

**“ ‘A disciple has crossed over by water’: an Analysis of
Lawrence Durrell's Alexandria Quartet in its Egyptian
Historical and Intellectual Contexts.”**

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ΦΙΛΟΙΣ ΑΛΕΞΑΝΔΡΕΥΣΙΝ

Dedicated to Phyllis (1908 - 1994) and Joan (1916 - 2000).

Abstract: “ ‘A disciple has crossed over by water’: Lawrence Durrell's Alexandria Quartet in its Egyptian Historical and Intellectual Contexts” by Mike Diboll.

This dissertation examines Lawrence Durrell's The Alexandria Quartet in its various Egyptian contexts. It contests the idea that the Alexandria of the Quartet is essentially a city of the imagination which bears little or no relation to the real city of history. It argues that various strata of Alexandrian history, from antiquity to the nineteen-fifties, are deeply embedded in Durrell's Quartet. Of particular interest is the tetralogy's representation of the history of Egypt's Wafdist independence movement in the years 1919 - 1952, and Britain's responses to it. The dissertation argues that the tetralogy can be read as an allegorical treatment of historical events that took place in colonial Egypt.

Chapter One of the dissertation provides an over-view of Durrell's Quartet and of the main critical and scholarly approaches which have been used in the study of the tetralogy.

Chapter Two continues the exposition, with particular reference to T.S. Eliot's concept of “tradition”, and Edward Said's “Orientalism” as keys for the understanding of the Quartet. This chapter then applies these two concepts to the analysis of the Quartet, and proposes a “tradition of Orientalism” with the tetralogy as the paradigmatic text of “late Orientalism”. Conrad's Heart of Darkness is proposed as an important precursor.

Chapter Three examines the ways in which the Quartet makes use of the history of Alexandria from the city's founding by the Ptolomies until early modern times, with particular reference to the British occupation of Egypt 1882 - 1956. The chapter then examines the tetralogy's treatment of British Imperial selfhood and the Egyptian “Other”.

Chapter Four examines the Alexandria Quartet, in particular Mountolive, in parallel to the history of the Egyptian *Wafd* party and the struggle for Egyptian independence. It argues that Mountolive should be read as an allegorical treatment of events that took place in Egypt between the years 1919 - 56.

Chapter five investigates the relationship between the Alexandria Quartet and the three phases of Durrell's “Egyptian” poetry: that written between 1938 - 40, which utilises themes from ancient Egyptian mythology; that written during Durrell's Egyptian exile between 1941 - 45; and that written in the immediate post-war period 1945 - 50. In this way the historical context brought up to the early nineteen-fifties.

Chapter Six concludes the dissertation by asserting the importance of the Alexandria Quartet as a key literary text from a period that saw the end of Empire and the beginnings of de-colonisation, and argues that the tetralogy should be given an enhanced status in the study of colonial and post-colonial English writing.

(98, 006 words, 353 pages)

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Chapter 1

Introduction

A disciple has crossed over by water.
The acorn was planted.
In the Ionian villa among the marble
The fountain plays the sea's piano,
And by the clock the geometric philosopher
Walks in white linen while death
Squats in the swallow's eye.

“Egyptian Poem” – Lawrence Durrell

This work explores the social and historical contexts of Lawrence Durrell's Alexandria Quartet with a particular emphasis on the tetralogy's Egyptian aspects. It will also explore the ways in which reading the Quartet can enhance understanding of the changes that took place regarding British and Egyptian perceptions of themselves and of each other during the inter-War and post-Second World War decades. This work will demonstrate that the tetralogy is a significant work of literature which explores the social, psychological, political, moral and cultural dimensions of British Imperial decline in the Middle East. Furthermore, this work will argue that the Quartet incorporates aspects of the indigenous Egyptian cultural, social and political movements which eventually displaced British Imperial power in Egypt. Thus, this dissertation will argue that the Alexandria Quartet should be seen as a paradigmatic work of literature concerned with cultural and other consequences of the end of Empire. As such, the tetralogy deserves to be read and studied in greater depth than is currently the case, and this dissertation will attempt to make the case for the relevance of the tetralogy to

university curricula concerned with the study of colonial and postcolonial English literature.

Firstly, however, it should be acknowledged that clear dangers accrue to reading literature as if it were historical record. For example, in A Room of One's Own Virginia Woolf contrasts the wretched position endured by women in society throughout most of history with the elevated depiction of womanhood in literature:

A very queer, composite being thus emerges. Imaginatively she is of the highest importance; practically she is completely insignificant. She pervades poetry from cover to cover; she is all but absent from history. She dominates the lives of kings and conquerors in fiction; in fact she was the slave of any boy whose parents forced a ring upon her finger. Some of the most inspired words, some of the most profound thoughts in literature fall from her lips; in real life she could hardly read, could scarcely spell, and was the property of her husband. (41)

For Woolf, men's elevation of women in literature in part allowed the subjugation of women in society. Critics such as Edward Said make a similar point about the depiction of the "Orient" in Western literature; for Said, the promotion of the Orient as a place of exotic and erotic sensuality in literature and art is closely related to the West's possessive subjugation of the Orient in terms of politics and economics. Any historical treatment of the Alexandria Quartet would need to be mindful of the fact that literature seldom parallels history directly; indeed, literature, especially colonial writing that deals with

cultural "Others", often represents or encodes the desires, frustrations and psycho-sexual displacements of the culture from which it emerges.

The socio-historical approach to the analysis of the tetralogy which is adopted in this work presents some immediate problems. The most pressing of these concerns the relationship of the Alexandria Quartet to Egyptian history. It is necessary to pose the questions, "To what extent is the Alexandria Quartet concerned with the "real" Alexandria of history?" Is it not really the case that attempting to read the Quartet historically -- by trying to "confine" the work within history -- is to do violence against the tetralogy and the intentions of its author? Mythic, psychological, psychoanalytic, structuralist, post-structuralist and more latterly post-modernist criticism have been the main critical perspectives from which scholars have studied the Quartet in the years following Lawrence Durrell's death in November 1990. There has been a relative paucity of socio-historic criticism of the tetralogy. Moreover, discussion of the Quartet is strangely absent from the numerous books and curricula that are to be found in Western academe which deal with colonialism and postcoloniality.

This introduction will consider the arguments for reading the Quartet as an ahistorical or unhistorical novel, or even as a wilfully *anti*-historical novel. Hopefully, playing the devil's advocate in this way will clarify aspects of the novel's apparent or alleged resistance to a historical reading. The general structure of the Quartet is a good place to start this investigation of the 'non-historic Quartet'. In a much-discussed "Note" prefacing Balthazar, Durrell explains the overall structure of the Alexandria Quartet:

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

Three sides of space and one of time constitute the soup-mix recipe of a continuum. The four novels follow this pattern.

The three first parts, however, are deployed spatially...and are not linked in a serial form. They interlap, interweave, in a purely spacial relation.

Time is stayed. The fourth part alone will represent time and will be a true sequel. (n. pag.)

Durrell gives a further insight into the Alexandria Quartet's experiments with time when he has Pursewarden describe the 'n-dimensional novel' in the "Workpoints" at the end of Justine¹:

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

¹ The Alexandria Quartet consists of four medium-length novels: Justine, published in 1957, Balthazar (1958), Mountolive (1958), and Clea (1960). Throughout this work, Justine will be referenced as "J"; Balthazar as "B"; Mountolive as "M"; and Clea as "C". Thus, Justine, page 12 will be written as (J 12).

Here, the novel “turning slowly on its own axis to comprehend the whole pattern” corresponds closely to Durrell's statement that “the subject-object relation is so important to relativity that I have tried to turn the novel through both subjective and objective modes” (“Note”, Balthazar, n. pag.). In a similar vein, Durrell has Darley read Pursewarden's posthumous letter which describes the structure of a hypothetical novel which corresponds well to that of the Quartet:

No, but seriously if you wished to be -- I do not say original but merely contemporary -- you might try a four-card trick in the form of a novel; passing a common axis through four stories, say, and dedicating each one of them to the four winds of heaven...The curvature of space itself would give you a stereoscopic narrative, while human personality seen across a continuum would perhaps become prismatic? (C 136)

Parallel with Durrell’s interest in the literary treatment of Time is an interest in structure. An insight to the general structure of the tetralogy comes from the New Testament; according to Professor Ian MacNiven’s authorised Lawrence Durrell: a Biography (1998, henceforth cited as Biography), while Durrell was “cured of formal Christianity for good” (63) at St. Edmund's, the Church of England school which he attended after being sent from India to England to complete his education, the mythic structures underpinning Christianity “a brilliant mosaic of half-truths” (Biography 435) interested Durrell greatly. Thus, another way of conceiving the general architecture of the tetralogy is to see it as echoing the structure of the New Testament, with Justine, Balthazar and Clea corresponding to the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, in that

both sets of books offer "synoptic" views of the a common sequence of events, albeit with subtle but important differences of perspective and emphasis. In the Quartet the synoptic perspective is achieved by having the character L.G. Darley as the narrator of Justine, Balthazar and Clea. However, despite the fact that they share a narrator, these synoptic novels differ in terms of perspective: Justine is written by Darley after he has retreated, emotionally traumatised by a bizarre series of events, to his Greek island to make sense of his experiences; Balthazar is also written by Darley on his island, but after his Alexandrian friend, Dr. Balthazar, has read his manuscript and written onto it his "great interlinear", which forces Darley to radically modify his view of events. Thus, Justine and Balthazar correspond to Matthew and Mark, the two earliest gospels. Clea is written by Darley after he has returned to Alexandria during the Second World War, some five years after leaving the city, and therefore corresponds to the later, more elaborate synoptic gospel, Luke. According to Durrell's "Note" at the beginning of Balthazar, Mountolive is "a straight naturalistic novel". Thus, Mountolive corresponds to John in that both books stand outside of their respective synoptic sequences: Mountolive uses the third person narrative of an anonymous narrator, with Darley appearing as a character in Mountolive; the Gnostic-influenced Gospel of St. John differs from the biblical synoptics in its use of the gnosticism of the *logos* which shines light into darkness, rather as Mountolive illuminates the mysteries and complexities of the plot of the synoptic Quartet. In this way, Mountolive allows events to be viewed in a new light and suggests Durrell's lifelong interest in Gnostic illuminationism, a theological system which informs both the Alexandria Quartet and the Avignon Quintet. Significantly, Mountolive reads a lesson from St. John to the staff at the British embassy in Moscow

“incomprehensible to them all” (M 71) on the Sunday morning that he hears of his promotion to the post of British ambassador to Egypt.

The correspondence between the structure of the Alexandria Quartet and the New Testament is especially pleasing because, according to E.M. Forster, highly syncretic classical Alexandria was “the intellectual birth-place of Christianity” (Alexandria: a History and Guide 1922 edition, 81). However, Durrell incorporates a wider range of theological and philosophical ideas into the tetralogy than those associated with Christianity. In Chapter Three this dissertation will examine the influence of key Middle Eastern theosophies found in the Quartet, namely: Gnosticism, Kabbalism, neo-Platonism and Sufism. However, Durrell maintained a life-long interest in Far Eastern religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism and Taoism. Durrell claimed that “my first language was Hindi” (Biography 19), and his interest in the philosophies and religions of the Far East began during his boyhood years spent near Darjeeling. There he used to watch the “devil dances” held at the Tibetan New Year, “it was an uncanny world of strangely conflicting emanations in feeling, thought and atmosphere,” and the comings and goings of the lamas who lived in a Tibetan monastery near St. Josephs, the Jesuit school where Durrell received his primary education. (Biography 36-7) Whilst living on Corfu in the nineteen-thirties Durrell read with great interest the Tibetan “Book of the Dead” the Bardo Thödol and its Ancient Egyptian equivalent, the Per-M-Hou. Both of these books had been translated into English for the first time early in the twentieth-century, and, as this dissertation will later show, had a profound influence on the underpinning mythic structure of the Alexandria Quartet. Significantly, given Durrell’s Indian background, Sir David Mountolive’s father is a distinguished Orientalist, a scholar of Pali, who has “gone

native” and lives at a Buddhist lodge near Madras wearing “the robes of an Indian *fakir*.”

Mountolive senoir belonged to:

...the vanished India, to the company of its rulers whose common devotion to their charge had made them a caste; but a cast which was prouder of a hostage given to Buddhist scholarship than of one given to an Honours List. (M 97)

Prior to leaving England to take up his post in Egypt, Mountolive visits his mother’s house where he sees his father’s Indian memorabilia, “mandala paintings from some Burmese shrine, the Lepcha flags, the framed drawings for the first edition of the *Jungle Book*”, and an “old Tibetan prayer-wheel which lay on the desk.” Mountolive “twirled it once or twice, hearing the faint scrape of the revolving drum still stuffed with the yellowing fragments of paper on which devout pens had long ago scribbled the classical invocation *Om Mane Padme Hum*.”

Whilst living in Paris at the Villa Seurat with Henry Miller, Durrell wrote for the *Aryan Review* an article entitled “The Tao and its Glozes” which commented that:

There is, to write nicely, no human entity; it is merged in the All. Here there is no trace of rupture between the individual and his scenery. Fused, there remains only the gigantic landscape of the spirit, in which our Aryan problem (“To be, or not to be”) is swallowed up, exhausted, sucked dry by the eternal factor, the Tao. The house admits its resident: the tenant is

absorbed, like a piece of tissue, into the very walls of his spiritual house.

The world of definition is exploded. (qtd. in Biography 196)

This spiritual impersonalism finds a literary echo in the Quartet, where the tetralogy's protagonists find themselves "exhausted", "sucked dry" and "absorbed" in "the projection of a will too powerful and deliberate to be human – the gravitational field which Alexandria threw down around those it had chosen as its exemplars." (J 19) David Mountolive's attempt to "go native" would be less successful than that of his father; this is attested to by the ultimate failure of his relationship with Leila Hosnani. Similarly, Nessim and Justine Hosnani are also "absorbed" into the external factor of a will too powerful and deliberate to be human. As if to confirm this, Durrell has them plot their anti-British plot "under a Tibetan mask with lighted eyeballs" (M232), suggesting that all the Quartet's protagonists have little more substance than *karagöz* lantern-puppets, projected against the "gigantic landscape of the spirit", a spirit that is the *deus loci* of the Himalayas, the "roof of the world," the highest point of the terrestrial sphere.

Later in his life Durrell worked with Jolan Chang, who Durrell described as a "Taoist-gentrologist" on Chang's *The Tao of Love and Sex*, and Durrell was do build around his discussions with Chang his book on Taoism *A Smile in the Mind's Eye*. (Biography 618-9) This interest in Far Eastern religion continued up until Durrell's death, he had said that he had prepared for death all his life and had wanted to die "on my feet, with all systems working"; Ian MacNiven notes that this would have been "the ideal Buddhist death, with the dying person alert and fully conscious of the process of dying", adding that Durrell's actual death, "in the homely process of relieving himself" was "not so inappropriate after all. God, as Larry and Pursewarden both appreciated, is a

humourist.” (Biography 688) Given Durrell’s life-long interest in esotericism and syncretic theosophies, Alexandria was an apt setting for Durrell’s tetralogy; for, as will be discussed at greater length below, Alexandria, the capital of the Hellenistic world, connected not only Greece with Egypt, but the put the cultures of the eastern Mediterranean and those further east, the Buddhist, the Hindu and the Zoroastrian in contact with each other: these cross-cultural influences on the tetralogy will be discussed later at greater length.

That the structure and style of the tetralogy echoes so much theosophical thought is but one example of the many structural intricacies and inter-textual links that are one of the Quartet’s most distinguishing features. Thus, an initial reading of both the Quartet itself and of the considerable body of critical material that has built up around it does not seem to encourage a socio-historical reading of the text. Durrell states in his introductory note to Balthazar that the central topic of the Quartet is "modern love"; similarly, he states that “the city [Alexandria] could not be less unreal”; likewise, Durrell is at pains to express his concern with establishing a literary method which relates subjectivity to objectivity in accordance with Einsteinian Relativity Theory.

