in Durrell's model, is the East defined against the West, with both inextricably tied to each other. The difficulty in recognizing the boundary between the two comes from the arbitrary nature of that boundary (Said 54); the only true way of recognizing the models of Orient and Occident is in recognizing the relative distance and direction of change between the two, not in absolutely quantifying that difference.

Jeff Malpas explains Heidegger's notion of spatiality as one principally concerned with "the notions of 'orientation' or 'directionality' (*Ausrichtung*) and 'distance' or 'de-severance' (*Ent-fernung*)" (Malpas, "Uncovering" 212–213). The distance and severance of Heidegger's *Ent-fernung* is one that measures and breaks the world down

the trials of wartime. Little is written of Switzerland, except to name it—making of it little more than another "neutral zone."

¹⁴Caradoc's speech is heavily influenced by a story from Vitruvius' *De architectura* quoted in Otto Rank's *Art and Artist* (170–72), which Durrell read.

into discrete units of relational difference. To follow this model in the space of Durrell's literary world, Athens, with its European and Ottoman pasts, is more Oriental than London, but more Occidental than Alexandria. Certainly, such a generalization may be problematic, but it is not unlike the "corrections" Said sees daily imposed "upon raw reality, changing it from free-floating objects into units of knowledge" (Said, *Orientalism* 67). Yet again, in Durrell's novels, any transformation from free-floating *Oriental* or *Occidental* objects into *The East* or *The West* happens not just in units of difference or direction: the dimension of time, previously added to Dickson's model, also has a place in this Heideggerian map of the spatiality of Durrell's novels. As Malpas writes, since

spatiality [...] is tied to activity and since activity is always projective—presently oriented toward a set of future possibilities on the basis of a past actuality—so it is temporality that enables the opening up of the spatial ordering of Dasein's world. (Malpas, "Uncovering" 213)

Likewise, our spatial ordering of Durrell's world, the thread which runs from East to West, from Alexandria in the Orient (in which "one suddenly confronted unimaginable antiquity [...] and] boundless distance" (Said, *Orientalism* 167)) to London in the Occident (the "brave new chrysadimantine world" (*Tunc* 173)) is temporal, running from past to present.

Moreover, the idea of Alexandria-as-Alexander's-City, granted stead by the presence of his body at the Soma, is like Said's distinction of the Orient as a *topos*. It is "less a place" than

a set of references, a congeries of characteristics, that seems to have its origin in a quotation, or a fragment of a text, or a citation from someone's work on the Orient, or some bit of previous imagining, or an amalgam of all these. (Said, *Orientalism* 177)

The actual presence of Alexander's body at the Soma is less important than the rumor of its presence. This "fragment of a text" is all that is necessary to give the city its set of references, its distinction as *topos*, an Aristotelian term which Malpas defines as "the limit of the enclosing body, at which it is in contact with that which is enclosed" (Malpas, "Uncovering" 215). Alexandria, Durrell's "half-imagined (yet wholly real)" city (*Quartet* 209), though a place ostensibly given stead by its founder's corpse, is bound by its "congeries of characteristics," its flies and its beggars, its light and its dust, its businessmen and professional women. "Half-Imagined" Alexandria is the completed and confirmed imaginary Orient described by Said (Said, *Orientalism* 167).¹⁵

¹⁵Ken Seignurie writes of the Egypt presented in the *Quartet* as a symbol pointing toward an idealized, sacred sense of the Orient (Seignurie 93). This consideration draws another dimension, Imagination, into the discussion of the path of the thread from Alexandria to London, picking up the thread left open from the previous chapter.

So too does the “immense graveyard” of Istanbul illustrated by Durrell represent a collected *expectation* of what it is to be Turkish. The “penis-turreted domes,” “choicer monuments,” bazaars, and mosques are merely quotations of *what the Istanbul experience must be like*. They are useful to correspond to the idea of the Egyptian/Oriental death-obsession presented by Caradoc and espoused by Charlock (*Nunquam* 233). Similarly, the Parthenon, the “last serviceable molar in some poor widow’s gum” (*Tunc* 29), calls to mind the age and troubled history of that “poor widow” Greece. At the same time the bright monument embodies the expectation of the Greek “sunny philosophy,” its comparative (to Turkey, at any rate) domestication of death, and its innocence (*Nunquam* 233). These ideals, like “the bright blue and white of Greece” found on the flag (*Nunquam* 234), are Said’s bits of “previous imagining,” the quotations and citations of the spirit of Greece, which Durrell asks the reader to recognize (or, perhaps more accurately, to remember). Any Oriental elements of Greece, those components that are “ominous or minatory,” are to be understood as the influence of the country’s proximity to Turkey and its historical connections to Egypt (*Nunquam* 233); nonetheless, they are accepted and recognized as part of the country’s whole impure past.

The Bridge of Avignon, too, represents some elsewhere-referenced idea of Avignon and its history. The bridge built by a mocked farm boy in Avignon’s zenith is the bridge on which everyone danced in a circle and which carried the weight of the world. It connects the town to the Rhône and in turn overlays its own set of references upon the town. Projected by the bridge’s past greatness, the exotic allure of the papacies of the “Babylonian Captivity” serve to contextualize the scandal of the Templar massacre and to mystify the legacy of the de Nogaret family. Projected by the bridge’s ruined nature, the city as testament to the earthly make-up of the church delineates a space for the legitimacy of literary authorial creation. Even the Pont du Gard speaks for the utilitarian admirability of Provence’s Roman heritage. Durrell quotes this set of characteristics, what amounts to an idea of *Avignon-ness*, using it to place and influence (and even justify) the happenings of his *Quintet*.

If Alexandria, Istanbul, Athens, and Avignon are easy to essentialize on account of what Said cites as an effortlessness to “*be there*” mentally with only little resistance on the part of the Orient or the Other (Said, *Orientalism* 7), London proves to be a different kind of place. Durrell instead appeals to the pride of assumed European and English superiority: the books in the library of Cathay encapsulate the greatness of Western thought; the navigational paraphernalia therein signify the pre-eminence of British exploration and colonization (not least of all over the East, to which it is opposed); and the cathedral in London epitomizes the mathematical rigor of English

engineers. Even London is interacted with chiefly on the grounds of it being an *idea* of what the city is expected to represent—more *topos* than geophysical location.

Beyond the City

The reduction of these literary places to their respective spirits is not one that strips them of significant profundity or of their relationships to the other, actual cities. Rather, the resulting map of imagined geographies in Durrell's corpus enriches the implication of these real cities by introducing new dimensions of spatiality. While Alexandria is a former Greek and British colony and a current Egyptian city on the southern shore of the Mediterranean, and while it is still a city in which Durrell lived for almost three years, it is further strengthened by the possibilities for symbolism that Durrell instills within it: when a young British diplomat falls in love with an exotic Egyptian woman, the parallels to British colonialism are impossible to ignore; when their relationship sours, so does that of their respective countries.¹⁶ Porter's sense of the duality of travel—outward and inward, learning a place and learning oneself—can be reconsidered in light of these constructions as well. The inward motion (a Heideggerian analysis of the making of place) and the outward motion (Durrellian and Saidean greater metaphors of place), while different, are not mutually opposed to one another. Obviously, Durrell's own notions of place were foremost in his mind when he wrote his novels, but the value of Heidegger's theories extends beyond his bridge. Particularly, his notions of *spatium* and *extensio*—an interpolated space between places and a broad extension of place, respectively—will be useful in examining the areas of the sea and the desert in the next section of this chapter.

II The Spirit of Space: Non-Dwelling Places

The spaces through which we go daily are provided for by <places> [...]. If we pay heed to these relations between <places> and spaces, between spaces and space, we get a clue to help us in thinking of the relation of man and space. ("Building Dwelling Thinking" 156)

Heidegger introduces the idea of space as one that is dependent upon place. By gathering the fourfold, place introduces the space in which these four collect. At the same time, place also establishes the greater idea of spatiality, with which the notions of distance or nearness and abstract three-dimensionality are bound. The locations "variously near or far from the bridge" are able to come into being because of these concepts of distance and extension, what Heidegger terms *spatium* and *extensio*. *Spatium*

¹⁶Anne Zahlan suggests that Durrell even uses the relationship of Leila and Mountolive to ridicule the British myth of empire, rather than merely showing its deterioration (Zahlan, "Rhodes" 229).

is a kind of space stripped of significance. It exists as the space between two locations: "In a space that is represented purely as *spatium*, the bridge now appears as a mere something at some position, which can be occupied at any time by something else or replaced by a mere marker." *Extensio*, on the other hand, exists as pure significance, though that significance resides in the place from which the space radiates: *extensio* is the space implied by extension of place (Heidegger 155).

This notion of space as one tied to the experience of place is quite similar to Michel de Certeau's definition of space as "*practiced place*." He takes his idea of practiced place from the expectation he has of space to incorporate "direction, velocities, and time" (de Certeau 117). Thus, to some degree, the space produced by the place of a bridge is accessible only to those who experience the space en route to or from the bridge. In this manner, the space of Alexandria, the city jointly defined by the places of the Soma and the Brokers' Club, is established by Justine's wanderings through these "two centres of gravity" (*Quartet* 38–39). Similarly, throughout Durrell's novels, other spaces, like the Mediterranean and the Sahara, are experienced only in practicing the transition from one place to another. In these spaces, varying characteristics of nearby places—with which these spaces interact both as *spatium* and as *extensio*—overlay upon and shuffle with each other, the notion of prime influence of place being overtaken by a more decentralized amalgam.¹⁷

The Sea

The Mediterranean is obviously important to Durrell, a self-professed exile and expatriate who spent much of his life moving from one country to another. But despite his claim to the expatriate's ability to "feel at ease anywhere, given a minimum of sunshine," to carry his country within him (Alyn 24–25), the Mediterranean pulled him back, enticing him with more than the promise of sunlight: it was also "the capital, the heart, the sex organ of Europe," and "the central point, the pivot" (38). In his books, too, the Mediterranean is perhaps central to everything. Greek 'Sea in the Middle of the Earth,' Arabic 'Middle White Sea,' it also features as central, cartographically at any rate, to almost all of his works. At the very least, it offers a colourful backdrop or the opportunity of fresh air for his characters, who often stroll along Alexandria's "Grand Corniche" (Pursewarden, Mountolive), swim recreationally (Balthazar, Darley, Clea), or even venture out in a little fishing boat to gaze back upon the city (Pombal, Sveva). But this recreational interaction is not of the same import as other kinds of interaction with the spaces outside of the city. The centrality of the Mediterranean is perhaps

¹⁷Tiziana Carlino writes that "The Levant is a space inbetween, only temporary hosted by the sea, non-national, neither nostalgic" (Carlino 1).

most notable when characters are drawn to the sea in the same manner Durrell himself was. For example, in *Quinx*, the last book of *The Avignon Quintet*, a busload of characters ventures out of Avignon through the space (*extensio*) of the surrounding countryside to the Mediterranean shore, traveling through Provence to Camargue to take part in the yearly gipsy fête of Saint Sara. This tradition, in which the statues of Saint Sara and the two Saints Mary sacred to gipsies are carried in procession into the Mediterranean, began in the 16th century and is associated with the trio's welcome arrival in France. In both of these movements, from Provence to Camargue (for Blanford, Sutcliffe, et al) and from Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer to Mediterranean (for the statues of the Saints and their *gardiens*), individuals interact with the space between and around places, but the interaction is a contentious one, at best.

Blanford and company's journey from Avignon to Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer and through the *stadiou* of the Provençal and Camargue countryside is a quick one in the text, taking a few pages, but spoken of directly in only two sentences. When Blanford and his companions depart is not clear; in fact it is almost as if they are swept along with the gipsies' migration "to honour their patron saint [...in] the little Church of the Saintes Maries de la Mer, the famous village on the sea to which all their steps were now bending" (*Quintet* 1233). They encounter the gipsies when "first they [the gipsies] filled up Avignon" on the way to the Camargue (1233), but it eventually becomes apparent that Blanford's group is also bending their own steps in that direction. Mostly, Durrell references the trip remotely, using the conditional or past perfect tense to indicate a distance of time or actuality: "they *would look* almost as strange [as the gypsies...] for they *had hired* a large red motor bus for the excursion [. . .] A van such as this *would free* them from the responsibilities of the road" (1235; emphases mine).

These sentences hint at the possibility or even the inevitability of travel (and requisite interaction with the spaces beyond the city), but they do not signal its start. At other times, the use of the past progressive, as in "After all, they had a purpose, they *were travelling* with the intention of invoking Saint Sara" (1235; emphases mine), seems to signify that they are in fact traveling in their red bus, though it might also just signify a motive for an intention to travel. The next few sentences are only slightly less ambiguous, once again referencing the journey only in relation to something else. In this case, Sutcliffe's thoughts of Sabine leads him on a mental journey whose description is entangled with the first glimpses of a passing and changing landscape: "the flowering meads of high Provence [...] soon gave place to the sadder, flatter plains of the Camargue—country of marsh and rivulet and lake" (1235). Finally, in the paragraph's concluding sentence, the end of the journey is in sight: depictions of landscape and other passing features are equated with the end of the journey. The "straggling column" of pilgrims is described as winding itself "dustily through his [the *gardien's*]

land to the sea,” and horses are described as white as “foam flowing over the land like waves on the blue sea which lay ahead, the crown of their journey, the church of Saint Sara” (1235–1236). And yet, after recognizing the whole of the journey, after describing the passage from Provence to Camargue and recognizing the sea as the final destination, Durrell never directly signals the journey until two paragraphs later, when he begins the sentence “So they voyaged,” and again, two more paragraphs later, with the sentence beginning “So the little bus struggled on” (1236, 1237).

But far more contentious than the road from Avignon to Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer is the unpracticed space of the named Mediterranean, at once part of the town (*de-la-Mer*) and not a part of it, unknowable except as an element of *extensio* (or even, more oddly, as the town is ‘of the sea,’ the unknown place from which the known element of the town extends). In the *Quintet*, the saints’ yearly baptism, the culmination of the festival and reason for the journeys of the gipsies and of Blanford and his friends, is described as obliquely as the journey from Avignon, hinting at the subtly shifting progress out of the town, onto the beach, and into the Mediterranean. When the ceremony to bring the statues to the sea is described in relation to the fair, Durrell recognizes that event as central to everything happening: the “great fair was growing up around the event which would end with [...] the transport of the three Maries down to the sea,” he writes (1237). The colourful and detailed description of the future ceremony (“the event [with] which [the fair] *would end*”) builds until it loses its position in time, described at one point in the past tense—“the whole party [...] plunging through the shallows until the sea *was* breast-high, and the whole cavalcade *seemed* to float”—and at another signaling a more immediate shift—“[the whole party] encircled *now* by all the fisher boats of the little seaport” (1237; all emphasis mine). Despite the apparent significance of the central moment of the statues’ procession, all of this description of *future* happening is employed to describe the textually *current* action of the red bus coming into view of the beach. Seven pages later, at the time when the saints actually *are* carried into the water, the only sketch Durrell affords the statues is a cursory mention (“the saints were being carried down to sea on their wooden trestle—part of the traditional service” (*Quintet* 1244)) buried in a sentence telling of Sutcliffe’s non-participation in that day’s festivities; presumably, however, the other characters take part in the ceremony into the sea.

Novelists Darley and Blanford also interact with the Mediterranean when they each traverse it en route to Egypt in respective novels. When Darley returns to the city in *Clea*, he crosses the sea from his Greek island. His journey is a pleasant one. “The night was superlatively warm and fine,” he writes. “A dolphin broke once, twice at the bow. A course was set” (*Quartet* 666). The journey begins when the boat “slip[s] out slantwise from the bay” and “shuttle[s] for a while along the ink-shadowed line of

cliffs” before the crew ventures “outwards upon the main deep,” trailing a phosphorescent wake like a comet across the night sky (666–667). Darley writes of nearing Alexandria, comparing the journey to traveling backwards in time across “the familiar pathways of the Greek sea” (667). As the journey progresses, he feels a stronger “tug of memory’s heavy plumb-line” until the boat is just outside the harbour (667).

Like that of Darley, Blanford’s Mediterranean is an outlet to immortality, a space of “perfect peace” and epic calm: the skies are cloudless and the sea is without “Homeric curl” (*Quintet* 618). During his passage to Alexandria in *Constance*, he takes advantage of the time and freedom to begin Arabic lessons from the Prince and to write poetry, which steadily improves.¹⁸ Distance is marked by the sliding influence of the world around them: first by news of the war and then by specific places as they near them. The yacht carries them “into Egypt and safety,” but they still trouble (albeit feebly) over the threat of torpedoes, and they feel they are surrounded by the unseen navies of warring countries, France, England, and Italy (*Quintet* 618–620). They travel “towards the white cliffs of Crete and then Evnostos, the harbour-home of the Alexandria basin,” sliding from place to place as they near Alexandria (620).

On the Mediterranean, Blanford and Darley gradually slide along spheres of influence, beginning with reluctant departures from respective origins, “shutt[ing] for awhile along the ink-shadowed line of cliffs.” They slide through the waters, mapping coordinates by where they are not. For Darley, the “Greek sea” itself is familiar through its mytho-historical importance.¹⁹ It is also a plumb line of personal memory, along which—as the boat nears Alexandria—he must pull himself. The journey is temporal and conjures a catalogue of ghostly recollections: religious conversations, passionate kisses, gestures, images of flying birds (667). For Blanford, crossing the Mediterranean represents a journey to the future, rather than the past. “My mother is dead, my friends dispersed, my future uncertain,” he writes, considering the trip to be his long-awaited turn of good fortune (*Quintet* 619). He describes the Mediterranean as all consumed by warring fleets, forming “some great hurricane” whose eye is the yacht on which he and the Prince travel (620). Through this hurricane, they progress, first towards Crete and then to Alexandria.

Both Blanford and Darley arrive at the city in darkness, confident they are just

¹⁸This linguistic freedom is not unlike that found in *The Revolt of Aphrodite* when Sacrapant takes Charlock across the Bosphorus to the Asian side of Istanbul and is struck dumb in the pre-linguistic limitlessness of the transition: “Sacrapant waved his arm at it and gave a small incoherent cry of pleasure—as if he had momentarily forgotten the text of the caption which should go with such a picture” (*Tunc* 110).

¹⁹Indeed, in *Balthazar*, Darley admits that the Mediterranean’s size is too easily inflated when one considers “the length and greatness of its history” (*Quartet* 213).

outside Alexandria but unable to see proof. In both instances, the visual confirmation is instant and dramatic, with Blanford's "utter darkness" replaced by spectacular brightness as "somewhere a switch was thrown and a sort of combination of Taj Mahal and Eiffel Tower blared out upon the night" (621) and with Darley's "all-obliterating darkness" exchanged for explosive brightness as the

harbour suddenly outlined itself with complete clarity upon the dark panels of heaven, while long white fingers of powder-white light began to stalk about the sky in ungainly fashion [...and] a dense stream of coloured rockets [...] emptying on the sky their brilliant clusters of stars and diamonds and smashed pearl snuff-boxes [...]. (*Quartet* 668)

In both instances, the Mediterranean is filtered through extremes of location, first recognized by proximity to origins, and then as the destination is neared, the sea is located with respect to Alexandria. Interestingly, their passage across its surface also represents the passage of time.

Likewise, between Avignon and the Mediterranean is temporal chaos marked by verb tenses vacillating between an "ocean of futurity" and an antiquity called to mind by "palaeolithic steeds" (*Quintet* 1235–36). The procession of the saints, too, is a *future* event (the "great fair [...] *would* end with [...] the transport of the three Maries down to the sea" (1237; emphasis mine)) until it is actually happening, at which point Durrell references it only as "part of the *traditional* service" having happened for centuries (1244; emphasis mine). This shift from future to past to present marks the difficulty of establishing spatio-temporal stability outside of established place: the Mediterranean is first an *extensio* of the point of departure before it is the open *spatium* of the journey (interrupted intermittently by the *extensii* of nearby places extending into the sea) and finally the *extensio* of the final port. Thus, while Blanford and Darley feel they are just at the harbour to Alexandria, they have no means of establishing an actual position until the city ultimately shocks them with its presence

The Desert

One came upon it, came to the edge of the carpet of human plantation and there it was like great theatrical personage, waiting serenely.[...] The desert was a metaphor for everything huge and dangerous, yet without so seeming.
(*The Avignon Quintet* 650)

Contrasting with the bleeding edge of the city's space into the sea, Alexandria also bleeds into the desert at its southern edges. The desert is not as romantic a notion as the Mediterranean in Durrell's personal life; neither is it "the sex organ of Europe." Durrell considers the desert to be depressing and devitalising to all of Egypt (Alyn 64), and while found in the *Quartet* and the *Quintet*, it does not figure in any of his

other travel writing or novels. Still, the unruly space of the Sahara is analogous to the un-knowable space of the Mediterranean.

In *The Alexandria Quartet*, Nessim takes a journey similar to that of the Avignon party, but instead of traveling from Avignon to Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer on the Mediterranean, he travels from Alexandria on the Mediterranean to Karm Abu Girg, his family home on the edge of the desert. For Nessim, the space between Alexandria and Karm Abu Girg is as obscured as that of the other trip. As he drives through “the barren network of faults and dried-out lake-beds,” dust soon covers his tires and clouds the air in his car, “coating everything in a fine-grained pollen” until the windscreen is so “snowed-up” he resorts to using wipers (*Quartet* 251). He soon arrives at a ferry crossing, where he meets his brother Narouz, who accompanies him the rest of the way home. Later in the *Quartet*, but years earlier, the young diplomat-in-training Mountolive makes this same journey to the rural home of the Hosnanis, but he finds that the road outside of Alexandria simply stops (405). Nessim’s difficulty—he can hardly see the road—is not too far removed from that of Mountolive, who has no prescribed trail to follow. In both cases, leaving Alexandria signifies leaving the known city and entering into an unknown space. The road outside of Alexandria ends when it can no longer serve the city, when the residents of the city no longer practice the city so far out. When the dust from the unpaved road impedes Nessim’s sight and when the complete lack of road hinders Mountolive’s forward progress, they cease to be within the practicable space of the city and are moving outward from it into the un-practiced desert.

The day after Nessim arrives home, the two brothers venture into the desert so Narouz can purchase and break in a new horse. They travel alone, because their servants find the desert “such torture,” believing it “to be an emptiness populated entirely by the spirits of demons” (264). The desert itself is a wild place of “pure draughts of desert air” marked by

the nakedness of space, pure as a theorem, stretching away into the sky drenched in all its own silence and majesty, untenanted except by such figures as the imagination of man has invented to people landscapes which are inimical to his passions and whose purity flays the mind. (266)

Even the horses feel the boundlessness and respond with “their tearing plunging gallop across the dunes, manes and tassels tossing” (266). Once the brothers familiarize themselves with the sense of freedom, they set to task to familiarize themselves with their geographical position. Though Narouz carries “the whole land in his mind like the most detailed map by a master cartographer [...] knowing [...] the drift of sand to an inch” (264), they dip into their surroundings cautiously, taking a “slow tacking path, questing about” for a hint as to their location. Eventually, they find the pathway,

an "ancient caravan route," leading to the Quasur el Atash, where they are to meet the horse sellers. They find the trail and soon recognize Quasur el Atash in the distance; at this point, the freedom and limitlessness of the desert is lost as they are no longer in an unmarked space but are instead "nearly there." The Sheik's four waiting escorts become a clear destination: "To them they rode—into the embrace of arms like dry sticks" (267).

In the *Avignon Quintet*, too, the characters venture into the desert from Alexandria. Bruce, Piers, Sylvie, and Toby set off on horseback with an Arab guide from Alexandria, "heading for an oasis called Macabru which lay some way to the east" (*Quintet* 91). At this point in time, Alexandria has no suburbs and the desert begins right at the gates to Alexandria, thrusting the four immediately into "the damp enervating heat which soaked and bathed one, until one could feel the sweat trickling through one's clothes into one's very saddle" (92). Here in the desert, "breathing was laboured" and everywhere are small villages, which, because of the numerous mirages, give "the illusion of being fictions" (92). But within this shifting landscape of illusion, Alexandria is firmly located, as Piers is happy to tell, at "31° 13' 5" north latitude and 27° 35' 30" longitude, near Lake Mareotis, on an isthmus which connects with *terra firma* the peninsula that forms the two ports" (94). Here in the desert, distanced from the city, the four ruminate on its past wonders, which reach fifteen miles into the desert in the form of artifacts, fallen monuments, "shattered archways, smashed causeways and musing lintels" (94). Piers recognizes within these earthquake-savaged ruins a direct connection with this past life—"And yet," he says, "the outer furnishings of his world are still here—palms, water-wheels, dervishes, desert horses. Always!" Nevertheless, Toby dismisses these very real relics as mirages, mere symptoms of the mutable environs (95).

They advance into the desert "and into darkness," recognizing and indeed seeing little around them for the night: "there was nothing to be seen save the desolate dunes stretching away on every side—and now visibility was foreshortened by the absolute dark" (98). The four travelers become unsure of their guide's sense of direction and begin to worry they are heading aimlessly into the desert, but they soon see an airplane—Akkad's—land somewhere ahead of them at the oasis. The plane orders the desert by establishing a place in the sea of sand. At this point, the travelers quicken to hurry their arrival to the "point of fixity in the midst of desolation" which is yet little more than "a shadow which dawn's light would break down into objects and planes," indistinguishable except for a certainty that it is "not part of the desert" (99). The oasis, distinguishable by its position within and yet against the desert, becomes immediate to the place of the travelers.

For these pilgrims traveling to Macabru, the desert establishes positional uncertainty equivalent to that of Darley and Blanford in the Mediterranean. The desert is “uneven” and equated with darkness (98) and an environment “in which the sand drifts were in some places blown up into heaps and in others spread out into vast mattresses, where our animals sank a foot deep, and in others again, water-covered and reduced to black mud” (97). While Alexandria is situated *precisely* at $31^{\circ} 13' 5''$ north and $27^{\circ} 35' 30''$ east, the four are imprecisely located in the desert, somewhere to Alexandria’s east. Even their guide, who seems to be on some sort of course across the desert (98) gives the impression of being lost in the “croak of relieved triumph” he lets escape when they are within sight of the oasis (99).

Correspondingly, Narouz, who is meant to be as knowledgeable of the desert as a “master cartographer,” carrying within him a “battle-plan” of “the drift of sand to an inch” (*Quartet* 264), establishes his and Nessim’s position only with time, trial, and error. For Narouz, much of the desert represents an unknown that is to be tamed, “for he had already mentally planted this waste with carobs and green shrubs—conquered it” (266). Nessim has been fighting such a battle at Abousir, where Justine’s Winter Palace is carved out of the sand drifts “which, after a winter of wind, would move forward and cover the stones of the courtyard in six inches of sand” (133). This conquering of the wild is not unlike Narouz’s breaking-in of the colt he has chosen, who gives “a low whistling cry of fear” at the “panic which always greets such a collision of human and animal worlds” before bucking and wildly galloping, “aimed like a shooting-star to pierce the very sky, and whirled away across the dunes” (269).

The desert as an unconquered, unknown entity is an object of desire to be learned and explored through the inward motion of travel, but the shifting sands and un-placeability within that space make it unknowable. Like the Mediterranean, the desert can only be experienced by the subtly sliding places whose influences permeate the space. Thus, Nessim and Narouz are disoriented until they find the road that leads to Quasar el Atash, and the four pilgrims experience Alexandria fifteen miles into the desert and are unsettled until they recognize the oasis, at which point their “spirits rose [...] with the confirmation that our course was a true one” (*Quintet* 99).

Out of Place

These areas of the desert and the sea are what Eric Dardel calls *geographical space*, “unique [for] it has its own name—Paris, Champagne, the Sahara, the Mediterranean” (qtd. in Relp 16). For Dardel, the naming of space establishes its relationship to the subject who names it, much in the same sense that for Heidegger a space is effected by the place that gives it signification. But despite having names, they are not truly

claimed for man in the manner Edward Relph writes of named spaces being claimed: “Where there are no names, the environment is chaotic, lacking in orientation, even fearful, for it has no humanised and familiar points of reference” (16–17).²⁰ Known, named, geographical spaces for Relph are cultural, reflecting “the significant space of a particular culture that is humanised by the naming of places” (16). The phenomenon of indigenous peoples populating their environment with mythologies of landscape-formation is such a construction of geographical space, as it is through these stories of the land that they come to know it, to “humanise the wilderness” (17). In this manner, the mythologies of named geographical spaces give place to the various rock formations or valleys that they name. The problem with “untenanted” named geographical spaces like the Mediterranean and the Sahara, however, is that they are not knowable in this manner; they are not humanisable because they are not dwellings. If space is truly claimed for man by naming it, then the Mediterranean’s lack of recognizable characteristics, its deficiency of recognizable dips or mountains or valleys in its surface to which humans might attribute a story, its dearth of orientations or spatiality independent of outside places, its scarcity of “humanised and familiar points of reference,” nullifies the cultural signification of that space, as the Mediterranean is never able to provide substantial signification for itself. Additionally, if an unnamed environment is “chaotic [and] lacking in orientation,” then the Sahara’s steadily shifting sands, where “the wind blew out one’s footsteps like candle-flames” (*Quartet* 278), where “one could not just walk into it for a stroll, for its shapes were always changing; at the least wind all contours changed, and one’s tracks were expunged at a breath” (*Quintet* 650), represents another un-knowable space. This lack of characteristics by which one might orient oneself introduces an absence of difference, the further lack of what Paul Carter calls “irriguous uncertainties of the ground that introduce us to the adventure [...] of engaging with in-between spaces” (Carter, *Lie* 5). Carter’s engagement with “in-between spaces” is travel. The deficiency of details found in the Mediterranean and the Sahara allow us to engage with these spaces only en route to other places of more “irriguous uncertainty” and knowable qualities.²¹

²⁰It is important at this point to recognize a derivation from the terminology of Heidegger: Relph and Dardel are both speaking of space with the expectation that it represent itself in the manner Heidegger expects place to represent itself. For Heidegger, the introduction of place also unidirectionally allows for spatiality. Relph and Dardel establish place as a component of spatiality.

²¹Yaacov Shavit writes of this Mediterranean instability, calling the sea “a singular instance of multiplicity and diversity [...] maintaining, over thousands of years, reciprocal relations, integration and acculturation, without either the multiplicity being impaired” (qtd. in Carlino 3). The instability Shavit writes of undoubtedly lends to the “uncertainty” common to in-between spaces, allowing for travel. Gil Hochberg suggests that the notion of travel is familiar in—and perhaps even native to—writing from the Levant: it “has always been transnational and has emphasized mobility. In contemporary Levantine literature, one immediately recognizes the emphasis put on transition and mobility” (Hochberg 237).

The Mediterranean and the Sahara are spaces that give way to other places—from Europe across the Mediterranean to Egypt, from Alexandria across the desert to Cairo and the rest of the Middle East, from West to East. Arnold van Gennep identifies territories like the sea and the desert as “neutral zones,” writing that whoever crosses such a zone “finds himself physically and magico-religiously in a special situation for a certain length of time: he wavers between two worlds” (van Gennep 18). Crossing the sea or the desert represents an unknowable transition, an Othering made anxious, challenged by an unknown and encroaching limit between. Not only is the sea or the desert neither *here* nor *there*, but the way in which the desert’s drifts challenge the sovereignty of the city’s edges, the way in which sands erode the carved edges of monuments, the way in which the sea is the means by which Alexandria is attacked in the war—all of these feats establish the sea and the desert as defiant of the fixity of knowable limits. At these points where cities come into contact with the shifting edges of the desert or the sea, they challenge the corporeality of those cities: the illusorily whole *topos* of the city is threatened at its point of definition, at “the limit of the enclosing body, at which it is in contact with that which is enclosed” (Malpas, “Uncovering” 215). James Gifford writes that challenged binaries (East/West, Self/Other, etc.) in Durrell’s novels represent a crisis of epistemology permeating these works (Gifford, “Reading” 1). When Durrell introduces such epistemological scepticism, he also challenges the absoluteness of established place. This enforced out-of-place-ness in turn establishes a discomfort with these open, unnameable spaces. Carter calls this discomfort agoraphobia, a loaded term signifying fear of space that is both “democratic [...] and] twinned with the wilderness” (Carter, *Repressed* 9). The Mediterranean and the Sahara are just such spaces: democratic because they are experienced from the vantage of the civilized places that space them in, and wild because they are unnameable. Thus, the desert is “inimical to [human] passion,” so pure it “flays the mind” (*Quartet* 266), and the sea is a “magic” frontier (*Greek Islands* 14) catalyst to immortality (*Quintet* 618).

The appellation of democratic wilderness is appropriate because the sea and the desert are both named (and hence peopled) but unknowable (wild) except by their ends, by the places from or to which travel commences, the places that “space them in” as *spatii* or *extensii*. The act of crossing over these spaces from one place to another is really the wholesale assumption of the properties of that other place. For this reason, Stefan Herbrechter writes that travel in relation to Durrell’s works “can only be experienced *après coup*” (Herbrechter, *Ethics* 256). This determination to know a space by its ends is why the “flowering meads of high Provence [...] gave place to the sadder, flatter plains of Camargue” and the “metalled road [of Alexandria] gave

place to the brown earth tracks” of the rural fringe of the desert (*Quintet* 1235, *Quartet* 251; emphases mine). The wealth of descriptions at the edge of spaces signals a desire to recognize the difference between designations; however, these borders are tellingly not spaces themselves. They are, instead, points at which one space “gives place” to another in sudden movements rather than through gradual displacement. If these frontiers are magical, it is because they introduce an immediacy of access to an Other separate from the self. Simply by entering into the democratic wildernesses of the Mediterranean or the Sahara, one opens oneself up to the interplay of competing *extensii*, the spaces of nearby places. Like the revealing of Alexandria for Darley and for Blanford, these places might at any time disclose themselves (the *world* might be *worlded*) in an explosive event (*Ereignis*), into which

everything disappears: everything (the work of art, world and thing, language, even, if we let go of our usual sense or command of things, ourselves)—everything withdraws or withholds itself, shows its reserve or self-standing (its lack of logical support). Everything is released from our control; nothing is as it was, everything (even Being) is otherwise, no longer speakable (cannot be put into statements). (Bruns 3)

Sacrapant comprehending the whole of Istanbul while crossing the Bosphorus is just such an event which language cannot articulate: witness his “incoherent cry of pleasure” (*Tunc* 109). Similarly in *Monsieur*, the guide’s “croak of relieved triumph” is in response to the sudden instigation of place brought about by the arrival of Akkad’s aircraft, which orders the wilderness of the desert (*Quintet* 99). Darley’s and Blanford’s journeys to Alexandria, too, end in darkness just outside the city, which they expect rather than recognize until the explosive moments of brightness, a brightness that subsumes everything else and in which the city makes its presence unignorable.

There remains a problem with this model of Heideggerian space, however. The cultural make-up of cities, especially those cities like Alexandria and Athens, is rarely a singular thing. While anxiety of the wildness and “nakedness of space” may be mitigated by conceptualising these geographical spaces as made of varying degrees of influences of the places on the rim, we still must ask the question of the border: to whom does it belong? De Certeau writes that the “river, wall or tree *makes* a frontier [...but] does not have the character of a nowhere that cartographical representation ultimately presupposes” (de Certeau 127). Rather, the borderland should become a subject in itself, articulating the likenesses of two lands, and becoming “a third element,” an “in-between,” a “space between” (127), what Edward Soja calls *Thirdspace* (Soja 2). As it stands, though traversable through the stepping-stones of cultural influences, the Mediterranean is still “a vast empty ante-room, a hollow bubble of blackness” (*Quartet* 667) about which little can be said. Moreover, the act of travel is not always one of transition of place if, as Durrell writes, the exile carries his country within

him (Alyn 25). The next section of the chapter will consider the active transition and communication of culture and identity in these hybrid places and peoples.

III Thirdplace: Extending the Frontiers

So much has been revealed to me by all this that I feel myself to be, as it were, standing upon the threshold of a new [...] Alexandria. [...] In the light of all these new treasures [...] what should I do? Extend the frontiers of original truth, filling in with the rubble of this new knowledge the foundations upon which to build a new Alexandria? (Quartet 338-39)

The above quote, from *Balthazar*, is Darley's reaction to the knowledge that Justine had never loved him. The information throws new light upon the events in his manuscript to *Justine*, setting off a chain reaction in which he reconsiders all he once thought he knew about his acquaintances and friends and the experiences he had in Alexandria. This reconsideration, in which the novelist does extend the "frontier of original truth," provides form to the tetralogy, which quickly overgrows the meagre size of its constituent four books to become something akin to Balthazar's "crabs in a basket" that crawl over one another, struggling for the top (*Quartet* 298). *Balthazar*, the revision of *Justine*, does not supersede the earlier book but instead exists alongside of it, subtly altering its contents in the same way that *Mountolive* amends and refigures the happenings of *Balthazar*. In the whole of *The Alexandria Quartet*, many conflicting revelations are never resolved; the result is a delicate simultaneity built upon the averages, interstices, interplay, and overlays of the contradictory versions. Michel de Certeau writes of a similar example of "exchanges and encounters," that it offers up a sort of "Middle place composed of interactions and inter-views" functioning as a "third element" (de Certeau 127). The interaction of the constituent parts of the *Quartet* is like this third element—or rather, for the *Quartet*, a fifth element. The inter-views afforded by the overlaying of perspectives look upon this Middle place, what Edward Soja calls Thirdspace. Theories of a third space/place/element, the whole of which being worth more than the sum of its differential parts, are practical to use when considering the hybrid places and peoples of Durrell's works.

Thirdspace

Soja establishes a hierarchy of perspective made of Firstspace, in which the "real" material world is the focus of study, Secondspace, in which the material world is filtered "through 'imagined' representations of spatiality," and Thirdspace, which builds upon and combines the other two spaces (Soja 6). This Thirdspace describes a collection of "real-and-imagined" places (6) that for Soja at once embody

subjectivity and objectivity, the abstract and the concrete, the real and the imagined, the knowable and the unimaginable, the repetitive and the differential, structure and agency, mind and body, consciousness and the unconscious, the disciplined and the transdisciplinary, everyday life and unending history. (56–57)

He takes the term from Homi Bhabha, who, regarding cultural hybridity, talks of a “third space” that “displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives, which are inadequately understood through received wisdom” (Bhabha, “Third” 211). The “third space”/Thirdspace, then, constitutes a situation that alters an understanding of those constituent parts. The process “gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognisable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation” (211). Elsewhere, he writes that the third space is a “space of translation: a place of hybridity, figuratively speaking, where the construction of a political object that is new, *neither the one nor the other*, properly alienates our political expectations” (Bhabha, *Location* 25).

The idea of Thirdspace is theoretically rich, but it is not merely abstract. Jonathan Rutherford offers the example of identity being comprised of an interplay of class and gender, writing that it “is not reducible to the single logic of class” and that class must instead be considered (not merely) along with (but also in a mutually-influenced relationship to) gender, among other things: “our class subjectivities do not simply co-exist alongside our gender. Rather our class is gendered and our gender is classed” (Rutherford 19). This same example is used by Bhabha, who writes that in moving beyond these simple, singular identifications of class and gender, an “awareness of the subject positions—of race, gender, generation, institutional location, geopolitical locale, sexual orientation—that inhabit any claim to identity in the modern world” is opened up. This awareness, however, is not enough; rather, he calls upon us “to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences” (Bhabha, *Location* 1). The practice of combining two terms into a third (“gendered class” and “classed gender” being different than “gender and/or class”) Bhabha and Rutherford both call *articulation*, identifying the term as one originating in the work of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. Laclau and Mouffe further define articulation as “any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice” (Laclau and Mouffe 105), and Bhabha identifies difference (possessive of “a cutting edge, a limit” and “a position of liminality [...and] the spirit of alterity”) as “the all-important *articulating world*” (Bhabha, “Third” 209, 213).

The all-importance of difference signals its necessity in a relationship of articulation. The balanced difference among the stories of *Justine*, *Balthazar*, *Mountolive*, and *Clea* allows the four to articulate the *Quartet*, in which none is predominant. The tetralogy is, in a sense, composed of a *Balthazar*-ed *Justine* (a refiguring of *Justine* in light of *Balthazar*), a *Justine*-d *Balthazar* (a *Balthazar* interpreted in light of *Justine*), and so forth. Culture, too, in the books is composed of overlapping meanings and identifications.

Cities and Citizens

Bhabha writes that “all forms of culture are continually in a process of hybridity” (211). The culture of Alexandria and its inhabitants is no exception; on the contrary, it would appear that Alexandria’s hybridity is especially foregrounded in Durrell’s works. It is much more than the city centered by the Soma and the Brokers’ Club: it is made of “a thousand dust-tormented streets”; it is peopled with “[f]lies and beggars [...] and those who enjoy an intermediate existence between either”; culturally, its inhabitants are of “[f]ive races, five languages, a dozen creeds [...] and more than five sexes” (*Quartet* 17). Durrell offers a list of some of these races and languages later in the *Quartet*:

Fragments of every language—Armenian, Greek, Amharic, Moroccan Arabic; Jews from Asia Minor, Pontus, Georgia: mothers born in Greek settlements on the Black Sea; communities cut down like the branches of trees, lacking a parent body, dreaming of Eden. (56–57)

But there does seem to be some parent body to the constituent cultures of Alexandria: the city’s eclecticism is due in large part to its position on the rim of the Mediterranean, the long-historical crossroads of various societies. Durrell writes of the sea at Alexandria in a letter to Henry Miller in which he automatically juxtaposes its description with a listing of its cultural influences: “A sea flat dirty brown and waveless rubbing the port. Arabic, Coptic, Greek, Levant French” (*Durrell-Miller* 168). Historically Greek but geographically Egyptian, Alexandria alternates between the “free Hellenic world” and the Orient (*Quartet* 18), among other worlds. Elsewhere in the *Quartet*, Durrell writes of

the reality of Alexandria, a city at once sacred and profane; between Theocritus, Plotinus, and the Septuagint one moves on intermediate levels, which are those of race as much as anything—like saying Copt, Greek and Jew or Moslem, Turk and Armenian. ...Am I wrong? These are the slow accretions of time itself on place. (338)

Alexandria is a kind of cultural free-town. Its association with the sea—an amalgam of influences—works against any attempts to essentialize fully or to work the place into

a too-simplified regional metaphor of the Orient or of antiquity. The intermediate levels of race or religion (with inhabitants at once “Copt, Greek and Jew” or at once “Moslem, Turk and Armenian”) permeate the citizens as much as the city. Justine, for example, is an Arab Jew married to a Copt; moreover, she is modelled in part upon Durrell’s second wife, Yve “Gipsy” Cohen, who is a faithful Alexandrine: “As a barefoot child of Tunisian Jewish parents, mother Greek from Smyrna, father Jew from Carthage, she has seen the inside of Egypt to the last rotten dung-blown flap of obscenity” (*Durrell-Miller* 169–170). Inheriting such a legacy from her real-life counterpart, Justine is a “true child of Alexandria; which is neither Greek, Syrian nor Egyptian, but a hybrid: a joint” (*Quartet* 28).

As such, she exudes that hybridity identified by Bhabha as “a difference ‘within’, a subject that inhabits the rim of an ‘in-between’ reality” (Bhabha, *Location* 13). This “difference within” is native to all citizens of in-between Alexandria—in-between not merely because it is at the edge of the Oriental world, at the boundary from which Heidegger might say the Orient “*begins its presencing*” (Heidegger 154), and not merely because it is a city with two “centres of gravity—the true and magnetic north of its personality: and between them the temperament of its inhabitants sparked harshly like a leaky electric charge” (*Quartet* 38), but in-between also because of that sparking character made up of its multitude of interacting (and articulating) identities.

Indeed, this difference within is native (though perhaps not as noticeable) to all citizens of Durrell’s in-between Mediterranean, which is both etymologically and semantically approximate to de Certeau’s “middle place.”²² In *The Revolt of Aphrodite*, for example, Baum fears a business proposal he is to make to Turkish leaders in Istanbul, citing what he supposes to be extreme alterity (“The Turks are Moslems and deeply religious—suppose we start a holy war without meaning to, eh? [...] How, for example, will all this stuff translate into Turkish, eh? One doesn’t know.”), but when the meeting goes well, he credits the growing Westernisation of the country: “After all Turkey abolished the fez out of a desire to make itself a modern state, and then the Latin alphabet replacing the Arabic...” (*Nunquam* 221–222, 240). Additionally, Jocas’ Bible is covered in layers of multi-coloured wax (symbolising the accumulation of multiple influences), and he solicits prophecies from Zeno, a Greek mystic (232). Greece, too, is allowed its Oriental influence (233). None of these places is left untouched by the influence of nearby cultures.

²²The Sahara, though a “middle place” and a cultural thoroughfare is not so significant from a Eurocentric viewpoint; lined with trails “which had been used for centuries by the caravans which plied between Algiers and Mecca,” the desert is mostly the meeting point of various cultures that, relative to Durrell’s oeuvre, figure merely as Oriental or African (266–267). For more on the figure of the desert in Durrell’s writing, see Ahmed Hussein’s *The Representation of the Arab World*, 90–152.

A Private Country

In Avignon, on the other hand, any difference within is manifest mostly as the penetration of gipsies into the city, a fundamentally physical representation of a political matter. Felix Chatto, wandering through Avignon one night, comes across an encampment of gipsies situated in

a fitting place for the enactment of mischief, a corner made for throat-slitting, settling of accounts and active whoring. The gipsies had not been slow to find it and to settle on it—in defiance of the law which from time to time ordered them to leave. In vain. (*Quintet* 381)

Later, the procession of gipsies streaming through Provence is described in a manner that presents the exhaustive multiplicity of their origins: they arrive in “swarthy columns of ‘Greek’ and ‘Egyptian’ and ‘Romanian’ and ‘Bulgarian’ gipsies, each tribe with its characteristic music and avocation—basketwork for the ‘French’, pots and pans for the ‘Greek’ farriers” (1236). They arrive in carriages reminiscent of places like Sicily and England (1236), bring goods like “coloured napkins from Turkey or Yugoslavia” (1351), and the parade of the *gardiens* is the “Orient answering the Occident, East mingling with West” (1250).

In these examples, the gipsies are presented as having no national identity in themselves and as being at the edge of the identities with which they do engage: the inverted commas around the nationalities—“‘Greek’ and ‘Egyptian’ and ‘Romanian’ and ‘Bulgarian’”—indicate some necessity of ironic qualification. Moreover, they live in the undesirable areas of the city and internalize an immediate and unavoidable externality. For this reason, they are mistrusted. Indeed, Blanford, recounting their history, tells how they faced widespread mistreatment and were “enslaved, tortured, often put to death: their lives were worth nothing” (1236–1237). In the context of the end of World War II, such violence resonates also with that faced by the Jews. Sabine, the *Quintet*’s Oxford-educated Jew-turned-gipsy, recognizes the shared untouchability of the two races and contemplates the inter-identification available to the two races: “I was spellbound by the self-evident fact that I *was* a gipsy—the whole of European culture slid from my shoulders like a cloak.” Continuing in her consideration of the untouchable, she talks of India, Spain, Central Europe, and the horrors of sickness and economic instability before asking, “But where does it come from, the ethnic puzzle? Even Freud did not know, I found” (1240).

Sabine’s ethnic puzzle requires one to recognize and hold all of its pieces to understand how they fit into one another. The Prince provides us with just one piece of the puzzle:

in Egypt they [the gipsies] are a sly and slippery folk—and their name is apparently derived from *gypt*, which is “us”. If they are, as you say,

unchangeable it is because they *are* change. They are like water and will take any shape, but always stay the same. (1234)

The “sly and slippery” nature of the gipsies is especially disconcerting when they are considered to be an “us” of the cultures into which they introduce their change. Though not by definition truly “Greek,” “Romanian,” “Sicilian,” or “French,” there is something of the gipsies from those regions—there is something of the “curious constant factor that we discern behind the word ‘Greeknness’” (“Landscape” 156)—that causes Durrell to differentiate them as such, if only to a degree. Moreover, if they do originate in Egypt, as the Prince seems to imply, the difference between gipsy culture and Provençal culture describes a trans-Mediterranean movement contrary to that of Blanford. To the residents of Avignon and Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer in south-eastern France, the gipsies problematize the Mediterranean-as-border by providing example of its permeability. Even the Prince’s wording to describe the protean nature of the gipsies—“like water”—recalls that nearby Greek sea, and the catalogue of places with which the gipsies identify all share a relative proximity to its shores.

Sabine herself provides another piece of the puzzle when she refers to Freud. In *Moses and Monotheism*, Freud presents his theory on the origination of Judaism, arguing that Moses, despite Judaic tradition’s claims otherwise, was Egyptian by birth: “Moses is an Egyptian—probably of noble origin—whom the myth undertakes to transform into a Jew” (Freud, *Moses* 22). Moreover, Freud argues that the religion Moses imparts upon the Jewish people is Egyptian as well (31). And yet, having identified Judaism as Egyptian, he also puts Jews under the larger umbrella of Mediterranean culture, with the same gesture finding similarity with the identity of Europe and Europeanism to which they are opposed. By tying the fate of the Mediterranean world so inextricably with that of the European tradition, Freud recognizes the influence the sea has had in the formation of the continent. Likewise, by referencing Freud’s theories on ethnicity, Sabine calls out the shared non-European nature of gipsies and Jews. Edward Said recognizes in Freud’s writing an idea of an “irremediably diasporic, unhoused character” that “in our age of vast population transfers, of refugees, exiles, expatriates and immigrants, [...] can also be identified in the diasporic, wandering, unresolved, cosmopolitan consciousness of someone who is both inside and outside his or her community” (Said, *Freud* 53). The characters of the Jew and the gipsy both trouble the European for this unresolved consciousness. They signify the *topos* of the European nature, the point of contact, the limit between that which is European and that which is non-European.

In an interview with Marc Alyn, Durrell identifies himself as an exile and an expatriate, defining the latter as one who “carries his country with him, inside him:

everywhere belongs to him, because he belongs nowhere" (Alyn 25). As exiles or expatriates of sorts, the Jew and the gipsy present a unique case when considering Malpas' definition of *topos*; while the European is enclosed within the idea of Europe, the Jew or gipsy inverts this containment by respectively embodying the ideas of Judaism or gipsy-ness. Heidegger, too, recalls the importance of the boundary in defining a space:

A space is something that has been made room for, something that is cleared and free, namely within a boundary, Greek *peras*. A boundary is not that at which something stops but, as the Greeks recognized, the boundary is that from which something *begins its presencing*. (Heidegger 154)

By carrying their own private countries within them, these exiles' sense of travel is one of representing difference, rather than merely encountering it. In the *Quintet* especially, the gipsy projects this otherworldly difference upon Avignon or Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer or even, by the Prince's own testimony, Egypt. They are portrayed as a frontier of culture—as a beginning of the presencing of change—at which the difference of these identities is recognizable.

Darley, upon recognizing the discrepancies in his manuscript of *Justine*, decides to extend "the frontiers of original truth" to build a new Alexandria upon the foundations of the old. So too must the frontier of Europe be extended upon recognizing that frontier within the Jew and the gipsy. The Mediterranean or the Sahara, while limits to the cultures which edge them, influence as much as they are influenced. The *extensio* of the Mediterranean can exert its own influence, its own *extensii*, through an amalgam of Mediterranean qualities articulated by heterogeneous cultures (such as that of the Jew or the gipsy) upon the neighbouring shores. The frontier extends into the enclosed body. As such, the Jew and the gipsy represent the very heart of the crisis in epistemology Gifford finds in Durrell's novels. The East mingling with the West in the parade of the *gardiens* is a challenge to old notions of European identity; at the same time, this mingling presents new possibilities, new interactions, and new territory for communication. They fashion a third space, the possibility of there being a "neither the one nor the other" within the One, by introducing the all-important articulating world of difference. As Said writes, "identity cannot be thought or worked through itself alone." Rather, it needs that "radical originary break or flaw" of difference to stand as a whole unit (Said, *Freud* 54). The "third space" fashioned as such is unique for its ability to stand on its own as a whole unit, and not as a space fashioned by a particular place.

In the historical context of the novels set in the shadow of WWII, these hybrid peoples, exiles and expatriates in the strictest sense, and the cities they populate serve as

an antidote to the bleak narcissism of self-discovery's inward motion. They broadcast difference, giving place to relationships of articulation; they *are* change. In colonizing the Middle Ground or Thirdspace these hybrid peoples and places extend the frontiers to being more than boundaries of enclosure or beginning. These limits, situated as they are in the domestic wilderness of the Mediterranean Sea, the Sea in the Middle of Durrell's World, are not just the beginnings of presencing; they are also the location of the interface of difference and articulation, but in an influencing, self-sufficient way. Bhabha's Third Space becomes, in a manner, a Heideggerian Third Place of the Durrellian Mediterranean, a place whose *extensii* enclose the various locales of Alexandria, Avignon, Istanbul, Athens, and Rhodes. The Spirit of the Landscape of the Mediterranean functions to infect and comment upon the "curious constant factor" of the Places for which the cities, events, and peoples are merely fauna. The next chapter will project this sense of landscape, the three-dimensional construction of the Mediterranean, into a depiction of the fourth dimension of time.

CHAPTER 4

The Viscera of Time

We...date things publicly, as it were, and by each other. The notion of one objective and "evenly flowing" time, cut into numbered instants, applies itself as a common measure to all the steps and phases, no matter how many, into which we cut the processes of nature. They are now definitely contemporary, or later or earlier one than another, and we can handle them mathematically, as we say, and far better, practically as well as theoretically, for having thus correlated them one to one with each other on the common schematic or conceptual time-scale.

(A Pluralistic Universe 232–233)

All the writing which I had borrowed from the living and the dead, until I myself had become a sort of postscript to a letter which was never ended, never posted... *(Clea 11)*

In *Clea*, Durrell finally frees the hand of time, returning Darley to Alexandria after a span of years to interact, once more, with the city and her citizens rather than inhabiting the capital of memory only mentally. This final book of the *Quartet* stretches the first three dimensions forward into the fourth, coming to terms—at least by the book's end—with the effects of time, and learning to inhabit and enact the *happening* rather than the *happened*. Durrell affects *The Alexandria Quartet* to be a romance built upon a literary representation of his understanding of Albert Einstein's theories of time and relativity, finding in the theory of space-time "the greatest Boy meets Girl story of the age" (*Quartet* 306). Though *The Alexandria Quartet* purports to laud this "Space and Time marriage" (306), the challenging representations of time in those novels nevertheless intimates a rocky home life rather than wedded bliss; indeed, Durrell's negotiations and renegotiations with chronological ordering, cyclical historicity, and temporal potentiality in *all* of his later novels deserve critical consideration.

A vital element of each of the settings he chooses for these novels, for example, is the historic importance and the antiquity of each site. Alexandria, far from merely an amalgam of culture on Egypt's Mediterranean coast, is also the modern threshold of extreme antiquity, the doorway through which Durrell—and Darley, Bruce, et al.—accesses the timeless Spirit of Place shared by Cleopatra and Clea alike. The Parthenon, too, lends its extreme age to every scene in Durrell's Athens in the same way that Istanbul's cemeteries and Avignon's bridge and papal complex inform their

respective cities, imposing respective times past upon respective practiced place.¹ In reading Durrell's construction of a literary world, one might be forgiven in confusing time and space, a distinction which even the residents of such a world often confuse.²

Apart from the historical significance of these settings, the novels of Durrell's "opus" all problematize time—that which Tarquin claims goes through us and that which we "are running through [...] without realizing" (*Black Book* 203), what Baltazar identifies as the medium in which truth most contradicts itself (*Quartet* 216), the ever-distant flux that Charlock seeks to master (*Tunc* 13), the authority of which Blanford casts off, and that which Durrell calls in his *Key to Modern Poetry* "the measure of our death-consciousness" (*Key* 23). To approach an understanding of Durrell's differential views of this fourth dimension, this chapter will first look at the critical influences he cites in his *Key* before, in its body, considering three approaches to the later three series.

A Key to Time

As part of the literary scope of his essay *Key to Modern Poetry*, Durrell examines modern shifts in the understanding of time in the popular consciousness. The Victorians, he writes, believed that the earth "had been created about 4,000 B.C. by God, and was more or less as we see it today." The rise of geology challenged those beliefs, and Darwin's theory of evolution upset the hierarchy of time even further, allowing for man to be as old as 100,000 years (15–16). Archaeology, too, uncovered reality hidden beneath Classical literature. Subsequently, "the civilization of Europe [...] began to look remote and tiny set against the historical perspectives opened up," and "the history of man on earth [...] began to appear of negligible importance" (16). These vast shifts in understanding changed even further with the introduction of Einstein's theory of Relativity. After Einstein, Durrell writes, the subject-object hierarchy is lost, and science can no longer claim to seek objective truth, as truth is no longer considered objective;³ the world as we think we know it becomes something impenetrable. Scientific absolutism, newly blossomed in the Victorian age, begins to wither on the stem (21). Moreover, after Einstein, time is a dimension of, rather than an afterthought to,

¹London, too, is identified by its *lack* of such ties to the past: it is the "brave new chrysadimantine world" (*Tunc* 173). This extreme modern element of that city might, in part, lead to what Kaczvinsky finds to be a preponderance of schizophrenia ("the loss of the sense of history on the individual and cultural level") in the *Revolt* (Kaczvinsky, "Postmodern Society" 65).