Durrell envisages the Quartet as a literary re-working of the relativity principle with each volume of the quartet representing one of the four Einsteinian dimensions, with Clea, the fourth and final volume, representing time. None of these concerns seems to indicate any particular interest in Egypt’s recent history on the part of the author of the Alexandria Quartet. Many commentators see in the Quartet’s structure a device for breaking down the linear concept of history. For example, Pauline Beard has taken this view in her essay "The Usufruct of Time in Lawrence Durrell’s Alexandria Quartet" ("Usufruct" 95), as has Dianne Vipond, who sees the Quartet as a “missing link”

connecting modernist to postmodernist writing ("Missing Link" 69 - 70). Similarly, Julian Raper has Balthazar "breaking the modernist mold" and thereby inaugurating post-modern writing ("Mold" 86-7). These essays seem to suggest that Durrell was primarily concerned not with producing a historical novel, but with writing a novel which disrupts and dislocates linear time. This interest in time and remembrance is then linked to a consideration of the dynamics of "modern love". Near the beginning of Darley's narration of Justine, Durrell has him reflect:

As for me, I am neither happy nor unhappy; I lie suspended like a hair or a feather in the cloudy mixtures of memory. I spoke of the uselessness of art but added nothing truthful about its consolations. The solace of such work as I do with brain and heart lies in this -- that only there, in the silences of the painter or the writer can reality be reordered, reworked and made to show its significant side. (J 14)

A linear view of time inhibits this process of artistic recollection and remembrance. Darley can "only enrich them [Justine and Melissa] as they deserve" in memory and imagination made manifest through his writing. Darley wants them to "live again to the point where pain becomes art" (J 20), recalling the line "until your pain become a literature" in Durrell's 1943 poem "Cities Plains and People" (Collected Poems 158)². Darley's meditation ends when he buries the dead Melissa's rings under the hearth of his house on his Greek island. This action points to the irrevocable nature of the forward

² Unless stated otherwise, all quotations from Durrell's poetry used in this work are taken from the 1980 edition of Durrell's Collected Poems; this work will be cited as "Durrell – 'Poems'".

march of progressive time. The rest of what follows through the four volumes of the work is an attempt to relive differing, rival and sometimes conflicting ideal pasts in the present time of writing. Durrell is seeking, through Darley, to make contact with a form of remembrance which transcends individual consciousness, a world of mythic remembrance mediated through place. The location is Alexandria, but not simply the Alexandria of lived experience; rather it is a four dimensional Alexandria, with the twenty-three centuries of the city's history as its fourth dimension. Darley narrates that:

At this time he [Nessim] had already begun to experience that great cycle of historical dreams which now replaced the dreams of his childhood In his mind, and into which the City now threw itself -- as if at last it had found a responsive subject through which to express the collective desires, collective wishes, which informed its culture. (J 155)

Nessim's opening up to the reality of the trans-temporal city is also the start of Nessim's madness, a madness which, at various points in the tetralogy, seems to affect most of the principal characters of the novel and from which Darley has retreated to his island retreat to effect a "writing cure". Nessim finds present and past mingling and interweaving:

But while the gallery of historical dreams held the foreground of his mind the figures of his friends and acquaintances , palpable and real, walked backwards and forwards among them, among the ruins of classical

Alexandria, inhabiting an amazing historical space time filled with living personages. (J 156).

In Balthazar, the second volume of the tetralogy, Darley discovers that "The picture I drew was a provisional one -- like the picture of a lost civilisation deduced from a few fragmented vases, an inscribed tablet, an amulet, some human bones, a gold smiling death mask" (B 14). It is L.G. Pursewarden who provides an objective theory to elaborate Darley's subjective realisation of the inadequacies of an individualised remembrance; " 'We live' , writes Pursewarden somewhere, 'lives based on selected fictions. Our view of reality is conditioned by our position in space and time -- not by our personalities as we like to think. Thus, every interpretation of reality is based upon a unique position. Two paces east or west and the whole picture is changed'. " (B 14)

Balthazar arrives on Darley's island bearing a typescript of Justine upon which he has written an interlinear commentary on the events recalled in Justine from his perspective. Darley calls this the "Great Interlinear". Armed with the "palimpsest" that is the "great interlinear" (B 21-22), Darley sets about telling the tale afresh, the narrative weaving between the first and third persons. Darley's subjectivity is at once both undermined and reinforced as Darley becomes aware of the relative and contingent nature of that subjectivity. Thus, Balthazar continues and further develops Durrell's interrogation of the wholistic sense of selfhood that he began in Justine.

With Mountolive Durrell effects an apparent return to pre-modernist objectivity. In his essay "Who Wrote Mountolive? The Same One Who Wrote 'Swann in Love' " Eugene Hollahan describes Mountolive as "an archaeological excavation of motives and motifs", but states that there are, nonetheless, "advantages in seeing Mountolive in [an]

ontological/rhetorical way.” (“Swann”, 28). Thus, Hollahan distinguishes between two distinct aspects of L.G. Darley in the Alexandria Quartet, namely Darley the “character” who appears in the tetralogy and Darley the “writer” of Mountolive. This work is the fictionalised political biography of the British Ambassador, Sir David Mountolive. Hollahan then equates Darley the writer with Durrell himself as “Durrell-Darley”, seeing Mountolive as a Proustian “education of Darley-as-writer” (117).

The objective account of events which Mountolive presents seems to be “setting the record straight”. It provides information on key events such as Pursewarden’s suicide, the nature of Justine’s relationship both to Darley and to Nessim, and her subsequent flight to Palestine by politicising them in the context of the Hosnanis’ Coptic conspiracy. Yet even here, the theme of a metaphysic which exists above and beyond human agency returns in Darley’s evocation of anonymous “forces”:

Indeed, now the masters were beginning to find that they were, after all, the servants of the very forces which they had set into play, and that nature is inherently ungovernable. They were soon to be drawn along ways not of their choosing, trapped in a magnetic field, as it were, by the same forces which unwind the tides at the moon’s bidding, or propel the glittering forces of salmon up a crowded river -- actions curving and swelling into futurity beyond the powers of mortals to harness or divert...(M 214).

Similarly, according to one of Durrell’s “Workpoints” at the end of Balthazar, Ambassador Mountolive was “swayed by the dangerous illusion that now at last he was

free to conceive and act -- the one misjudgment which decides the fate of a diplomat" (B 249). Thus, Mountolive too would soon fall victim to "forces" beyond his control.

Nevertheless, in his evocation of these forces, Darley is establishing a version of the Hegelian master-slave dialectic. In this dialectic, no one version of events can ever be wholly right or wholly wrong. The interplay of subjectivities in the text of the tetralogy and their further interrogation by the apparent objectivity of Mountolive are not stages in a process by which absolute truth is determined; rather, they function dialectically in relation to each other. Darley is alluding here to the dialectic between human agency and the unseen forces that determine his environment, be they natural (the forces which unwind the tides) or metaphysical (beyond the powers of mortals to harness or divert). However, if a materialist, as opposed to a metaphysical, perspective is adopted and these "forces" are taken to be socio-historical processes, it becomes apparent that what Darley is describing is the contingent nature of "masterhood" in the political process, and thus the provisional nature of its claims to objective agency. Thus, when this reading is applied to Mountolive, the philosophical underpinnings for a socio-historical reading of the Quartet which goes beyond a crude imposition of an historical template over the surface of the novel come into view.

In the tetralogy Durrell is concerned with the question of time and of human duration through it. His starting point, as Hollahan argues, is Proust ("Swann", 119). However, Durrell goes beyond the question of time and remembrance to consider the question of time and human agency. The Alexandria Quartet shines its own particular light into the dark and hidden nooks and crannies of the processes behind historical recollection. In doing so, it illustrates the shortcomings of historicist objectivity; it digs the skeletons out of history's closet and puts them on view for all to see. The Quartet

draws out and revels in the multiplicity of meanings inherent in historical processes in such a way that, by the end of the sequence of novels, it becomes impossible to weave all those strands together into one consistent and objective narrative: in the tetralogy, the shifting dynamics of remembrance are everything; it is a novel about 'secret lives' (George Elliott qtd. in Moore, 93) where contingent perceptions are more important than "truth"; thus, "Shiftiness" is:

...the grand strategy of the novel. What really happened matters only as it is known; no one can know all of what really happened, including the author himself; reflecting upon it is one of the fascinations of life; and finally, knowing and reflecting upon what has happened becomes part of what has happened. (94)

Although the tetralogy clearly does not set out to be a historical novel in the nineteenth-century meaning of that term, this does not mean that the Quartet is an unhistorical novel in the sense that it is unconcerned with history *per se*. Rather, the Quartet decants into the minds of its readers the spirit of the age from which it emerged. From its subtle alchemy emerges a *usquebaugh*; Durrell, who according to his authorised biographer Ian MacNiven spent “a lifetime of using alcohol as a therapy against depression, writer’s block and boredom...” (MacNiven Biography 581), has concocted a heady historical *eau de vie* distilled from the day-to-day dregs of lived experience and hung-over remembrance in which memory’s grasp on history is simultaneously affirmed and negated. In this respect, the tetralogy does conform to some aspects of the revived historical novel envisaged by Georg Lukács:

The historical novel of our time, [1937] therefore, must above all negate...its immediate predecessor and eradicate the latter's traditions from its own work. The necessary approximation to the classical type of the historical novel which occurs in this connection will...by no means take the form of a simple renaissance, a simple affirmation of these classical traditions, but...a renewal in the form of a negation of a negation.

(350)

Indeed, the Quartet can be seen as developing its own theory of history: in the tetralogy history is the recollection of the coming into mature consciousness on the part of those who are participants in events. Pursewarden, in his monologue "My conversation with Brother Ass" in Clea, the final part of the tetralogy, elaborates on this schema:

....a civilisation is simply a great metaphor which describes the aspirations of the individual soul in a collective form -- as perhaps a novel or a poem might do. The struggle is always for greater consciousness. But alas! Civilisations die in the measure that they become conscious of themselves. They realise, they lose heart, the propulsion of the unconscious motive no longer there. Desperately they begin to copy themselves in the mirror. It is no use. But surely there is a catch in all this? Yes, Time is the catch! Space is a concrete idea, but Time is abstract. In the scar tissue of Proust's great poem you see that so clearly; his work is the great academy

of time-consciousness. But being unwilling to mobilise the meaning of time he was driven to fall back on memory, the ancestor of hope! (C 143)

In its early stages, this history-making is as much a process of forgetting (or at least ignoring) as it is of remembering; furthermore, this kind of history-making is entirely subjective in nature: this is Darley's condition in Justine. At a certain point, however, a kind of critical mass of consciousness is reached whereby the attainment of an ever heightened level of self-awareness becomes a goal in itself. History making becomes a comparative process, its subject becomes aware that histories are relative, doubts grow as to the validity of a subjective historical reconstruction. This is Darley's condition when the Magus figure Balthazar, Alexandria's "Platonic *daimon*" (J 81), provides Darley with his interlinear commentary on Darley's "Justine" narrative. Once the idea that history is relative to the position one views events from becomes established, then the history-maker becomes adept at weaving together these various strands to form an identifiable pattern, evaluating each strand and allotting to it its position in the whole. This is the stage of objectivity which Durrell expresses in Mountolive, which is written in "a fairly objective, realistic third-person style" (Elliott qtd. in Moore, 92).

It is significant that Darley the narrator drops out of the picture in Mountolive. However, following Hollahan, it is "Darley-writer" ("Swann", 126) who is the "ghost-writer" of Mountolive. Finally, the duration across time of the historical subject within the confines of its own notions of objectivity precipitates a final crisis of consciousness. Confused, physically and psychologically damaged -- wounded in his sex -- Darley sat down to write Justine:

For us artists there waits the joyous compromise through art with all that wounded or defeated us in daily life; in this way, not to evade destiny, as the ordinary people try to do, but to fulfill it in its true potential -- the imagination. (J 14)

Thus, in the process of writing, Darley seeks to cure both his artistic insecurity and his psycho-sexual injury. He explores the dynamics of the subjective-objective dialectic in history-making and learns to live authentically. The contradictions arising from the competing demands of his personal friendships and his professional calling froze Mountolive into inaction and inauthenticity, like a hare frozen in the headlight beams of an oncoming juggernaut. In Clea, Darley has returned from his Greek island having undergone a quasi-psychoanalytic “writing cure” by penning Justine, Bathazar and, following Hollahan, Mountolive; he is now able move confidently in Alexandria strengthened by a new awareness. This is confirmed by his passing one final and epic test at the end of Clea, where he cuts free the drowning Clea and brings about her “forcible rebirth’ by a ‘pitiful simulacrum of the sexual act -- life saving, life giving” (C 251). The contrast with the Darley of Justine, where sex is equated with wounding (12), sickness (12) and death (21) could not be greater. In dialectical terms, by the end of his *education sentimentale* in Clea, Darley has transcended the dialectic between innocence and experience, and has synthesised a kind of innocence in experience which enables him to announce his coming-into-being as a writer by writing:

Yes, one day I found myself writing down with trembling fingers the four words...with which every storyteller since time began has staked his

slender claim to the attention of his fellow-men. Words which presage simply the old story of an artist coming of age. I wrote: "Once upon a time...." And I felt as if the whole universe had given me a nudge! (C 282)

Concluding thus, Durrell emphasises the question of time at the very end of the Quartet, embedding it in the cliché by which fairy stories begin. But by the time Darley reaches this stage, Durrell has charted the psychological development of an individual [Darley] from angst and self-doubt to existential authenticity and has investigated the processes by which Darley arrives at artistic maturity. As well as acting as a general statement on this human condition, Durrell's description of the process of Darley's personal psychological development has autobiographical significance. Moreover, in the tetralogy Durrell provides a sketch of Alexandria at the very end of the colonial period. In this way, the Quartet functions as an epitaph for an age which has gone for ever; Durrell was both witness to and participant in the passing of this age. However fictionalised, Durrell's account of British diplomacy and of high and low Egyptian politics *entre deux guerres* provides an impressionistic account of the political scene at this important juncture in history. The Quartet, as an example of late Orientalist writing, provides a snapshot of the death of Empire. In his piece "Closing the 'Toybox': Orientalism and Empire in the Alexandria Quartet" Roger Bowen has referred to the Imperial endgame in mid-twentieth century Egypt as a closing of the "toybox of Egyptian life" (C 33) to Empire ("Toybox" 17). Egypt ceased to be a playground in which the fantasies of British colonialists could be acted out. Furthermore, the tetralogy alludes to concrete historical events, offering its commentary on these events as it does so. Later chapters of this work will show how the

tetralogy's relationship with these historical processes supplements rather than works against its metaphysical and psychological speculations.

In these speculations Durrell takes the Proustian idea of "time consciousness" developed in *À la Recherche du Temps perdu* as his starting point, but he aims to go beyond Proust's use of memory as a means of marshalling the power of the past in the present. In the "Brother Ass" monologue Durrell has Pursewarden question the value of the Proustian schema in a world characterised by an unending hunt of the "attainless":

...But being a Jew he had hope -- and with Hope comes the irresistible desire to meddle. Now we Celts mate with despair out of which alone grows laughter and the desperate romance of the eternally hopeless. We hunt the attainless, and for us there is only a search unending. (C 143)

The *Quartet* describes Pursewarden's nearly-completed journey toward existential authenticity. By being able to dispense with hope, and by reconciling himself to "the attainless" and "a search for the unending", Pursewarden is close to achieving that state where one is able to live authentically by being reconciled to contradiction. Durrell is attempting to bring Proustian "remembrance" up to date for the post-War, post-Imperial world of the nineteen-fifties; thus, with Pursewarden's "search unending" Durrell, the "post-Hiroshima Proust" (Green qtd. in Moore, 132), parallels Estragon and Vladimir's unending wait in Samuel Beckett's 1956 play *Waiting for Godot*.

However, rather than take the final step, that of learning to live not simply

with the contingency of the universe but with its ultimate pointlessness (“We'll hang ourselves tomorrow...Unless Godot comes.” [94]), Pursewarden backs off and retreats into irony:

Why for example don't they recognise in Jesus the great Ironist that he is, the comedian? I am sure that two thirds of the Beatitudes are jokes or squibs in the manner of Chuang Tzu. Generations of mystagogues and pedants have lost the sense. I am sure of it however because he must have known that Truth disappears with the telling of it. It can only be conveyed, not stated; irony alone is the weapon for such a task. (C 144)

Much has been made of the Alexandria Quartet's use of humour and irony. Yet in the Quartet there is as much tragedy as there is humour, and as much didacticism as there is irony. Does the Quartet not try to find ways of describing the human condition which, while acknowledging that tragedy and comedy can often co-exist in the same moment, go beyond the limitations of this age-old dichotomy? Pursewarden's retreat into irony -- reflected in the rather weak sounding title of his fictive trilogy, ubiquitous in the tetralogy “God Is a Humorist” -- is his undoing. Pursewarden tabulates his feelings on discovering the fate of Justine's child, which he discovers had died of meningitis in a brothel:

- (1) Relief at the end of a search
- (2) Despair at the end of a search; no further motive force in life.
- (3) Horror at death.
- (4) Relief at death. What future possible for it?