²In *Prospero's Cell*, Durrell claims that Corfiots determine distance by a measure of (albeit spatialized) time: "Ask a peasant how far a village is and he will reply, nine times out of ten, that it is a matter of so many cigarettes" (*Prospero* 27).

³It is likely Durrell is confusing Einstein's theory of Relativity with Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle.

space, in the same way that space is a dimension of time—or rather, they are both dimensions of space-time. As Durrell writes, “This completely revolutionized our whole attitude to the universe” (23).

As proof of his thesis of time being a measure of death-consciousness, Durrell highlights notable cases of literary foregrounding of death-obsession in Joyce, Woolf, and Eliot, saying that as modern philosophies of time have changed, so do these changes affect our modern notion of death—and life: “Time is one of the great clues to the modern outlook” (23). Darwinian evolution, archaeological discoveries, and Einsteinian relativity may have shaped the modern outlook to be conspicuously different from that of the past, profoundly altering the ways we think about religion, history and geology, and perspective, but scientific progress is not the only thing altering our views of time (and, by association, life). Industrialized expectations of time management and clock-time oblige us to break time into discrete units where before it had been a flowing medium: as Durrell quotes H. V. Routh, “modern man is tempted, almost compelled, to regulate this idea (Time) by the face of a clock and the pages of a calendar” (Routh qtd. in 24). This industrialized expectation of universal regulation of time by clock and calendar is an unfulfilling one for “modern man,” who cannot reconcile the rigidity of such systems with

what passes in his own head. [This system] suggests or confirms the fiction that life is a sequence of continuous yet distinct moments, a perpetual birth of instantaneous impressions, whereas all artistic and imaginative experience insists that life as we perceive it is duration. (Routh qtd. in 24)

Life as we perceive it—the qualifying phrase “as we perceive it” is as important as “life” itself—is an exploration common to all of Durrell’s novels. That time somehow factors into Durrell’s poetic equations is not surprising; however, the manner in which it factors into everyday living, evolving from book to book, can be remarkable.

Time and Western Man

At the end of his “Preface” to his *Key*, Durrell names Wyndham Lewis’s *Time and Western Man* as an “admirable survey” that he has used “to formulate some of my own vague ideas” about time (xi–xii), recommending the book for anyone newly come to the subject. Lewis himself excuses his work from its beginning, calling it a work of belief. At the same time he says that it is as far as one can go to write a work on reality: “For the understanding of ‘reality,’ and to get at the meaning of the problem suggested by the term ‘reality,’ there is no term so important as ‘belief.’ *Reality* is in fact simply *belief*” (Lewis, *Time and Western Man* 351).⁴ The purpose of his book,

⁴For more on this relationship of *belief* and *reality*, see also Peirce, “Of Reality,” or the discussion thereof in Chapter 2.

then, is to examine beliefs of reality, despite the potentially paradoxical position of *reality* being “simply a way of describing our capacity for belief, and the things in which we believe” (351). Lewis’s book presents a philosophy of time and civilization by examining and commenting on the beliefs of reality (and reality of beliefs) held by various thinkers and writers. The section of the book on time focuses primarily on three persons: Albert Einstein, Oswald Spengler, and Henri Bergson.

According to Lewis, one of Einstein’s particular fortunes was in founding a theoretical principle whose rudiments were easily adopted by inexpert audiences. The common, unspecialized person knows more about Einstein’s relativity theory, Lewis writes, “than any layman has ever known about the Newtonian cosmology, either during Newton’s lifetime or since” (137). It has entered the popular consciousness and shaped it more than can be measured.⁵ Spengler, on the other hand, is seen by Lewis as one who champions history disproportionately over all else: “The Theory of Quanta, the Evolutionary theory of Darwin, the music of Wagner and Weber, a Dresden Shepherdess, El Greco and Einstein—[...] At bottom there is really no physics, no art, no philosophy, only *politics* and *history*” (Lewis, *Time and Western Man* 129–130). In Lewis’s opinion, for Spengler the historical context of any event ultimately overshadows the immediate implications of that event. He is “of the widely-held belief that everything whatever—as much a scientific theory as the hat you wear—is a phenomenon of fashion, a Time-phenomenon—a ‘history,’ and not a ‘truth,’ whatever its pretensions to be the latter” (258). He is “very exactly the philosopher of *Zeitgeist*,” finding the context of historical period crucial to the understanding and even creation of everything (258), disallowing, to the dismay of Lewis, for true creativity. In his examination of Bergson, Lewis returns from *history* to a metaphysics of time. Like Einstein, Bergson enjoyed popular recognition, even to the point of (though a philosopher) most likely having been read by Einstein himself: “That Einstein [...] had not at least read the work of Bergson, and formed some opinion upon it, favourable or otherwise, is unlikely, to say the least” (139). Lewis is decidedly less approving of Bergson than he is of Einstein, though. “Bergson discovered nothing,” he writes; “he interpreted science; and he gave it an extremely biassed opinion” (153). Lewis echoes (and quotes) the sentiments of Bertrand Russell, who writes that in Bergson’s system, “The beliefs of today may count as true today, if they carry us along the stream; but tomorrow they will be false, and must be replaced by new beliefs to meet the new

⁵Alan J. Friedman and Carol C. Donley write of Einstein’s intense lecture tour of the US, England, and France, suggesting that Einstein’s *image* and carriage as much as his theoretical rigor were responsible for the mounting popularity of the scientist (and popularization of his theories): “Einstein did much to popularize the new physics [...] His shaggy and ruffled Chaplinesque appearance endeared him to photographers and cartoonists while his natural openness won his listeners” (Friedman and Donley 17–18).

situation" (Russell qtd. in 190). For Lewis, whose beliefs create the kind of reality to which they are native, such an irresolute system is not desirable.

Inasmuch as Durrell cites Lewis's *Time and Western Man* as a good introduction to ideas of time and Lewis cites the work of these three intellectuals as worthy of (varying degrees of) study, this chapter will consider these philosophers of time alongside Durrell's books in which their influence is most obviously shown. In doing so, we can develop an idea of the meaning of time in Durrell's novels, pointing out discrepancies and new overlaps to arrive at a more complete theory of what time means—or does—in the body of his work. The first section will consider Durrell's *The Alexandria Quartet* with the theories of Einstein, the second section will look at *The Revolt of Aphrodite* with the notions of Spengler, and the third will focus upon *The Avignon Quintet* along with the ideas of Bergson. Each section will also highlight the means by which Durrell's texts interpret respective approaches of time to be transitory or unstable: Einstein's continuum in the *Quartet* problematizing a construction of past/future, the *Revolt* breaking free of its Spenglerian destiny by casting off memory and achieving the pure present of the Classical culture, and the *Quintet* emphasizing Bergson's present being one formed by an inextricable connection to the past. Finally, the chapter will speculate on the consequence of Bergsonian action in all of the works, arguing that each claims for itself a purity of the present, celebrating the indeterminacy between past and future.

1 A Word Continuum

The fourth novel of Durrell's *Quartet* opens with a note further outlining the full structure of Durrell's Alexandrian tetralogy, previously explained in *Balthazar*: "Together the novels constitute 'The Alexandria Quartet'; a suitable descriptive subtitle would be a 'word continuum'" (*Clea* 5). In this continuum, the aspect of time mixes freely with those of space. This section will first examine the temporal free-association in the *Quartet* before considering Durrell's ostensible source for his model of the continuum, the work of Albert Einstein, to qualify the level of success he has in such an undertaking.

The Alexandria Quartet

Darley begins the *Quartet* on an island away from the city, chronologically later than the events of the story he writes. He describes approaching the writing of his manuscript as if he were mentally revisiting Alexandria: "I return link by link along the iron chains of memory to the city which we inhabited" (*Quartet* 17). Moreover,

his temporal distance from Alexandrian life is mirrored by his physical distance from the city, both of which are necessary to encapsulate fully the entirety of his story: "I have had to come so far away from it in order to understand it all!" and "I had to come here in order completely to rebuild this city in my brain" (17, 18).

These first scenes of island life are written along a temporal line separate from the time of the rest of the book. Gérard Genette (citing Gunther Müller) calls this original time *Erzählzeit*, or narrative time. It is the time of the teller of the story, and as it represents itself as the time of the author—that is, a time outside the *histoire*, though it is in fact a part of the time of the book, a "false time standing in for a true time"—he classes it a *pseudo-time* (Genette 33–34). It is also the *first narrative*, the temporal level from which we gain our footing and from which we can follow later temporal acrobatics (48).

Darley is careful to represent this time with certainty by describing things in the present tense ("The sea is high again today"), designating the succession of seasons ("In the midst of winter you can feel the inventions of Spring"), and repeatedly distancing himself from the past ("I have escaped," "such a remote place," "I have had to come so far away from it") (*Quartet* 17). Once he establishes *Erzählzeit*, however, he uses it as the port from which to launch his manuscript and its corresponding *erzählte Zeit*, the temporal line of the story he tells (Genette 33). Easing into more poetic prose, he introduces notes to himself that might help him with writing, establishing a gentle break from the time of the island. The notes expand into analepsis, or flashback (40), taking focus from the narrative as temporally non-localizable (and non-tensed) details of the landscape slowly give way to more specific descriptions of discrete moments: "a whore walks in a dark street at night," people begin to search each other out in cafés, and backgammon-playing boys "stir uneasily" (*Quartet* 18).

By this point in the text, the temporal assurance of Darley's island haven is out of reach: he has momentarily surrendered the present tense of island life to the present tense of living memory. The tenseless list of landscape tones—breathless fragments of description—"inflames" his memory (or so the text would suggest) so that "the flesh comes alive, trying the bars of its prison." The city, no longer complacent in its secondary existence, infiltrates the first narrative, and (in recognizing particular cafés as ones "where Balthazar went so often with the old poet of the city") even introduces further derivative temporality (18).

The text shimmers between *Erzählzeit* and *erzählte Zeit* before settling for the latter in the rest of the book, interrupted only by occasional present-tense references to the time of the manuscript's creation, the time of the narrating: "I am thinking back to the time when [...]" (21); "I record this [...]" (25); and

These are the moments which possess the writer [...] and which live on perpetually. One can return to them time and time again in memory, or use them as a fund upon which to build the part of one's life which is writing. (27)

These and other narratorial comments aside, the greater form of the text is analeptic, focusing on events that take place in a past that supersedes the present of island life, before returning to *Erzählzeit* in the end. Just as, in the beginning of the book, the firings of memory lead Darley into his manuscript and the tense of a former time, at the end of the book "memories are already refunding themselves slowly into forgetfulness," leading Darley into the tense of the present and future: "soon it will be evening and the clear night sky will be dusted" with stars (195). Again, the passage of island-time is an attempt to actualize the pseudo-time of the narrator: while Darley begins writing in late winter, he ends *Justine* in the summer. Even though the beginning and end of the analeptic manuscript dovetail almost seamlessly with the first narrative, the secondary status of that *erzählte Zeit* is never in doubt. For the bulk of the book, it might take on the role of first narrative in introducing or leading into derivative temporalities, but time still passes (in the present tense) for Darley, the author-narrator, writing on his remote island.

In *Balthazar* and *Clea*, Darley further memorializes the ancient city, characterizing it in one as something that begins and ends in "us, roots lodged in our memory" (209), and in the other as "the capital of memory!" (657). As he does in *Justine*, Darley begins *Balthazar* from a distance. Writing about his friends—"[d]ispersed now by time and circumstance"—is an attempt to "reinstate them in memory, allot to each his and her position in my time" (210). Darley admits that the act of writing about another time becomes a subjective assertion of his own time, but he also recognizes the truth in Pursewarden's lesson: "We live [...] lives based on selected fictions. Our view of reality is conditioned by our position in space and time [...]. Thus every interpretation of reality is based upon a unique position" (210). After *Balthazar's* Interlinear, the only value to the manuscript of *Justine* can be as a means for Darley to come to terms with his own perspective, his own unique position in space and time—a position which is definitively opposed to the one he once had in Alexandria.

Justine and *Balthazar*, then, are texts that define Darley's position. Alexandria is physically and temporally distant, accessible only through Darley's admittedly limited recollections of what his perspective *had been*. In both texts, analepses of Alexandrian life comprise the bulk of what we would traditionally say the novels are *about* (their *histoire*),⁶ but these analepses are increasingly problematized—initially by the accen-

⁶Citing Roland Barthes, Marta Dahlgren notes the equivalence of *reading* to the "successful decoding of a message" (Dahlgren 74).

tuated distance between first and second narratives and then by the mounting encroachment of the *Erzählzeit*'s narratorial doubt upon the domain of the *erzählte Zeit*. Eventually, Darley abandons the task of a truthful representation of reality for a plausible representation of a possible series of circumstances. The ostensible objectivity of his own perception is replaced by Balthazar's reporting for much of *Balthazar*—"So much have I reconstructed from the labyrinth of notes which Balthazar has left me" (*Quartet* 275)—and by his own invention in other parts: "Shall I reconstruct it—the scene I see so clearly, and which his few crabbed words in green ink have detonated in my imagination?" (314). By being texts that define Darley's position, they are also texts that define the limits of that position. Balthazar seems to suggest that for a text to be as accurate as it can be, it must recognize these limits, though full accuracy is never possible.

Mountolive introduces a new model to challenge that of the first two novels' limited authorial perspective. Written from an omniscient third-person perspective, this third book disregards any earlier troubles of questionable accuracy. Moreover, though the *Erzählzeit* seems to be similar to that of Darley's first two books as it uses the past tense, little can be said about the writer's "position in space and time." Certainly, as the narrator of *Mountolive* is non-localizable, his position within the field of relativity is also unknown; we can only assume that this writer's version has as many limitations in it as do the others. Nevertheless, in presenting a seemingly complete version of memorialized Alexandria, a version lacking the level of irony and purposeful invention found in *Balthazar*, the text playfully ignores the lessons of that earlier book. As one of the psychologist Balthazar's more famous truisms states, "Truth is what most contradicts itself in time" (216). The passing of time, a component of every perspective, represents a passing of every corresponding perspective; the perceived truth of these perspectives, Balthazar seems to be saying, will also pass. Aware of this paradox of writing in *Balthazar*, Darley amends his text to be less an encapsulation of the past and more an invention and artifact of the present. As Balthazar's Interlinear, "cross-hatched, crabbed, starred with questions and answers in different-coloured inks, in typescript," seems to vibrate with change, it is to Darley "somehow symbolic of the very reality" of Alexandria (215). *Mountolive*, unquestioning, like Darley's manuscript to *Justine*, is another singular perspective that will pass.

Clea is the passing of that perspective. In his note to the fourth novel, Durrell writes that it is a sequel to the previous three novels, the only one in which time will be allowed to have passed in Alexandria since Darley left it before *Justine*. Early in the novel, Darley writes that he "had been forced to admit defeat on paper" regarding his original aspirations to "re-work reality." In this admission, he has gained what he calls an "increase" in his character, a new understanding of the nature of time and change

(657–658). Alexandria is still an “ancient city” and “the pith of memory” (657) it always has been in the *Quartet*, but in *Clea* the passing of time leads to another kind of change. In the fourth book, Darley writes entirely in the past tense, and he ends the novel with the revelation of one day having “found myself writing down [...] the old story of an artist coming of age” (877). This story of an artist coming of age is presumably the same story—the failed manuscript written in *Justine*, corrected throughout *Balthazar*, presented in *Mountolive*, and revisited in *Clea*—of the *Quartet*, the experiencing of which transforms Darley into the artist come of age: “the act of writing had in itself brought me [...] way to begin living” (658).⁷

Interestingly, in this course of Darley’s transition into his art, he also increasingly distances himself from the story he tells. In *Justine*, Darley is on an island, writing confidently in the present tense about writing. From the first sentence, beginning “The sea is high again today” (17), he places himself resolutely between the story and his telling of it. There is a Darley who has experienced Alexandria, he seems to say, and I am that Darley writing you this book. The beginning of *Balthazar*, however, is more like *Justine*’s unstable first transition into analepsis: in *Justine*, we find “Notes for landscape-tones.... Long sequences of tempera” followed by a list of verbless descriptions (18), while in *Balthazar* we are immediately introduced to “Landscape-tones: brown to bronze, steep skyline, low cloud” followed by another list of verbless descriptions (209). The temporal form found in *Justine* is projected onto the *Quartet* at large. Just as in *Justine* the text uses the device of tenseless, descriptive lists to elide the transition from present into past tense, *Balthazar* begins the transition in the *Quartet* from present to past, shifting from *Justine*’s obvious temporality in the present of Darley’s island to the past tense of *Mountolive*. *Mountolive*, absent of Darley’s narrative voice (and any corresponding narratorial present tense) but presumably written from the same temporal vantage, eventually gives way to *Clea*, in which the narrator is able to speak of the text’s future: in *Clea* he is a narrator from a later temporality than we ever see in the text.

While *Clea* presents a fully transitioned past tense and the narrative voice of a come-of-age Darley, that first sentence of *Justine* marks the beginning of the transition to be carried throughout the *Quartet*. Typical of a transition, there is the betwixt-and-between of Turner, the combined neither-nor *and* both-and of unsettled matters. For example, in *Justine*, Darley substitutes what might be either iterative analepses for scenes of specificity or scenes of specificity for synechdochic example—or both:

Six o’clock. The shuffling of white-robed figures from the station yards.
The shops filling and emptying like lungs in the Rue des Soeurs. The

⁷Here, again, we can recognize in Darley’s statement the affirmation of his artistic subjectivity, discussed in Chapter 1.

pale lengthening rays of the afternoon sun smear the long curves of the Esplanade, and the dazzled pigeons, like rings of scattered paper, climb above the minarets to take the last rays of the waning light on their wings. [...] This is the hour least easy to bear, when from my balcony I catch an unexpected glimpse of her walking idly towards the town in her white sandals, still half asleep. (*Justine* 19)⁸

It is difficult to determine whether the “Six o’clock” of this scene describes a specific morning or a typical one. Present participles and tense suggest the timelessness of generality, but details like the timing of “Now tired men throw back the shutters of their balconies” yet allow room for specificity (22).

This particular scene comes soon after Darley mentions the beginning of his love affair with Melissa, describing how he had seen her “daily for many months on end” (21), but the scene does not name Melissa explicitly. The next scene seems a continuation, but it is not unambiguously so:

I have had many such glimpses of her at different times, and of course I knew her well by sight long before we met: our city does not permit anonymity to any with incomes of over two hundred pounds a year. I see her sitting alone [...] in the vestibule of the Cecil Hotel, among the dusty palms, dressed in a sheath of silver drops, holding her magnificent fur at her back as a peasant holds his coat. [...] Under the palms, in a deep alcove, sit a couple of old men playing chess. Justine has stopped to watch them. (*Justine* 20)⁹

In this scene, which starts innocently as a continuation from the one before it, the woman Darley is watching is undeniably Justine. Justine’s wealth and social status far removes her from being possibly confused for Melissa, and while the “sad yet quick smile” (22) of the woman on the street fits more with his image of the impoverished prostitute, the earlier scene could just as easily be describing Justine. In these scene(s) in which he transitions into the capital of his memory, Darley conflates separate loves as easily as separate moments.

Durrell uses this technique often in the *Quartet*, taking all advantage of vagueness and juxtaposition to imply situations he never writes as alternatives or additions to those he does write. In the *Quartet*’s form, in which a memory of the past overtakes the details of the present eventually to run the present into its future, the technique is unsettling, but it also places the reader in a situation similar to that of Darley, who must reconcile his memory with the Interlinear of Balthazar. What really happened in the past? Darley scrambles to understand, and the reader scrambles alongside him, bringing forward new pieces of understanding in an effort to form a full chronology of

⁸The omnibus edition follows this passage with the exhalation “Justine!” (*Quartet* 22), removing much of the (seemingly purposeful) ambiguity inherent in these early passages of *Justine*.

⁹The omnibus edition of the *Quartet* removes much of the ambiguity of this passage, beginning “I have had many such glimpses of Justine at different times” (*Quartet* 22).

the events of Alexandria. While Donald Kaczvinsky has constructed a rough timeline of events in the *Quartet*,¹⁰ any specific ordering of events in the *Quartet* would be a Sisyphean task. Syllepsis, rather than chronology, is Darley's rule of progression; too much of the work is comprised of achrony, "an event we must ultimately take to be dateless and ageless" (Genette 84) for any sense of temporal sequence to be recognized—tall order for a work designed to be a literary representation of time.¹¹

Lists of description filled with present participles and gerunds ("shuffling [...] filling [...] emptying [...] lengthening") are timeless while at once alluding to a state of action requiring a passing of time. Memory of the past becomes lived in the present; it is even re-lived to the point that details are changeable. Events are told out of the order they happen; they are told instead in the order most suitable to Darley: "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" (*Quartet* 97). In these ways, Durrell talks of time in the first novels of the *Quartet* without letting it progress. The reader shares Balthazar's anxiety in searching for the key to wind his watch: "Without the key it was useless to open the delicate golden leaf and expose the palpitating viscera of time itself stirring" (81). Until *Clea*, time does stop in Alexandria. It is all the reader can do to search for the key that will unlock "the doll's house" of Darley's city of memory (210), the key that Darley is "trying to turn" (217), the key necessary to synchronize the delicately disordered story he tells.

Einstein and Relativity

With the 1958 publication of *Balthazar*, fans of *Justine* were first made aware of the *Quartet's* form (and *Justine's* place within it). The author's note at the beginning of that second novel claimed to be following "the soup-mix recipe of a continuum," differing from "Proustian or Joycean method" in favor of something altogether different: Einsteinian "Space-Time" (*Balthazar* 9).¹² Accordingly, much criticism on the

¹⁰Mentioned during the "Round Table" at the On Miracle Ground XIV conference in Victoria, 26 June 2006.

¹¹Randall Stevenson suggests that the *Quartet's* chronological digressions signify a broadening of modernist technique into postmodernist practice (Stevenson, "Greenwich" 133).

¹²In this regard, Durrell seems to contest Alan Warren Friedman's assertion that "The modern artist [...] does not consciously become a student and exponent of, say, Einstein or Freud" (Friedman, "A 'Key'" 32); Durrell overtly claimed to be a student and exponent of both. Theodore Steinberg contends that Durrell's understanding of Einstein surpasses that of most artists of the twentieth century (Steinberg, "Postmodern Epic" 65), but popular science writer Richard Morris writes that Durrell "succeeded only in demonstrating that he hadn't the slightest idea of what modern physics was all about" (Morris 206). Alan J. Friedman and Carol C. Donley, too, write that Durrell's "free interchange of the terms of relativity theory and quantum theory [...] indicates his confusion of these two different revolutions in physics" (87). Further confusing the issue, in an interview Durrell himself confesses to having "confused Bergsonian time with Einsteinian time" in his *Key* (Young 45). While Friedman

Quartet follows this path: despite Pauline Beard's deprecation of the preponderance of "mental grannies" who choose to focus on the theme of free love, thereby ignoring the novel's structure (Beard 93), Göran Palm writes in 1960 that, to get the effect, the reader of the *Quartet* must read all four novels at once and at the speed of light (Palm qtd. in Dahlgren 76).¹³ Lee Lemon writes too, in 1963, of the *Quartet*'s "relativism," seeming to confuse it with relativity (Lemon, "Form and Fiction" 329); Willis McNelly finds, in the joining of body and soul of *The Revolt of Aphrodite*, Durrell's urge to connect subject and object as a faithful step in his project to make literature from Einstein's theories (McNelly 68); and Carol Peirce sees in the "historic present" tense of the *Quartet* "a literary parallel of Einsteinian space-time" (Peirce, "Wrinkled" 485, 497).

Nevertheless, despite the attention drawn to Durrell's claim of having modeled his book on Einstein's theories of relativity, few scholars have considered Durrell in light of Einstein himself.¹⁴ In his book *Relativity*, Einstein acknowledges a sense of unease common to lay persons when approaching the idea of four dimensions (Einstein 56). Nevertheless, he also acknowledges that time as a fourth dimension is nothing new (151); in truth, the significant novelty implicit in Einstein's theory of relativity is that time itself is a part of the (previously thought to be) spatial continuum, rather than a linear construction added to the continuum of space:

That we have not been accustomed to regard the world in this sense as a four-dimensional continuum is due to the fact that in physics, before the advent of the theory of relativity, time played a different and more independent rôle, as compared with the space co-ordinates. It is for this reason that we have been in the habit of treating time as [...] independent. (56-57)

Physics *after* the advent of the theory of relativity, however, presents a continuum "no longer resolvable objectively into sections." As such, "'now' loses for the spatially extended world its objective meaning [...] and] space and time must be regarded as [...] objectively unresolvable" (151). In such an understanding

the concepts of happening and becoming are indeed not completely suspended, but yet complicated. It appears therefore more natural to think

and Donley offer that Durrell's insistence on an "ultimate relativism of truth"—an ultimate relativism "distinctly colored by [every] character's prejudices and previous knowledge" (thus drawing the *Quartet* once again to Bergson)—is "in conflict with both the spirit and letter of Einstein's theory," they also suggest that "the novels actually reflect Einstein's work better than Durrell's stated intentions" (Friedman and Donley 88). Whether Durrell's understanding is truly of Einstein or rather of a misnamed personal philosophy, it is an understanding that informs much of his writing and, as such, cannot be ignored.

¹³Durrell concedes this point, lamenting that the reader lacks "four-dimensional spectacles" and as such must rely on imagination to recognize the *Quartet* as "a four-dimensional dance, a relativity poem" (qtd. in Mitchell and Andrews 57).

¹⁴One article which does consider Einstein directly is John Peters' "The Incense of Homage."

of physical reality as a four-dimensional existence, instead of, as hitherto, the *evolution* of a three-dimensional existence. (152)

The four-dimensional existence of physical reality is one that presents time as accessible as any of the other dimensions of the continuum.

Thus—perhaps “seized by a mysterious shuddering when [one] hears of ‘four-dimensional’ things” (Einstein 56)—Pauline Beard quotes Gary Zukav writing of recognizing “that everything that now seems to unfold before us with the passing of time, already exists *in toto*, painted, as it were, on the fabric of space-time” (Zukav qtd. in Beard 81), and Durrell himself quotes James Jeans writing that everything, “from its beginning to the end of eternity, is spread before us in the picture” (Jeans qtd. in *Key* 29). In light of these understandings, too, Beard writes of Durrell presenting “a shifting reality” (Beard 78) and Nancy Lewis describes characters “jolted into discovering the flux of continuous change” much at odds with a “false conception of experience as discrete, fixed events rather than the continuous interaction of a changing past and a changing present” (Lewis, “Einsteinian” 5).

In the *Quartet*, Darley’s narratorial shift into the analeptic *erzählte Zeit* is just one example of a post-Einsteinian temporal mutability. Here, Durrell challenges the linguistic traditions of a change in tense being used to indicate a change in temporal frame: Darley’s past is not a past of *was* and *were* but one of *is* and the present participial suffix *-ing*. In the novel, this linguistic *presenting* of the past is not just a literary technique; for Darley, the past, that which has already happened, still lives. His memories “stir uneasily” until “the flesh”—that is, the memory of reality which retains the reality of its being, its flesh—“comes alive, trying the bars of its prison,” disputing its past-ness. In this way, the past is accessible in the present; it is of the present and is interchangeable with it.¹⁵ Moreover, in Darley’s story, the sequence of events is negotiable: what matters to Darley is not the order of events as they happen, but the order of events as they become significant to him. In this sense, time’s role as organizer of events along a unidimensional line is abandoned in favor of another method of organization. While Dahlgren writes that Durrell’s continuum “is not successful simply because language is subject to sequential control” (Dahlgren 78), in Durrell’s

¹⁵Nahla Swedan finds that Darley’s tendency to constantly shift focus from the present moment in Greece to the past in Alexandria is an achievement of what Pursewarden calls the “n-dimensional novel” (Swedan 78–79), thus embodying a book in which “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” (*Quartet* 198). We might recognize in this construction of the “marriage of past and present with the flying multiplicity of the future” a sense of Turner’s liminal (“neither one thing nor another; or may be both; or neither here nor there; or may even be nowhere (in terms of any recognized cultural topography), and are at the very least ‘betwixt and between’ all the recognized fixed points in space-time of structural classification” (Turner, “Betwixt” 97)) or van Gennepe’s neutral zone (“physically and magico-religiously in a special situation for a certain length of time: he wavers between two worlds” (van Gennepe 18)).

construction past, present, and future give up their inviolable partitions in favor of mutually interpenetrative and interchangeable perspectives.

In such an infinite universe—now infinite in four dimensions, rather than three—it is impossible to say that one thing comes before another, or that one thing follows from another. Thus, as Durrell points out, the relativity theory “sidetracks causality” (*Key* 29). As Bertrand Russell explains of Einstein’s theory, “The language of cause and effect [...] is merely a convenient shorthand for certain purposes; it does not represent anything that is genuinely to be found in the physical world” (Russell, *ABC* 140). Nevertheless, the unenlightened Darley in *Balthazar* admits to a desire to understand connections between all the elements of his story: “I must know *everything*” (*Quartet* 216). He works to find order in all the details of happenstance, tracing a chain of effects, hoping to find one stable cause: “How had all this come about? To understand it is necessary to work backwards, through the great Interlinear which Balthazar has constructed around my manuscript, towards that point in time” (238). But he finds that tracing causality through human actions is not a straightforward affair—“It is hard to isolate a moral quality in the free act” (244)—and Balthazar commiserates with Darley’s difficulty: “One assumes that they [people’s actions] have grown out of their feelings as leaves grow out of a branch. But can one work backwards, deducing the one form from the other?” (275).

In such an understanding of time and space, if causality, the mainstay of scientific observation, cannot be proven logically sound, then intuition gains newly sure footing and “everything is perpetually brand new, everything is, if you care to think of it like that, a miracle” (*Key* 30). In a situation in which observation must be distrusted, then it follows too that any certainty of understanding the natural world must be discredited: “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” (30). Balthazar answers his own question about working backwards, offering the poetic imagination as a stepping stone to understanding:

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? What was going on in Nessim’s mind? This is really a question for you to put to yourself. (*Quartet* 275)

Balthazar encourages Darley to intuit that which he cannot know, writing “To imagine is not necessarily to invent” (275); Pursewarden agrees: “If things were always what they seemed, how impoverished would be the imagination of man!” (216). The world in which limitations of perspective are also limitations of understanding is a world in which intuition, over objective observation, is the best means of comprehension. Intuition is used to fill the gaps, to connect that which we conveniently call *cause* with

that which we conveniently call *effect*.¹⁶ Darley understands “that the key I am trying to turn is in myself” (*Quartet* 217), so he moves to “reconstruct it—the scene I see so clearly [...] detonated in my imagination” (314). The city about which he writes transforms from a city of the past, to a city of the present: “The city, inhabited by these memories of mine, moves not only backwards into our history, [...] but also back and forth in the living present, so to speak” (314). Imagination and intuition reinvigorate the city in the present, and Darley dismisses objective observation as a viable means of coping with the world.

This loss of the human throne of subjectivity seems to be the most freeing of all symptoms of relativity to Durrell, who seems excited about the possibility of accepting “two contradictory ideas as simultaneously true” (*Key* 31). It is in the spirit of this creative ability of imagination that Balthazar tells Darley, “There are only as many realities as you care to imagine” (*Quartet* 315). Armed with this maxim, Darley in *Balthazar* imagines into being another reality, at odds with the other reality he has imagined in *Justine*. As Balthazar predicts, the truth does contradict itself in time. The *Quartet* takes the shape of “a palimpsest upon which each” imagined reality leaves its “individual traces, layer by layer” (215), each layer persisting throughout the revision and existing simultaneously. Darley, as a part of the whole of the world he studies, cannot retain any unique subjectivity without examining less than the whole set of facts; his only recourse is to accept all contradictory ideas not as *possible* but as *true*. In doing so, he cannot favor one reality over another, but must “crowd” as much time as possible into one moment, endeavoring, as Durrell writes in his *Key*, “to render a sort of immediacy of impact” (*Key* 36).¹⁷ Durrell’s tenseless lists, merging past with present and conflating the two on the linguistic level, and his palimpsest of perspectives, interleaved and interlocked in meaning, is his way of rendering this immediacy of impact, presenting all truths, which through time will be intra-contradictory, simultaneously.

Despite the impossibility of Durrell’s *Quartet* actually representing Einstein’s continuum—a failing caused in part by the readers’ lack of four-dimensional spectacles—it certainly does present an idea of “this fascinating theory of indeterminacy” (Durrell qtd. in Mitchell and Andrews 58). The sense of multiple perspectives in the *Quartet* presents a reproduction of individual doubt of perception, a doubt which on a singular level is combatted by negotiations and renegotiations we make every day. As

¹⁶Bergson, too, discusses intuition, writing that it is “instinct”—sympathy incapable of extending its object and of reflecting upon itself—“that has become disinterested, selfconscious, capable of reflecting upon its object and of enlarging it indefinitely” (Bergson, *Creative* 176). Of Bergson’s intuition, Bertrand Russell explains that it “does not divide the world into separate things, as the intellect does” (Russell, “Bergson” 10). Bergson will be considered in greater detail from page 131.

¹⁷For more on this notion of crowding time into the present moment, see the discussion of Bergsonian *action* on page 135 of this chapter.

Einstein writes, this “conceptual ordering principle for recollected experiences” may in fact help to construct a “subjective concept of time, *i.e.* that concept of time which refers to the arrangement of the experiences of the individual” (Einstein 142–143). The third section of this chapter considers this subjective concept of time further; before that, however, the next section of the chapter surveys another model—that of time as lived history.

II The Watermark of Time

Wyndham Lewis’s complaint of Spengler that he reduces everything to history, worrying that the reduction thereof negates any understanding of *truth* (Lewis, *Time and Western Man* 258), underestimates the full impact of that notion of history. E. E. Sperry, in 1927 writing a review of Spengler’s recently released work, explains of Spenglerian history that it “deals with things-becoming, with human life and development; with living nature in contrast to dead nature, with the world-as-organism in contrast to the world-as-mechanism” (Sperry 827–828). Spengler’s sense of history is one that encompasses a sense of truth in that history is the making of it and the perpetual (and perpetuating) living of it.

Nevertheless, Howard Becker concedes that Spengler seems to have missed his target of the academic reader, writing that the *Decline* “has received little acclaim in university circles,” making up for it with popularity (Becker 458)—undoubtedly how Durrell himself must have discovered Spengler. Still, despite Gregory Dickson noting the influence of Spengler on the setting of the *Revolt* (Dickson 533)—and despite the postface in that work explicitly naming Spengler as the raw source of consideration (*Nunquam* 285)¹⁸—too few have written on the impact of Spengler in Durrell’s writing. In this section of the chapter I will consider this impact, reading it alongside his *The Revolt of Aphrodite*, which numbers Spengler most immediately as its influences.

The Decline of History

In his treatise, arguing the case for historically cyclical periodicity, Spengler asks, “Is it possible to find in life itself [...] a series of stages which must be traversed, and traversed moreover in an ordered and obligatory sequence?” (Spengler, *Decline* 3).

¹⁸In a letter to Henry Miller in 1938, Durrell writes that “Spengler is WRONG, you know; terribly wrong; but the journey was worth it, he scores terrific truths” (*Durrell-Miller* 104). His notes in the postface to *Nunquam*, however, suggest a reconciliation with Spengler’s ideas: the line “He’s [Spengler is] not a pessimist at all. He is a realist, that is all” (*Nunquam* 285) mirrors the conversation between Constance and Schwarz in the *Quintet* (noted in the footnote on page 40), suggesting further, perhaps, Durrell’s perceived connections between pragmatism and Spengler’s view of history.

He finds these life sequences in any examination of world history and past cultures, which, when looked on from our vantage of progressed time, seem to rise and fall, ebb and flow, with a sense of regularity—or predictability. Spengler's aim in *The Decline of the West* is to examine this predictable regularity of history and to determine if it is perhaps formed on a model of what he calls "biographic archetypes" (3)—determining factors that play a role in the patterning of our lives specifically and those of culture generally.

Spengler calls those characteristics, in which we are able to recognize the form of a culture, physiognomic, a name reflecting the sense of history as a biological construction (Spengler, *Decline—abridged* 88). Spengler believes that physiognomic methods represent the zenith of potential for the scientific method and predicts that within a hundred years, an application of his physiognomic principle will be standard within the sciences (88). Physiognomy recognizes the life of a culture as dependent upon the life of its constituent parts: "*The notion of the life duration of a man [...] comprises a specific time value [...]. Thus every culture [...] has its determined phases.*" From the duration of human life, including the form relative to it, its "springtime" and "rise and fall," a reflexive notion of lifespan and form can be extracted to be placed upon that more general idea of cultural lifespan or cultural shape: "*it is possible [...] to reconstruct the organic characteristics of whole periods of history, and even to pre-determine the features of the still unaccomplished features of our western history*" (91–92).

One consequence of such biological modeling is an inevitable form to each culture; rather than a steadily improving string of cultures, each giving way to a subsequent culture, better and somehow more suited to survive (almost in an evolutionary improvement), Spengler's model proposes limits on the life of any culture, predicting a certain rise and fall before inescapable final demise (88). Like the Spirit of Place for Durrell, for Spengler a Culture is dependent upon the space in which it is formed, maintaining—similar to the relationship of plant-to-soil—a relationship of Culture-to-space, "in which and through which it strives to actualize itself" (90). This forward motion, towards actualization, is a defining precept of Culture for Spengler, who characterizes it as "a picture of life[...] not as things-become, but as things-becoming" (Spengler, *Decline* 6). But such forward motion inevitably drives it toward an actualization of potential, towards a situation of *things-become*, at which point a Culture hardens and stagnates into "*Civilization, the thing which we feel and understand in the words Egyptianism, Byzantinism, Mandarinism*" (Spengler, *Decline—abridged* 90). From this hardening we can recognize a culture's *decline*.

Despite Hankins' commendation of Spengler's "historic striving," he claims for the *Decline* a place in "that dreamland which borders poetry and philosophy on the one hand and the field of scientific imagination on the other. It is a combination

of myth-making and historical synthesis" (Hankins 298–299). Interestingly, in his review of Spengler's history, he notes one of the key differences in mood or expectation between his generation and that of later postmodernists (perhaps, even, signaling the true prescience of Spengler's poetic/philosophic treatise):

he does not note that ours is the first civilization in which the conscious pursuit of knowledge by well-attested methods of scientific research became the absorbing pursuit of a galaxy of the best minds. Moreover, science is still in its infancy; in that lies the hope of our salvation. [...] We seem to be approaching an era of world peace and organization, an era of the manhood of humanity as a whole. We may, perhaps, have less romance but more common sense, less mysticism but more scientific prevision. In any case, we might as well, even on Spengler's postulates of an inscrutable destiny, be optimistic about it. (300)

Where Hankins' belief in the assurance of modern scientific improvements reveals his tantamount trust in the world overcoming the trials of its past, Spengler's writing on the inevitable decline of the culture of the West paints a bleak portrait, intimating, even, that these very points Hankins seems to have found absent in Spengler's overview (an obsession with knowledge, a compulsion to compare modern European culture with its darker past) comprise the bulk of the identity of the West ("We men of the Western Culture are, with our historical sense, an exception and not a rule. World-history is *our* world picture and not all mankind's" (Spengler, *Decline* 15)), and thus lead it even further to its destiny of decline.¹⁹

The Revolt of the West

Spengler's identification of the West as definitively focused on the mastery of knowledge and an encapsulation of the past ("What, then, *is* world-history? Certainly, an ordered presentation of the past, an inner postulate, the expression of a capacity for feeling form" (Spengler, *Decline* 15)) finds purchase, too, in Charlock's fascination with the workings of memory (which Spengler identifies as the "organ of history" (9)): "The development of memory! [...] It absorbed me utterly and led me to do weird things" (*Tunc* 22).

While in his recording of the books Charlock exhibits this fascination with memory Spengler sees in the Western culture, compared to the *Quartet*, *The Revolt of Aphrodite* is a straightforward work. Comprised of two books, *Tunc* and *Nunquam*,

¹⁹"Classical" man, on the other hand, lacks this historical sense and lives instead in the "pure present," which "predicates the *negation of time*" (9). This sense of the pure present in which segmentation of time is abrogated shares much with Bergson's views of pure duration, "pure heterogeneity" (Bergson, *Time* 104). For more on Bergson's duration, see the discussion on page 131 of this chapter.

titles derived from a line by Petronius, whom Durrell quotes as an epigraph to the second book—“*Aut Tunc, aut Nunquam*, ‘It was then or never...’”—the books are largely free of anachrony: the events of the first book consist of a single external analepsis (one “whose entire extent remains external to the extent of the first narrative” (Genette 49)), and those events told in the narrating of the second are entirely chronological. Nevertheless, both begin with a sense of temporal uncertainty. In *Tunc*, the text varies seemingly arbitrarily between tenses, sometimes describing things in a past tense (“said Nash”) and at other times describing them in the present (“says Nash”) (*Tunc* 12). And *Nunquam* opens illustrating Charlock waking in an asylum, as uncertain in his physical surroundings as he is in his temporal ones:

There is a small green diary by the bed [...] But the book seems very much out of date—surely the Coronation was years ago? [...] moreover in the middle a whole span of months is missing, has been torn out. Gone! Vanished months, vanished days—perhaps these are the very days he is living through now? A man with no shadow, a clock with no face. (*Nunquam* 11–12)

Just as, in *Tunc* the first section gives way in later ones to relative “normalcy,” in *Nunquam*, too, Charlock regains his mental capacities and becomes capable of recognizing his positioning in time.

Furthermore, in the *Revolt*, Julian recognizes equivalents to Spengler’s “Egypticism, Byzantinism, Mandarinism,” the remote forms of Civilization that are stagnated and accessible only as a type. The cultural artifacts he lists are iterations of a pattern that is “only repeating itself”: The Parthenon, Taj Mahal, Buddha’s Tree, the Holy Sepulchre, Herculaneum, and Pompeii represent respective pinnacles of cultural achievement, *actualizations* of respective Cultures. So too is the United Nations of “great value as a relic of the future, like the Rosetta Stone” (87), as it is an artifact through which the pinnacle of the Culture of the West might be read.

The firm Merlin’s, though, “can’t help reflecting the corpus of what, for want of a better word, we must call our civilisation,” for “its very size (like a blown-up photograph) enables us to see that it is the reflection of something, the copy of something” (87). As a reflection of Civilization, the stagnation and end of the Culture of the West, Merlins’ marks the end of an epoch; however, Spengler’s world is not an inert “world-as-nature” to be studied under ideal conditions and understood absolutely, but a “world-as-history,” constantly varying its shape (Spengler, *Decline* 6). Even the dead Culture, the Civilization—the thing-become, as opposed to the thing-becoming—gives rise to the next Culture. “How do cultures come about, how do they vanish?” Julian asks in the novel:

We would give anything to know. Can the firm and its structure perhaps inform us a little—that’s the point? Well, to break a chain you must hit a

link I suppose—the fragile link upon which the whole structure depends. One such link in man's culture is the fragile link of association of one with another, articles of faith, contracts, marriages, vows and so on. Snap the link and the primordial darkness leaks in, the culture disintegrates, and man becomes the coolie he really is when there is no frame of culture to ennoble him, to interpret himself to himself. (*Nunquam* 89–90)

In Spengler's model, this primordial darkness always merely predates the rise of the next culture to take its own place in a cyclical history.

In this rise and fall, too, the form(s) of the novels mirror one another. Not only do both begin with a shiftiness and temporal instability, but both end, too, with an act of drastic violence. In *Tunc*, the accidental shooting of Charlock's child by his invention Abel (the very agent of memory in the *Revolt*) signals the final end of an ideal of family life that, throughout *Tunc*, had been in decline. At the end of *Nunquam*, too, Charlock decides to hit the "link" upon which the structure depends, to challenge the construction of the firm—which is not only a model for the Culture of the age, but is also tentacularly enmeshed within it: he sets fire to the firm's archive (283). Whether the destruction of the firm's contracts lets in the primordial darkness or not, is unresolved:

The only one who has shown alarm is Baum who said "Either everything will disintegrate, the Firm will begin to dissolve; or else nothing, Mr. Felix, absolutely nothing. People will be afraid to take advantage of the fact that they have no contractual written obligations. They might stay put from funk or...." So it will be either/or once again; it will be now or never. (283)

In any event, the move leaves Culture newly at a crossroads. The doubt at the end of the novel—"Either everything will disintegrate [...] or else nothing," "either/or," "now or never"—introduces a new state of things-becoming where before had only been things-become. As Charlock lacks the necessary narrative perspective to hint about the future, the reader is left unsure whether the revised state of things-becoming is a disavowal of past stagnation and a return to a viable culture of the West or an introduction of a fresh Cultural soul, awakening "out of the proto-spirituality of ever-childish humanity" to bloom in the soil fertilized by the remains of Merlin's and an old Civilization (Spengler, *Decline—abridged* 90).

The "watermark" of time that Charlock seeks to understand throughout the *Revolt* (*Tunc* 23) represents, in part, the unnaturally inert world-as-nature of a fallen civilization. The conflagration of the archive at the novel's end opens the door to the motion and change possible when such inert symbols are cast aside.²⁰ The next section will return to presentation of time faithful to this shifting change, as presented

²⁰See the note and discussion on Marinetti on page 136.

in *The Avignon Quintet*.

III Time Immemorial

Charlock's notion of time as a watermark and Spengler's notion of history as composed of cycles present an external sort of ordering to time, not necessarily at ease with the way we experience it. Temporality (and even sequence) in Durrell's *Quintet* resists such an external comparison, which must present stable *states*. Instead, the *Quintet* presents time as continually shifting—not just forwards, but bleeding, also, into the past. The bidirectional nature of Blanford's writing suggests an affinity to Henri Bergson's sense of a personal notion of time not beholden to these extremities. William James, writing on Bergson, explains that we should try "to see into the intervals," a failing in many mathematical theories (James, *Pluralistic* 237). Nonetheless, Bergson's own theories are not without critics. Bertrand Russell complains that Bergson's model should be "regarded as a poetic effort" and that it "is in the main not capable of either proof or disproof" (Russell, "Bergson" 24), and Durrell himself dismisses Bergsonian duration as outdated by "Space-Time" (*Balthazar* 9). Nevertheless, as Mary Ann Gillies argues (Gillies 5), Bergson's influence on British literature of the early- to mid-twentieth century is indisputable. Moreover, despite Durrell's protests, Bergson's philosophy is not incompatible with Einstein's quantum physics. In this section I will first consider temporal troubles in Durrell's *Quintet* before I address Bergson and, finally, apply a reading of Bergsonian attributes to the entirety of Durrell's opus. In doing so, I hope to show the sense therein of pure duration and a privileging of the present moment arrived at through action.

The Avignon Quintet

In his final multi-part work, *The Avignon Quintet*, Durrell returns to the narrative intricacy of his *Quartet*, opening with one of the main characters recognizing the full loss of memory of the past: "The southbound train from Paris was the one we had always taken from time *immemorial*" (*Quintet* 5, my emphasis). Immediately, Durrell's later text contrasts with Darley's drive throughout the *Quartet* "to be matter-of-fact" regarding past events (*Quartet* 210). Bruce's ambition in the beginning of the *Quintet* is not to recapture the past and understand it, but to understand the making of the present:

How well I remembered, how well he remembered! The Bruce that I was, and the Bruce I become as I jot down these words, a few every day. A train subject to unexpected halts, unexplained delays; it could fall asleep

anywhere, even in the open country, and remain there, lost in thought for hours. [...] It has never been, will never be, on time our train. (*Quintet* 5)

Bruce's intimately half first- / half third-person, multiply present- / past- (and even future-) tense narrative navigates the troubles inherent within "the swirls and eddies of" time and memory (5).²¹ Just as a train might "fall asleep" anywhere, regardless of rightness or appropriateness of it doing so, memory might muddy certain recollections, swirling them into one another so that they become indistinct. Time, as we think we access it through memory, might be immemorial—beyond the scope of memory—and a train of thought might never be on time, bending to associated rules and expectations. At *Monsieur's* beginning, Bruce is aware of, and even draws attention to, these problems.

Bruce travels to Avignon for the funeral of his friend / lover / brother-in-law Piers, who has committed suicide before the first narrative of the novel. His death shocks Bruce into a forced understanding of a kind of time that is neither so forgiving nor so capricious: "Dying," he writes, "one becomes out of date" (7). Unlike the train, which after unexpectedly halting in the open countryside will eventually resume, the kind of time which forces itself upon Piers, effecting his outdatedness, will not reverse itself—at least from Bruce's perspective of space and time.

Bruce later reawakens Piers by remembering how they had traveled with Bruce's wife and Piers' sister Sylvie to Macabru, a Gnostic shrine situated in an oasis outside of Alexandria. He explores his recollections, beginning his journey from as distant a perspective as that of the author of *Mountolive*: "The four riders, one of them a woman, who set off that noon from the Canopic Gate were as young as their mettlesome longlegged horses." He continues his description, employing a third-person analeptic style—"The party was," "They were" (91)—presenting one of these almost-stable vignettes in the style of classical realism; though he is at the time a rider, he assumes for the moment the perspective of a writer, of one looking on to the scene from afar. It is as if the heavily romanticized image of the four horsemen, "one of them a women" (perhaps the idealistic manner in which they are silhouetted by the sun renders their sexes otherwise indistinguishable), setting off from the anciently grandiose "Canopic Gate" of an anciently mysterious city to ride into the desert in late afternoon—led, of course, only by a one-eyed Arab mounted upon an as-picturesque white

²¹Moreover, they deny the reader the stability of a first narrative as found in the *Quartet*. Instead, the *Quintet* presents multiple narrative levels, competing and overlapping *Erzählzeits*, narrating times, in a series of almost-stable vignettes.

camel—cannot be one he remembers from the perspective he lived, and must be remembered from the externalized recollection.²² This externalizability of the situation allows him to portray Piers not as he was, but as a character, treating the memory of Macabru not as analepsis but as a manifestation of the narrating present.

As the four explorers, four horses, camel, and one-eyed guide leave Alexandria to permeate the desert beyond its gates, they lose sense of perspective, unable to trust their sense of sight, which deceives them with mirages, introducing the unstable in this memory by juxtaposing anachronisms. They permeate the past lives of the city, stumbling across its real, half-buried “extensive remains of ancient buildings, shattered archways, smashed causeways and musing lintels” (94). They become, in a sense, time travelers, “modern scavengers of history” who are able to take up the perspective, to some degree, of those who had lived the time: “we had some truthful inkling of the original dream-city of the boy Alexander” (94). This perspective is not without qualifications, though. The scene was one “which had, it seems, long since exhausted all its historical potentialities”: “repeated historical earthquakes have [...] engulfed the place time and time again” (94). These earthquakes, historical in the sense that they happened in the past, also seem to be disruptions in history itself, engulfing the city and its surrounding desert in time after time, era after era. Thus, the modern scavengers of history are able to find artifacts of its existence—the signatures of time and history graffitied on sunken archways and half-buried treasures—at any level of the desert. Moreover, the dry heat preserves the structures from the time of Pliny, through “the time of the French invasion,” and into the contemporaneous architectural style of French Riviera (94), all of which remain on one level or another. The past has “quite gone, and much had vanished with it,” but much remains: Piers even recognizes the “outer furnishings” of Alexander’s world—though whether this is a statement on the timelessness of his choice of symbols of Alexander’s world (“palms, water-wheels, dervishes, desert horses. Always!”) or on the instability of historic perspective (“‘Mirages,’ groaned Toby, ‘and oases’”) is not clear (95).

Time becomes a destructive element, ravaging the “dream-city” of Alexandria, the sanity of both the old man in the desert (“he was alive but mad [...] the blissful amnesia that all excessive suffering brings. [...]ime passed [...] and the criminal went slowly mad” (93)) and of Sylvie (her lapses of reason are moments in which she has “slipped, so to speak, off the time-track” (88)), and the life of Piers. The romance of four horsemen and the Canopic Gate becomes the only way to approach

²²He interrupts this authoritative voice soon enough, conceding, “we were all four somewhat new to the place, and as yet very much under the spell of its skies and its vistas of many-coloured desert” (91). This recollection, then, though told in all the conventions of classical realism, might not be entirely unlike the experience of wide-eyed tourism he may have had.

the history surrounding Alexandria's periphery—and indeed any history at all. “Can't you see how marvelous history is?” Piers asks his sister: “The presence of other people whose actions and thoughts seem to still hang about in the air?” (95). The standoffish perspective of one looking back onto a “marvelous history” is the only one that offers enough solidity to comment upon that history while escaping the detrimental effects of the intervening time.

These ostensibly stable memories are further undermined by the larger structures of temporal presentation in *The Avignon Quintet*. As is the case in *The Alexandria Quartet*, in Durrell's *Quintet* one perspective will always be undermined by another. The *Quartet* addresses the issue on a small scale by showing multiple perspectives of one scene in a sort of cubist still life. The *Quintet*, on the other hand, is a more cinematic version of cubism, a variation in which each frame is shot from a different angle, though time itself is allowed to continue on. Careful consideration of truth and variation among perspectives in the *Quartet* gives way to the *Quintet*, in which differentiation among perspectives is merely accepted—or not acknowledged at all. We learn in the end of *Monsieur*, for example, that the conversation about *Monsieur* that Blanford has been having with the Duchess Tu, Constance, over dinner has been entirely one of his imagination, as she has been dead “for some time” (293). Nevertheless, in the second book of the series, *Livia*, Blanford learns of her death upon its happening *after* his dinner with her; when he receives the phone call informing him of her death, he thinks back on the dinner they had shared and the manuscript she had enjoyed:

She would miss reading (the selfishness of writers!) all the new material he had added to his book. [...] He reached out and touched the earlier manuscript of his book *Monsieur*. He had given it to Tu and she had had it bound. (299–302)

The text disrupts the flow of time again when Sutcliffe, a character who dies in Blanford's manuscript *Monsieur*, telephones his author to commiserate on Constance's death. Blanford is not pleased: “‘You are dead, Robin,’ said Blanford. ‘Remember the end of *Monsieur*?’” Sutcliffe, challenging the finality of that text, rejoins “Bring me back then, [...] and we shall see” (304).

This posthumous reintroduction of Sutcliffe as author places him at a comparable level of authority to Blanford. We learn that while Blanford is responsible for the manuscript of *Monsieur*, Sutcliffe has composed its twin, *The Prince of Darkness* (306), the text of Bruce, Piers, and Sylvie. The combined effort challenges all expectations of sequence and causality; the text that purports to be a joint “quincunx of novels set out in a good classical order” (309) is anything but that. Instead, we are faced with a reproduction of Charlock's theory of composition, explained in *The Revolt of*

Aphrodite:

While I am writing one book, [...] I write another about it, then a third about *it*, and so on. [...] Like those monkeys in the Indian frescoes [...] who can dance only with their index fingers up each other's behinds. This would be *my* way of doing things.²³ (*Nunquam* 16)

Multiple perspectives of each scene, past and present, overlay upon one another simultaneously as action proceeds, developing an interleaved, interpenetrating catalogue of differences that play out over time. Not until the third book, *Constance*, do we ever learn of the "tremendous burst" (*Quintet* 660) that cripples Blanford, giving him the "swayback" gait of *Monsieur* (278), which is explained away as "a spine full of shrapnel," necessitating daily massages from his manservant (284)—and not until *Constance* do we learn that Bruce Drexel, *Monsieur's* first narrator on the train to Avignon, is the doctor who treats him. Further, it is not until the fifth book, *Quinx*, that we learn that Constance helps Blanford overcome his physical handicap by way of a regimen of massage, physical therapy, and (eventually) sexual intercourse (1313–1321), though in *Monsieur*, after her death, he has never been cured at all.

In the model of time followed in the *Quartet*, the *Revolt's* Pangarides could only have had sex with the boy or the girl, though in each novel the situation of what actually had been the case could change; in the Spenglerian sense of history and destiny of the *Revolt*, he has them both at once, as he has been expected to do since his birth; in the *Quintet*, on the other hand, every possibility is taken into consideration, and Pangarides can have had the boy, the girl, both, none, and even all of the above—though only *simultaneously in retrospect*.²⁴ The cubist perspective change between cinematic frames allows us to look back upon previously unexplored perspectives to see them all at once, holding them all simultaneously in our memory. Rather than consider these perspectives he cannot show us, Durrell allows for any one of them to follow on, however shockingly, from any other; only in recognizing the absolute differences among all the assumed perspectives of the *Quintet* as they play out through time can we recognize the network of perspectives in the text.