- (5) Intense shame. (don't understand this).
- (6) Sudden desire to continue search uselessly rather than admit truth.
- (7) Preferred to continue to feed on false hopes! (Clea 145)

Pursewarden's moral confusion over the child's fate and his prevarication over what to tell Justine does not seem to be consistent with his claims to have discovered that "truth has its own built in morality" (C 153).

A similar moral confusion underlies Pursewarden's suicide. In Mountolive, his suicide appears to be an act of moral cowardice "the easy way out", because Pursewarden was unable to face up to the error of his earlier advice to Mountolive that Brigadier Maskelyne's report "Nessim Hosnani: A Conspiracy Among the Copts" was mistaken in its conclusion and was a product of "the value-judgments of Maskelyne" (M 110). Further, Pursewarden was unwilling to make a sound ethical assessment of his conflicting loyalties to both "our gentle Nessim" (M 110) and to Mountolive. Following Hollahan's schema, "Darley-character", a struggling writer, always felt inadequate beside Pursewarden, the accomplished man of letters. However, the mature "Darley-writer", the "hidden" narrator of Mountolive, has the confidence to condemn Pursewarden's suicide as an act of "cowardice" (M 214).

However, the idea that Pursewarden's suicide was motivated by moral cowardice is questioned in Clea when Darley discovers Pursewarden's incestuous relationship with his blind sister, Liza. Pursewarden commits suicide when Liza writes to him to tell him of her love for Ambassador Mountolive. His suicide thus becomes, in the original sense of the word, an act of *charity*, "the completest gift I can offer you as your wedding present" (C 171). A new respect grows in the heart of "Darley-character" toward Pursewarden, for

whom he had previously entertained mixed feelings of envy, resentment, fear and irritation. This new respect leads Darley to reassess Pursewarden's standing as an artist, helped by his reading of Pursewarden's letters to Liza (C 175). From Darley's re-assessment of Pursewarden springs one of the clearest statements of the tetralogy's methodological rationale:

If two or more explanations of a single human action are as good as each other then what does action mean but an illusion -- a gesture made against the misty backcloth of a reality made palpable by the delusive nature of human division merely? Had any novelist before Pursewarden considered this question? I think not.....It was now only that I began to see how mysteriously the configuration of my own life had taken its shape from the properties of those elements which lie outside the relative life -- in the kingdom which Pursewarden calls the 'heraldic universe'. (C 176-7)

Following his death, Pursewarden leaves Darley a legacy of £500. Pursewarden earned this money from Leila Hosnani for writing an epitaph for a favourite uncle of hers (M 169), this recalls the Alexandrian poet Raphael's commission in C.P. Cavafy's poem "For Ammonis, who died at 29, in 610"³ (CP-CC, page 51). This legacy is important to Darley; it gives him sufficient financial independence to assert his personal autonomy by quitting Alexandria for his Greek island where he would begin to write the Quartet. Additionally, in his idea of a "heraldic universe" Pursewarden also passes on a creative legacy: an insight into the nature of Time in relation to human experience.

³ Unless stated otherwise, all quotations from the poetry of C. P. Cavafy are from the 1975 Hogarth edition of Collected Poems; this work will be cited as "Cavafy – 'Poems'".

Pursewarden's waste was that he used humour and irony to avoid having to apply this wisdom in the world. When he was confronted by a coincidence of two situations, one personal and one political, which could not be overcome by irony alone, Pursewarden's only response was self-annihilation. Yet when, through reading Pursewarden's letters to his sister, Darley was able to comprehend the completeness of Pursewarden's position; he was immediately able to understand human experience through time as a multipersonal, interpersonal continuum where discreet personal identities functioned as grammatical elements conjugating the verb 'to love' across and between the four dimensions which constitute the stage in which the drama of human existence is played out:

We were three writers, I now saw, confided to a mythical city from which we were to draw our nourishment, in which we were to confirm our gifts. Arnauti, Pursewarden, Darley -- like Past, Present and Future tense! And in my own life (the staunchless stream flowing from the wounded side of Time!) the three women who also arranged themselves as if to represent the moods of the great verb, Love: Melissa, Justine and Clea. (C 177)

Darley talks of the "real fiction" which is "life itself" and of "the limited nature of my own powers" (C 177), but this is not a simple retreat into a position resembling *miyah*, the Hindu belief in the illusory nature of material reality; rather, Darley is contemplating illusion *in* reality, not reality *as* illusion. The illusion is that of the atomised, discrete individual as an independent unit, sole master of his own destiny; the "fiction" of individualised subjectivity is subsumed into a greater whole. Durrell sees the result of



this method to be a space-time continuum, a further development of Proust and Joyce's use of Bergsonian "Duration" ("Note" Balthazar). For Henri Bergson:

...draws a distinction between the concept and experience of time; the former might be subjected to the kind of analysis applied to the concept of space, but, 'real time' is experienced as duration and apprehended by intuition, not through separate operations of instinct and the intellect.
(Flew 41)

Thus, Bergson's ideas about 'real time', his concept of life as "duration" goes a long way toward answering Cavafy's fears about time and life in his poem "Candles". However, Durrell develops the idea of time advocated by Bergson by removing the stasis implied by the term "duration". The application of the scientific theory of relativity to the structure of the Quartet could lead to a "'science fiction' in the true sense" ("Note" Balthazar). Durrell's statement of authorial intention is reinforced by the discourses of the characters of the book who are artists or writers: Arnauti, Darley and Pursewarden. That these characters have an autobiographical aspect offering different perspectives on the author's psyche has long been a given in Durrell criticism. They function rather as a cubist painting attempts a simultaneous depiction of multiple aspects of its subject, each persona giving way to the next at crucial junctures. Richard Pine has described this as a process whereby:

This novelist-within-a-novelist-within-a-novel in fact makes the type of claim for autonomy that...had its most recent and best developed

expression in 1939 in Flann O'Brien's At Swim-Two-Birds...Pursewarden is, in fact more Durrell's alter ego than Darley...Certainly Durrell was more attuned to, or 'fond of' Pursewarden than any other of his characters. (186)

Thus, different aspects of the psychological life of the author take on a "life of their own" within the text. The sometimes lengthy discourses of these *alter egos* are embedded in the text as conversations (ongoing or remembered), internal monologues and as sections of other (imaginary) novels and poetry quoted as a "work within a work". These discourses nearly always seek to frame the action of the novel within a purely abstract context, by distancing events from cause and effect within linear time, thereby maintaining a thoroughgoing authorial attempt to build the Quartet as a metaphysical and psychological construct, whilst apparently undermining the validity of the text as a document of historical relevance.

The concept of the Quartet as a primarily metaphysical construct which finds only a contingent and provisional earthly manifestation in mid-twentieth century Alexandria, has been further reinforced during interviews with Durrell:

I knew I was going to write a Big City Poem in a special form when I was there, and, of course, I was interested in the colour of Egypt. but when it came to choose my city, I (being a romantic) chose the most various and colourful I could remember; technical question. I had to have enough colour to support four long volumes without boring. At first I started a book about Athens, then switched to Alexandria. There I had everything,

different cultures, civilisations, religions, all together; so I could, if I were clever, keep my paint from drying until I had finished the whole canvas.
(qtd. in Moore 159)

Here it is secondary "technical" factors which determine the Alexandrian setting for the Quartet, Alexandria's "colour", its ethnic and cultural diversity provide a specific *locus* for the manifestation of the literary idea, Durrell's "Big City poem", which seems to have had an *a priori* existence in the mind of the author. The view that the essential Alexandria of the Quartet is this *idea* of a metaphysical Alexandria existing outside of history is explained by Pine, who argues that: "The Quartet is a textbook for lovers because the city – 'site of the *carcinoma maxima*' -- provides an education for their adolescent minds: in the reader's complicity with the author, both sexual curiosity and metaphysical speculation are requited but remain unfulfilled, because they are left waiting for miracles" (244).

In such a configuration, Alexandria becomes a site of unrequited desire and frustrated passion which has echoed around the Mediterranean world since at least the time of Anthony and Cleopatra. In the Middle Ages, this finds its expression in the verse of both the European Troubadours and the courtly poets of Islamic Spain, in both Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet and in Leila va Majnun by the eleventh-century Persian poet Nizami; and this Mediterranean dialectic of frustrated desire and passion has a twentieth-century manifestation in the Quartet. Durrell seems to be not simply aware of this heritage, but is intent on celebrating it. Durrell's Alexandria appears to be a site for the exploration of purely mythic, metaphysical, or psychological themes. Is Durrell simply using Alexandria as a colourful palate with which he can "paint" his big city

poem? It is Durrell's use of such Alexandrian "colour" that has led some Egyptian critics to view the Quartet as simply a big joke at the expense of the actually existing Alexandria. Does the Quartet thus fall firmly into the "Orientalist" tradition by having no other aim than the intellectual titillation of the Western reader? Is this not, as those critics who are eager to draw the Alexandria Quartet into post-modernism allege, just another exercise in writing as play, as a celebration of the *jouissance* of the endless shifting of signification? Dianne Vipond contends that:

In the Alexandria Quartet, Durrell shapes form to illuminate content, subjects appearance to scrutiny in the service of meaning, and reveals how aesthetics embodies ethics, a virtuoso post-modern literary performance which assures the Quartet a prominent and lasting place in the history of the English novel. ("Missing Link" 66)

Viewed this way, it becomes hard to look beyond the tetralogy's experiments with form. Any historical relevance that the work might have becomes lost in the dialectic of appearance and meaning. Viewed from this "post-modern" perspective, the work aims at nothing more than the aestheticisation of ethics and a transcendence of history slipping dangerously close to what Lukács (188) has called "historical solipsism". Insisting in incorporating Durrell into a "canon" of post-modernism, Vipond states:

It is useful to think of postmodernism as both a period in literary history (the later half of the twentieth century -- 1960 and beyond) and as a theoretical model that posits certain literary traits: metafiction with its

emphasis on the imaginative process of storytelling and the mixing of literary and critical concerns; often a baroque or neo-baroque style with accompanying linguistic artifice and self-consciousness; a recognition of the collaborative role of the reader as interpreter; a privileging of form as integral content; tolerance of paradox and ambiguity; an awareness of the ideological underpinnings of rhetorical "truth", use of irony, parody and intertextuality as defamiliarisation techniques; attention to a destabilised reality; a dynamic subject/object relationship; and a sensitivity to context/historicity. The Quartet exhibits all these characteristics. ("Missing Link" 54-5)

Yet the overly-enthusiastic application of post-modernist theory to the Quartet carries with it the danger of a kind of post-modernist reductionism whereby the ontological status of the Quartet in relation to the historical city of Alexandria slips from one predicated upon socio-history, to a status based in representation and eventually simulation according to Jean Baudrillard's formulation of the post-modern artifice which "bears no relation to any reality whatever: it is its own pure simulacrum" (170). However, Durrell's city is not merely a "simulacrum" of the Alexandria of the nineteen-thirties and 'forties. Strapping the Quartet down onto a Procrustean bed of postmodernity is to vandalise the relationship between the tetralogy and the historical circumstances from which it arose. Taken to an extreme, such abstraction does harm to the understanding of key aspects the work, not least of all Durrell's concept of *deus loci*, which has at its heart an investigation of the dialectic between human existence and location in four dimensions.

It is the Greek-Alexandrian poet, C.P. Cavafy, who provides a link between the Alexandria of the Quartet and the city of history. Cavafy weaves in and out of the text of the tetralogy; sometimes he is referred to by name, sometimes alluded to as the “old man” or “old poet of the City” as in Darley’s stream of consciousness reflections at the beginning of Justine (18-19). Durrell's translations of Cavafy's poems appear at the end of Justine and Clea. Durrell frequently alludes to Cavafy's verse to denote key points in the text where human emotion and feeling intersect with time (J 147, C 40); significantly, Darley first meets Justine after a lecture he gives on Cavafy (J 31).

The Alexandria Quartet, like much of Cavafy's poetry, is a work of confession; it sets out to explore the sexual, psychological and emotional extremes of human experience through the vehicles of historical and personal remembrance. This exploration occurs within the historically significant time frame of the nineteen-thirties and 'forties, and at a culturally significant geographical crossroads where the Arab, Egyptian, Greek, Jewish, and western European cultures intersect. The tetralogy explores the dynamics of human experience in this particular *milieu* around the story of L.G. Darley's coming into being as an existentially authentic artist; this exploration occurs in the context of a crossing of the axis of a trans-Mediterranean dialectic. Like St. Augustine, both Durrell and his fictional *alter ego* Darley are refugees fleeing the collapse of an ailing and disintegrating Empire. Like Augustine, Durrell-Darley crossed the Mediterranean from one of the cradles of classical Western civilisation “the right side of the Mediterranean” (J 27) to land on one of the ancient cities of the North African littoral. Third-century Carthage, like Alexandria of the mid-twentieth century, was a cosmopolitan city of restless sensuality. Just as Augustine's final rejection of Carthage was central to his arrival at his spiritual maturity, so an eventual rejection of Alexandria,

“*beloved*” Alexandria (J 17), was essential if Durrell-Darley was to achieve existential integrity as a writer. A voice remarkably similar to that of Durrell-Darley in Alexandria, that of a young man searching for some sort of existential or experiential authenticity in a notoriously sensual city on the “Other” side of the Mediterranean, can be detected in Augustine’s Confessions:

I went to Carthage, where I fond myself in the midst of a hissing cauldron of lust. I had not yet fallen in love, but I was in love with the idea of it, and this feeling that something was missing made me despise myself for not being more anxious to satisfy that need. I began to look for some object for my love, since I badly wanted to love something...[yet] in the midst of joy I was caught up in the coils of trouble, for I was lashed with the cruel fiery rods of jealousy and suspicion, fear anger and quarrels. (55)

The tetralogy is Darley’s journey from naivety to artistic and existential maturity narrated as confession. Durrell would have been aware of the above passage from Augustine from Eliot’s allusion to it in The Waste Land (II 307-11). Moreover, many of Cavafy’s poems are set in late-classical Alexandria; this would help Durrell to imaginatively re-enact Augustine’s journey in twentieth-century Alexandria. On the other hand, Cavafy’s poetry set in the contemporary city offered Durrell the opportunity to contextualise his “Big City poem” within an indigenous Alexandrian tradition of sensualist writing. Indeed, Durrell acknowledges the correspondences between his Alexandria and Augustine’s Carthage as Darley approaches the war-time city near the beginning of Clea:

I had no idea that we were so near, or that the city could be so beautiful in the mere saturnalia of war. It had begun to swell up, to expand like some mystical rose of the darkness, and the bombardment kept it company, overflowing the mind. To our surprise we found ourselves shouting at each other. We were staring at the burning embers of Augustine's Carthage, I thought to myself, we were observing the fall of city man.

(24-5)

Thus, it is from Augustine that Durrell adapts one of the tetralogy's key themes, that of the "fallen" city: mid-twentieth-century Alexandria as the dark, demonic opposite of Augustine's City of God.