²³This, of course, is reminiscent of the indiscretions of Pangarides, who (Banubula tells us) is a connoisseur and advocate of a particular sexual act, the "chariot": "A sort of *en brochette* effect. [...] It's having a small boy while the small boy himself is having a girl" (*Tunc* 108).

²⁴It is a natural limitation of text that in order to maintain comprehension, one sentence will project only one world. A paragraph of sentences, on the other hand, can project a cosmos of understanding, the entirety of which is comprehensible only upon having read each constituent sentence. Again, Durrell faces the difficulty of readers lacking four-dimensional spectacles. (See the note on page 117.)

Creative Time

Bergson defines his idea of *durée*, or duration, explicitly against the notion of a measured, analyzable time: "Pure duration is the form which the succession of our conscious states assumes when our ego lets itself *live*, when it refrains from separating its present state from its former states" (Bergson, *Time* 100). The state of being in which we find ourselves measuring out time, differentiating moments of memory is one in which we are in a sense constrained by the past. Instead, Bergson explains, "life is a movement, materiality is the inverse movement, and each of these two movements is simple, the matter which forms [...] an undivided flux" (Bergson, *Creative* 249), incorporating past and present states into "an organic whole, [...] melting, so to speak, into one another" (Bergson, *Time* 100). These commingling states cannot be placed in any particular order without distinguishing among the moments, disrupting the incorporated *mélange*. In attempting such a thing, writes Bergson, we convert what had been successive moments into a different kind of simultaneity, placing them beside one another and projecting them into space (102). Pure duration, on the other hand, consists of "qualitative changes" that "permeate one another, without precise outlines, without any tendency to externalize themselves in relation to one another, without any affiliation with number"; pure duration, he writes, "would be pure heterogeneity" (104).

This pure heterogeneity of pure duration, the internal working of the human mind, still meets up at some point with the external. The two, (external) space and (internal) duration, are synchronized in action: "each moment [in duration...] can be brought into relation with a state of the external world which is contemporaneous with it, and can be separated from the other moments in consequence of this very process" (110). In other words, our sense of internal duration comes into contact with actions of external space, and although moments might "melt" into one another, they "retain something of the mutual externality which belongs to their objective causes" (125).

For every moment in memory, there is an actuality. Though our memory might take the form of an indistinct mass, we can still separate that mass by recognizing the respective actions of the external. It is only in this mutual association of external and internal that elements of the external can persist (108). Our recognition of Bergsonian *durée* is really the result of the *endurance* of ourselves through successive states: though the world around us changes, making up the elements of our memories and past, that world has no memory of the change to qualify it; it is only in our capability of qualification, through the enduring of our memory of the past, that the past continues to live within us (108). However, Bergson warns against mistakenly equating duration and space:

To put duration in space is really to contradict oneself and place succession within simultaneity. Hence we must not say that external things *endure*, but rather that there is in them some inexpressible reason in virtue of which we cannot examine them at successive moments of our own duration without observing that they have changed. (227)

The duality of space and *durée* becomes a defining precept of Bergson's philosophy. It is an imbalance between elements of this same duality that Durrell, quoting Routh, warns us of, an unfavorable encroaching of space (manifest in the external and measured sense of Time) upon our inner lives—a disparity that “cannot ever satisfy man's consciousness” (*Key* 24).

Out of Time

It is not difficult to recognize Bergsonian elements of duration in the *Quintet*. Most obviously, the Bergsonian pure heterogeneity of *durée* is apparent in the stream-of-confusion of the *Quintet*, whose encapsulation of utter difference reveals the past to be a knotted skein not easily disentangled. Blanford's memory consists of intermingled moments, a spatialization of which would necessarily be destructive to certain elements. For example, though Blanford's dinner with Quartila in *Monsieur* seems unproblematic until its end, the factor of her death refigures the entire conversation. To consider her death, that later detail, as true in a spatialized understanding of Time strikes out an honest consideration of the dinner conversation. Similarly, throughout the *Quintet*, other interwoven elements of the past resist the strict expectations of externalized spatialization, in which any two elements must not contradict with each other, must not “permeate one another,” must not be “without precise outlines” (Bergson, *Time* 104). In many other situations, the *Quintet* shows a Bergsonian consideration toward the past and memory.

These constructions are not limited merely to *The Avignon Quintet*, though. In fact, Bergson's understanding of memory and duration is perhaps more suited as a governing model for Durrell's other novels than those models which they purport to follow; even *The Alexandria Quartet*, which claims to differ from the “Proustian or Joycean method [...] for they illustrate Bergsonian ‘Duration’” (*Balthazar* 9), depends upon a consideration of narrative subjectivity not strictly compatible with Einstein's space-time. In *The Revolt of Aphrodite*, too, though Durrell models his notions of history and destiny on Spengler's philosophies of a science of history, Charlock's preference for a personal inner time (*Tunc* 22) and the means in which he relates to his past argue for a Bergsonian understanding of personal comprehension. While the themes and forms of the novels might differ from one to the next, the shared model of memory and time is best understood in relation to Bergsonian duration.

In all of Durrell's later novels, he challenges prescribed forms of linearity, preferring instead the problematic disorder of stylized telling, in which the narrator relates events in the order of their importance to him. In *The Black Book*, even, in Lawrence Lucifer's selective reading of Gregory's diaries—his memories—the latter are presented as-is, with no recourse to understanding what must have been the linear cause-and-effect of their actualization, a homogeneous form of external time. In *The Alexandria Quartet*, too, the ordering of Darley's world is based not on external action, but on internal significance. *The Revolt of Aphrodite* is no different, every recollection being relayed via dactyl, the personal memory device of Charlock, which depends upon the relay of spoken histories—not as they happen, but as they are recalled. And in *The Avignon Quintet* we face a radically internalized story, non-externalizable insofar as the process of externalization would necessitate a preferment of certain versions of the story over others.²⁵

Each of these novels presents a problem of reading, the solution to which at first seems to be merely a reordering of events into a comprehensible sequence, a synchronizing of the internal with an external. Like Balthazar, the reader lacks the key necessary to expose “the palpitating viscera of time itself stirring” and so has no recourse to reorder—or reconsider the order of—events in the novels. In truth, such a reordering is undesirable. Though in Bergson's philosophy for every inner moment there exists a corresponding outer happening with which it is simultaneous, the synchronization of the two depends upon the recording mind:

we gather up the multiplicity of atoms in a single perception: get rid of the mind which carries out this synthesis and you will at once do away with the qualities, that is to say, the aspect under which the synthesis of elementary parts is presented to our consciousness. [...] For their co-existence to give rise to space, there must be an act of the mind which takes them in all at the same time and sets them in juxtaposition. (Bergson, *Time* 94)

In the novels, this act of the mind “gathering up” the multiple positions and setting them in juxtaposition, corresponds to Genette's *narrating*: “the producing narrative action and, by extension, the whole of the real or fictional situation in which that action takes place” (Genette 27). The act of creating a text, the very act of ordering events in a fiction, depends on a narrating mind. As Bergson writes, “We [...] solidify our impressions [...] to express them in language. Hence we confuse the feeling itself, which is in a perpetual state of becoming, with its permanent external object, and especially with the word which expresses this object” (Bergson, *Time* 130).²⁶ Not only

²⁵In this respect, the multiple versions of “truth” in the *Quartet* are nevertheless externalizable, as all variations depend solely on a difference in externalized perspective. The significance of Darley's ordering of those events, however, is not.

²⁶Durrell resists even this solidification by—in later books of his various series—reconfiguring, re-visiting, and recanting readings found in earlier books.

would any readerly reordering be inaccurate, but it would also introduce spatiality into the concept of time:

we could not introduce *order* among terms without first distinguishing them and then comparing the places which they occupy; [...] in a word, we set them side by side, and if we introduce an order in what is successive, the reason is that succession is converted into simultaneity and is projected into space. (102)

Any attempt at reordering the succession of events in the story—indeed, any attempt at finding an already existing order or any questions regarding cogency of a presented order—falsely recognizes space in the novels, which are, for their respective narrators, merely compendia of memory.

Throughout the novels, the construction of memory along the lines of something similar to Bergsonian duration has a few other ramifications as well. Describing the force of duration on the individual, Bergson portrays a familiar image:

A violent love or a deep melancholy takes possession of our soul: here we feel a thousand different elements which dissolve into and permeate one another without any precise outlines, without the least tendency to externalize themselves in relation to one another. (132)

Elements of Darley's memory in *The Alexandria Quartet*, too, have no tendency to externalize in relation to one another: they are heterogeneous, each moment of the past inseparable from others to which it is related by theme, rather than external order. He conflates the scene of a woman (Melissa?) wandering the early morning streets with another of Justine wandering the vestibule of the Cecil; memories of songs are grafted upon memories of perfumes; hospital visits roll into one. Moments are so intermeshed that each subsequent memory leads to another; this seemingly random vehicle drives the narrative forward. And in *The Revolt of Aphrodite*, the model of cultural history is an element of the present; while Spengler advocates extracting an understanding of the transcendental to be applied systematically to individual cultures, in the *Revolt*, any move to understand the transcendental shape of the history of Culture is overshadowed by Charlock's ability to act. History becomes less a structure imposed upon the present and more a personal understanding of the past through the present. As Bergson writes, "external things change, but their moments do not *succeed* one another, if we retain the ordinary meaning of the word, except for a consciousness which keeps them in mind" (226–227). Historical succession, as we understand it, is applied retroactively.²⁷

²⁷This tendency of consciousness seems to be most at play when considering the temporal setting of the opus, especially the *Quartet* and the *Quintet*, both of which overlap World War II. As "I endure," the "I" that endures as embodied in Durrell's narrators keeps this consciousness in mind.

On a larger level, the novels' (and narrators') shared obsession with memory gives place to focus on the present. At first, Lawrence Lucifer revisits the journals of long-gone Gregory, Darley constantly reworks the past in hopes of arriving at a greater understanding of it, Charlock admits to obsessing over memory, and Blanford lives for part of the *Quintet* in the past of Constance's life. Their lives unfold "in space rather than in time"; they "live for the external world rather than for [them]selves"; they "speak rather than think"; they "'are acted' rather than act [them]selves" (231). This living for the external world is most apparent in Darley's assertion that the city of Alexandria "used us as its flora" (*Quartet* 17), in Charlock's pogonometric predictors, and in Blanford's creation of a text fixated upon the past he once shared with his dead friends (*Livia, Constance, Sebastian*).

In each of these cases, "deep introspection [...] leads us to grasp our inner states as living things, constantly *becoming*" (Bergson, *Time* 231). In recognizing the inner state of life as a living thing in itself, in recognizing life as a process of becoming, Durrell's narrators open to themselves a world of freedom; they "act freely [...] to recover possession of oneself." In this liberating action, they are able "to get back into pure duration" (231–232), "the form which the succession of our conscious states assumes when our ego lets itself *live*, when it refrains from separating its present state from its former states" (100). In the *Quartet*, Darley's acting-Alexandria is acted upon in the fourth book, which witnesses the effects of World War II on the city. In the *Revolt*, Charlock's predictors become less predictors than actualizers of the future they foretell. In the *Quintet*, too, the train of reminiscence ridden by Bruce in the beginning is somehow derailed or diverted in the course of the writing of the novel, which, though purportedly a novel about the deaths of friends in the past, neglects to match that past with the present of the first book, ending instead in an alternative present, in which Constance lives and Sutcliffe is real (and alive).

This rejection of the past in favor of a created and interpreted present is effected partly through the therapeutic introspective aspects of the creation of respective novels for their narrators, but it is also due partly to an action, which brings the present recognizably into the control of the narrator. Bergson writes that "life is an evolution [...] in reality the body is changing form at every moment [...] *form is only a snapshot view of a transition*" (Bergson, *Creative* 302), but that we seldom recognize this truth:

We must, by a strong recoil of our personality on itself, gather up our past which is slipping away, in order to thrust it, compact and undivided, into a present which it will create by entering. Rare indeed are the moments when we are self-possessed to this extent: it is then that our actions are truly free. (200)

This same call to action is mirrored in Filippo Marinetti's "Founding and Manifesto of

Futurism," in which he deprecates the tendency "to waste all your best powers in this eternal and futile worship of the past" (Marinetti 252)—a tendency found in all of Durrell's narrators—advocating instead the decision to "give ourselves utterly to the Unknown" (250). These unique moments, serious decisions which might never be repeated, mark the denouement of each of Durrell's texts: in the *Quartet*, the action of Darley saving Clea from drowning by cutting off her hand;²⁸ in the *Revolt*, the torching of the firm's contracts;²⁹ in the *Quintet*, the action of Blanford defying his handicap to save Constance from drowning.³⁰ In the *Quartet* and the *Quintet*, two true Künstlerromane, further action toward the end of those texts marks additional decisive moments: in *Clea*, Darley writes "with trembling fingers" the story of the *Quartet* (*Quartet* 877); and in *Quinx*, shivering in anticipation, Blanford—along with Constance, a troop of gypsies, and the whole town of *Saintes-Mairies-de-la-Mer*—enters the booby-trapped cave which is, at once, an old storehouse of World War II arms, a gypsy shrine, and the hidden location of the Templar treasure (*Quintet* 1366–1367). At the end of each of Durrell's novels, the text gives place of precedence to an extreme becoming, an enlarged present of liberated consciousness, what *The Black Book* calls "the enormous Now" (*Black Book* 244), the *Quartet* calls the Heraldic Universe (which "nudges" Darley (*Quartet* 877)), the *Revolt* recognizes in the disaffected dancing of Charlock and Benedicta (*Nunquam* 283), and the *Quintet* calls "reality prime" (*Quintet* 1367). Each of these constructions intimates a timelessness of action of the present: Darley's authorship of the *Quartet* is "quite unpremeditated, quite unannounced," but it is also the action of "every story-teller since the world began" (*Quartet* 877); in the *Revolt*, characters can no longer rely on a prediction of the future modeled upon a scientific understanding of the past to place themselves in the present; in the *Quintet*, reality prime is the "totally unpredictable" (*Quintet* 1367). Additionally, in all of the novels, this final action marks the end of the past and the beginning of the unpredictable future, beyond the bounds of the novels' edges.

²⁸Dahlgren sees the severance of Clea's hand as the point at which Darley changes from observer to actor (Dahlgren 82).

²⁹Charlock's destruction of the firm's archives is a true Marinettian action: "We will destroy the museums, libraries, academies of every kind [...] Come on! set fire to the library shelves!" (Marinetti 252–252). This past that Marinetti advocates abolishing is one composed of mutually external states, an externalization hindering any affiliation with the "pure heterogeneity" of Bergson's pure duration (Bergson, *Time* 104): "Museums: cemeteries! ... Identical, surely, in the sinister promiscuity of so many bodies unknown to one another" (Marinetti 252).

³⁰Only *The Black Book*, mitigated by the failure of Lawrence Lucifer's project, might suggest an inability to enter into the present through action; nonetheless, that failure itself represents an abandonment of the past (and the externalized journal entries of Herbert Gregory) in favor of the celebration of present tense at the end of that text: "There is Bach playing [...] There is you dancing [...] There is the cadenza of flesh here naked [...] It is [...] For this is [...] There is [...] It is [...] It is [...] There is [...] This is how it ends" (*Black Book* 243–244).

These actions evince states that “cannot be adequately expressed in words or artificially reconstructed by a juxtaposition of simpler states” because these states are “phases of our real and concrete duration, a heterogeneous duration and a living one” (Bergson, *Time* 239). In the *Quartet*, Darley tells us that “everything depend[s] on our interpretation of the silence around us,” explaining in an endnote to find an explanation on the next page, which turns out to be blank (*Quartet* 195, note on page 203). In the *Quintet*, the reality prime that “rushed to the aid of fiction” also rushes in to aid in the camouflaging of that novel’s edge (*Quintet* 1367). In each of Durrell’s novels, this Bergsonian duration realizes a Present composed of the carrying of all Past states into the Future, an inclination for becoming (of self, of text, of place, and of time) rather than become. In Durrell, as in Einstein, Spengler, and Bergson, this present is the moment from which all opportunities are available. After each work’s relative *Tunc* and *Nunquam*—after Then and No Time—can come only *Nunc*, the enormous, living Now, free from the constraints of the past and living in the “pure present.”

CHAPTER 5

A System of Question Marks

Pluralistic empiricism knows that everything is in an environment, a surrounding world of other things, and that if you leave it to work there it will inevitably meet with friction and opposition from its neighbors. (Pluralistic Universe 90)

You see, I've done these things that read a bit like detective stories. But of course they're more than that, because I've built a whole system of question marks into them. This is what bothers the critics with their passion for categorizing. They don't know what to call the books.

(Durrell, *Conversations* 91)

If the first four dimensions correspond to Durrell's understanding of Einstein's four-dimensional continuum, then any attempt at understanding a fifth dimension must complement those earlier ones. As the second dimension extends the first by presenting a *plane* on which a plurality of (first-dimensional) *lines* might interact, so too does the third dimension present the *depth* that allows interaction of a plurality of planes, and the fourth dimension offers *time* as a means of interaction for multiple three-dimensional states. Continuing this thread, a plurality of *times* suggests a periodization quite similar to that employed by Spengler: by recognizing similar aspects among periods or eras, we compare them, presenting them the field in which they interact with one another.

Such a comparison elicits a familiar question with regard to Durrell's writing: what to call the books? In a 1968 interview, Durrell playfully acknowledges the problems of categorization his readers face with regard to his works. These problems are understandable: his four serious works are actually twelve, published between 1938 and 1985, and which (as early as 1937) were styled as one. His writing, too, shifts considerably from *The Black Book*, with its stark pessimism and obvious influences of Henry Miller, to the playful *Quinx: or The Ripper's Tale*, the ending of which promises incalculable cultural renewal through the lost treasures of a mystic order—or the death of a multitude of people and the simultaneous loss of thousands of years of culture, hinging on the precipices of the fallout of World War II, a theme which haunts his work from the *Quartet* onward.

What to call the books? Reed Way Dasenbrock makes the argument that critics of Durrell ought to work to place him in a theoretical context that affords him continuing relevance (Dasenbrock, "Centrifugality" 91). The sentiment mirrors the quote by Wordsworth featured as the epigraph to the *Quintet's* last volume: a work "must itself create the taste by which it is to be judged" (Wordsworth qtd. in *Quintet* 1176). While some critics might take alongside any study of Durrell the concomitant task of placing him in a manner that he might be well "received,"¹ Stefan Herbrechter on the other hand disagrees:

The concern over the survival of literary reputation implies at least two things: first, that Durrell's work has either not yet been, is not being, or has stopped being received; and second, that there is a certain necessity to encourage, extend or revive a reading or re-reading of Durrell's texts [...]. (Herbrechter, *Ethics* 9)²

And Donald Kaczvinsky writes that Durrell's "status in British literature remains uncertain" (Kaczvinsky, "Review" 183). Critics have questioned Durrell's literary survivability ever since the publication of *Tunc*, widely expected to be the successor to the *Quartet* but widely and wildly unpopular among the *Quartet's* advocates. In "Lawrence Durrell and the Modes of Modernism," Dasenbrock argues that this unpopularity and shift in style is perhaps a result of his development as an author: the many people who enjoyed the *Quartet* did so because of its inherent modernism; the same many who dislike the *Revolt* do so because of its inability to fit into those modes of modernism (Dasenbrock, "Modes" 516). While Dasenbrock was not the first to categorize the eddy of change in Durrell's oeuvre as part of a larger current in the twentieth century, there is little agreement as to when or where any such change can be recognized.

Continuing a trend that began in the 1970s and that steadily grew in force in the 1980s, Durrell scholarship in the 1990s and into the 21st century has increasingly hinged on his placement as a modernist or postmodernist writer. Early considerations are usually conservative in their methods, eager to connect Durrell with the already-lauded names of modernist literature: James, Conrad, Moore, Wilde, Shaw, Pound, Eliot, Lewis, H. D., Lowell, Joyce, Woolf, Aldington, Huxley, Read, Lawrence, Graves, Campbell, and Auden (Dasenbrock, "Centrifugality" 200–201).³ This trend reverses as the concept of postmodernism filters through literary studies, providing an alternative cachet in the form of a new and respectable literature—and a trendy new theoretical stance. While early proponents of Durrell's postmodernist placement may depend upon homespun definitions of a particular sort of non-

¹ See Keith Brown, "Letter from Norway."

² For more on Herbrechter's view of *receiving* Durrell, see also (Herbrechter, "Canon" 329).

³ MacNiven adds to this list others, such as Proust, Ford, and Greene (MacNiven, "Quincunx" 235).

modernism, later analyses tend to employ established theories of postmodernism, less dependent upon a particular (and sometimes peculiar) personal interpretation of modernism.

This chapter will consider as a field of comparison these periods, suggesting a differentiation in Durrell's works from his understandings of modernism (as evidenced in the *Key*, delivered as lectures in 1947–1948) to his practice in his opus. In making such a suggestion, I will first justify Durrell's understanding of modernist literature (an understanding that is itself seldom studied *as* an understanding, rather than the mouthpiece of an author) to those of others more highly considered. I will then trace—in the fondness for literary forms that disrupt, echoed variously throughout his opus—an expectation for the opus to enact a kind of change, a disruption from a modernist tradition. In the second section of the chapter, I will show, too, that to call his books *postmodernist* for their unwillingness to fit into modernist expectations, is equally problematic. Finally, in the last section I will return Durrell's opus to the flux, the liminality of Turner and plurality of James, arguing that it is both more beneficial and more accurate to consider the motion of the opus as something continuing and continual. In the planning of Durrell's opus we can see a *separation* from modernism, and in the practice of that opus we can recognize the bewildering betwixt and between of the *liminal*, but we never get a sense of *aggregation* of competing forces, a coming to the fore of new order in light of all the indeterminacy of passage. The inability to place Durrell's oeuvre, an inability to “know what to call the books,” arises from Durrell's keen desire to implant a “system of question marks” into them, resisting categorization and reductionist readings.⁴

I SEPARATION - Modernism?

Other than through letters he wrote on the subject to Miller and Eliot, Durrell's understanding of early twentieth-century literature is best approached through his *Key to Modern Poetry*, published from a collection of lectures he gave in Argentina, where

⁴John Frow has argued that the continuing success of postmodernism as a concept depends greatly upon considerations of what the word itself might mean; any debate of a definition is always “a move *within* the genre of the postmodern” as “any publicity is good publicity” (Frow 22). Nevertheless, as I am entering into a dialogue already begun (and still continuing) the luxury of refraining from offering free press eludes me. Still, in this chapter I hope to show the placement of Durrell's opus in a twentieth-century continuum of change, thus avoiding as much as possible the problematic nature of the term as “a trap [...] lacking any historical reference” (22). At the same time, I hope to overcome the danger Frow recognizes in the term's plurality of meaning (21). I argue instead that Durrell's decisive move against a modernist tradition in his opus (see the discussion from page 147) begins the transition toward something that might be called a postmodernist tradition; the works of the opus represent milestones of progress rather than any realization of a final outcome.

he served the British Council. The title itself hints at Durrell's approach to modernist poetry as if to a puzzle needing a *key* to be understood:

the common reader [...] knows that the twentieth century is a battlefield, but he does not know what the battle is about [...]. The allusions to books he has not read, to authors he has only heard of, irritate him and make him feel that perhaps he is the victim of an intellectual leg-pull. (*Key* 144–145)

Nevertheless, writes, Ian MacNiven, “the book is a ‘Key to Lawrence Durrell’, although not intended” (MacNiven, *Biography* 351). As such, it serves as an appropriate entry into Durrell's understanding of modernism, putting him in the context of other early twentieth-century literature. Having done so, I will then compare Durrell's understanding with those of critics writing later in the twentieth century who enjoy the advantage of time and a privileged hindsight. Finally, I will consider the opus as a response to this state of “modern” literature, ultimately recognizing it to be a reaction against the modern novel, a bid to reanimate what Durrell thought to be a genre grown woefully out of touch.

A Key to Durrell's Modern Poetics

Durrell begins his *Key* with an apology and an explanation: printed from his British Council lectures, the book's primary purpose is to “supply a satisfactory key to the complexities of contemporary practice in poetry” (*Key* ix). He warns his reader that he may be “guilty of oversimplifying ideas,” blaming the limitations of the lectures for the shape of the essays (ix). If he begins his book with an apology, he readily extends that apology on behalf of modern poetry itself, openly sympathizing that “The unspoken question at the back of the common reader's mind today is always: ‘Why doesn't the poet say what he means more clearly?’” (ix). The *Key* itself takes as its premise the idea of modern poetry as some locked secret needing to be opened. Nevertheless, the reader troubled by lists of books he has not read and authors he has only heard of will not be assuaged; in the first chapter alone, Durrell's study ranges from poetry to psychology, anthropology to quantum physics, biology to sociology, and theology to archaeology. In his preface he drops the names of prominent literary personalities alongside those of criticism and science, hardly distinguishing one from another: Hardy, Eliot, Newbolt, de la Mare, Frazer, Jung, Rank, Groddeck, Freud, Einstein, Whitehead, Eddington, and others (ix–xii). Such alienation is perhaps partly designed, as Durrell explains his earlier understandings in a later address:

as I came to read them I realised just how stable their Victorian world had been and how unstable mine had become [...] The new departures in scientific thought had unsettled and indeed had even ruptured both syntax and serial order. (“Elephant” 4)

As Durrell's syntax and serial order is threatened by the instability of modern living, any distinction between poetry and science becomes increasingly arbitrary. In presenting a key to *modernist* poetry, Durrell seems to hint at the possibility of the reducibility of any poetry under such a banner; such is not his intention:

I have thought to present poetry as one dialect of [...] a universe perpetually shifting, changing its relations and tenses [...], altering its outlines [...] By this means I hoped to trap those qualities which were inherent in the poets of a given time. (*Key xi*)

These qualities are part of localized currents, themselves always already trapped within greater flows of contradictions often averaged out to a single flow, simplified to be understood: "if we [...] examine one or two of the heavier objects [...] we might reach a few conclusions, however tentative. Of course to use the historical method often leads one into over-simplifications" (8). These simplifications are necessary in order to make sense of staggering shifts over time; only by subjecting ourselves to them can we hope to "trace historic origins for the change [...] and] find some sort of clue to the exhausted subjectivity of the contemporary hero" (14).

He identifies modernism's crucial concerns as "new hypotheses concerning the self or psyche, and the new theories about the make-up of the universe we are inhabiting" (xi).⁵ Among these concerns of the self are new considerations in psychology, which bring with them added concerns about the mortal and observational limits of subjectivity (4–6). The theories of the makeup of the universe that differentiate (Victorian and) modernist thinkers from their predecessors include increased awareness of the true age of the Earth—dependent, in part, upon Victorian geological hypotheses by Lyell, anthropological contributions by Darwin, and archaeological discoveries by Schliemann, Petrie, and Evans (14–16)—and Einstein's virtual implosion of the Newtonian model of physics (23).⁶

These discoveries and advancements of the Victorian age meet up and suggest a larger and interdisciplinary picture to the thinker of the modern era willing to consider them. The discovery of radioactivity in 1898, for example, leads scientists into the field of philosophy, conjecturing on the concepts of time and causality before arriving at the possibility that (in the words of Durrell) "the ultimate laws of nature were simply not causal at all." From here, Einstein's theories of relativity are no small leap, but the cross-disciplinary implications, Durrell argues, are as influential: "It is important to realize that Einstein's theory joined up subject and object, in very much the same

⁵Marxism also gets a mention; though Durrell calls it "the ugly duckling among the philosophies," he nonetheless recognizes its importance in Victorian culture (18).

⁶While many of these cultural moments he cites are from the Victorian, and not modernist, age, "Food," he writes, "takes time to reach the stomach," suggesting that writing after the 1890s represents an act of delayed literary digestion (19).

way as it joined up space and time." What is important, he maintains, "are not the equations [...] but the symbolic act of joining what is separated" (25–26); these ideas permeated everyday life and likely even shaped Einstein as much as they were shaped by him. In literature, Durrell finds this new approach of time in Proust and Joyce, who exhibit a "slow-motion camera at work":

Their books do not proceed along a straight line, but in a circular manner, coiling and uncoiling [...]. Characters] hang above the time-track which leads from birth to action, and from action to death: and, spreading out time in this manner, contribute a significance to everything about them.
(31)

The Einsteinian joining of space and time manifests itself in literature by presenting a newly-rich multi-dimensional permeability: just as a director might pan his movie camera across a scene in two dimensions or move through the space to present alternative perspectives, so too might the modern author adopt the fourth dimension as a potential medium through which to move for considering an object-event from another angle.

Psychology, too, presented new dimensions in which to consider the ego: "The same forces which were inquiring into the structure of the universe were also busy extending the domains of our understanding within the boundaries of the self" (50). Like the archaeological and geological discoveries that suggested an incomprehensible age of the earth, the mapping of consciousness introduced equally unfathomable depths to the human mind. Furthermore, the introduction of the Unconscious carried with it the consequence of alienation's inescapability, and Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* suggested the inherence of linguistic play—all leading to new artistic styles in modernist literature:

the literature of our age is distinguished by two sorts of compression which reflect both the changes in the idea of time [...] and also the change in our attitude to the psyche. Thus you find not only the ideas of a poem compressed but the sound-values as well, with the rhyme often coming in the middle of the line instead of being set like a milestone at the end [...]. Further compression still (as in James Joyce's last work) leads to the pun—the word with more than one meaning [...]. (65)

Durrell finds a significant interdependence between literature and these new scientific areas in modernist works. While it is certain that past ages have had similar overlaps between science and literature, science during the Victorian age and after is profound enough in its difference to merit special attention: "the last hundred years has been one of the most momentous epochs in history. Between 1840 and 1900 lie sixty years characterized by tremendous intellectual upheavals" (14). Nevertheless, he uses the image of a pendulum which, once in motion, will always swing back, seeking new

methods of portrayal and rejecting the ones of old once they are thoroughly “digested” (65).

Other Critical Approaches

Durrell’s *Key* marks two particularly disruptive elements of modern culture: new understandings of the self, and new conceptions of the world. Moreover, the interaction between these realms is particularly different in modernist living, Durrell recognizes, as Einstein’s influence joins these two halves and effaces the distinction between self and world—even as the complexity of each grows.

Other later critics expand this list; as Victorian discoveries were swallowed and took time to travel the gullet of modernist literature, so too has other, newer work nourished the culture of criticism. Alan Friedman writes in 1966 of the “confluence of psychological, philosophical, scientific, social, economic, and political causes, analogues, and explanations” responsible for many aspects of modernism (Friedman qtd. in Stevenson, *Modernist* vii).⁷ While Stevenson explains that the term *modernism* was used deprecatorily early on, describing something betraying “the solid values of tradition,” it has taken a more positive turn by Woolf’s “Modern Fiction” (1919) at the latest, denoting things as varied as innovations in style, structure, and language (2–4), or something as subtle as a notable “extent” of such change (5); it can even be determined by a commitment to novelty, as Stevenson writes in 2004: “modernist writing [...] is critically defined, as its name suggests, by its determination to make literature itself a new experience: its appeal for later generations of writers principally resulted from its offer of new styles, forms, and strategies” (Stevenson, *Last?* 73).⁸

Peter Childs also recognizes the sense of disruption of which Durrell writes, identifying in modernism a departure from traditional styles and forms (Childs 2–3). Nevertheless, he problematizes the word, explaining that it is not one owing its provenance to the arrival of a particular style in 1900s, but rather that it is one of which a form has been used to describe a contemporary style since the late-sixteenth century (13), and which has since been used to describe the traits of that one period of time. While Durrell’s meaning of “modern” in the title of *Key to Modern Poetry* belongs undoubtedly to the former understanding, the contemporary style he speaks of in the 1940s

⁷While Friedman laments that his perspective lacks the necessary critical distance from which to consider this confluence “properly” (Friedman qtd. in vii), in 1992 Randall Stevenson writes that “it is no longer premature to examine modernist fiction in terms of the ‘confluence’ [Friedman] outlines” (vii). Among the new understandings afforded by time, Stevenson lists the critical work of Mikhail Bakhtin, Gérard Genette, Fredric Jameson, and Stephen Kern (vii).

⁸See also Christopher Baldick’s *The Modern Movement*: “the major development of literature during these three decades is presented—commonly to the exclusion of all else—as the triumph of the revolution that we call modernism” (Baldick 3).

is one identified primarily by key artists of the latter definition: Pound, Eliot, Joyce, and Woolf. Even still, writes Childs, while a time-bound model of modernism would fall within the years 1890–1930, “most literature written in the period was not Modernist” (18). This sense of exclusivity of style (as not all artists within a particular period of time can be considered *modernist*) leads us, then, to consider the sense of style meant in the term.

Michael Levenson recognizes a stylistic concern in the very sense of disruption highlighted by Durrell, Stevenson, and Childs. Modernist artists embodied a paradoxically simultaneous “mix of skepticism and ardor,” he finds: “skepticism about the destiny of the species, ardor for the latest innovation in a brush stroke or a rhyme scheme” (Levenson 6). And Michael Bell finds the seeds of this skepticism in contemporary science—the very science to which Durrell attributes the twinned disruptions of self and universe—which “was losing some of its epistemological self-evidence and privileged status,” thus lending literature an accompanying questioning and epistemological uncertainty (Bell 11). Bell identifies in this uncertainty a central tenet of modernism very much aligned to Durrell’s sense of “exhausted subjectivity” (*Key* 14): Bell’s “central recognition” of modernism is its displacement of the subject to a “relative status” (Bell 13).

In addition to this emphasis on relativism and epistemological instability, Bell identifies a few other traits of modernism: the concerns of history “in a double sense”—that is, simultaneous concerns of historical context and historicity itself (14–15); an emphasis on the nature of the artistic medium, in literature manifesting as an awareness of language (16);⁹ a disavowal of earlier idealism and advocacy of skeptical metaphysics (Bell 19); the interest in primitivism, resulting from new anthropological pursuits (20); similarly, the interest, if mostly artistic, in colonial subjects, and their use in writing as objects of psychological projection (23–25); and an espousal of “Sexual liberation, and liberation through sexuality” (25). Childs, on the other hand, favors the characteristics of modernism described in Norman Cantor’s “Model of Modernism”: a favoring of “anti-historicism”; focus on the individual over the social; self-referentiality; discord over harmony; the primacy of functionality; elitism; sympathy to “feminism, homosexuality, androgyny and bisexuality”; the superiority of art over ethics; and a general feeling of despair (Childs 18–19).

⁹Citing David Lodge, Childs writes of this awareness of language, identifying a rise in modernist literature’s use of metaphor in favor of the metonymy of realism in earlier literature. In the interbellum wane of modernist literature’s metaphor, he writes, “the late Modernists, such as Beckett, Lowry and Lawrence Durrell, staged a recovery for metaphor before the down-to-earth postwar authors (such as Philip Larkin, Kingsley Amis, John Wain) once more championed a realist style.” Postmodernism, too, favors this use of metaphor and language play “in its use of the fantasy mode, in its radical dismantling of character and plot, and particularly in its experiments with language” (Childs 189). The recognition of a modernist surge of metaphor corresponds to Durrell’s recognition of linguistic compression.

Durrell's *Key* misses out on much of Bell's considerations: in 1947 it is likely he is himself very much in the midst of digesting some of modernism's newer philosophical implications and is perhaps unaware of the consequences and conclusions of them. For example, while he devotes a large portion of the *Key*'s introduction to the new sense of history such a world is responsible for creating, he focuses more on history in a single sense: namely, an enlarged historical context.¹⁰ Likewise, he does not recognize the modernist predilection to use colonial figures as objects of psychological projection, despite having used the same technique himself in his first novel, *The Pied Piper of Lovers* (1935)—“pied piper” in the title referring to the protagonist's implied racial and cultural duality as simultaneously Indian and English.¹¹ Furthermore, though the aspect is crucial to any reading of the *The Alexandria Quartet*, Durrell avoids the sense of sexual liberation completely in the *Key*. Neither do Cantor's emendations fit entirely into Durrell's model: as Durrell's history is singular, it cannot be anti-historic; the primal changes Durrell notes in the modern era are decidedly social rather than individual; and despair does not enter into his consideration of modernist literature at all—except perhaps on the part of the reader (*Key* 144–145).

Childs' sense of modernism expressed in a style rather than a particular timeframe finds purchase, too, in Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane, who agree that it is difficult “to find a place or date for” modernism (Bradbury and McFarlane 30). While there are many differing opinions on the meaning of modernism, Bradbury and McFarlane argue that these opinions share a similar interpretation of “historical evolution coupled with a notion of crisis and a notion of a point of culmination,” or “*Wendepunkt* (turning point)” (36, 40). It is this lack of continuity—mirrored equally in Harry Levin's unsettling “awareness of chronology” and sense of “feeling belated and up-to-date simultaneously” (Levin 285, 287), Cantor's anti-historicism, and Bradbury and McFarlane's *Wendepunkt*—that leads to an equation of history with mythology (Childs 19). Durrell's *Key* seems, in this regard, to be a modernist creation itself: the key to the *Key* lies in Durrell's understanding of the modern period to be “characterized by tremendous intellectual upheavals” and “one of the most momentous epochs in history” (*Key* 14). Durrell's perspective of his own historical context is one that causes him to mythologize it so that it seems both greater and more disruptive; while he is more optimistic about the outcomes of such tremendous change, the drive to newness Durrell expresses in the *Key* corresponds well to what David Trotter describes as “a feeling, more prevalent among writers than among critics, that the

¹⁰The results of such a delayed digestion might explain the discrepancy between his 1938 epistolarily-expressed dislike of Spengler's theories and the 1970 novelistically-dedicated endorsement of the same. See the footnote on page 121 of Chapter 4.

¹¹Joseph Boone also recognizes Egypt as a convenient screen for eroticized projection in Durrell's writing (Boone 93–95).

novel as traditionally conceived was no longer up to the job: that its imaginary worlds did not, in fact, correspond to the way one's fellows spent their entire lives" (Trotter 70).

A New Logic

It is in light of this sense of newness that I place Durrell's opus; rather, it is in light of Durrell's call to a *new* sense of newness that I hope to establish a field in which his opus might find itself at home. For all of his theorizing on modern literature in the 1940s, the subjects of the *Key* tend to be of the 1920s and 1930s. In 1937, in a letter to Henry Miller, Durrell describes the plan of what he later calls his opus (*agon, pathos, anagnorisis*), describing that the impact of such a collection—if he decides to write them—would be revolutionary in the literary field: "Perhaps I shan't write them. If I do and they are what they might be, well, as I say, one will be an answer to you all" (*Durrell-Miller* 65). And in a letter to Eliot written in 1945, Durrell expressed an opinion of himself that he was one of the top three poets in England, numbering only among Auden and Eliot; the rest being merely "decorators of each others' bed-sitters" ("Letters to Eliot" 355–356). From these letters we can gather that Durrell's opinion of any modernist sense of newness—by then even a *tradition* of newness expressed by modernist writers in a shared, common vocabulary of Bergsonian and Freudian application (*Key* 116–117, 50)—is that it is, in the words of Trotter, "no longer up to the job." While "modern" artists describe a world that imparts a sense of newness, the overuse of particular methods of description dulls that message.

Durrell's opus is a project to reinvigorate the novel, to make it once more "up to the job." It is for this reason that he begins to differentiate among his writing—*serious* novels, other novels, poetry, travel books, essays—as created for different purposes. To Miller he writes in 1937 of composing these *serious* novels "for full orchestra" once every three years, proposing to spend the rest of the time with "literary gardening" (*Durrell-Miller* 81). To Eliot he describes in 1945 the need to satisfy artistic muses as well as worldly ones: "I must write for practice for fun for money and for my girl friends—no?" ("Letters to Eliot" 354). And in 1955, to Miller again, he describes the opus as "3 *real* novels" (*Durrell-Miller* 278). This sense of the combined *agon, pathos*, and *anagnorisis* (and, later, *sparagmos* (Pine 34)) as significant works among other, less-serious writing bespeaks Durrell's desire for the opus to achieve something more significant, to revolutionize the scene of the twentieth-century novel—a desire he puts to words more explicitly in an address he gives in Pennsylvania in 1986: "What I had vaguely in mind was [...] that I might by luck manage to refurbish a little bit the English novel, which it seemed to me was showing signs of terrible wear and tear

because of its epistemological backwardness" ("Overture" 18). As such, the opus is both a "challenge" and "a toehold to young poets and young thinkers" as well as "a provocation to people who are not growing fast enough" (19).

It is perhaps for this reason that Theodore Steinberg argues that the use of Einstein to structure *The Alexandria Quartet* marks a disruption from Durrell's modernist forebears and an entry into the postmodern (Steinberg, "Postmodern Epic" 65): though Durrell numbers Einstein's influence as crucial to understanding modern literature, his *Quartet* explicitly seeks to redress the imbalance of Bergsonian (in favor of Einsteinian) representations of time.¹² Likewise, John Unterecker's commentary in 1975 on Durrell and the state of the contemporary novel ("terms that until the mid-twenties of this century were enormously valuable [...] no longer seem even faintly applicable" (Unterecker 168)) emphasizes the very difference marked in Durrell's writing from that of earlier modernist writers. For this reason, too, Reed Way Dasenbrock identifies the difference between the *Revolt* and works styled in the modernist tradition, finding in Durrell "a revolt against those modes and a searching critique of them" (Dasenbrock, "Modes" 516).

For our purposes, we might recall Lawrence Lucifer's attempt to write a novel, "a short *précis*," to *explain* his new concept of the novel—"the new myth which I am undoubtedly on the point of creating"—an attempt which, as *The Black Book*, marks merely the beginning, "the new vocabulary which I am learning with ease":

I am beginning my agony in the garden and there are too many words, and too many things to put into words. In the fantastic proscenium of the ego, when I begin my soliloquy, I shall not choose as Gregory chose. To be or not to be. [...] The question has been decided. Art must no longer exist to depict man, but to invoke God. It is on the face of this chaos that I brood. (*Black Book* 242–243)

This vocabulary which Lawrence Lucifer begins learning in *The Black Book* is of the language in which Darley speaks at the end of the *Quartet*; here, Durrell's agony develops into a pathos fashioned much in the style of Pursewarden's plans to reinvigorate the genre with the introduction of an "n-dimensional novel" comprised of a "marriage of past and present with the flying multiplicity of the future" (*Quartet* 198). Balthazar's suggestion of form for Darley's manuscript as "sliding panels" or a palimpsest, depicts the kind of reality in which truths "are thrown down one upon the other, the one obliterating or perhaps supplementing another," the consideration raising for Darley "the harder-grained question of form" (338). This intertwining and interpenetration of form in the pathos makes way further to the *Revolt*, Durrell's sparagmos in which Charlock writes subsequent books simultaneously—"While I am writing one book

¹²Anne Zahlan, on the other hand recognizes Durrell's use of Einstein as a modernist convention. See the discussion on Zahlan's placement of Durrell starting on page 160.

[...] I write another about it, then a third about *it*, and so on”—a style that he suggests might offer a sense of renewal: “A new logic might emerge from it, who knows?” (*Nunquam* 16).

Finally, entering into Durrell’s anagnorisis, the “sliding panels” of the *Quartet* slide back to reveal truth:

the dire and absolute procedure which enabled him to effect a breakthrough into the other register of consciousness [...] glimpsing the very “itness” of things, of all nature, if you wish! [...] This kind of reality had no Therefore in it. [...] All Sesame slid back—it was a simply mental knack to slide the panel back upon the mirror of truth! (*Quintet* 1227–1228)

In the *Quintet*, the capability to reveal this other register is reserved for artists—often confused with *autists* (1092)—who, alone, can understand the “several dialects” of reality (1263). Finally, in Durrell’s anagnorisis, we can recognize the futility of trying to depict reality as it is lived: “‘Ordinary life’—*is* there such a thing? Yes, the observer fouls up everything by trying to [...] reproduce the limitations of his understanding” (1260). While Sutcliffe wants to “really control things. I mean Reality or YTILAER,” such a desire is incompatible with what he recognizes to be the supreme distance between perception and that very reality he wants to control: “we have never been interested in the real world—we see it through a cloud of disbelief. Ni eht gninnigeb saw eht drow!” (1094).¹³

With his opus, Durrell separates himself from the modernist tradition and texts that, as Brian McHale writes, reassure the reader in “what is (fictively) real and what fantastic” (McHale, *Constructing* 65). Julius Rowan Raper recognizes this separation specifically in *Balthazar*, arguing that Durrell’s writing in *Justine* and earlier shares elements with that of Fowles, Nabokov, Barth, and other late-modernist writers who “depend heavily on verisimilitude [...] and] avoid fantasy materials” (Raper, “Durrell’s *Justine*” 94). While these late-modernist texts often dealt with protagonists searching for patterns or order or, ultimately, meaning, Raper sees a shift towards imagination in Durrell (Raper, “Breaking” 70–73), thus evading what McHale recognizes to be the modernist predilection for reassurance. Robin Visel and Yorgos Papatheodorou, on the other hand, find Durrell’s use of the “modernist technique of multiple narrative perspectives” to be well suited to the destabilizing democracy of polyglot life in postcolonial Alexandria—and thus characteristic of modernist literature (Visel and Papatheodorou 95).

¹³This logocentrism is manifest in the *Quintet*’s metafictional play, for example in the way Durrell describes the noise made by a character as similar to the description one might use to describe the noise made by a character: “He made the noise which is represented in French novels phonetically as ‘*Pouagh!*’” (1096).

Nevertheless, the narrativistic destabilization found in the *Quartet* denies reassurance, constructing instead a network of “ontological doubt.” This ontological uncertainty is a key trait of the texts McHale calls “an anticipation of postmodernism” (McHale, *Constructing* 65). If the modernist tradition is to be recognized by texts that reassure the reader of the divisions between reality and fantasy, the postmodernist one deliberately muddies such divisions using a variety of techniques; readers of postmodernism in Durrell’s works recognize varying levels of these techniques. The next section of the chapter will explore considerations of Durrell’s opus in light of an understanding of postmodernism.

II AGGREGATION - Postmodernism?

While Reed Way Dasenbrock notes the leanings Durrell shares with other culturally centrifugal figures (Dasenbrock, “Centrifugality” 202), and while Ian MacNiven has no trouble in producing a list of adjectives derived from the names of prominent modernist authors against which to compare Durrell (MacNiven, “Quincunx” 234–235),¹⁴ Earl G. Ingersoll berates a “general insistence on reading [Durrell’s *Quartet*] as modernist fiction” (Ingersoll, “Postmodernism” 334). In fact, since the mid-1980s, most of the critical readers of Durrell’s works have been keen to recognize its postmodern elements; Dianne Vipond, for example, sees in the *Quartet* a “true postmodernist form” and a response to the epistemological backwardness Durrell writes of in his “Overture” (Vipond 55), and Anne Zahlan notes the “postmodernist territory of *The Avignon Quintet*” (Zahlan, “Crossing” 85). Still, many of these readings depend less on specific postmodernist aspects of Durrell’s works and more on an inability to read modernist ones into them. In this section, I will first consider postmodernism as it relates to modernism before looking closely at some of these postmodernist readings. Finding these readings inconclusive, I will show that a satisfactory reading of Durrell’s postmodernism is elusive, arguing in the end that Durrell’s opus cannot be considered reliably postmodern.

Postmodernist Readings

While willing to acknowledge the novelty in the *Quartet*’s undertaking, Dasenbrock is also quite willing to place it “comfortably within modes of modernist fiction writing already assimilated by mainstream taste.” Nevertheless, he is one of the earliest to

¹⁴Compare Dasenbrock’s list of names—among them, James, Conrad, Joyce, Pound, Eliot, and Beckett (Dasenbrock, “Centrifugality” 202)—to MacNiven’s string of derived adjectives: Proustian-Bergsonian, Joycean, Conradian, Lawrencean (MacNiven, “Quincunx” 234–235).

suggest a postmodern understanding of Durrell's *Revolt*, writing that it "represents a revolt against those modes and a searching critique of them" (Dasenbrock, "Modes" 516). Unlike Zahlan, who later finds development in the *Quartet* to be leading towards a disavowal of authority (Zahlan, "Crossing" 91), Dasenbrock recognizes in that author-narrator's growth an earning of artistic integrity and novelistic command (Dasenbrock, "Modes" 516–517). This novelistic command—which Darley has only begun to recognize by the end of the *Quartet*—provides "order for the chaos of modern society." Durrell's novel, while modeled after a common nineteenth-century genre, modernizes the *Künstlerroman* by providing a complex structure, thereby "fitting into a clear modernist tradition" (517–518). In doing so, he highlights the primacy of art in modernism.

More importantly, Durrell orders this chaos through memory rather than imagination: "Memory—not imagination—is crucial in modernism" (518).¹⁵ Dasenbrock itemizes the primacy of art and memory as principal themes of modernist literature "through structure, by forming the ordinary," adding to them "life's (and art's) escape from other social forms of control [...] through sex, by breaking with that ordinary" (Dasenbrock, "Modes" 519–521). These are the modes of modernism against which, Dasenbrock argues, *Aphrodite Revolts*: where the *Quartet* places the Freudian psychological tradition in a place of importance, the *Revolt* "presents psychoanalysis as a bogus church"; where the *Quartet* chronicles Darley's search for understanding, the *Revolt* offers "titillation in place of enlightenment"; where the exploration of sex in the *Quartet* transcends and liberates, the firm in the *Revolt* promises, crucially, "control in place of liberation" (522).

Dasenbrock recognizes in the *Revolt* a growing discomfort with modern society, a capitalistic super-structure that increasingly reifies and evaluates people and art, trapping all in a veil of inauthenticity: "in the vision of *The Revolt of Aphrodite*, we are losing our freedom precisely because we are being controlled and manipulated by imitations and mechanical reproductions" (524).¹⁶ The surreal version of reality in the *Revolt* is such that it is one full of publishers but no writers, the merchandising, packaging, and distribution of a product, but no depiction of its creation (except for that of Robo-Iolanthe, who, in an odd twist, is no merchandise). Dasenbrock correctly identifies that "art is a commodity bought and sold in the world and controlled by

¹⁵ Contrast this distinction with Raper's recognition of postmodernist techniques in *Balthazar's* favoring of imagination: "Darley has transcended the literature of the memory and entered the kingdom of the imagination reclaimed by Durrell [...] and the postmodern movement" (Raper, "Breaking" 76).

¹⁶ This vision is not unlike Jameson's view of postmodernism being an artifact born of late-capitalistic society (Jameson, *Postmodernism* ix), a consciousness of Jameson's titular late capitalism, synonymous with "multinational capitalism," "spectacle or image society," "media capitalism," and "the world system" (xviii).

marketing specialists" (Dasenbrock, "Modes" 525). The sex that would have, in the *The Alexandria Quartet*, signaled transcendence and liberation is here cold and commodified, an obsession for Julian who cannot have it, a mockingly convenient ware for Iolanthe who cannot get rid of it, and an act of violence for Benedicta who delights in it—and yet is hurt by it. Dasenbrock argues that the *Revolt* refuses to conform to the limiting roles of modernism that the *Quartet* reinforces. As such, the *Revolt* represents Durrell's foray into the postmodern.

Confusingly, Dasenbrock's identification of the *Quartet*'s solidly modernist techniques is the same Vipond makes of its postmodernist ones: Vipond identifies the *Quartet* as "the earliest postmodern work of fiction where the subject is art" (Vipond 55), leading to her assertion that the *Künstlerroman* is a postmodern trend (56).¹⁷ Vipond claims Linda Hutcheon's *Narcissistic Narrative* to be her theoretical impulse for approaching "postmodernism," a marked change from earlier criticism which seems often to talk of postmodernism as if the word's meaning were personal rather than general; nevertheless, her definition of the term is strikingly broad as "both a literary period in history [...and] a theoretical model that posits certain literary traits" (54). Her list of these postmodernist literary traits is impressive in its scope, if inconclusive:

metafiction with its emphasis on the imaginative process of storytelling [...]; often a baroque or neo-baroque style with accompanying linguistic artifice and self-consciousness; a recognition of the collaborative role of the reader [...]; a privileging of form [...]; tolerance of paradox and ambiguity; an awareness of the ideological underpinnings of rhetorical "truth"; use of irony, parody, and intertextuality as defamiliarization techniques; attention to destabilized reality; a dynamic subject/object relationship; and a sensitivity to context/history. (54–55)

While Vipond may assert that the "debate over the existence of postmodernism has died down since it has become an institutionalized critical term," her own treatment of the word, unwilling to institutionalize a meaning for it, betrays the very viability of its problematic past. Nevertheless, she ultimately identifies postmodernism to be a logical extension of modernism, rather than a violent break from or rebellion against it (55).

Vipond connects Durrell's Einsteinian affiliation with the modernists, despite the natural paradoxes inherent in the relativity proposition's destabilizations (57). At the same time, the Heisenberg Principle of Indeterminacy "is common to a postmodernist

¹⁷While she mentions "Many modern novelists, e. g., Joyce, Woolf, Faulkner" (57), Vipond overlooks the primacy and influence of famous *Künstlerromane* written by some of these same modernists. An argument could be made for the propensity of certain postmodern elements in the *Künstlerroman* lacking in other forms of the *Bildungsroman*, but Vipond does not make this distinction. To note, the making of the artist in the *Künstlerroman* calls into question the nature of the work of art itself, introducing ontological instability especially where the work under question is a book presented with suggestions of *mise en abyme*.

perspective" (58). And while the form and content of *Justine* "firmly aligns the *Quartet* with the metafictional mode of postmodernism" (57), the opposition implied by the other three novels to *Mountolive* is "fundamental," the tension between *Mountolive* and the other three mirroring "the dynamic evolution of the novel as a literary genre in the twentieth century" (60). In the end, it would seem that the "missing link" to postmodernism is neither the *Künstlerroman* nor the narcissistic narrative, but the ever-elusive definition of this "institutionalized critical term."

Challenging other critics' use of the word "postmodern" as theoretically devoid of meaning, Theodore Steinberg takes it upon himself to define "postmodernism" as "works that in some way demonstrate either an awareness of or at least the effects of [Einstein's] discoveries about time and space" (Steinberg, "Postmodern Epic" 65).¹⁸ Steinberg bases this distinction on Durrell's own fascination with the implications of Einstein's physics, noting that

The *Quartet* may indeed share a number of characteristics with Cubist painting, but it is doubtful that the Cubists understood as much about Einsteinian time and space as Durrell did. The Cubists may embody that scientific revolution, but again, what makes Durrell's work epic is that he both embodies and consciously explores the implications of that revolution, of that critical moment in human history. (65)

This differentiation—the revolutionary aesthetics of Cubism *embodying* the same spirit of the revolutionary science of Einstein, while the revolutionary aesthetics of Durrell's literary style *embodying* but also *studying* and *evaluating* the implications thereof—he makes is far from a light-hearted one, as this "critical moment in human history" in part defines Steinberg's project of the epic.¹⁹ While many of the varyingly "postmodern" epics he touches upon in his paper take into consideration the moment and effect of World War II, he identifies the "critical" theme of the twentieth century (and, by association, the calling card of a postmodern work) to be, nevertheless, the reverberations of Einstein's theories and how they affect "the way that artists and thinkers approach the concept of reality" (Steinberg, "Postmodern Epic" 65).

Steinberg's recognition of the new approach to reality echoes Durrell's questioning of reality in the *Quintet* ("how real is reality, and if so why so?" (*Quintet* 1266)), just as his identification of a new extent of Einsteinian understanding is significant

¹⁸In light of his admonition of using "postmodernism" as "one of those Humpty-Dumpty terms that mean whatever the user wants them to mean," Steinberg's explanation of his own use—"I use it to mean something quite specific"—is odd (65); nevertheless, the distinction he chooses in his understanding of postmodernism is at least helpfully direct.

¹⁹"The epic is a narrative that focuses simultaneously on the lives of its characters and on a pivotal moment in the history of a community, whether that community be a nation or a people or the whole of humanity. [...] The narrative deals with both the pivotal moment and with the individual characters as they live through that moment. Because the action of the epic is so crucial to a whole civilization, it is often viewed as having cosmic significance" (Steinberg, *Epic Novels* 29).

to Durrell's project. Similarly, Vipond's acknowledgment of the *Quartet's* metafictional elements and Dasenbrock's consideration of the *Revolt's* imaginative ones are approaches few could argue with. The question of the term *postmodern*, on the other hand, is slightly problematic in each approach: Dasenbrock differentiating between modernism and postmodernism as memory and imagination; Vipond by the liberality of use of metafictional techniques (and further recognizing an epochal distinction between Einsteinian and Heisenbergian physics); and Steinberg by the lack or presence of the element of Einstein. Moreover, the prismatic nature of these three approaches is found elsewhere: Alan Friedman cites Eagleton's postmodernist dearth of depth, style, history, and political content (Friedman, *Fictional Death* 262); Raper associates *Balthazar* with a postmodernist deconstruction (Raper, "Breaking" 79); Marguerite Alexander shares McHale's sense of ontological instability in her reading of postmodernist elements of the *Quartet* (Alexander 81); and Donald Kaczvinsky writes of the *Revolt's* postmodernist awareness of the dissonance "between personal freedom and economic security" (Kaczvinsky, "Postmodern Society" 72). To approach these and other possible postmodernist readings of Durrell, it is necessary also to recognize—and reassemble, in all its Humpty-Dumpty impossibility—the term itself.