In the Quartet, Cavafy often serves as Durrell-Darley's muse connecting the writer's consciousness with a dream-like recollection of the fallen city that had used him as its "flora" (J 11). Cavafy's "The City" and "The God Abandons Anthony" weave through the text of Justine, and "Far Away" and "The Afternoon Sun" weave through the texts of Clea, just as the ubiquitous quartertones and syncopated rhythms of traditional Egyptian music run through the Arab quarter of Durrell's Alexandria. Cavafy passes on to Durrell his metaphysical sensualism and initiates him into the mysticism of the mythical city. Durrell becomes the artistic locus for the manifestation of the mythical Alexandria for a new generation: Cavafy's death in 1933 corresponds closely to Darley's arrival in Alexandria. Thus, Cavafy's city can, like Durrell's, evoke feelings of waste and frustration, as in "The City":

Wherever I turn, wherever I look,
I see the black ruins of my life here,
where I've spent so many years, wasted them, destroyed
them totally." (Cavafy Poems 22)

Like Durrell in the tetralogy, Cavafy does not see this desolation as an endgame; rather, he takes it as a point of departure; Darley sets out to "rebuild this city in my brain -- melancholy provinces which the old man saw as full of the 'black ruins' of his life". In "The God Abandons Anthony" desolation has been converted into a moment of coming into existential authenticity because rather than flee the city for a lifetime in exile and humiliation (as did King Farouk after the Free Officers' *coup* of 1952), Anthony chooses his 'final pleasure' before falling on his sword, a moment of *unio mystica* with the *deus loci* of the city he is losing:

As one long prepared, and full of courage,
as is right for you who were given this kind of city,
go firmly to the window
and listen with emotion
but not with the whining, the pleas of a coward;
listen -- your final pleasure -- to the voices,
to the exquisite music of that strange procession,
and say goodbye to the Alexandria you are losing. (Cavafy Poems 27)

In Cavafy's later work, he more fully develops the idea of a mythical Alexandria, where he draws on all the resources of the city's long and rich history to discover hidden metaphorical meanings inherent in the city that surrounds him. This poetic linking of Alexandria's past with its present was to deepen Cavafy's affection for his city, so that, in the final stage of his work, he was able to speak of "This city which I love" ("In the Evening" Cavafy Poems 53, line 15); this affection is a marked departure from the tone of, for example, "Walls" or "The City" where the poet complains that "Now that you've wasted your life here, in this small corner, / You've destroyed it everywhere in the world" (Cavafy Poems page 22, lines 17-18). As he grew older, Cavafy was able recall the sensual and amoral Alexandria of his youth and make it live again in the present. The hypocrisy of bourgeois morality and the gossip and scandalising which had been a source of real misery for the youthful Cavafy is forgotten. The past is made to work in his present; the past becomes Cavafy's muse, as in "Understanding":

My younger days, my sensual life -
how clearly I see their meaning now.

What needless futile regret...

But I didn't see it then.

In the loose living of my early years
the impulses of my poetry were shaped,
the boundaries of my art were plotted.

(Cavafy Poems, page 60, lines 1 - 7)

Similarly, sensual Alexandria provides the imaginative impetus behind Durrell's series of poetic novels, the Alexandria Quartet. Situated on his Greek island, Darley also depends on memory, dragging the past into the present by "the iron chains of memory" in order to make art from sex (J 11). Cavafy scholar Edmund Keeley describes how Cavafy's poems which are concerned with the Alexandria of antiquity are related to those that are set in the modern city:

It seems that the major thematic purpose of the parallel between the sensual cities of Cavafy's ancient and modern worlds was to underline areas of continuity, even of identity, between past and present in the erotic experience of the lovers portrayed, while at the same time underlining the vast difference between past and present in the status and social roles of these lovers. (72)

In this way Cavafy establishes a continuum connecting deep history with contemporary reality which is a synthesis of that dialectic between the city's past history and its present reality. This is similar to Durrell's treatment of space, time and experience in the Quartet. Cavafy provides not simply a concrete historical link between the Alexandria of history and the Alexandria of Durrell's fiction, but he also provides a theoretical precedent for Durrell's use of ideas of continuum and duration. Moreover, this Cavafian synthesis is native to Alexandria and lies outside of mainstream European modernism. An example of the way in which the ancient world intrudes and overlaps into Durrell's contemporary

city is in Nessim's daydreaming at the Graeco-Roman museum in Justine (143-148).

Durrell also uses Cavafy's poetry to provide the kind of commentary on his own work, just as Cavafy uses the ancient world to comment on his contemporary city.

In the tetralogy, Durrell establishes a dialectic between this "free Hellenic world" and the "Orient". Durrell was very much aware of the ancient synthesis of this trans-Mediterranean dialectic and its reverberations through history; in his 1960 essay 'Landscape and Character' Durrell wrote:

And how different is the rhythm of Egypt to that of Greece! One isn't surprised by the story that the High Priest at Thebes said contemptuously: "You Greeks are mere children!" He could not bear the tireless curiosity and sensuality of the Greek character -- the passionate desire to conceptualise things metaphysically. They didn't seem to be able to relax, the blasted Greeks!...I could name a dozen top Greek thinkers or philosophers who were trained by Egyptians, like Plato, Pythagoras, Anaxagoras, Democritos. And these "tiresome children" certainly didn't waste their time, for even when they got back home to their own bare islands the pure flower of Greek culture spread its magnificent wings in flights of pure magic to astonish and impregnate the Mediterranean.

(1969, 159)

Hence, Durrell acknowledges the dynamic aspects of the trans-Mediterranean dialectic in enabling "Greek culture" to "impregnate the Mediterranean". From Cavafy, Durrell learnt a method of establishing a dialectic across the four dimensions of space and time

which separate human existences and histories. This method which respects place and history, heritage and tradition whilst being flexible enough to partake in a changing modernity.

Important though Cavafy is to grounding the tetralogy in the history that surrounded its creation, the Quartet has other links to history. In the period between Durrell leaving Egypt in 1945 and the publication of Clea in 1960, Britain's status in the world was transformed. Britain relinquished control of India in 1947 and was involved in a messy hand-over of British mandated Palestine to the fledgling Zionist state in 1948. In 1952 the Free Officer Movement overthrew Egypt's puppet king, Farouk and adopted Nasserite Arab nationalism as its governing creed. In 1956 came the twin shocks of the Suez crisis and the EOKA uprising in Cyprus; also in the mid-nineteen fifties, Britain was facing the so-called "Mau-Mau" uprising in Kenya. By the time the Alexandria Quartet had been published in its entirety, the British Empire had all but ceased to be.

For much of the nineteen-fifties, Durrell lived in the midst of this Imperial collapse; from 1953 until 1956, Durrell lived on Cyprus, where he worked an advisor to the island's British administration and an English teacher to Greek-Cypriot highschool students; whilst in Cyprus Durrell began writing Justine. However, it soon became clear to Durrell that life on the island would not be another Hellenic idyll as was his stay on Corfu, for during Durrell's years on Cyprus the EOKA uprising against British rule erupted. In Bitter Lemons, his book on Cyprus at the time of EOKA, Durrell has this conversation with a pupil:

"Tell me, Sir, soon England will solve all this and we can be at peace -- is it not so? I am getting worried about the boys at school, they spend all

their time singing nationalist songs and joining demonstrations. It will all end soon, will it not?"...I said, " I don't say you'll get your Enosis [the union of Cyprus with Greece] because of our responsibilities in the Middle East, but I'm sure we'll come together". (137)

A similar exchange between teacher and student is recalled in another English language Alexandrian novel of the nineteen-fifties, D.J. Enright's Academic Year, which is based on Enright's experiences teaching English literature in Alexandria in 1948-9. Central to the novel's plot are the anti-British disturbances that were eventually culminate in the revolution of 1952 (130-140). One student excuses herself from lessons saying, "We all honour you, Sir, you are our teacher. But we cannot work today -- it is 'down with Britain day', if you will excuse it, Sir?" (136). As in Cyprus, the British Empire was also being driven out of Egypt. Like Enright, Durrell was a witness to this Imperial unravelling and was aware of Britain's "pig in the middle" position vis-à-vis nationalists in both Cyprus and Egypt and other countries of the Middle East during the early post-Second World War period, when Britain was burdened by a host of mandates and protectorates which were becoming ever harder to control. The post-War polarisation of international politics was further compromising Britain's autonomy, as Albert Hourani, a Lebanese historian of the emergence of the Modern Arab world describes:

...the agreement under which British forces were to leave the [Suez] Canal Zone did not lead to the entry of Egypt into the Western defence system. On the contrary, it gave Egypt the freedom to follow a policy of non-alignment, and to form around itself a bloc of similarly non-aligned Arab

states that the outside world had to deal with as a whole. One expression of this policy was the close relationship established with the leading supporters of the idea of non-alignment, India and Yugoslavia; another more dramatic one was the agreement made in 1955 for the supply of arms to Egypt from the then Soviet Union and its allies...(366).

When Egyptian President Gamal Abd El Nasser announced the nationalisation of the Suez Canal in Alexandria in 1956, Britain and France, the two main Imperial powers represented in the Quartet, entered into a humiliating war to try to grab the canal back from the Egyptians. The conclusion of the Suez crisis was to make it plain to the rest of the world that Egyptian independence on Nasserite terms was a permanent reality and that Britain and France were no longer able to act as independent players on the world stage without superpower support. Roger Bowen equates the humiliation of Ambassador Mountolive in the house of the child prostitutes (M 288 - 295) with the disintegration of the British Empire

:It is a nice irony that the political and sexual quests which drive the characters in the Quartet should end up in this particular labyrinth of streets so often and so hauntingly, especially in the case of Mountolive, the servant of empire who once fell in love with Egypt.(15)

Bowen goes on to make an explicit case for the tetralogy's relevance to the socio-history of the mid-century Middle East:

In July 1956, at a speech in Alexandria, Colonel Nasser announced the nationalisation of the Suez Canal. Later that summer Durrell completed Justine and sent it off to Faber; the first reviews appeared in February of the following year. In the intervening months, the Suez crisis had added a final chapter to the history of Britain and France's control of Egypt. John Holloway has insisted that "public realities" have a firmer hold on the Quartet than may first appear. The tension between a European 'possession' of the Middle East, its "version" of the Orient, and the winds of change which will in time dispossess the European, is at the heart of this complex sequence of novels. (17)

The rise of Arab nationalism in Egypt under Nasser during the nineteen-fifties and 'sixties had a drastic effect on the cosmopolitan Alexandria depicted in the Quartet; the city of the tetralogy with its bars, night-clubs and Greek, Jewish and European *commerçants* all but disappeared within a decade. In his poem "Since Nine O'clock" an ageing Cavafy writes as if he had foresight of the changes that his Alexandria was to undergo in the decades that followed his death in 1933:

Since nine o'clock when I lit the lamp
 the shade of my young body
 has been haunting me, reminding me
 of shut scented rooms,
 of past passion -- what daring passion.
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streets now unrecognisable,
 bustling night-clubs now closed,
 theatres and cafes no longer there. (Cavafy Poems page 66, lines 6 - 14)

Cavafy's poem of remembrance presciently anticipates the condition of present-day Alexandria. Walking through the streets of the contemporary city an almost archaeological effort of investigation is required to find the city of Cavafy and Durrell. For, like Ptolomaic, Roman or Byzantine Alexandria, the city of the first half of the twentieth-century can now only be known by its traces, only a few ageing French-language street-signs, a virtually abandoned synagogue and a handful of Greek owned hotels and night-clubs remain. Edmund Keeley observes that, "The surface of Alexandria is Arabic again -- Arabic and little else -- and the mythical city beyond it is visible only to the inner eye of an Egyptian poet, one who can see the vital and imaginative resources that remain hidden to a European perspective" (5). Thus, massive political, social and cultural changes took place in post-War Egypt; these changes altered the city of the Quartet almost beyond recognition. It is the contention of this study that Durrell's Alexandria Quartet is an important work of British literary modernism and a significant example of the literature of transition from the colonial to the post-colonial world. The Quartet stands astride the nexus dividing the endgame of Britain's Empire from the post-colonial world of modern Egypt. The task of this dissertation is to identify and tease out the many important historical strands that are woven into the tapestry that is the Alexandria Quartet. To this end, this work will investigate both Western and Egyptian historical, social and cultural contexts that are relevant to the study of the tetralogy. As a preliminary to this investigation, however, the following chapter will review critical

approaches that can be usefully be part of the analytical toolbox that will be used to reconnect the Quartet to the history from which it emerged.

Chapter 2

Saidian "Orientalism", Eliotic "Tradition" and Conradian "Darkness" and The Alexandria Quartet

*Nothing changes. The indifferent
Or the merely good died off, but fixed
Here once the human type, 'Levant'.*
"Levant" -- Lawrence Durrell

This chapter will investigate the ways in which the Alexandria Quartet relates to the wider context of Western literature. In particular, it will focus on the place of the tetralogy in English writing as it developed during the age of "High" to "Late" Empire: for the purposes of this dissertation "High" Empire will refer to the period between the beginning of the British Occupation of Egypt in 1882 until the end of the Great War in 1918; "Late" Empire covers the period between 1919 and the Suez Crisis of 1956, 1919–1945 being roughly the time-frame in which the action of the tetralogy takes place, and 1945–1957 being the intellectual "gestation period" of the Quartet. In order to facilitate this investigation, this chapter will employ both T.S. Eliot's critical concept of "tradition" and Edward Said's theoretical position on "Orientalism", the chapter will then attempt to place the tetralogy both within Eliotic "tradition" and Saidian "Orientalism." Finally, the chapter will investigate the ways in which the Conradian idea of "Darkness" can illuminate Durrell's depiction of Alexandria's Arab and African aspects.

The contribution of the Palestinian-American intellectual Edward Said to literary criticism in the last quarter of the twentieth-century has been considerable. Said's work

has provided both a starting point for new areas of critical endeavour in the study of colonial and post-colonial literature and a different reference point from which more established bodies of literature can be re-assessed. Said's "Orient" has its epicentre in the Middle East; encompassing the Levant, Mesopotamia, Arabia, Egypt, and reaching out to Persia and India, Ethiopia and the Sudan; Libya and the Maghreb and Turkey and the Caucasus are at its geographical extremities. However, for Said the Orient is far more than a simple geographical location, albeit, "the location of Europe's greatest, richest and oldest colonies" (1). In Said's Orientalism, (this work will be referenced as "O") the Orient is an imaginative location within the Western psyche (2). Moreover, this imaginative "Orient" has its concrete and material manifestation in the cultural and ideological productions of the West (O 2). For Said, Orientalism is "a way of coming to terms with the Orient, which is based on the Orient's special place in European Western experience" (O 1). The relevance of Said's work to the analysis and criticism of The Alexandria Quartet is obvious, since the tetralogy has as its setting one of the great cities of Said's "Orient". Furthermore, the Quartet is a prime example of a Western imagining of that Orient, an imagining whose temporal setting is at a key juncture in the history of Western involvement with the Orient. Durrell begins the Quartet with Darley's stream-of-consciousness musings:

The symbolic lovers of the free Hellenic world are replaced here by something different, something androgynous, inverted upon itself. The Orient cannot rejoice in the sweet anarchy of the body -- for it has outstripped the body. (J 12)

From this statement, and from what follows in the Quartet through to its final denouement in Clea, it is clear that Said's "Orientalist" paradigm provides an important tool for the analysis of Durrell's tetralogy. Some critics of the tetralogy, notably Roger Bowen, have done pioneering work in the application of Said's "Orientalist" paradigm to The Alexandria Quartet. This chapter will briefly review the key points of Said's ideas as developed in Orientalism; it will also apply Saidian theory to the Alexandria Quartet, the better to establish the relevance of the theory to the text.

Orientalism was published in 1978, and it had an immediate impact on new areas of criticism such as those concerned with colonial and postcolonial literature which were then in their infancy. Orientalism also helped establish the use of Foucauldian "discourse analysis" in the study of such historical phenomena as Imperialism. Foucault developed the idea of "discursive formation" in books such as The Archaeology of Knowledge and Discipline and Punish to describe the way in which an object of discourse comes to be formed, the rules governing its formulation, and the role played by forms of expertise and specific institutions in the development and propagation of a given form of discourse. Foucault was particularly interested in the way new forms of discourse develop, rise to prominence, and thereby bring about changes in cultural, political or ideological practice. In Discipline and Punish, for example, Foucault looks at the rise of the modern criminal justice system in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth-centuries. He is interested in the move away from retributive punishment or from punishment as spectacle, toward the idea of punishment as a corrective process. Central to this shift in criminal justice practice is the institution of the modern prison and the rise of new fields of expertise such as criminology, criminal psychology and a science of law enforcement. Each of these new institutional developments articulates its own "discourse" or the

language through which a body of knowledge is communicated. Foucault's translator Alan Sheridan-Smith clarifies the Foucauldian concept of "discourse", "...the object of a discourse is not to be confused with the linguistic referent, the thing referred to by a verbal sign. Discourse is not about objects; rather, it *constitutes* them. Foucault dispenses with "things" in order not to make discourse the sign of something else" (98).

In this way, Foucault questions the "innocent" nature of learned discourse by refusing to take the direct relation between the discourse and the objects to which it is supposed to refer for granted. Instead, he makes the discourse itself and the way the discourse "frames" its subject as the object of his analysis. Interpreter of Foucault Richard Kearney notes that Foucault's study of history within societies becomes a study of "history within the discourses within societies" (295). Foucault's method goes beyond the view held by conventional historicism, that of history as a teleological progression of chronological events. For Foucault, history consists of a series of coded discourses, each one setting up new *epistemes*: new formulations for legitimate knowledge and dominant discourse.

However, Foucault has been criticised for his unwillingness to consider the political and economic fields as originating sites of historical narrativisation; this line of criticism is pursued by Aijaz Ahmad in his book In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures. Ahmad criticises Foucault for specifying the "spatial limits and temporal constitution" of the episteme in which he is engaged; for Ahmad, Foucault's insistence that he is investigating a specifically *Western* episteme is no more than a ploy which enables Foucault to side-step the historical and political-economic issues that underpin the emergence of this episteme, "Foucault always side-steps Marxist terminology, but he knows what he is talking about -- namely, the emergence of bourgeois society...the

episteme is Western *because* it is located in a transition that occurred specifically in Europe..." (165-6).

Following Foucault, Said maintains that "the Orient" is not just a geographical location. Rather it is an act of imagination, a cultural and ideological practice, "...a history and a tradition of thought, imagery, and vocabulary" (O 5); this definition of the "Orient" re-emphasises the cultural subjectivity of the Western observer of the Orient and recalls the idea of a "personal landscape", the title of the poetry magazine which Durrell edited during his stay in war-time Egypt along with Robin Fedden and Bernard Spencer. Following Foucault, Said insists that "Orientalism" is not simply an idea, it is also a practice, "Orientalism is more particularly valuable as a sign of European-American power over the Orient than it is as a veridic discourse about the Orient (which is what, in its academic or scholarly form, it claims to be)" (O 5). Said quotes from Jean-Baptiste-Joseph Fourier's *préface historique* from the Description de l'Égypte, an exhaustive encyclopaedia of Egypt produced during France's brief occupation of that country (1798 - 1801), to establish the particular importance of Egypt to European Orientalism. For Fourier Egypt's significance stemmed from its geographical position "Placed between Africa and Asia and communicating easily with Europe" (O 84), and its historical connections with important classical figures such as Lycurgus, Solon, Pythagoras and Plato, Alexander, and Pompey, Caesar, Mark Anthony and Augustus (84).

Thus, Said concludes that Egypt was the "focal point of Orientalism" (O 383), and was important to the Orientalists of the nineteenth-century because, "Egypt was saturated with meaning for the arts, sciences and government, its role was to be a stage on which actions of a world-historical importance took place" (85). Furthermore, "By taking Egypt, then, a modern power would naturally demonstrate its strength and justify

history" (85); however, although the annexing power would thereby "enter a history whose common element was defined by figures no less great than Homer, Alexander, Caesar, Plato, Solon and Pythagoras", the set of values which Europe attached to Egypt was related not to that country's "modern realities" but to "a series of valorised contacts it had had with a distant European past" (85).

However, Said's Foucauldian concern with themes such as representation, discourse and epistemic difference lead him to devalue the importance of political-economic factors in the rise of European Imperialism in the Orient. Rather than see the rise of capitalism in general and of the imperialist phase of capitalism in particular as the result of historical processes which had an *accidental* relationship to Europe (or to "the West" in Said's generalisation), Said tends to see Orientalism in *essentialist* terms; thus, for Said, Orientalism is defined as a series of cultural or psycho-social practices by which "the West" achieves self-definition by the projection of its fears onto a demonised or pathologised "Other". Whilst this Saidian approach can be useful in the analysis of texts such as the Quartet, the fundamental weakness of Saidian theory is its hidden essentialism which, *pace* Foucault, insists on the "Western" nature of its fundamental episteme without having adequately defined what the "West" is. Consequently, Said fails to fully explain the historical processes that caused that episteme to appear in western Europe in the mid-eighteenth century: Said often does little more than turn the representational and narrativising tables on "the West" in a kind of "Occidentalism".

It was Imperial Britain, rather than its rival France, that succeeded in "demonstrating its strength" by occupying Egypt. Durrell's Quartet is set at the tail-end of this occupation in Alexander's "opulent city" and pays ample tribute to Egypt and Alexandria's "valorised contacts" with a "distant European past". However, the

tetralogy's action takes place in inter-War and War-time Egypt, and the work was published in the post-War world of the nineteen-fifties, when the British Empire was clearly dying. Britain's precarious hold over the Egypt of the Quartet is a sign of British weakness rather than strength, and Britain's ability to maintain control of the Suez canal is a test of its ability to hold on to the rest of its Empire. Egypt's destiny is beginning to be "un-annexed" to that of Europe, and the country's "modern realities" are starting to assert themselves. As a result, contextualising the Quartet within the discourse of Orientalism enables the tetralogy to be read both as a work which, in its language and symbolism, reproduces the Orientalism and as being an ironic commentary upon what Bowen calls a "late chapter to the tradition of Orientalist discourse" ("Toybox", 10).

At this point it is necessary to address the question, "To what extent is Darley's Alexandria the real city of history, or is it a city purely of the imagination?" In his note following the title page of Justine, Durrell states that, "The characters in this story, the first of a group, are all inventions together with the personality of the narrator, and bear no resemblance to living persons. Only the city is real" (7). So, for Durrell, the "real" city is the setting for an invention, an imagining; but what meanings can accrue to the "reality" of a setting for a work of fiction, and to what extent can the "real" city be separated from the "imaginary" characters that populate it?

In the opening passages of Justine, Darley is trying powerfully to construct within the mind of the reader the imaginative framework within which the rest of the picture that he paints will be set. This first part of this framing is the establishment of the binary opposition between, on the one hand, the "free Hellenic world" and on the other hand the Orient. Said describes this process as "Orientalising the Orient" (O 167), making a subject "Other" by imposing upon it the vocabulary and modalities of a hegemonic

discourse. Darley's vision of unhappy, introverted and metaphysical Alexandria comes at the tail end of a discursive tradition. Near the beginning of the Orientalist tradition is Edward Lane, an English philologist, scholar and travel writer of the mid-nineteenth century who lived in Cairo for thirty years; Lane is best known for his Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians, first published in 1836. One of the first European Orientalists to don Arab garb and live in the Middle East as a "native", Lane took to "[living] among the people as one of them, assuming an Arabic name and adopting their manners and customs, and even their opinions, so far as conscience would allow" (8). In his discussion of Lane, Said examines the issue of sexuality in Orientalism:

Lane not only described, but edited it [the Orient]; he excised from it what, in addition to his own human sympathies, might have ruffled the European sensibility. In most cases, the Orient seemed to have offended sexual propriety; everything about the Orient -- or at least Lane's Orient in Egypt -- exuded dangerous sex, threatened hygiene and domestic seemliness with an excessive "freedom of intercourse", as Lane put it more irrepressibly than usual. (O 167)

Writing in the eighteen-thirties, Lane was dependent on aristocratic patronage. Lane, therefore, may have had good reason to conform, at least outwardly, to the prevailing norms of propriety of his time. However, the tradition of Orientalist discourse was to outgrow the confines of being a purely scholarly body of knowledge. The Orient was becoming important subject matter for the literature of nineteenth-century Europe, and of British and French literature in particular. These literary Orientalists did not suffer

from quite the same primness in discussing "Oriental" sexuality as did their more scholarly predecessors. As Said puts it, "what the pioneers made available, the literary crowd exploited" (O 168). Thus, although Orientalism had its origin as an ostensibly descriptive and scientific discourse, the assumed objectivity with which Orientalists examined their alien subject provided the Victorian literary imagination with an exotic backdrop on which it could project its psycho-sexual fantasies.

This revived aesthetic interest in Egypt and the "Orient" took place against the backdrop of Europe's growing military and economic power in relation to the Orient. As a near contemporary of Orientalist scholars such as Renan, Sacy, Lane and Volney, Gustave Flaubert is, for Said, the pivotal writer who defines and establishes Orientalist discourse in its literary form. It is with Flaubert that the Orient becomes a site of escapist sexual fantasy and a location in which licentious sex can be freely indulged. Said writes:

...for nineteenth century Europe, with its increasing embourgeoisement, sex had become institutionalised to a very considerable degree. On one hand there was no such thing as "free" sex, and on the other, sex in society entailed a web of legal, moral, even political and economic obligations of a detailed and certainly encumbering sort. Just as the various colonial possessions -- quite apart from their economic benefit to metropolitan Europe -- were useful as places to send their wayward sons, superfluous populations of delinquents, poor people and other undesirables, so the Orient was a place where one could look for sexual experience unavailable in Europe. (O 190)

Said goes on to note that what these people were looking for was “a different type of sexuality, perhaps more libertine and less guilt-ridden” (O 195). This was to lead to a situation where, “Oriental sex was as standard a commodity as any other available in the mass culture.” (195) Here, Said has anticipated the world of the Alexandria Quartet; he brings immediately to mind Darley’s evocation of Alexandria at the beginning of Justine, “the sexual provender which lies to hand is staggering in its variety and profusion” (J 12). Furthermore, it is Said’s “wayward sons” of Empire, superfluous delinquents, poor people and assorted undesirables, Darley and perhaps Durrell himself among them, who make up the European population of the Alexandria of the Quartet. Darley, nursing his physical sores and psychological scars seeks a “writing cure” safely confined on his island in the “free Hellenic world” remembers Alexandria as “the great winepress of love” populated by the sick men and prophets who have been “wounded” sexually (J 12).

This dis-orientating Orient is a place to which wayward Europeans, Darley, Pursewarden, Pombal, Scobie *et al*, have gone looking for these sexual experiences which are supposedly “unavailable in Europe”. It is a place to which they have gone in order to set themselves apart from the generality of European manhood. It is a place to which they have gone in order to acquire a certain Oriental auralty inscribed upon their bodies and psyches by the needles of bitter-sweet experience. For the alien Orient allegedly leaves its physical as well as its mental scars on those who are tempted by the unique kinds of pleasure which it has to offer. On the one hand the Orientalising subject inscribes its controlling discourse on its orientalised “Other”; on the other hand, that Other writes upon the bodies of the Westerners who live out their psycho-sexual fantasies within that Other. Out of this dialectic of psycho-sexual inscription emerges a sexualised Orientalist literature emerges from this dialectic of inscription; likewise, an equally

sexualised postcolonial literature also arises from the same dialectic, Tayyib Salih's Season of Migration to the North, a story of a Sudanese medical student's sexual corruption of Western women in London in the nineteen-fifties is a case in point. This process of bodily inscription, whereby stages of character's initiation into the organic life of Alexandria is marked physically features large in the pages of the Quartet; thus, Melissa dies "with her sex broken" (J 21). Similarly, European characters such as Clea, Darley, Mountolive, Pombal, Pursewarden and Scobie all undergo physical and psychological mutilation as they become progressively more "Alexandrian", denizens of that city which, as Darley remembers, "used us as its flora -- participated in us conflicts that were hers and which we mistook to be our own: beloved Alexandria!" (J 11).

Thus, the Quartet's European protagonists are initiated into the city by physical or psychological mutilation. In contrast, the tetralogy's native Alexandrians are often born deformed, as are Narouz or Semira, or succumb to "natural" disease, as do Leila or Justine. In this way they confirm the sickly and deathly nature of Durrell's Orient, "a death uttered in every repetition of the word, Alexandria, Alexandria" (J 55). The pathologisation of the Oriental Other arises out of the construction of its autrality; the bodily inscription of discourse and the pathologisation of Otherness are combined most poignantly in the Quartet in venereal infection, which is used to figure metonymically for the city itself. Venereal disease is foregrounded when Darley tells us that Balthazar "...spends much of his working-time in the government clinic for venereal disease. (He one said dryly: 'I live at the centre of the city's life - its genito-urinary system; it's a sobering sort of place')." (J 82) In Egypt, circumcision is an important cultural signifier by which indigenous Christians, Jews and Muslims alike differentiate themselves from Others. Accordingly, Durrell has Joshua Scobie turn circumcision (or, as Scobie would

have it “hyphenation” [B 138]) into an agent for the spreading of disease by insisting, “they’re spreading syphilis old man!” (B 139). Clea is a painter, but she works in Balthazar’s VD clinic, painting “The ravages of syphilis...in every degree of anomaly”; Clea's paintings display a “terrifying lucidity and tenderness”. Her depictions of the ravages brought on by tertiary syphilis have “all the values of depicted human faces -- abdomens blown like fuses, skin surfaces shrunken and peeling like plaster, carcinomata bursting through the rubber membranes which retain them.....” (J 116).

Here Clea, a European-Alexandrian artist, stands in the same relation to her subjects as the Orientalists do to the Orient; she faithfully depicts a pathologised and diseased difference, diligently performing her task of faithful recording and inscription:

Before her, [Clea] seated half-crouching upon a wicker chair, was a big-breasted sphinx-faced *fellah* girl, with her skirt drawn up above her waist to expose some choice object of my friend’s study. It was a brilliant spring day, and in the distance one could hear the scampering of the sea. Clea’s capable and innocent fingers moved back and forth upon the white surface of the paper, surely, deftly, with wise premeditation. Her face showed the rapt and concentrated pleasure of a specialist touching in the colours of some rare tulip. (J 116)

Durrell is writing at the tail-end of the tradition of Orientalist writing, yet his depiction of Balthazar’s practice recalls the earliest phase of literary Orientalism. According to Said, this literature is a way of “seeing and recording” the Oriental Other, often as something horrible yet seductive, reflecting Orientalists' contradictory feelings of attraction and

repulsion vis-à-vis their subject. In his description of Clea's artistry, Durrell is alluding to a classic scene in Orientalist travel writing, Flaubert's visit to Kasr El 'Aini hospital in Cairo, which Flaubert recorded as follows in his Travel Diaries:

Pretty cases of syphilis; in the ward of Abbas's Mamelukes, several have it up the arse. At a sign from the doctor, all stood up on their beds, undid their trouserbelts (it was like an army drill), and opened their anuses with their fingers to show their chancres. Enormous infundibula; one old man's prick entirely devoid of skin; I recoiled from the stench. (65)

It is the inscription of this diseased Otherness upon the Western body, as signified metonymically by venereal disease, which marks out the man who really knows the Orient from the mere passer though. For Darley, writing Justine on the Greek island was part of his convalescence from the physical and psychological sicknesses which were part and parcel of the ordeal of living the "Oriental" life. For Darley and others like him, living as an exiled European hedonist in the Orient is a kind of transformation by ordeal, which takes the Western man out of himself, out of the kinds of sexual, behavioural, moral and aesthetic strait-jackets in which an embourgeoisified Europe seeks to bind him. The Orientalist imagination transforms this liberation from the dominant sexual *moeurs* of Europe into a kind of mythology. The Oriental experience causes within those who enjoy it a heightened sensuality and an enhanced sexuality. The initiate who undergoes the ordeals which the Orient sets against him is able to emerge a Magus figure who is a master of languages, of *moeurs*, of cultures, of sexualities, a man of extraordinary physical and mental resources, a man made *Übermenschlich* by ordeal.

Durrell invokes this transformative myth in Clea when the self-realised Darley saves Clea from drowning, thereby overcoming the hex Narouz has put on her by bringing her back to life with his ironically sexualised kiss-of-life (251). Narouz's curse on Clea was cast with his deathbed cry "Clea!" (M 313); if Narouz could not possess her in life, then maybe he could drag her down to the underworld with him. Darley's submarine struggle to rescue Clea at the end of the Quartet pits Darley against Narouz, Briton against Egyptian, colonist against colonised, the modern against the feudal, the artist against the farmer, St George rescuing the maiden from the dragon. It is also a struggle within the self, the rational mind against the unconscious, the human against the bestial, the ego against the id. However, with Darley's victory over Narouz comes not entrenchment, a further reinforcement of his presence in Egypt, but a flight from the Orient to France where he hopes to meet Clea and where the "bitter-sweet herb of self-discovery" (C 279) can flourish. In Darley's victory over the ghost Narouz -- his saving an imperilled white woman from a representative of the forces of African "darkness" -- there is a fantasy of wish-fulfilment. Darley is enacting on behalf of Europe a final victory over its demonised Oriental *alter ego*. A dying colonialism snatches a final pyrrhic victory from the jaws of terminal Imperial decline, a final rearguard action is fought which achieves for an imaginary Imperial son a final boost for its imagined superiority over the Orient. Durrell's imaginative re-working of Imperial wish-fulfilment illustrates the extent to which the tetralogy partakes in the Orientalist tradition. Yet writing at the very end of the Orientalist literary tradition, Durrell understands that being locked into a dialectic of pathologised auality was profoundly unhealthy for both the Orient and the West.