Reading Postmodernisms

In 1960, Hary Levin delivered his lecture "What was Modernism?"—among the first of a system of question marks bothering "the critics." Here, the questioning of the title assumes the end of modernism and the beginning of something else: "Today we live in what has been categorized [...] as the Post-Modern Period" (Levin 277). The modern and the postmodern Levin differentiates by recognition of the former's debt to "Humanism and the Enlightenment" versus the latter's "anti-intellectual undercurrent" (271), marking *modernism* as an indicator of qualitative, rather than merely temporal-historical, positioning (276). Nevertheless, Levin reserves less flattering characteristics for postmodernism. Postmodernism is "reproduction, not production" and postmoderns are "consumers rather than producers [...] readers of reprints and connoisseurs of high fidelity [...] gourmets by virtue of the expense account" (279). He attributes postmodernism's perceived lack of authenticity to intense insecurity, citing a list of desires camouflaged as clichés: the postmodernist wants "to take a chance on a sure thing [...] to call the long shot while hogging the inside track, to take credit for originality without risking unpopularity" (281). Modernism's recognition of and emphasis on the limits of the artistic medium (as recognized by Bell) and its self-referentiality (as recognized by Cantor) give way to a postmodernism in which art is criticism. Of contemporary novels, Levin writes, "It is significant that Lawrence Durrell's tetralogy,

one of the very few ambitious novels to appear in Britain latterly, takes place in the self-consciously decadent city of Alexandria" (279). If modernism is "the product of cities," that which is "so impelled to recreate the image of cities," it is not surprising that the postmodern work takes as its image the postmodern city—not that modernist "metropolis in all its frustrations and incongruities" (291), but a postmodern agglomeration of images, Fredric Jameson's "alienated city" that is "above all a space in which people are unable to map (in their minds) either their own positions or the urban totality in which they find themselves," a place denying the "construction or reconstruction of an articulated ensemble" whose constituent parts meaningfully align (Jameson, *Postmodernism* 51).

As Durrell recognizes a built-in delay for the ideology of an era to effect change in its literature, Levin, too, recognizes an ebb and flow of change, an ebb whose cycle he calculates to be 30 years (Levin 281). Thus, as "Broader movements, succeeding one another, are comparable in their periodicity," Levin identifies the complete cycle of Romanticism as spanning 1800–1830, followed by "Positivism, Realism, and Naturalism" from 1830–1860, "Symbolism, Estheticism, and Decadence" from 1860–1890, "The Irish Renaissance" from 1892–1922 and, finally, modernism from the 1920s–1950s (282). Needless to say, while these dates are subject to much contention, the notion behind them is not. In the 20th century, modernism is commonly considered to be withering in the 1930s, meeting its death in the horrors of World War II: Stevenson writes of a common agreement of "a decisive transition between modernist interests and postmodernist writing"—a transition whose maturation depends upon the end of World War II (Stevenson, *Last?* 79).

Still, the dates of postmodernism are as problematic to place as those of modernism. The very urge to date it might itself be considered postmodernist: much like modernism's fascination with the idea of *Wendepunkt*, Jameson writes that "the postmodern looks for breaks, for events rather than new worlds, for the telltale instant after which it is no longer the same; for the 'When-it-all-changed'" (Jameson, *Postmodernism* ix). Nevertheless, he writes, while "The moderns were interested in what was likely to come of such changes [...Postmodernism] only clocks the variations themselves" (ix). As such, "modernist history is the first casualty and mysterious absence of the postmodernism period" (xi). Rather than *history*, all postmoderns can represent are ideas and "stereotypes about that past" which remains "forever out of reach" (25).

Disagreeing with Jameson's notion of history as the "first casualty" of postmodernism, Linda Hutcheon recognizes postmodern literature by *historiographic metafiction*, "those well-known and popular novels which are both intensely self-reflexive and

yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages" (Hutcheon, *Poetics* ix, 5). Hutcheon's historiographic metafiction is notable for its awareness of both history and fiction "as human constructs" (5), an awareness that empowers that literature to challenge "the invasive culture industry [...and its] commodification processes from within" (20). Historiographic metafiction, like most metafiction, assumes irony as its main principle, both within fiction and beyond its borders (39), thereby also effacing any certainty of meaning (55). As such, she argues, it

suggests that truth and falsity may indeed not be the right terms in which to discuss fiction [...]. Postmodern novels [...] openly assert that there are only *truths* in the plural, and never one Truth; and there is rarely falseness *per se*, just others' truths. Fiction and history are narratives distinguished by their frames [...] which historiographic metafiction first establishes and then crosses, positing both the generic contracts of fiction and of history. (109-110)

Hutcheon claims that the growth of historiographic metafiction is a result of our codified difficulty in "unproblematically" knowing reality (and, equally, unproblematically knowing that we know it), always qualifying how it is we know something: the question is always "To which prior textualizations must we refer?" (119). Historiographic metafiction's inclusion and simultaneous subversion of history is a symptom of the constant qualification of discourse-awareness. Hutcheon argues that this awareness actually *empowers* the text to make obvious the necessary limitations of *textualizations* of history—the only access to history available.²⁰

Hutcheon's challenge of Jameson and other theorists of postmodernism who argue that postmodern works are "dehistoricized" highlights the effort of postmodern art to "contest the 'simulacrizaton' process of mass culture [...by] suggesting the potentially reductive quality" of such claims: "We are not witnessing a degeneration into the hyperreal without origin or reality, but a questioning of what 'real' can mean and how we can *know* it" (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 223-224). These very issues are at the heart of Brian McHale's construction of postmodernism, which is that "postmodernist fiction differs from modernist fiction just as a poetics dominated by ontological issues differs from one dominated by epistemological issues" (McHale, *Postmodernist* xii); in fact, McHale's consideration depends upon an understanding of constructivism and the belief that "*all* our cognitive operations [...] are theory-dependent" (McHale, *Constructing* 2). The anxiety Hutcheon perceives in a postmodern approach to reality is one that, in this same sense, constructs the reality (and the history) that it explores. While McHale suggests that "the dominant of modernist fiction is *epistemological*"

²⁰Earl Ingersoll, writing of *mise en abyme* in *The Avignon Quintet*, describes the situation of reversal between the text and the world: "the textual is the real and the real may be only textual" (Ingersoll, "Mise-en-Abyme" 119).

and “the dominant of postmodernist fiction is *ontological*” (McHale, *Postmodernist* 9, 10), he also writes of constructions of postmodernism that “*all of them are finally fictions*” (4).

Reading Durrell, Durrellian Readings

This uncertainty suggests the problems inherent in reassembling Steinberg’s Humpty-Dumpty with any final assurance of having done the job properly: it would be only too easy to overlook a missing piece in light of the larger goal of recognizing a sense of what will be called *postmodernism*.²¹ While it might be tempting to read *The Revolt of Aphrodite* as a postmodern problematization of the boundaries of reality and fiction, such a reading would ignore the “Postface” at the end of *Nunquam*, explaining the *Revolt* as a work in which Durrell “tried to play about with the notion of culture—what is it?” (*Nunquam* 285). Dasenbrock’s reading of the *Revolt* as offering control in the place of liberation and titillation in place of enlightenment indicates the limitations of such an understanding of reality, a postmodern reality that encloses and binds individuals. In Donald Kaczvinsky’s reading, Charlock’s burning of the archive at the end of the *Revolt* suggests that “‘modern’ values would be resurrected from the ashes of the doomed postmodern world” (Kaczvinsky, “Postmodern Society” 73), offering—much like the gypsy caves in the *Quintet*—a new means of accessing a previously hidden cache of culture. This reading can also offer an understanding of Durrell’s anxiety of *culture* as an emphasis on modernist values, proposing—in Durrell’s opus—an antithesis to the postmodern revaluation of reality in the modern consideration of culture.²²

Likewise, despite Sutcliffe’s excitement of the authorial ability to control Reality or “YTLAER,” in truth he believes that reality is clouded by “ERUTLUC”—culture—the cloud through which we see the world and which also clouds any interest in that world (*Quintet* 1093, 1094). In the *Quintet*, a sense of culture is especially important after the war, giving rise to Lord Galen’s position (“the Coordinator of Coordinated Cultures!”) from which he worries, “Our culture! What is it? I wish someone could

²¹The problems raised in these three essays are not universal to all analyses of Durrell’s potential postmodernism, but they do embody some of the common problems of dealing with the terms. To be fair, other approaches deal with these problems more subtly and to greater satisfaction. (See, especially, Kaczvinsky’s “Bringing Him to the Lure,” Zahlan’s “Crossing the Border,” Pinkney’s “Seizing the Image,” and Herbrechter’s “Lawrence Durrell and the Canon,” addressed later in this chapter).

²²In his *Key*, Durrell defines culture as a collection of methods used to interpret reality: “I take this word to mean the sum, at any given time, of all the efforts man is making to interpret the universe about him” (*Key* 1). In defining it as such, Durrell places his emphasis on the human element of reactions to such a beast—not *reality*, per se, but *art*.

tell me" (1095–1097).²³ The ending of the work may invoke "reality prime," but it does so at the moment when the discovery of the Templar's treasure just might offer extreme cultural enrichment. Recognition of culture is fundamental in the *Quartet* and *The Black Book*, too, there respectively represented in major themes of those books: imperial shifts of the mid-twentieth century and a deprecation of the status quo "English death" (*Black Book* 9).

The mania for righting cultural imbalances found throughout Durrell's opus—coupled with his plan for the work to renew the "culture" of fiction—presents a challenge to Levin's understanding of postmodernism as comprised of reproduction (and not production) and consumers (and not producers). Vipond's recognition of the central concerns of *art*, its production, and the artist in Durrell's works reflects a faithfulness to production and to the producer just as it reflects a commitment to authentic cultural artifacts. Furthermore, Steinberg's identification of Durrell's understanding of Einstein as one that afforded him a more certain understanding of the world suggests the ontological stability—the very possibility of a world able to be known—McHale limits to modernist texts (McHale, *Constructing* 64–65). In this sense, Steinberg's project of the postmodern epic, the text written of a "pivotal moment" in culture, already implies a predisposition toward ontological stability, the only position from which culturally pivotal moments might be recognized—thus suggesting for a reading of the works as not postmodernist.

We can certainly find the kind of economic postmodernism written of by Jameson throughout Durrell's opus, but we run into trouble when considering other understandings. For example, despite the nature of the texts to subvert it by reinvigorating dead characters and ascribing certain characteristics to historical figures, the history of Durrell's opus is all-too real. Reading Hutcheon's historiographic metafiction in Durrell presents a limited field for understanding history as mere construction, but Durrell's texts depend upon a particular shared historical context. The tendency of (earlier) Durrellian criticism is to mark his work's rupture with modernist techniques, finding in that distinction an illogically natural argument for the texts' postmodernity. The flawed argument is an *ignorantio elenchi* masquerading as an *ad absurdum* argument: proving the texts to be not modernist does not also prove the texts to be postmodernist. Childs' tendency to reserve the mantle of "modernist" for a selection of those writing between 1890 and 1930 rather than calling all writers of the early twentieth century modernist (Childs 18) holds equally true in an understanding of

²³As Durrell hopes to refurbish, challenge, and provoke to offer a new future for the English novel ("Overture" 18), Galen's position is especially important as one of his duties is to plot "the whole future of the European book" (*Quintet* 1095). Finding a lack of merit in the past and present states of the European book, he laments, "This is what our civilisation has come to..." (1096), intoning, via Spengler, the inevitability of a rise and fall of cultures.

“postmodernist.” Though the term is problematic to define, the currents are harder to recognize. In the next section, I will consider Durrell’s works as belonging to this current, a universe perpetually shifting.

III LIMINALITY - *Betwixt and Between?*

The first impulse of every critic of postmodernism is still to relate it to the semanteme it contains: namely, modernism. This often leads to intellectual miseries, and sometimes to critical conceits. The degree to which modernism and postmodernism seem continuous or discontinuous, and indeed both at the same time, will always depend on historical presuppositions; probably, that degree will remain perpetually moot. (Hassan, “Prospects in Retrospect” 214)

As Ihab Hassan notes above, it is nearly impossible to consider postmodernism without also addressing concomitant issues of modernism: where does one begin and the other end? in what manner are the two related (or opposed)? William James’ understanding of pluralistic empiricism describes a field of perpetual mutual influence, in which everything relates to everything else and in which each “will inevitably meet with friction and opposition from its neighbors” (James, *Pluralistic* 90). Many of the problems of (especially early) postmodernist readings of Durrell’s work is that they too often ignore this friction, relying on what Hassan calls “critical conceits” in place of a recognition of perpetual shifting.

McHale addresses some of the problems inherent in such considerations; though his *Postmodernist Fiction* is “essentially a one-idea book” (McHale, *Postmodernist* xii), in it, McHale repeatedly questions the term—“Postmodernist?”—before conceding that “Nobody likes the term, yet people continue to prefer it over the even less satisfactory alternatives” (3–4). The trouble comes, as he explains more adamantly in *Constructing Postmodernism*, when critics forget that there really is no postmodernism “out there” (McHale, *Constructing* 205).²⁴ Rather, he reminds us that

period terms such as these [...] are after all *only* constructs, convenient literary-historical counters, figments generated by the discourses of critics, literary historians, reviewers, publishers, professors, and (sometimes) writers themselves. If we reify such categories, turning them into pseudo-objects with sharp outlines and unambiguous identities, we will inevitably get “amphibious” texts [...] wrong; but worse than that, we will delude ourselves about the epistemological and ontological status of all our literary-historical discursive constructs, and in that sense will get *all* our “modernist” and “postmodernist” texts wrong. (164)

²⁴McHale is quite clear in this regard: “the *thing* to which the term claims to refer, *does not exist*” (McHale, *Postmodernist* 4); “No doubt there ‘is’ no such ‘thing’ as postmodernism” (McHale, *Constructing* 1); “there is no such ‘thing’ as postmodernism” (205).

Too often critics overlook the constructed nature of these terms in eagerness to figure out “what to call the books.” Durrell’s image of the pendulum swinging (*Key* 65) is perhaps more accurate when considering something as abstract as periodization: to rely too heavily on fixed terms introduces the notions of exteriority, externality, and separation, negating any overlap in constructions. Allowing the two to meet provides a rich ground for sharing connection—and allows one to consider the factors of any transition between the two. This section will address the connection inherent in a shift between modernism and postmodernism, revisiting a sense of the liminal as read in Turner and James before finally reading in the instability of Durrell’s works an inhabiting of that transition.

Borderline Receptions

Anne Zahlan uses Brian McHale’s theories of dominants in modernist and postmodernist fictions to identify a different separation in Durrell’s writing, finding in *Clea* the transition which would follow in the postmodern qualities of *The Revolt of Aphrodite*. While *The Alexandria Quartet* “as a whole qualifies as modernist according to McHale’s chief criterion [...] Durrell appears [later] to have turned away from the *Quartet*’s epistemological investigations of perception and impression to undertake ontological exploration” (Zahlan, “Crossing” 88). In *The Avignon Quintet*, Zahlan recognizes McHale’s *ontological* dominant of postmodernist literature, literature engaged in asking the question “Which world is this? What is to be done in it? Which of my selves is to do it?” (Higgins qtd. in McHale 10 and Zahlan 88).

Zahlan identifies the *Quartet*’s preoccupation with Einsteinian science—and the concomitant concerns with knowledge and understanding—as a touchstone of that work’s inherent modernism (89). The *Quintet*, on the other hand, is “a work that moves towards the unpredictable” and is a text in which “no authority exercises control.” Where modernist texts consider the authority of understanding as something transcendental to the textual world, Zahlan (and McHale) argue that postmodernist texts pull any authority into the text itself, thereby undermining it in “deliberate violation[s] of textual boundaries” (91).²⁵ Where the *Quartet* delighted in “the intricacies of psychic process,” the *Quintet* problematizes the verity of the ego: “What always bothered me was the question of a stable ego—did such a thing exist? The old notion of such an animal was rather primitive, particularly for novelists with an itch to

²⁵While Marcel Cornis-Pope agrees that “postmodern narrative practices [...] reconsider the rapport between margin and center, dominant and secondary structures” (Cornis-Pope 28), I would argue that in the context of Durrell’s oeuvre this denial of authorial authenticity is not *postmodern* but is itself unstable and shifting.

explain this action or that" (*Livia* 37 qtd. in Zahlan, "Crossing" 91–92).²⁶

Finally, Zahlan recognizes *Clea* to be "a fiction of and on the border." *Clea* "negotiates transitions in time and in space" and foregrounds numerous transformations. As Zahlan writes,

Friendship changes into love; love becomes hatred and then again love. Power and freedom are lost and then regained; war possesses and then releases the city. Journeys are made from island to continent, from Europe to Africa, and back again. The novel is poised also at a border-crossing of the artist's life: By its close, *Clea* has been transformed as a painter; Darley will after all be a writer. As these metamorphoses take place, the text's concerns also undergo transformation: Epistemological explorations of shifting perception and relative truth give way to the ontological interplay of realities that dominates Durrell's later fiction. (Zahlan, "Crossing" 92–93)

Zahlan characterizes this transition into the postmodern in light of other transitions, joining the two elements in a wide continuum of infinitesimal difference, placing *Clea* as what McHale calls an amphibious text straddling the genres (McHale, *Constructing* 164).

In this sense, Joan Pinkney, too, calls Durrell a "border' intellectual and artist" positioned "on the edges of systems the better to capture the useful processes of those systems" (Pinkney 250). Like Zahlan's characterization of *Clea* as marked by perpetual change, Pinkney recognizes in Durrell's work elements from disparate traditions. Of Durrell's border-straddling, Pinkney writes that he "drew from the ancients, lived among the moderns and wrote with the awareness of the postmodern" (250). This sense of straddling the generic markers of modernism and postmodernism affords him not just a dual identity—marked by both postmodernist de-authenticated, hollow imagery and modernist mimetic difficulty (250)—but also access to styles from as temporally "far" afield as classicism. Ultimately, she suggests Durrell's placement as "an uncomfortable modernist, with the postmodern mantle flirting above his shoulders" (252).²⁷

Stefan Herbrechter also refuses to *place* Durrell with any certainty under either umbrella. Perhaps not incorrectly, Herbrechter writes that "Durrell's texts seem not to be able to live up to the expectations they create," identifying the *Quintet* with "a

²⁶Zahlan quotes a letter Durrell sent to Ian MacNiven: "the human personality is far from discrete . . . Nor does reality itself have outlines, borders, because it is provisional and not fixed and demarcated" (MacNiven, "Quincunx" 237). In his speech "From the Elephant's Back," Durrell acknowledges that this idea comes from D. H. Lawrence's letters ("Elephant" 4).

²⁷James Gifford writes that "his oeuvre exists 'in-between' a variety of schools and movements" ultimately suggesting that Durrell be numbered among the borderline modernists: "as a modernist, his texts consistently anticipate effects and sensibilities associated with the postmodern, as might be expected of writings between 1931 and 1990" (Gifford, "Introduction" 1).

context that desires itself to be 'postmodern'" (Herbrechter, "Canon" 325). He reconsiders the system of question marks thrown into relief by Durrell's works—"Where to find a place for Lawrence Durrell's work today? [...] Is the *Quintet* a modernist or a postmodernist work, or neither?" (326, 327)—before acknowledging the problems inherent in attempting to answer those questions:

just as there are various and culturally determined meanings of modernism, any concept of postmodernism as coming somehow "after" modernism, or even modernity, will have to embrace not only the plurality postmodernism has come to designate, but also the plurality of this plurality, and will thus have to speak of postmodernisms. (327)

In this sense, Herbrechter's analysis comes farther than most considerations of Durrell's writing and "postmodernism." In fact, his most definitive statement on the place he reserves for Durrell's writing actually serves to strengthen the instability of Durrell's oeuvre among the mutually exclusive notions of modernism and postmodernism:

His work, in its evolution and its range seems to be the very instance of an un-positionable text, and thus "reputation" in this context can only mean the un-settling of the kind of reputation writing usually achieves: the confinement to an epoch, for example, the "modernist," or the "postmodernist," both with their ongoing process of "positioning," and of setting themselves against each other. (326–327)

Herbrechter's refusal to provide a simple position for Durrell's oeuvre evidences many of the same problems Pinkney describes; too, such a refusal rejects the condition of limiting a reading or understanding of Durrell's style in light of larger structures and flows.

Receptive Borders

Ihab Hassan describes postmodernism in light of just such a flow, highlighting the difficulties inherent in the term—it sounds "awkward, uncouth"; it "evokes what it wishes to surpass or suppress"; it (wrongfully) "denotes temporal linearity and connotes belatedness"; it "suffers from a certain *semantic* instability" (Hassan, "Toward" 87)—and in the concept: like any period, it belies an inevitable openness to change; there is no "Chinese Wall" separating it from modernism; it works "in terms *both* of continuity *and* discontinuity" (88). Nevertheless, he presents a schematic list comparing elements of modernism with those of postmodernism to provide an understanding of a contrast between the two genres (91–92). Modernism is, for example, informed by Purpose, Design, and Hierarchy, whereas postmodernism relies on Play, Chance, and Anarchy. Hassan's list contains thirty-three elements for each of the two columns, re-invoking the problem of classification in such a system: where to put the work or works that are marked by Purpose, Design, Form, Narrative, God the Father,

and Metaphysics (all modernist elements) as equally as they are marked by elements of Participation, Deconstruction, Metonymy, Signifier, Indeterminacy, and Immanence (all postmodernist elements)?

Durrell's opus presents such a work. He laid out the intricate *design* of his opus in 1937, working on it for nearly fifty years after that, imbuing each work with a variation of a quest motif. The closed *form* of the novels he shaped pseudo-independently from one another, but the opus itself depends upon the structure of the whole shape, as well. And Durrell's *metaphysics* is detailed in the novels themselves, from Darley's construction of a kingdom of the imagination, through Charlock's reliance on Spenglerian physiognomic relations, to the *Quintet's* centripetal characterization, and in all of the novels' reliance on a greater Spirit of Place.

Contrastingly, the texts rely on a sense of *deconstruction*, in which the worlds they describe are often undermined by revelation of past untruths.²⁸ This tendency leads to an interplay of *indeterminacies* that can be recognized in the unstably nested authoring of *Monsieur*, the nebulous fictionality of many characters, and the generous interleaving of history with fiction; in *The Alexandria Quartet*, too, the joint authorship of later books and the gaps between the volumes—and, especially, the open-ended nature of the final volume, whose “Notes (by Pursewarden)” deny any previous apparent resolution of the text—are further examples of these indeterminacies. At the same time, we can recognize Hassan's *immanences* in instances like the invention and intervention of the *Quintet's* “Reality Prime” whose effects, a manifestation of Blanford's authorial immanence, blow the pages of his destroyed notebooks back to Avignon (*Quintet* 1178, 1319) and free *l'histoire*, the story, from the finality of the back cover of *le livre*.

Where to place the texts? Hassan's lists illustrate the very problem of depending too greatly on the reducibility of static concepts. While it would be tempting to follow William James' advice regarding the usefulness of distinction—“If no practical difference whatever can be traced, then the alternatives mean practically the same thing, and all dispute is idle” (James, “Pragmatism” 18)—and end the debates over Durrell's placement, I contend that the very difficulty in placing his oeuvre within the generic

²⁸While Stefan Herbrechter marks the difference between Durrell's application of deconstructive elements and a true Derridean deconstruction—in Herbrechter's recognition of monistic elements throughout the *Quintet*, in the privileging of subjectivity—arguing that Durrell's texts do not go far enough (Herbrechter, “Encounter” 26–27), the linguistic worlds of Durrell's opus always, eventually, undermine themselves. Nevertheless, such commentary ultimately speaks on behalf of the specific worlds of those texts (rather than the problems inherent in the methods and systems of *language*), suggesting again the distinction between Durrell's opus and a postmodernist literature.

borders evinces a particular resistance to classification in the opus.²⁹ Durrell's opus lauds "a great synthesis" bringing together many different modes of thinking, "making them interpenetrate, interfertilise," describing how "two metaphysics, Eastern and Western, are moving steadily together" ("Elephant" 6, 7). Durrell plans his opus to represent this convergence, to show "complementaries and not opposites," to "to celebrate this marriage" of unlike forces (7). It is the "poetic equation" of the European- and Tibetan-type novels ("Overture" 19).

To consider Durrell's opus as it fits among the dualities of modernism and postmodernism, East and West, subject and object, displaces the mechanisms of change at work within those novels. As William James writes on change: "The stages into which you analyze a change are *states*, the change itself goes on between them. It lies along their intervals, inhabits what your definition fails to gather up, and thus eludes conceptual explanation altogether" (James, *Pluralistic* 236). To deny Durrell's opus these intervals denies also the progression in the novels—the sense of "youth, maturity, and old age" (*Durrell-Miller* 278–279), the "continuity which hints at an inner progression from the *Black Book* onwards" ("Elephant" 7), describing also "a kind of travelogue of my life" ("Overture" 18). Durrell's opus resists generic classifications of *modernism* and *postmodernism* for its "polluting" nature as a "transitional being," "'betwixt and between' all the recognized fixed points in space-time of structural classification" (Turner, "Betwixt" 97).³⁰

In 1985, Durrell said in an interview that he hoped to "leave behind something as consistent as what the French call an *oeuvre*" (Durrell qtd. in Christy 227). James Gifford remarks on this very consistency when he writes that "the intertextual relationships among the texts overlap in a seemingly endless array" (Gifford, "Introduction" 1). Considering this confession alongside his early designs laid out for the work, I can only argue that it is most correct to consider his opus at large as a single work. While we might recognize postmodernist elements in the *Quintet* (or the *Revolt*, the *Quartet*, and even *The Black Book*), it would be foolish to overlook the privileging search

²⁹That the many varying critiques of the modernist or postmodernist elements of the novels seem in part motivated by perceived wrongness in previous readings—see, for example, even just the title of Julius Rowan Raper's "Durrell's *Justine* and Fowles's *The Collector* as Late Modernist Novels: Why the Postmodern?"—bespeaks the difficulty Durrell writes of in knowing "what to *call* the texts" (qtd. in Collier 91). The particular resistance to classification in the opus makes the topic worthy of consideration but hostile to agreement.

³⁰As such, it presents not only a wealth of characteristics relating to both modernist and postmodernist literature but also characteristics belonging to neither: indeed, as Gifford affords Durrell the unsettling position of one "in-between" (Gifford, "Introduction" 1), Pinkney recognizes classical elements (Pinkney 250), Carol Peirce finds "Elizabethan language" (Peirce, "A Lass Unparallel'd" 174) (Durrell admits "to having 'Elizabethanized'" (Durrell, "Persuading the World" 74), and *Time* calls him a "Neo-Elizabethan" ("Carnal Jigsaw" 96)), and Durrell declares himself "the first of the new Romantics" (qtd. in Lyons and Antrim 111).

for culture in the *Quintet*, the optimism in the conclusion of the *Revolt*, the ordering structures in the *Quartet*, or the symbolist form of *The Black Book*. Durrell's desire for the opus to challenge established literary traditions signals his urge to break with those modes of modernism Raper finds effaced in *Balthazar*. Though he effects the separation necessary in every rite of passage, his opus lacks the aggregation that would signal its end. And yet to say his texts merely "anticipate effects and sensibilities associated with the postmodern" (Gifford 1) overlooks the rich potential of Durrell's situation "in-between." In this sense, the opus is an "amphibious" text inhabiting the transition between modernism and postmodernism, at once at ease with the modern and the postmodern as it is at odds with each.