Durrell wrote both within and without the Orientalist "tradition" (Bowen,

"Toybox" 17) at one and the same time. He adopts the vocabulary of this tradition, along with its images, its style and its rhetoric in order to turn Orientalism in on itself, the better to achieve an ironic effect that distinguishes Durrell's late Orientalist perspective from the hubristic triumphalism of Victorian and Edwardian Orientalists. Durrell suggests not only that a parting of the ways between the British Empire and the nations that it subjugated is inevitable, but also that this parting of the ways may not be such a bad thing for all concerned. The Orientalist tradition had for so long treated its subject as if it were sick, diseased or deficient that this pathologisation came to be viewed, by Western eyes, as something natural, an essential attribute of the Oriental Other. With the Quartet, however, British writing on the Orient 'confesses the artifice' ("Toybox" 17). Just as Conrad's work asks the question as to whether the real 'heart of darkness' lies in the heart of Africa or in the darkest recesses of the Western psyche, so Durrell's work raises the possibility that the "sickness" of the Orient might be more profitably searched for in the imagination that created the idea of the "Orient", the imagination of Imperialist Europe, rather than in the Middle East as it actually exists: Durrell's Alexandria Quartet provides an insight into the psycho-pathology of the end of Empire.

Although Said is primarily concerned with the "high" Orientalism of the nineteenth-century and the early twentieth-century rather than the Quartet's era, that of the transition between the colonial and post-colonial moments, Saidian "Orientalism" clearly provides a way of rendering apparent some of the rhetorical, cultural and ideological underpinnings of the tetralogy. Said's paradigm enables the Quartet to be contextualised within a particular tradition of discourse, Said's "imaginative geography" (O 49). Said's analysis of the application of imagination to location ranges over a wide range of disciplines such as, archaeology, anthropology, philology, geography, literature

and the arts. Said describes the cumulative effect of centuries of Orientalist endeavour in these fields as a tradition. Moreover, an ideological dimension accrues to this concept of tradition, causing it to partake in the articulation of a national consciousness in the West:

No scholar or thinker, of course, is a perfect representative of some ideal type or school in which, by virtue of national origin or the accidents of history, he participates. Yet in so relatively insulated and specialised a tradition as Orientalism, I think there is in each scholar an awareness, partly conscious and partly non-conscious, of national tradition, if not national ideology. (O 263)

As has been mentioned, Ahmad criticised Said for his over-dependence on Foucault in framing his "Orientalist" episteme and his refusal to engage with the political-economic underpinnings of imperialism. Said's use of "tradition" exposes another important weakness in his theory of 'Orientalism'. For Ahmad, the notable comparativist Erich Auerbach is "...the silent anti-hero in Said's counter-classic. If Auerbach began with Homer, Said too must begin with Greek tragedy; and a special venom must be reserved for Dante, because Dante, after all, is the hero of Auerbach's account." (163) Ahmad's observation about the hidden influence of Auerbach on Said sheds light on a contradiction at the heart of the Saidian paradigm of Orientalism: having branded "the whole narrative of European Literature from Aeschylus to Edward Lane" (164) as being complicit in the projection of "Western" power onto the Orient, Said names the ethical values of that literature's high humanism, such as "tolerance, sympathy, relativism, affiliation and accommodation", as the tools by which Western humanism

might be disentangled from Western Imperialism (164). This, in itself, is not contradictory; it is merely unremarkable in that Said's liberal humanism is the self-same solution to the problems posed by colonialism which a woolly-minded Imperial do-gooder, such as the Quartet's David Mountolive, might advocate. What is absolutely contradictory, however, is Said's parallel use of an Auerbachian concept of "tradition" coupled with Foucauldian discourse theory. This is contradictory because, as Ahmad insists, Foucault's theory is ultimately grounded in Nietzschean anti-humanism and anti-realist theories of representation. Said proposes what is effectively a liberal humanist solution to the problems caused by European literatures "entanglement" with Western Imperialism, yet the Foucauldian analysis which underpins Said's Orientalism insists that the liberal humanist tradition and Orientalism are simply a different aspects of the same "Western" episteme.

However, Said's use of the term "tradition" to refer to the intellectual and artistic elements which go to make up a sense of national consciousness or "nationhood" is consistent with the hidden essentialism that dwells within his discursive categories "Western" and "Oriental". This echoes T.S. Eliot's understanding of "tradition" as he outlined it in Eliot's essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent", "Every nation, every race, has not only its own creative, but also its own critical turn of mind; and is even more oblivious of the limitations and shortcomings of its critical habits than of its creative genius" ("Tradition" 37). Eliot's idea of "tradition" is anti-individualistic; the mind of the poet is subsumed into the wider cultural consciousness of the nation. Eliot stresses that for the poet, "...the mind of Europe -- the mind of his own country -- [is] much more important than his own private mind..." (39). In Eliot's schema, individual artistic talent has validity only in so far as it is able to partake in the national cultural

tradition; this artistic “impersonality” is achieved when the artist develops within himself what Eliot calls 'historical sense' (38). Developing this “historical sense” is, for Eliot, synonymous with artistic “maturity” which, “we may call nearly indispensable to anyone who would continue to be a poet beyond his twenty-fifth year” (38). Thus, Eliot’s “tradition” sees literature as essentially an historical and cultural process, rather than as the product of a discrete individual consciousness. Nonetheless, Eliot does not advocate a dead conformity any more than he advocates pointless and frivolous innovation; rather, he manages to establish an artistic dialectic between the individual artist and the wider social and cultural tradition from which he emerged. For Eliot it is necessary that the artist should “conform” and “cohere” to the tradition in which he or she partakes. Moreover, existing artistic “monuments” in that tradition form an “ideal order” among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the “new (the really new) world of art among them”, this leads to a “conformity between the old and new” (38).

As Eliot believes in “national” traditions, so Said believes in national Orientalisms, modalities of Orientalism which function within the national consciousnesses of the “Great Powers” of the nineteenth and twentieth-centuries. Said’s paradigm offers a similar dialectic between the individual and the wider culture as we see in Eliot’s formulation, “...I study Orientalism as a dynamic exchange between individual authors and the larger political concerns shaped by three great empires -- British, French, American -- in whose intellectual and imaginative territory the writing was produced” (O 15). Said is aware of the selective nature of his project, which, “in order to cut my archive down to manageable dimensions” (16) focuses on the Anglo-Saxon and French Orientalist traditions at the expense of considering the Orientalism of Germany, Italy, Russia, Spain and Portugal, although Said notes that these Orientalisms had, in common

with English, French and later American Orientalism, "...a kind of intellectual authority over the Orient within Western culture. This authority must in large part be the study of any description of Orientalism, and it is so in this study."(19)

Said adds an awareness of the political dimensions and ramifications of culture to Eliot's notion that "every nation has its creative and critical turn of mind" with the result that a clear correspondence develops between Eliot's idea of "tradition" and Said's "Orientalism". Despite the many real differences between them, both men view tradition as "national ideology". Said clarifies his ideas about exactly how Orientalism functions simultaneously as national tradition and national ideology in his discussion of the work of the Orientalist scholar of Islam, Sir Hamilton R. A. Gibb:

The Islamic Orientalist expressed his ideas about Islam in such a way to emphasise his, as well as putatively the Muslim's, resistance to change...When Gibb opposed nationalism in the modern Islamic states, he did so because he felt that nationalism would corrode the inner structures keeping Islam Oriental. (O 263)

Thus, for Said the primary political cultural function of the Orientalist text lies in its ability to maintain cultural and social barriers between the Orient and the Occident, and in the ability of that literature to reinforce geopolitical borders and divisions by supplementing their political existence with cultural significance. Orientalist literature becomes a militant signifier of cultural difference, a difference which provides a cultural buttress to the weight of the West's economic, military and political superiority vis-à-vis its Oriental subject. Said's idea of tradition emphasises tradition's *exclusivity*; Europe

achieves its self-definition in relation to that which Europe has made “Other”, that is to say the “Orient”. Eliot, on the other hand, stresses the *inclusivity* of tradition, as 'the mind of Europe' ("Tradition" 39). Both Eliot’s concept of "tradition" and that of Said can be seen as different aspects of the same cultural movement which investigates the internal nature of European selfhood and at the same time delimits the cultural borders of that selfhood.

In addition to the relevance of Eliot’s literary criticism to the study of the tetralogy, Eliot is a significant figure in the study of the Quartet biographical reasons Lawrence Durrell and T.S. Eliot maintained a literary correspondence from 1937 up until Eliot’s death (MacNiven Biography 160), India-born Durrell sometimes referred to Eliot as his "guru". The relationship between Durrell and Eliot gives an added, personal dimension to tracing the influence of Eliotic "tradition" on Durrell’s work. Eliot refused to accept that “tradition” was the mere cultural hand-me-down of fixed styles and forms through historical time, as he makes clear in “Tradition and the Individual Talent”:

Yet if the only form of tradition, of handing down, consisted in following the ways of the immediate generation before us in a blind or timid adherence to its successes, “tradition” should be positively discouraged. We have seen many such simple currents soon lost in the sand; and novelty is better than repetition. Tradition is a matter of much wider significance. It cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labour. It involves, in the first place, the historical sense...(38).

Durrell follows Eliot’s advice by incorporating into the Quartet strata of myth, literature and history. It is easy to trace the influence of The Waste Land on the Quartet, for example in the way that Joshua Scobie, an ageless, timeless, suffering figure of shifting, indeterminate sexuality, enacts Tiresias' role in The Waste Land. Aged, frail and half-blind, Scobie is the epitome of unredeemed human experience, observer of human futility and of mankind’s suffering. Scobie’s significance, like that of Tiresias, lies in his ability to strengthen and deepen the characters of the work's main protagonists. Indeed, Tiresias is mentioned directly in the "jazz-hit", “Old Tiresias / no-one half so breezy as / Half so free and easy as / Old Tiresias” (B 44), one of several refrains which recur throughout the tetralogy, “Old Tiresias” similarly recalls Eliot's experimentation with jazz rhythms in The Waste Land. Durrell was very much aware of Eliot’s treatment of time in The Waste Land, stating in his Key to Modern Poetry that:

[The Waste Land] turns the whole time like a mirror; taking us backwards and forwards between reminiscence and description, between the present and the past: and packed closely into it, among the images, are the fragments of the culture to which we belong, our art, our religion, our mythology. (157)

Having taken as his starting point Eliot’s treatment of time in The Waste Land, Durrell develops out of this time-consciousness a radical schema which foregrounds the way in which, as Beard puts it, “time and space combine in the act of reading and writing” (“Usufruct”, 76); just as Einsteinian physics joins Space to Time, so Durrell’s treatment of Time enables the reconciliation of such binary oppositions as those between subject

and object, reader and text, by disrupting narrative continuity in favour of a multiplicity of variant readings, each of which is relatively true. Durrell has Pursewarden explain the underlying mechanism by which the Quartet follows The Waste Land in the exploration of time in the "Workpoints" at the end of Justine, Pursewarden writes in terms of the "n-dimensional novel":

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

The synchronicity of Pursewarden's explanation of n-dimensionality is clearly related to Durrell's view of Eliot's treatment of time in The Waste Land, and corresponds to Eliot's assertion in "Burnt Norton" that "all time is eternally present". The close correspondence between Durrell's commentary on The Waste Land, where he states that the poem "turns the whole time like a mirror taking us backwards and forwards...", and Pursewarden's concept of the "n-dimensional" novel, is clear. In his "Brother Ass" epistle Pursewarden posthumously suggests to Darley such an "n-dimensional novel":

...if you wish to be...you may try a four-card trick in the form of a novel; passing a common axis through four stories, say, and dedicating each one

to the four winds of heaven...The curvature of space itself would give you stereoscopic narrative, while human personality seen across a continuum would perhaps become prismatic? (C 135-6)

Pursewarden suggests that the plot of such a novel be based around something quite day-to-day, “an ordinary Girl Meets Boy story” (136), before offering to collaborate (posthumously) with Darley on such a work, “Come, let us collaborate on a four or five decker job, shall we? ‘Why the Curate Slipped’ would be a good title. Quick, they are waiting, those hypnagogic figures among the London minarets, the muezzin of the trade. ‘Does Curate get girl as well as stipend, or only stipend?’ Read the next thousand pages to find out.” (C 136-7)

This sort of synchronic structure clearly was pioneered by Eliot in The Waste Land, but how does the Quartet stand in relation to Eliotic "tradition" ? Eliot explains the position of the individual artist vis-à-vis tradition in "Tradition and The Individual Talent", “No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead” (38). Accordingly, Durrell was determined to contextualise his work in "traditional" terms. In view of the deep strata of inter-textuality in the Alexandria Quartet, attempting to trace in detail Durrell’s use of Eliot’s concept of tradition to establish complex inter-relationships between characters and events in the Quartet and the “dead poets” of the European literary canon is a massive task. Hollahan acknowledges this, “Given Durrell’s unmistakable ambition of producing a large fiction that would be evaluated in the context of a main tradition, we should not be surprised to

discover numerous allusions to earlier authors and texts in that tradition" ("Swann" 120). Hollahan mentions that Schopenhauer, Hume and Spengler set the philosophical grounds for Durrell's scepticism and Greek mythology provides Durrell with material for deploying Eliotic mythic method. In her paper "The Artist as Shaman: Durrell's Alexandria Quartet" Paige Matthey Bynum equates the story of Narouz with the story of the Fisher King as outlined by Jessie Weston in From Ritual to Romance and to the figure of the sacrificial god-king in Sir James Frazer's The Golden Bough ("Shaman" 84). Hollahan sees allusions to Shakespeare's Othello, Hamlet and Anthony and Cleopatra in the Quartet, and to Swift's Gulliver's Travels in the scene in which Mountolive is poked by the child prostitutes ("Swann" 119). Among modern novelists, Hollahan sees within the tetralogy allusions to Flaubert, Gide, Dickens, D.H. Lawrence, Graham Greene, and James Joyce's Ulysses (119). The aim of this dissertation is to not catalogue precisely possible literary influences and allusions in the Quartet, merely to establish Durrell's desire to partake in a canon of European writing, and his use of the mythic method, intertextuality and Eliotic tradition to achieve this.

In the Quartet, Durrell seeks to diminish his role as individual author and creator; Durrell's use of multiple author-characters, Arnauti, Pursewarden and Darley as a prism to fragment and disperse his own personality and autobiographical elements in the narrative is evidence of this. Moreover, in trying to cover over the tracks within the Quartet which lead directly to his self, Durrell is working in accordance with Eliot's concept of the "mature" artist who diminishes selfhood in favour of "historical sense". The concrete manifestation of this historical sense in the Quartet is in Durrell's use of literary allusions which refer to a wide range of texts across the entire history of Western writing from Homer through to modernism. According to Eliot, this historical sense is

“what makes a writer traditional” (“Tradition” 38). Moreover, for Eliot the “mind of Europe” is “a mind which changes, and that this change is a development which abandons nothing *en route*, which does not superannuate either Shakespeare or Homer or the rock drawing of the Magdalenian draughtsmen” (39). This concept of tradition makes its mark on The Alexandria Quartet; Durrell seems to have written a work which partakes of the “mind of Empire”. The Quartet is concerned with issues related to British self-definition in the face of Imperial collapse. The Waste Land too was written at a time of crisis, the immediate aftermath of the Great War; a time of mourning when great material and psychological devastation when the realisation of modernity’s enhanced capacity for death and destruction signalled the end of early modernism’s naive faith in progress.

The Waste Land searches the soul of Europe as expressed in Europe's literary canon and searches for a new identity for a new and terrifying age. In this new Western identity the imperatives of change are tempered by the continuity of tradition. Ironically, the nearest that the poem offers as a hopeful solution to the sterility and devastation of the post-Great War wasteland is the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad's “peace that passeth understanding” and this derives from a non-Western tradition, namely Hinduism. Durrell was born and raised in the foothills of the Himalayas, as is recalled in his poem “Cities, Plains and People,” “On draughty corridors to Lhasa / Was my first school” (Durrell “Poems” 159, I: 21 - 22) Durrell also explored living non-Western traditions, such as Buddhism, Hinduism and Taoism, and past ones, such as the Egyptian “Book of the Dead” in order to find a way out of the cultural, spiritual and existential morass in which the post-Second World War world seemed stuck.