The opus displays these amphibious qualities following many understandings of the words "modernism" and "postmodernism." The modernist devotions to time and the psyche Durrell describes in his *Key* are both at home in his works; at the same time, the writing eschews the "epistemological backwardness" Durrell laments in other work of that age ("Overture" 18): witness the commitment to Einstein and to Spengler in the very form of the *Quartet* and the *Revolt* and the fascination with sanity and the Unconscious in all four novels, along with the denial of knowledge and truth ("I thought I understood. But beginning this act with paper I can only say for certain that I am not responsible" (*Black Book* 243); truth is "what most contradicts oneself in time" (*Quartet* 216)). Likewise, Hassan's list allows for both postmodernist and modernist readings of Durrell's works. Finally, McHale's distinctions of epistemological and ontological dominants in modernist and postmodernist works respectively describe the amphibious qualities of Durrell's opus. Tarquin's lament that he knows "nothing of the world which created me. Nothing." (*Black Book* 134); Pursewarden's description and Darley's construction of a world in which truth is unstable; Charlock's and Julian's robotic replication and corruption of Iolanthe from her knowledge and memories; and Blanford and Sutcliffe's contradictory texts providing the only path to truth and understanding of a world which defies understanding: the dominant in each of these texts is at once ontological and epistemological—the epistemological dominant of *The Black Book* ("I know nothing") is ontological ("of the world which created me"), just as the ontological dominant of the *Quintet* ("This kind of reality") is epistemological ("had no Therefore in it" (*Quintet* 1228)). These are not the question marks Durrell has built into his "detective stories,"³¹ but in considering the

³¹Claiming the very term for him, Earl G. Ingersoll nevertheless writes that Durrell had no concept of postmodernism:

Durrell began writing as a variety of modernist, and it has been as a modernist that he has continued to be (mis)read. It might even be argued that he has (mis)read himself as a latter-day modernist because he was never a part of any artistic or academic/critical community in which he might have participated in the discourse of postmodernism. Durrell

dimension of periodicity we can recognize the mechanisms constructed only partially consciously: Durrell's separation from the modernist tradition suggests a trajectory in some ways verging toward a postmodernist aggregation, but in many crucial ways the opus never successfully negotiates the postliminal rites, van Gennep's "ceremonies of incorporation into the new world" (van Gennep 21), ultimately residing at full in a liminal stage.

wrote as a postmodernist without any benefit probably of ever having encountered the term! (Ingersoll, "Introduction" 14)

Conclusion

Practically it [the absolutist view of the world] is less beautiful; for [...] in representing the deepest reality of the world as static and without a history, it loosens the world's hold upon our sympathies and leaves the soul of it foreign. Nevertheless it does give peace, and that kind of rationality is so paramountly demanded by men that to the end of time there will be absolutists, men who choose belief in a static eternal, rather than admit that the finite world of change and striving, even with a God as one of the strivers, is itself eternal. (Pluralistic Universe 114)

Until Nessim calls to Narouz, telling him that it is time to return home, the reader of the *Quartet* cannot help feeling like a witness to a volatile scene; until the men in their boats end their intrusion between the worlds of the fish and the birds, until they finish their journey, their safety is threatened on both sides. While the scene in *Mountolive* does resolve on the brothers' return to the shore, I have shown that other liminal moments in Durrell's opus refuse to resolve in a similar manner. In fact, this refusal to resolve is crucial to the project of—and thus any reading of—the opus.

Durrell emphasizes the liminal and the components of transitions in order to highlight the potential navigability of the space between two positions, as the project of the opus is ultimately one of communication and compromise: "It would be nice to leave something that represented the prevailing problem which is 'Which side is right or is there a compromise by which we can join them and make the one world viable?'" (Durrell qtd. in Christy 227). This one and viable world is not one that can be found in the opus; instead, the opus marks only the transition toward such a viability, leaving the rest up to imagination. As the "joiner is the reader" (Durrell, "Persuading the World" 71), Durrell offers no more than the rudiments of transition, thus inciting the transition which cannot happen as a whole in the works themselves.

In each of the dimensions under consideration, we can find evidence for the in-built mechanisms of change: Durrell presents the self not in the narrow terms of self/other or subject/object but in terms of *selves* and subjects, mediating the distance between two absolute states by placing both in a continuum; furthermore, the process of construction of an artistic subject, an "I" who says "ego," never finalizes into death and objectification, and Durrell instead enlarges that construction and employs

a pluralized "I." At this, we can recognize the propensity for the doubling of author-narrators: Lawrence Lucifer and "Death" Gregory, Darley and Pursewarden (and Arnauti and Balthazar), Blanford and Sutcliffe (and Bruce). The *Revolt's* Charlock, too, is doubled in his mental illness in the beginning of *Nunquam*, as is Iolanthe doubled in her robotic form. This multiplying opens the field of perspective so that every pronouncement is not the predicating division of subject and object Benveniste describes it to be (Benveniste, "Relationships" 197). Rather, the speaker in Durrell's situation of pluralized subjectivity is at once subject and object and is always in effect transitioning among other subjects, always in motion, and always as much other as self.

Moreover, fiction and reality in his opus intermingle and interfertilise one another in a cohabitation of *imagination* which orders and reorders the world. In the end, Durrell emphasizes this ordering and reordering over any final product: the narrating becomes the product of itself. Darley's reconstruction of a *histoire* that never was, Charlock's construction of a *récit* to chronicle his *techne*, Lawrence Lucifer's attempts to explain something he never understood, and Blanford's shuffling and reshuffling of his inklings and falling leaves to the point where order can no longer be perceived: these works are works about their own creations. The details of the Regina Hotel or Alexandria or London or Avignon are merely distractions from the main plots, which are always mediations of the space between fiction and reality.

Too, Durrell treats the geopolitical concepts of East and West as shades of the same Mediterranean hue, while he reverses the roles of place and space both as *extensio* and *spatium*. Though he publicizes his works' dependence upon place, the space between places is as influential—if not far more. Durrell's novels and island books—"residence" writing, rather than travel writing—detail the variations found in the different Mediterraneans; thus, elements of the Orient and the Occident, ostensibly polar and the subjects of treatment, become mere objects of their greater shared and common point of reference. Durrell's Mediterranean, perhaps one of the most defining aspects of the entirety of his oeuvre, defines also the elements of the world which space it in. Similarly, the Mediterranean works to define the spirit of that world's inhabitants, those who regularly cross the sea and live on its shores.

Additionally, the valorization and fascination of the past coupled with a succumbing to worry about the future make way for the immediacy of the unpredictable and immediate *present*. Though Lawrence Lucifer, Darley, Charlock, and Blanford each enter their respective artistic projects through admitted fascinations with history and memory, these explorations of the past capitulate to the relentless and increasingly influential pull of the present moment, which drives them all to act. Durrell's opus privileges this middle stage of the transition from the past to future, thus emphasizing the agency and potency of the artistic creation. Nevertheless, it is only by forfeiting

an impossible fidelity to the traditions of the past that artists in the opus can create anything.

Finally, as Durrell's artists must overcome the past in order to effect their creations, Durrell's opus shows a break with the traditions of modernism, suggesting a new understanding of representing the world; nevertheless, the works elude the mantle of "postmodernism." When reading the opus, it is crucial to consider the works in their proper context, caught up in a current perpetually shifting. The works reside somewhere in between these two giants of twentieth-century genre-studies, exhibiting traits of both styles: they illustrate postmodernist anxieties with modernist technique while they address modernist ones with a postmodern understanding. To debate the placement of individual texts not only overlooks the planned consistency of the "oeuvre" (Durrell qtd. in Christy 227), it also disregards the inevitable, transitional *change* in favor of a consideration of static *states* (James, *Pluralistic* 236).

Just as, in *Mountolive*, the intrusion of fishermen enlarges the otherwise infinitely thin surface of the lake to highlight the violence between the aerial and the aquatic, so too does Durrell's opus magnify transitions and the liminal in general, bringing focus to the usually-effaced violence that links and separates any two states. Furthermore, the opus presents itself as an incomplete transition, moving from one state to another, but stopping mid-stream in order to highlight the delta of that transition. This privileging of the liminal is no accident; rather, Durrell purposefully colonizes this fertiley unstable betwixt, weaving change and motion into the fabric of the novels.

Durrell compares the limited use of separating these states from the intervals of change to the futility of considering a film via its individual frames: "To lecture about reality is to stop it—as one might stop a film—and lecture about the still image of reality instead: the still picture upon the screen" (*Key* 3). Nevertheless, as the film critic will consider the composition of a crucial scene frame by frame, and the metaphysicist (and Durrell) will lecture on reality, so too must one consider these individual points, making sure to keep in mind the context of their intervals, the change that goes on between them. In failing to do so, one runs the risk of totalization.¹

In reading Durrell's opus, we must always remember it to be a symbol of transition. By the anagnorisis, we can recognize "the flying multiplicity of the real" (*Quintet* 1260), a multiplicity comprised of enantiotropic "shifty strangeness" (1093) in which everything begins to "turn into each other, to melt into each other's inner

¹See Charles Sligh's review of Herbrechter's *Lawrence Durrell, Postmodernism and the Ethics of Alterity* (Sligh 187).

lifespace [...everything] comes closer and closer together, moving towards the one" (1265). Such a construction is composed at "the edge of the Provisional, [...] the very precipice!," thereby, in the end, allowing for that shifty strangeness that can be found in every beginning:

New sorts of agency were beginning to make their appearance in the town [...]. The faintest shadow of a new atmosphere had begun to flower among the ruins of the epoch. [...] And now once more changes were in the air, the structure of things was shifting, disintegrating. (1092–1093)

This structure is one framed in the agon and built upon in the pathos and sparagmos. The vocabulary of Lawrence Lucifer's *Black Book* (*Black Book* 243)—the Word / eht drow—unwinds itself in the end of the opus to open the whole construction outward once more to a flying multiplicity.

Indefatigable agency—in corpses, in creations, in landscapes, in the very presentation of time—is the mistress of change in Durrell's opus, an agency found even in the epochal ruins of World War II: the war (though begun after *The Black Book*) which raises the questions considered in Durrell's opus ("how real is reality, and if so why so? Has poetry, then, no right to exist?" (*Quintet* 1266)), the war which is to Durrell's opus as World War I is to Eliot's *Waste Land*. The new sense of form contained in the opus certainly presents a provocation renouncing any potential semblance of epistemological backwardness. Nevertheless, it introduces ontological conundrums in an epistemological manner: "real or imaginary, I cannot tell" (*Black Book* 120), "I know nothing of the world which created me. Nothing" (134). This world is the same five-fold world Durrell writes of in the *Key*, the whole of which can be inhabited only in the imagination (*Key* 5), an empirical construction joining opposites and multiplying plurality (James, *Pluralistic* 7–8). Durrell's perpetually shifting universe is one comprised of liminality, colonizing the uneasy third and continually upsetting the two worlds between which it thrusts itself to enlarge and celebrate a sense of surface tension, the violence and uncertainty inherent in every transition.

APPENDIX A

Relevant Publication

James M. Clawson, "The Length and Greatness of its History: The Mediterranean in Durrell's Novels" (2005)

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James M. Clawson

The Length and Greatness of its History

The Mediterranean in Durrell's novels

Q In the second book of *The Alexandria Quartet*, Darley's island haven is invaded by the Alexandrian doctor Balthazar. The intrusion surprises Darley, who finds it easier to believe his bearded friend to be a member of the Greek pantheon until Balthazar exclaims, "No—I am real!" Darley's disbelief, he concludes, lies in the disproportionate importance of the Mediterranean as a buffer zone between Europe and Africa with regard to its actual size. "The Mediterranean is an absurdly small sea," he writes: "the length and greatness of its history makes us dream it larger than it is" (*Quartet* 213). The Greeks knew of its significance as a thoroughfare of cultures, calling the Mediterranean the "Sea in the Middle of the Earth." In Arabic, too, al-Bahar al-Abiyad al-Mutawasit makes plain the Mediterranean's centrality in its appellation—"Middle White Sea."

And yet, though the Mediterranean is small compared to the Atlantic or Pacific, the distance is great when one actually considers crossing it. Ovid in *Metamorphoses* and Aeschylus in *Prometheus Bound* tell of another for whom the journey to the other side of the Mediterranean is even more exacting. Mortal daughter of the river god Inachus, Io is cursed to suffer the lust of Zeus, by whom she is turned into a cow. Io is lost to all who knew her, for she can no longer communicate in the manners she once did: "She strove to speak, she spoke not, but she low'd" (Ovid 31; bk. 1, sc. 14). Though her makeover is Zeus's vain attempt to shield her from the wrath of Hera, the goddess suspects foul play and entrusts heifer Io into the care of the ever-watchful Argus. Hermes slays the sentinel, and Io flees, only to be pursued by the madding sting of a gadfly sent by Hera:

Impatient to revenge her injur'd Bed,
She [Hera] wreaks her anger on her Rival's Head;
With Furies frights her from her Native Home;
And drives her gadding, round the world to roam. (Ovid 35; 1.17)

Thus "the girl with horns" in *Prometheus Bound*, Io meets the Titan who warns her that her travels are not over, foreseeing that she must cross into Egypt before being allowed to rest. Hopeless, she considers throwing herself from a cliff, but Prometheus dissuades her; once in Egypt, he tells her, Zeus will restore her human form, and she

will bear a great son (Aeschylus lines 561-886). Moreover, but this he does not tell her, there she will be worshipped as Io-Isis, goddess of fertility. This traveling from Greece across the Mediterranean into Egypt is a fruitful journey. Io is not merely driven to travel by Hera's torture; she *must* travel, wandering to the other side of the Mediterranean to fulfill a creative purpose. The gadfly is nothing more than her travel agent. Durrell echoes this pattern of trans-Mediterranean travel in his writing, but in his world it is not the river-maiden but the author who must travel—again, across the Mediterranean to Egypt—to actualize the birth of a fully gestated creation: the novel. This essay will trace Io's Mediterranean footsteps, considering that sea as a symbol of fertility in Durrell's three final novels—*The Alexandria Quartet*, *The Revolt of Aphrodite*, and *The Avignon Quintet*—in light of Durrell's own spirit of place and an understanding of rites of passage.

I. The Durrellian Myth

Assuming Io's role, novelists Darley and Blanford cross the Mediterranean in parallel scenes in the *Quartet* and the *Quintet* respectively. When they arrive in Egypt, they face violent physical transformations culminating in newfound literary success. The passage for both is an evocative one with some differences, some parallels—and many perils. Both cross during the war, daringly sailing when it might not be wise to do so: Darley leads into the journey by discussing the war advancing like bad weather, nebulous storm clouds growing firmer and tighter before compacting and manifesting into the ostensible innocence of a single periscope in the harbor of his island (*Quartet* 665-666); Blanford and the Prince coolly contemplate the pity of what would be inevitable material loss of their extravagant provisions—were a torpedo to strike their ship (*Quintet* 619). The war drives them gadding, round the world to roam. But unlike Io they also relax during their journeys, whether in nighttime—which Darley calls “superlatively warm and fine” (*Quartet* 666)—or in daytime—which Blanford characterizes as cloudless “with not one Homeric curl” (*Quintet* 618). Moreover, both journeys are beautiful, Darley's likened to riding a comet across the night sky (*Quartet* 667), and Blanford's to immortality (*Quintet* 618).

Once they land in Egypt, they face respective transformations of those around them. In the *Quartet*, Nessim loses an eye, Balthazar his teeth, Clea her hand, and Darley enjoys a newfound physical polish: “But Darley, how you've changed!” Clea exclaims when they meet again: “You don't stoop any more. And your spectacles...” (*Quartet* 712). The transformations of Darley's compatriots—particularly that of Clea—awaken his procreative abilities and allow him finally to give

birth to a work of art, the book whose labor pains manifest as the *Quartet*. In her letter to Darley at the end of the tetralogy, Clea predicts that Darley's artistic fulfillment is imminent: "I have a feeling that you too perhaps have stepped across the threshold of the kingdom of imagination, to take possession of it once and for all." When Darley does cross that threshold, he likens himself to "some timid girl, scared of the birth of her first child." But, having traveled and transformed, Darley creates his art with the blessing of the universe (*Quartet* 877).

In the *Quintet*, Blanford and Sam are the victims, respectively losing mobility and life to a freak accident in the desert (*Quintet* 659). While Darley's favorable transformation into the spectacle-less and tall-standing happens before his arrival in Egypt (though it is not acknowledged until he arrives there), Blanford's bringing back into life begins later—after he is blown up, transformed into an unfamiliar form, and suffering depression—when he is seen by Theoroda, who restores him in the same manner Zeus restores Io: "with a gentle touch" (Aeschylus 848). His transformation is not complete until he returns to Europe, crossing the Mediterranean back to Provence, becoming a patient of Constance and eventually consummating their mutual love after a physically demanding rescue (which shares many circumstances with Darley's rescue of Clea) (*Quintet* 1320-1322). This final act corresponds with the strangely coincidental collecting of Blanford's hitherto released and wind-strewn notes, allowing him to focus on "his forthcoming book whose presence had begun to loom up strangely over his future life" (*Quintet* 1318). Just as Darley comes into his kingdom of imagination, a "whole new world opens before" Blanford, and he begins to see the possibility of becoming a successful novelist at last (*Quintet* 623).

Unlike Darley and Blanford, Io's direct descendant Iolanthe in *The Revolt of Aphrodite* enjoys little of this relief. The very pronunciation of her name, "I-O-lanthe" (*Tunc* 29), with the accent on the second syllable and sometimes shortened merely to Io, stresses the already-obvious connection of the actress with the river maiden. More than name, Iolanthe shares with her mythical counterpart a transition into Egypt that lends her greatness, as it is in Egypt that her films are made, catapulting her into screen Godhead (*Tunc* 195). But once her first life is lived, Iolanthe's second incarnation, Robo-Iolanthe, loses any access to the myth's powers of positive transformation. Deified in life and reified in death, Iolanthe/lo evades the grasp of all-powerful would-be suitor Julian/Zeus before falling victim to her mortality and subsequent transformation into a robot/cow. Denied routine intercourse—sexual/verbal—she finds instead that she electrocutes/moos. Madness ensues when she realizes she is no longer human (*Nunquam* 274). She flees the

control of Henniker/Argus, hides from panoptic gaze, and wanders (*Nunquam* 269)—but crucially in the case of Durrell's Iolanthe, she finds neither Egypt nor the Mediterranean. Aeschylus's catalogue of placenames—Hybristes, Caucasus, Themiscyra, Salmy-dessus, Bosphorus, etc. (707-34)—is replaced by Durrell's London, Ipswich, Harrow, Pinewood, and Paris (*Nunquam* 271-72). High in the Whispering Gallery beneath the giant images of St. Paul—or, high on Mt. Caucasus in conversation with the giant Prometheus—she faces her pursuers Felix and Julian—or, the gadfly (*Nunquam* 280-81). Weighing her options, Iolanthe commits suicide by jumping over the balustrade. There is no Prometheus to cause her to reconsider, and St. Paul is just a mural on the wall. Iolanthe remains a “cow,” and for Julian and Felix there are no sons—neither in Adam, the male robot, nor in Mark. Durrell's removal of the Mediterranean setting from the myth replaces a sense of hope with one of cynical despair.

II. *The Spirit of Place*

Gregory Dickson recognizes the importance of location in *The Revolt of Aphrodite*, writing that its characters are “products of place”: “This concept is neither new nor surprising to anyone who has read (any one) of Durrell's novels” (Dickson 528). He is referring, of course, to Durrell's notion of the spirit of place, set down in the essay “Landscape and Character” as the “invisible constant in a place” (“Landscape and Character” 157): though populations and nations change, the spirit of place is fixed resolutely within the landscape of a region (156). In introducing the concept of spirit of place, Durrell makes the essence of Spanish-ness or Italian-ness or Greek-ness—heretofore accessible only to those who knew and studied the respective language and culture—available to anyone willing to meditate:

Ten minutes of...quiet identification will give you the notion of the Greek landscape which you could not get in twenty years of studying ancient Greek texts. (“Landscape and Culture” 158)

Of course, Durrell concedes that “knowledge of language is a help” (156), but he by no means limits the accessibility of the spirit of place to linguists or book scholars.

Dickson continues, writing that location in *The Revolt* is polar: from mechanical, rational England and Europe in the West to the holistic, simplistic Turkey and Asia in the East. Greece and Switzerland are somewhere in the middle (Dickson 528-29). In *The Avignon Quintet*, Durrell expands this geographical range farther, drawing in

India in his description of Egyptian Baroque architecture as “a sort of a combination of Taj Mahal and Eiffel Tower” (*Quintet* 621), situating the Levantine Alexandria as a midpoint between the cultures found in Europe and Asia. That same year, he calls Greece “half way home” (“From the Elephant’s Back” 5) to India from Europe, reinforcing his notion of the Mediterranean as “the central point, the pivot” (*Big Supposer* 38). For this reason, Stefan Herbrechter writes that the “mythologizing of Greece” specifically in Durrell’s writing serves “to overcome difference and promote the final merging and interchanging of cultural identities” (255). Not only Greece, but the Mediterranean-at-large fills this role of cultural interface, by providing a medium through which physical travel is made possible. In addition, the Durrellian Mediterranean traveler experiences the Mediterranean at some level before beginning the journey because it too is mythologized and accessible as an idea. Physically and mentally, the Mediterranean is interface and access to an experience of difference; however, the extent of this experience is questionable.

Roger Porter traces the etymology of *experience* back to the Indo-European root *per*, from which we derive our words for “test” and “experiment,” gathering along the way other meanings, such as “to cross space” and “to reach a goal.” He also pairs the outward motion inherent in travel writing, one of new experiences and gained knowledge, with a motion of returning back home, both actual and in the figurative sense of regaining something lost or claiming an unconscious desire (“Durrell and the Dilemmas of Travel Writing” 51). Durrell writes that the first, outward motion for the travel writer has as its aim the isolation of “the germ in the people which is expressed by their landscape” (“Landscape and Character” 156). But that discovery is less important than that which the traveler makes about him- or herself in the second, inward motion of travel, all passage being nothing more than “a sort of metaphorical journey—an outward symbol of an inward march upon reality” (*Dark Labyrinth* 59). The journey home is really a journey within, what Herbrechter calls “an antidote against exile,” or a re-figuring of the quest for the island, “the disconnected land whole to itself” (Herbrechter 257, 260). In Porter’s sense, the *experience* of *crossing over* to *reach the goal* of the disconnected land, the process of travel there, is one of personal growth. That the process can only be experienced as pure difference *après coup*, as Herbrechter writes (255-56), is not important; it is the spirit of travel and the opportunity of change it affords that is vital. The Mediterranean serves as a symbol of this change.

III. *The Rites of Passage*

This personal growth-through-travel is an expected part of *Künstlerroman*, like *The Alexandria Quartet* and *The Avignon Quintet*. Roberta Seret writes that in this form of the *Bildungsroman* the budding artist must “voyage through several stages of development” to arrive at “art which becomes the creator’s homeland” (Seret 1), a quest in Durrell’s work which others have noted as one of ritual crossings of water and requisite displacement from nation before being re-assimilated into a newly healed realm (and as a newly healed citizen). (See Unterecker 29-31.) Victor Turner characterizes this separation from society primary to any journey as the first stage in the ritual process (“Liminality” 94). We can recognize the artist’s development beginning with a separation from society in each of our texts. For Io, her metamorphosis into a cow marks the beginning of her separation from her community. Darley’s separation begins upon leaving Alexandria, sometime before he writes *Justine*, but his severance becomes more pronounced when he receives Balthazar’s corrected manuscript in *Balthazar*. For Blanford, Livia’s desertion marks the beginning of his disconnection. Iolanthe’s extreme celebrity robs her of a personal life and begins her displacement, furthered by her physical death. In each, the community in which the respective character had belonged becomes inaccessible.

The second stage of passage is the liminal period in which “the characteristics of the ritual subject (the “passenger”) are ambiguous; he passes through a cultural realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state” (Turner “Liminality” 94). In this phase, the Mediterranean delineates a “neutral ground” (van Gennep 17) between known West and unknown East. For the length of the journey, the “passengers” find themselves in an “interstructural situation” of neither-nor, or both-and, “at once no longer classified and not yet classified” (Turner “Betwixt and Between” 93, 97). Arnold van Gennep writes of neutral ground: “Whoever passes from one to the other finds himself physically and magico-religiously in a special situation for a certain length of time: he wavers between two worlds” (van Gennep 18). The magico-religious-ness of transition is manifest in Io’s aimless wanderings in the way they lead her into stranger and stranger lands, habited by Gorgons, gryphons, and worse (Aeschylus 791-815); in the *Quartet* in the good omen of the dolphin breaking twice at the ship’s bow (*Quartet* 666); and in the *Quintet* in Blanford’s experience of the sublime “immortality” of a poet (*Quintet* 618). Even in *The Revolt*, when Sacrapant takes Charlock across the Bosphorus to the Asian side of Istanbul, he is struck dumb in the pre-linguistic limitlessness of the transition: “Sacrapant waved his arm at it and gave a small incoherent

cry of pleasure—as if he had momentarily forgotten the text of the caption which should go with such a picture” (*Tunc* 110). And young Iolanthe’s relocation to Egypt lends her a screen presence which causes her to “swim up out of the screen”—if only metaphorically, and if only from the perspective of Charlock (*Tunc* 195). Robo-Iolanthe’s journeys, however, are not so magico-religious. Lacking full liberty of travel, her transition is stillborn: there are no two worlds between which she can waver, and she fights against her state of separation, sexually “re”-connecting with Britons only to kill them unwittingly when sparks really do fly (*Nunquam* 273). For each character but Iolanthe, this stage passes after crossing the Mediterranean.

The third stage of a rite of passage is one of one of “reaggregation or reincorporation” in which

the passage is consummated. The ritual subject, individual or corporate, is in a relatively stable state once more and, by virtue of this, has rights and obligations vis-à-vis others of a clearly defined and “structural” type. (Turner “Liminality” 94-95)

Christopher LaLonde calls the rite of passage a model in which “order is transformed by transgression” (LaLonde 7). The systematic separation of the first phase of passage introduces the second stage, in which significance becomes ambiguous and “interstructural situations” usurp normalcy. In all of this, writes LaLonde, “the destruction of boundaries, followed by a reconstruction of a new order *in light of* indeterminacy,” introduces the third stage of passage (LaLonde 7). This third stage signifies a successful transition and, in a *Künstlerroman*, an artist’s attainment of his art. In the third stage of her rite of passage, Io’s indeterminate and bizarre journey makes way for the birth of a son and the founding of a great empire. For Darley and Blanford, the passage is consummated by their arrivals at the realm of creativity, the “kingdom of the imagination” which marks an end to artistic and physical crippling and signifies respective reaggregation and incorporation into new levels of wholeness.

Iolanthe, however, remains in a stage of preliminal separation until her mechanical fault when she hits the floor of the cathedral—either her second death or her first truly successful one, when, we must assume, she finally crosses over a different boundary. Removed from society, she does not waver magico-religiously between two worlds; imposed upon by an unexpected level of indeterminacy, she experiences no relief from a reconstruction of a new order. Robo-Iolanthe’s passage stalls before it begins. We can be certain that Durrell, in quoting this myth as much as he does and yet in taking Io out of the

Mediterranean—and the Mediterranean out of Io—intends to show how vital it is.

This “Sea in the Middle of Durrell’s World” is more than canvas backdrop. Just as Alexandria uses its inhabitants as flora and precipitates among them various conflicts (*Quartet* 17), so too does the Mediterranean provide an “invisible constant” to influence the peoples around it. Durrell constructs this constant in all of his major novels; for this reason, Durrell’s Mediterranean has been likened to Poe’s Virginia and Faulkner’s Yoknapatawpha County (Scholes 24; Dasenbrock 209). Durrell’s Mediterranean is a peopled place whose identity extends beyond its littoral and literal boundaries, an influential umbrella encompassing, imbibing, and exuding the mutual influences of the unified space and individual spaces of the Ancient and the Modern, of Northern Africa, the Levant, Greece, Italy, Southern France, and beyond to the Pillars of Hercules. Durrell’s characters *experience* the Mediterranean not only because of its being mythologized in the same manner as Greece but also because of its importance to all locations in his work, because of its unique status as cultural crossroads, and because of its cultural connotation and mythological meaning as a place whose spirit Durrell constructs within their expectations, a space whose mythical and historical significance makes it seem longer and greater than it really is. Travel in this space between places, the pivot point of cultural definition from self to other, is necessarily bi-directional: inward at the same time that it is outward. The “magic” frontier (*The Greek Islands* 14) of the Mediterranean in Durrell’s family of novels is one that can only be breached through working one’s way “through the ancient crust” (“Landscape and Character” 159), traveling in spirit into the myth of the place. ♦

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