Thus, like The Waste Land the Alexandria Quartet is also a work written at a time

of crisis. European civilisation had again plunged the world into death and destruction, and Durrell believed in the imminence of a third world war, as a 1948 letter to Mary Hadkinson attests, "I still think I shall live there [Greece] some time -- perhaps after the next war -- looks pretty imminent doesn't it? I wonder why we don't get it over now? Russia can't be allowed to take over where Hitler left off -- that's obvious" (Spirit of Place 97). The atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki posed a threat even more dreadful than that of the mechanised destruction of the First World War. With the thermo-nuclear H-bomb first tested in the mid-'fifties Western man had unleashed as a weapon of mass destruction the elemental power that binds the universe together. When J. Robert Oppenheimer, director of the Manhattan Project witnessed the world's first atomic explosion in New Mexico he was lost for a suitable quotation from the Western tradition with which to capture the awesome spectacle he had just witnessed, so he followed Eliot in turning to the Hindu scriptures and quoted from the Bhagavad Gita "I have become Shiva, the destroyer of worlds". Durrell, child of the Raj and "post-Hiroshima Proust" sits down to write a novel which reflects the Einsteinian relativity principle, a novel which unravels the principles upon which identity is constructed and explodes identity into myriad particles which re-group and re-form continuously.

The profound geo-political changes which were going on around Durrell in the nineteen-fifties were raising many such deep and profound cultural questions. Such questions had a personal importance to Durrell: he had been born into the world of the Raj in which Britain was also the dominant power in south Asia, and the Far and Middle East and had lived more of his life in this colonial world than in Britain proper. His later career in the British diplomatic service ensured that he moved in a world where, however anachronistically, British political and military supremacy were taken as givens. This was

a world of an Empire on which it was still assumed that the sun would never set, a world kept in order by men like Brigadier Maskelyne, who could only conceive of a world in which events were either “a good show for the Raj” or “not such a good show for the Raj.” (M 107) Durrell was a man of the British Empire, a son of a global Imperial culture. Some of his writing gives the impression that he was prepared to offer his energies in the service of Empire as late as the mid-nineteen fifties. When Durrell writes of his work as Government press officer in Cyprus during the EOKA crisis of 1956, he presents himself as a curious blend of Imperial servant, spy and Philhellene:

...I presented the Government with a brief political report in which I tried to condense the fragments of all these conversations into something which might interest policy-makers. The conclusions I had reached were roughly these: the present situation might be captured and yet manipulated while it was still in its operative phase, so to speak, and capable of being turned to advantage with fair words...Outside of all this, of course, our moral and legal title to the island was unassailable, though it would be a psychological error to lie back upon it. (173)

However, in both his fiction and his personal writing, Durrell was scathing about Britain, the British and, most especially, what he understood to be the English mindset. In Clea, for example, Pursewarden expresses some of Durrell's views on the subject of the English attitude to art, “A puritan culture’s conception of art is of something which will endorse its morality and flatter its patriotism. Nothing else. I see you raise your eyebrows. Even you, Brother Ass, realise the basic unreality of this proposition. Nevertheless it

explains everything. A puritan culture, *argal*, does not know what art is -- how can it be expected to care?" (C 130) Pursewarden then broadens his criticism so as to include the Anglo-Saxon mentality in general:

So much for conscious thought: you see, we Anglo-Saxons are incapable of thinking *for* ourselves; *about* ourselves, yes. In thinking *about* ourselves we put up every kind of pretty performance in every sort of voice, from cracked Yorkshire to the hot-potato-in-the-mouth voice of the BBC. There we excel, for we see ourselves at one remove from reality, as a subject under a microscope. This idea of objectivity is really a flattering extension of our sense of humbug. When you start to think for yourself it is impossible to *cant* -- and we live by cant! (C 134-5)

Writing to T. S. Eliot about English attitudes to writing, Durrell expresses a similar frustration to that of Pursewarden:

One thing that is driving me almost cuckoo about English writing today is this terrible cult for the urbane; anything that's too hot, that disturbs at all, is not permissible. It comes out of this fervent desire on the part of Englishmen to be gents. A terrible inheritance for a writer to start with. This is just after reading Charles Morgan reviewing Henry Miller, and the Manchester Guardian cursing him for using 'gutter-words'! Such a farce it is. (Spirit of Place 83)

Later, in the same letter, Durrell cries out to the Anglophile Eliot, "How the Devil do you manage to stay on in the fogs and cramps of that damned island?" (84) Durrell's contempt for the little Englander mentality is sometimes attributed to his Celticism; Durrell was of partly Irish stock and did sometimes allude to himself as an "Irishman". Durrell's Celticism is echoed in Pursewarden's assertion of Celticness in his "Brother Ass" diatribe (C 143).

However, in the same "Brother Ass" passage Pursewarden also writes to Darley "we Anglo-Saxons" (C 134). The dilemma caused by Pursewarden considering himself to be both Irish and Anglo-Saxon sheds some light on Durrell's concept of British identity. For Durrell the deplorable Puritanism and cant of "Englishness" is redeemed by the Celtic elements which go to make up both Great Britain as a nation-state and "Britishness" as a national identity clearly distinguishable from "Englishness". For Durrell, the Celtic contribution to Britishness adds vital aspects of humour and irony to our English prudishness, Puritanism and cant which characterise what Durrell believes is the Anglo-Saxon aspect of British identity; being part of a minority subsumed within a hegemonic political whole helps break up the homogeneity of Imperial identity, allowing difference and diversity to disrupt the totalising unity of Empire. As Balthazar explains to Darley in Clea:

I remember old Pursewarden used to say: "Ah! you Jews have the knack of suffering" and I used to reply with a quotation from Mommsen about the bloody Celts: "They have shaken all states and founded none. They nowhere created a great state or developed a distinctive culture of their own." No, this was not simply an expression of minority-fever: this was

the sort of murderous passion of which one has read, and for which our city is famous! (68)

Yet Clea is set in the nineteen-forties, by then Ireland had achieved independence from the United Kingdom and the state of Israel would be founded before the decade was out: the insurgency that led to the establishment of territorial homelands for both the Irish and the Jews had been the vanguard of the post-War decolonisation movement which proved terminally destructive for the British Empire. Both Ireland and Israel re-claimed land occupied by a receding British Empire. Balthazar's Cabal is implicated in Nessim and Justine's plot to establish an independent Coptic Egypt in co-operation with the Zionists in Palestine.

However, Durrell's British identity is not the Britishness of the British Isles which he mockingly called "Pudding Island". Rather, Durrellian Britishness resembles that of other writers who spent significant parts of their lives in the Empire rather than in Britain proper, such as E. M. Forster and Rudyard Kipling: Durrell's "British" identity reflected the Britishness of Empire. This identity is not simply an expatriate identity, rather, it is diasporic. The British-Asian sociologist Avtar Brah has defined "Diaspora space" as follows, "The Diaspora space is the site where the native is as much a diasporan as the diasporan is a native" (131); this idea of a diasporic identity arising from a diasporic space corresponds closely with Durrell's boyhood experiences in India, as Ian MacNiven recalls:

"I would prefer to present my case in terms of biography," said Durrell some sixty five years later, [after Durrell had left India] "for my thinking

is coloured by the fact that I am a colonial, an Anglo-Indian born into that strange world of which the only great poem is the novel Kim by Kipling.”

(Biography 1)

Durrell's mention of Kim is significant, for like Kim Durrell was an Anglo-Indian; significantly, Durrell began publishing in 1936, the year of Kipling's death. MacNiven mentions that the Durrells and Lawrence Durrell's maternal kin, the Dixies, had “paid with their bodies, leaving their bones in the cemeteries of Mymensingh, or Roorke, of Mussoorie or Dalhousie, -- now-forgotten places of the Raj” (Biography 2). Durrell described himself to Henry Miller as “...a pure Anglo-Irish-Indian ASH BLOND” (2), although he was once to claim to a French interviewer that he was “Ninety per-cent” Irish (4). Durrell spoke Hindi, and thought that the word “home” applied to England meant “nothing”, and thought his being sent off to England for schooling an “exile” (48). Thus, Durrell was not so much a British subject in the contemporary meaning of the term; rather, he was a citizen of a now vanished world, he was an Imperial subject of the British Crown.

Although Durrell never felt truly at home during his exile in Egypt, Alexandria nevertheless represents a species of “diaspora space” where boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, of belonging and otherness, of “us” and “them” were being negotiated and contested. The Alexandria of the 1940s was inhabited by native Egyptians, Jews and Greeks, by migrants; writers, artists, soldiers, those “wounded in their sex”, Europe’s superfluous populations of artists and delinquents, and by those who, like the Quartet's Joshua Scobie have stayed long enough in Alexandria to have become virtually indigenised. Durrell portrays Scobie as an old “pirate” (J 109), recalling the piratical

roots of Britain's first Empire in the Americas. According to Scobie's somewhat unreliable recollections of his life, he spent his youth as a Rider Haggard-style adventurer sailing the seas and crossing the deserts of the British Empire. In Alexandria in an old-age teetering into senility ("he was getting on seventy, and still afraid to die" [J 106]), Scobie was, "the aged bimbashi with the glass eye" (M 133) who conducted the Egyptian police band assembled to greet Ambassador Mountolive on his arrival in Egypt. This apparently incompetent elderly transvestite with "peddyrastic tendencies" (B 32) was put in charge of the Vice-Squad "under Nimrod Pasha" (133), apparently to slow down the investigations that the British demanded the Egyptian police undertake into Nessim Hosnani's "Coptic conspiracy". Scobie met his death (the reader is led to believe) by being kicked to death "by the ratings of HMS Milton" (B 170) whilst going about the city in the anachronistic drag of his "Dolly Varden" outfit (B 41). Although the "naive" Darley of Justine was incredulous, Scobie was far from being incompetent, and had the Hosnani conspiracy figured, "The enemy is working night and day, old boy, right here among us...the most dangerous gang of all is right here in Alexandria...all friends of yours" (138); this opens the possibility that the old man's death was the result of events other than an assault by drunken sailors. In death, Scobie is transformed into a saint by the poor of the Arab quarter in which he lived and died, complete with a *Maquam* (shrine) and a *Mulid* (holy day) and canonised by the Coptic church as "El Yacoub". Thus, in his folk-canonisation, Scobie makes a full transition from would-be Imperial adventurer to real-life saint, entering into the folklore of the poorest of Alexandria's native inhabitants. Moreover, Scobie's *Milud* is held on St. George's Day, the day of the Alexandrian patron saint of both Coptic Egypt and England. Thus, Scobie/El-Yacoub represents a particular form of diasporianism where the culture of the migrant is

inextricably mixed in with the native culture, becoming an organic part of that culture. In this way, Scobie partakes in what Homi Bhabha has called in his essay "DissemiNation: time, narrative, and the margins of the modern nation" "the third space of hybridity" where, the process of cultural hybridity gives rise to something new and unrecognisable, an area of negotiation of meaning and representation (312-320). Scobie stands as a somewhat extreme example of the hybridity of the colonial space in which Durrell himself, "a pure Anglo-Irish-Indian", partook.

Darley describes the procession at the *Mulid El Scoob*, the triumphant *pompa* held in honour of Scobie/El-Yacoub by the people of Alexandria's Arab quarter, in terms which recall descriptions of *miluds* given by Orientalists such as E.W. Lane:

But gradually the raucous night around us was swelling with the deeper rumour of the approaching procession. One saw the rosy light of the cressets among the roofs. The streets, already congested, were black with people. They buzzed like a great hive with the contagion of the knowledge. You could hear the distant bumping of drums and the hissing splash of cymbals, keeping time with the strange archaic peristaltic rhythms of the dance -- its slow walking pace broken by queer halts, to enable dancers, as the ecstasy seized them, to twirl in and out of their syncopated measures and return once more to their places in the line of march. (C 267)

At Scobie's *milud*, the Alexandria's *deus loci* was abandoning the British in Egypt just as surely as it had abandoned Mark Anthony, a representative of an earlier Imperial

occupation of Egypt. With the Alexandria Quartet, Durrell has written a poem which represents, to paraphrase Cavafy, the “invisible procession” which Alexandria's god leaves the hapless British to their fate. Aware that the British in inter-war Egypt lacked the courage and dignity of an Anthony that would enable them to quit the city “as one fully prepared”, Durrell allowed his poetic novel full measures of humour, scepticism and irony, the better to apprehend the feelings of self-doubt, insecurity and uncertainty which haunted the British national consciousness at the time of the end of Empire.

Durrell allows the *Milud El Scoob* to become the procession with exquisite music by which the god bids farewell to those it temporarily permitted to possess Alexandria. The Britishers, Maskelyne, Pursewarden *et al* may be blind to the metaphysical significance of this native procession, but Darley, the existentially authentic hero of the Quartet, the self-realised man who has already decided to quit Egypt “as one long prepared, full of courage” is able to treat the procession with its strange, exquisite music as his final pleasure before saying goodbye for ever to the “Orient”.

In the tetralogy, Durrell charts the decay of an old order; what were once symbols of power and prestige are turned ironically in on themselves; the new order that will replace the old is, in the Quartet, as yet unknown, but it seems threatening, barbarian. In place of redemption and renewal, the Quartet allows only transcendence, and ultimately escape. In The Waste Land Eliot marshalled the disparate and diverse elements of Western tradition in the hope of re-connecting the modern world with its historical sense and thereby revitalising tradition as a cultural force in the west of the twentieth-century. Durrell, too, marshals Eliotic tradition in the service of his art, but his purpose is all together more dark. Durrell’s poetic novel is the ironic epitaph written for the headstone

of an Empire which is dying as he writes. Unlike Anthony or Cleopatra, Darley is a survivor and a realist, so he escapes from rather than dies for his Alexandria.

Durrell manages to locate his tetralogy within a "tradition" of Orientalist writing by alluding in the Quartet to earlier Orientalist writers, such as Flaubert and Lane. However, Durrell throws his allusive net wider than is allowed for by Orientalism proper, and alludes to other writers who have dealt with the theme of colonialism. This is particularly apparent when Durrell writes of the "African darkness" (J 158) of the Arab quarter of Alexandria, for example, "Our room bulging with darkness and pestilence, and we Europeans in such disharmony with the fearful animal health of the blacks around us. The copulations of boabs⁴ shaking the house like a palm tree. Black tigers with gleaming teeth" (54).

According to Darley Alexandria was "a dyke to hold back the flood of African darkness" (J 58). With this imagery of "blackness" and "darkness" as metaphors for an African "Other", Durrell alludes to Conrad's Heart of Darkness. Durrell is echoing the Conradian binary oppositions between light and darkness, black and white, the civilised and the savage. We read of "...sleek oiled heads and smiles made brilliant by their darkness, brown skins slashed by white teeth" (M 161) and of punt-man Fraj's "black barbaric face" (J 189); elsewhere Durrell writes of the "dark Arab-smudged street" (J 47) as if the darkness of the Egyptian Other could somehow rub off onto the white skins of Durrell's diasporic Empire-men. Durrell paints a picture of a European presence in an alien Africa surrounded on all sides by disease, pestilence and savage customs. Darley read of Justine's squalid upbringing in the *quartier des attérines* from her diary, where he reads of the leprosy, insanity, the wife beating *bey*, the old herb seller selling herself, and

⁴ *Boab*: a servant or doorman, typically in a middle class Egyptian house. Often, Boabs are *Saidis* or *Fellahiin* from Upper or Middle Egypt.

the camel sacrifice (J 54-5). Yet in Islamic ritual, the most prized sacrifice is that of a camel. However, in the fallen city of the Quartet the camel is not set aside for a special sacrifice; it is merely too exhausted to make it to the knacker's yard and is hacked to pieces in the street. The poor camel, with its 'white flesh' being hacked to pieces by "dark Africans" is an allegory for Britain's enfeebled colonial presence in Africa and the Middle East. Durrell's description of the camel stoically meeting its doom as it is slowly hacked to pieces recalls Conrad's description of dying and chained African slaves, stoical in their enfeeblement, in Heart of Darkness:

Black shapes crouched, lay, sat between the trees leaning against the trunks, clinging to the earth, half coming out, half effaced within the dim light, in all the attitudes of pain, abandonment, and despair...They were dying slowly -- it was very clear. They were not enemies, they were not criminals, they were nothing earthly now, -- nothing but black shadows of disease and starvation lying confusedly in the greenish gloom. (66)

In Heart of Darkness, written in 1902, the dying Africans personify the absolute powerlessness of Africa before European colonialism at the pinnacle of its strength. However, in Durrell's mid-century tetralogy, the roles are reversed. The camel, with its pained aristocratic expression dies a death of a thousand cuts until only the head is left alive. Similarly, the decaying British Empire of the 1950s is gradually being blown away by the post-War winds of change that brought about decolonisation. The camel gives up without a struggle. The mess left over after the killing of the camel, blood in the mud in the streets, stands as a poignant reminder of the messy aftermath of Empire, where in the

streets of Palestine, of India during Partition, of Egypt during the Suez crisis and in the the Cyprus of the EOKA the streets were similarly blood-stained.

Durrell's own misgivings about the way in which the end of Empire was being managed are recorded in his Cyprus book Bitter Lemons:

They [the British colonial administrators] regarded Cyprus as if it were Tobago -- their only referent. Few spoke Greek or Turkish, and while many had spent years in the island, few had ever visited Greece or Turkey. Perhaps this was not very serious -- though it seriously bedevilled judgement on the spot. (155)

Thus, the exhausted camel of Empire looks on pained and puzzled as yet another member is hacked from its body. The camel's 'white flesh' recalls the "ivory" face of the dying Kurtz in Heart of Darkness, "I saw on that ivory face an expression of the sombre pride, of ruthless power, of craven terror -- of an intense and hopeless despair" (146). Indeed, the passage in Justine which describes the death of the camel ends with a double evocation, " It is like a death -- a death of the self uttered in every repetition of the word Alexandria, Alexandria" (J 55). The double evocation of the city's name together with the twice-repeated word "death" recalls Kurtz's dying words in Heart of Darkness: "The Horror! The Horror!" (146)

Nessim's hallucination of Alexander's Macedonians in the garden of Alexandria's Graeco-Roman museum, the beginning of Nessim's madness, contains another dualistic vision of Europe in Africa, of a deluded Europe being drawn deep into African darkness:

The brave plumed helmets with which they had been issued were too hot to be worn at midday. Africa, which they had somehow visualised as an extension of Europe - an extension of terms, of references to a definitive past - had already asserted itself as something different: a forbidding darkness where the croaking ravens matched the dry exclamations of spiritless men, and rationed laughter fashioned from breath simply the chattering of baboons. (J 158)

In Clea, Durrell evokes "African" darkness to indicate the darkness of war, the reason for his flight from Greece to Alexandria; however, darkness of the Second World War seems simply to enhance an already existing darkness, a deeper, older darkness, a Conradian "darkest Africa":

It was still dark when we lay up outside the invisible harbour with its remembered outworks of forts and anti-submarine nets. I tried to paint the outlines on the darkness with my mind. The boom was raised only at dawn each day. An all obliterating darkness reigned. Somewhere ahead of us lay the invisible coast of Africa, with its "kiss of thorns", as the Arabs say. It was intolerable to be so aware of them, these towers and minarets of the city, and yet to be unable to will them to appear. I could not see my own fingers before my face. The sea had become a vast empty ante-room, a hollow bubble of blackness. (C 24)

The "darkness" of Africa becomes transformed; it is no longer the darkness of the primitive, of the "savage" as African darkness had seemed to Conrad fifty years earlier. Rather, Alexandria's darkness has become a cloak of invisibility, a defensive darkness into which all that is Egyptian in the city is able to retreat. The European in the harbour is not even able to see his hand in front of his face. This is the sea-change which distinguishes the Alexandria of Justine, Balthazar and Mountolive from that of Clea. In the first three parts of the tetralogy Alexandria is the city of the decadent phase of colonial decline. The Alexandria of Clea, however, is a different, darker place. According to Kaczvinsky's essay "When was Darley in Alexandria? A Chronology for the Alexandria Quartet", Darley arrives in the Alexandria of Clea in 1941, six years after departing from the city (594). War has brought the British *ancien régime* to its knees; on the somewhat dubious basis of "my enemy's enemies must be our friends", many Egyptians were looking to a British defeat in the desert war to deliver the final blow to the British occupation of Egypt. Back in the nineteen-thirties, Nessim had, (somewhat disingenuously, given his involvement in the Coptic plot) said to Pursewarden:

Nor need France and Britain fear anything from us. We love them both. Such modern culture as we have is modelled on both. We ask no aid, no money. We think of ourselves as Egyptian patriots, but knowing how stupid and backward the Arab National element is, and how fanatical, we do not think it can be long before there are violent differences between the Egyptians and yourselves. They are already flirting with Hitler. In the case of a war...who can tell? The Middle East is already slipping from the

grasp of England and France day by day. We minorities see ourselves in peril as the process goes on. (M 117)

Nessim's estimation of the political lie-of-the-land in nineteen-thirties Egypt is backed up by historical fact. As the Lebanese historian of the modern Arab world Albert Hourani points out in his A History of the Arab Peoples (331), by the middle 1930s, it was becoming more difficult for Britain to maintain a balance between the interests of the various ethno-political groupings of the Levant. The anti-Semitic persecution of the Nazi regime in Germany caused Zionists in the Middle East to pressure Britain to allow larger immigration to Palestine and this immigration in turn was changing the balance of population and power there. By 1936 the Palestinian Arabs had begun to resort to armed insurrection against Zionist settlers, and were supported in this by figures such as Amin al-Husayni, the mufti of Jerusalem. The involvement of senior Islamic notables in the Palestine question had the effect of making the fate of Palestine a pan-Arab and pan-Islamic issue at a moment when the Italian and German threats to British interests in the Middle East made it desirable for Britain to have good relations with Arab leaders. The long-term effects of the rise of pan-Arabism would shake both the British Empire and the cosmopolitan Alexandria of the Quartet to their foundations after the Second World War.

The Alexandria of Clea, then, is a place where the bewildering and enchanting Orient has become a place of forbidding darkness. The darkness of war and the darkness of political upheaval yet to come are superimposed upon the Conradian darkness of Egypt's African aspect. However negative the darkness of the Alexandria of the time may have seemed to Darley this same darkness, and the invisibility it afforded, offered opportunities to others. In a tipsy reverie, just prior to the *coup* with Melissa which ends

with her divulging to him a secret that will lead to his suicide, Pursewarden reflects on Alexandria, 'Outside the grey awnings, the city had once more assumed the true pigmentation of night. Black faces now melted into blackness; one saw apparently empty garments walking about, as in *The Invisible Man*. Red pillboxes mounted upon cancelled faces, the darkness of darkness (M 166). Pursewarden's predicament here is that of colonial man checkmated in the endgame of Empire; this passage is susceptible to two readings. The first is classically Orientalist combined with Conradian themes wherein black faces melt into an overwhelming darkness. "Black faces" are the faces of anonymous, undifferentiated people, only the garments are real -- they have no real personality, individuality or character, only "darkness", the world of the depersonalised Other. However, in an alternative reading, the native Alexandrians resemble the central protagonist in the film 1933 The Invisible Man (based on a novella by H.G. Wells); their invisibility is at first a deficiency, a negation of selfhood. Later, however, these same people are able to use the invisibility and anonymity imposed upon them by the colonial order as a cloak of subterfuge, enabling them an autonomous political and cultural life which the colonisers literally cannot see.

Moreover, "The Invisible Man" could also be understood as referring not to the movie, but to Ralph Ellison's novel of the same name. Ellison's novel was published in 1952; therefore, it could not be referred to by the character Pursewarden whom Durrell has commit suicide in the mid-nineteen thirties. However, the book would have been well-known as Durrell was writing Mountolive in 1958. Thus, Pursewarden's invisible black faces in mid-twentieth century colonial Egypt parallel Ellison's black protagonist in the United States of the nineteen-fifties: Durrell's Egyptians and the African-Americans of Ellison's novel both use the invisibility imposed on them by a racist or

colonial elite as a door to a public space that excludes the hegemonic Other; decolonisation and the American Civil Rights movement both emerged as powerful political forces in the post-War world of rapid change. Ellison's The Invisible Man provides a further insight into the ideas of "darkness" and "invisibility" explored in another nineteen-fifties novel, the Alexandria Quartet.

Darley's struggle with the mighty Narouz, a character who incorporates elements of both the "timelessness" of peasant Egypt and the dynamism of Egyptian nationalism, has some heroic aspects. However, Sir David Mountolive's conduct in his post as the first British Ambassador to Egypt is tragic and farcical. When Mountolive first arrives in Egypt as a "junior of exceptional promise" (M 11) he fully expects to enter a world where the British Empire still enjoys an unquestioned hegemony over Egypt, its feudal colonial subject. However, his stay with the Hosnanis and his sexual *liaison* with Leila Hosnani threw the young Mountolive into confusion, for it was:

...a complete departure from everything he had known to be thus included in the pattern of family life based in and nourished by the unconscious pageantry of feudalism which stretched back certainly to the Middle Ages, and perhaps beyond...here, seen from the vantage point of someone inside the canvas his own imagination had painted, he had suddenly found the exotic becoming completely normal. (M 22)

The shared bond of normality that existed between Mountolive and his lover, Leila Hosnani had the potential to disrupt the hegemonic dichotomy between colonialist and colonised, master and subject. Through Leila, Mountolive had the opportunity to develop

a new and more humane basis for his professional and personal relationship with Egypt and the Egyptians. However, such a realisation is quashed by Mountolive's failure to understand that the Romanticism of Orientalism is itself part of the hegemonic discourse by which the British Empire rendered Egypt its subject. This kind of Romanticism can only lead to feelings of disappointment and loss on the part of the Orientalist; as Said notes and Mountolive will later discover to his cost, Orientalists eventually discover that "...there is disappointment that the modern Orient is not at all like the texts" (O100). Thus, any direct experience of the Orient ironically comments on "such valorisations of it as were to be found in Goethe's *'Mahometsgesang'* or Hugo's *'Adieux de l'hôtesse arabe'*" (101). Mountolive's ultimate disappointment, "In a sense she [Leila] had *been* Egypt, his own private Egypt of the mind; and now this old image had been husked, stripped bare" (M 284), is summed up nicely by Said's observation that "For a person who has never seen the Orient, Nerval once said to Gautier, a lotus is still a lotus; for me it is only a kind of onion" (O 101). Like the earlier Orientalists of the nineteenth-century, such as Lane, Mountolive felt as if his command of the Arabic language gave him the potential to embark upon a special and intimate understanding of Egypt, "Mountolive who had already found the open sesame of language ready to hand, suddenly began to feel himself really penetrating a foreign country, foreign *moeurs* for the first time" (M 22). Mountolive supposed that language was a key with which he could unlock Egypt, a linguistic phallus to which "she", a gendered and personified Egypt fetishistically represented in Mountolive's mind by Leila, will yield. Leila and Egypt become interchangeable in Mountolive's mind. He feels that he "knows" both Egypt and Leila in a way which is at once mystical, linguistic and biblical. Yet this delusion will prove to be Mountolive's undoing. The Orientalist's Romanticisation of his subject keeps

Mountolive locked into a nineteenth-century mindset, unable to engage meaningfully with an emergent new Egypt which is modern, which, in the person of his lover Leila is looking at him face-to-face eye-beams twisted, upon one double string. Although Mountolive maintains an epistolic relationship with Leila throughout the long years of his diplomatic postings away from Egypt, his fetishisation of an image of Leila-Egypt derived from a romanticised nineteenth-century ideology fossilises his relationship with both her and her country in the amber prism of fantasy and the sediment of sentimentality, "He had begun transplanting a whole huge intact world from his imagination into the soil of his new life." (M 22)

On his return to Egypt as British ambassador, Mountolive imagines that the British hegemony of the nineteenth-century still holds good:

He proved himself upon the outer circle of Egyptian officials whom he greeted in excellent Arabic. Smiles broke out everywhere, at one merging into a confluence of self-congratulatory looks. He knew also how to present himself in half-profile to the sudden stare of flash-bulbs as he made his first speech -- a tissue of heart-warming platitudes pronounced with charming diffidence in Arabic which won murmurs of delight and excitement from the raffish circle of journalists. (M 133)

Yet something is wrong. Egypt has changed and Mountolive has not. The Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of 1936 had brought about semi-independence for Egypt and Mountolive is ambassador to a diplomatically independent sovereign state. However, with his colonial mind-set Mountolive is unable to face Leila directly after the passage of over two

decades and goes out of his way to avoid meeting her. For if Mountolive were to meet Leila he would have to resolve the conflict between the Leila he knows as a person, and Leila as an object of control, a colonial subject which he has been trained to dominate. Rather than undertake the psychological adjustments that would enable him to look upon both Leila and Egypt as independent entities Mountolive continues to relate to them as if he were a colonial *sahib*. Mountolive denies both the evidence of his own ears and eyes and the evidence of his aides, advisors and friends with regard to the Hosnani's anti-British plot. Pursewarden's suicide and Mountolive's own humiliation follow on as direct effects of Mountolive's delusions. Repulsed by Leila when he eventually does meet her, Mountolive gets drunk in an Arab bar, "Leila had suddenly left him face to face with a reality which, he supposed, had always lain lurking behind the dusty tapestry of his romantic notions" (M 284).

Still Mountolive does not learn, and he dons the *tarbush* (fez) and goes off into the Arab quarter in imitation of the "blackened up" exploits of the titanic adventurers of high imperialism such as Burton and Lane. In the brothel the child prostitutes shred Mountolive's "disguise"; Mountolive is left humiliated, and finds himself nursing a hangover "like some merchant sailor cast up helpless in a foreign port at the other side of the world." (M 294) This feeling of "helplessness" in a distant "foreign port" alludes to the enfeebled condition of the dying British Empire following the Suez crisis of 1956. Thus, the "objective" Mountolive (Elliott qtd. in Green 92), provides a clear example of the Quartet's engagement by allegory with the history of the unravelling of the British Imperial hegemony in the period between the end of the Great War, when the young Mountolive first visits Egypt as a "junior of exceptional promise" (M 11) and Suez.

Provided its shortcomings are borne in mind, Saidian Orientalism provides a

useful theoretical tool with which to analyse Durrell's Quartet. Said's awareness of the political ramifications of cultural processes makes it possible to tease out political and ideological strands embedded within the text of the Quartet. This process allows for a fuller contextualisation of the tetralogy in terms of geo-politics and social history, and opens up the possibility of an investigation into how the text was received by its nineteen-fifties readership and the meanings it generates in post-Imperial Britain nearly half a century after the tetralogy was written. Furthermore, investigating Said's "Orientalism" side-by-side with Eliot's "tradition" opens up a new perspective on the development of Said's paradigm. Moreover, Durrell's conscious attempts to contextualise his work within an Eliotic idea of "tradition" has interesting correspondences with Durrell's unconscious relationship with what came to be known as "the discourse of Orientalism". Conrad's depiction of "African Darkness" has been highly contested: on the one hand, scholars such as Hunt Hawkins in his "Conrad's Critique of Imperialism in Heart of Darkness" Bentia Parry in her Conrad and Imperialism have argued that Heart of Darkness should be read as a specifically anti-Imperialist work; on the other hand, Chinua Achebe in "An Image of Africa" and K.K. Ruthven in "The Savage God: Conrad and Lawrence" have argued that Heart of Darkness is a work that endorses the dominant European construction of "the primitive" and that Conrad was, in Achebe's words, "nothing but a bloody racist." The Alexandria Quartet is similarly contested, with scholars such as Roger Bowen advocating that the tetralogy be read as a critique of Imperialism, whilst the Egyptian critic Mary Masoud sees the tetralogy as just another example of exploitative Orientalism. These debates shall be revisited in the conclusion of this dissertation.

The following chapter will use and develop the Eliotic, Conradian and Saidian perspectives discussed in this chapter to investigate the Alexandria Quartet in its various historical Egyptian contexts from Antiquity to the twentieth-century with a special emphasis on Alexandria's intellectual history. For such ideas as the ancient Egyptian theology of the 'Book of the Dead', neo-Platonism, the Kabbalah, Gnosticism and Sufism pervade the tetralogy and provide it with an underpinning mythic infrastructure and a philosophical superstructure. Furthermore, these Alexandrian philosophies and theologies provide Durrell, in a philosophical adaptation of the modernist "mythic method", with a link between the city's past and present, allowing him to portray the city's trans-temporal *deus loci* and prepare the stage for his allegorical representation of the history of Britain's changing relationship with Egypt in during the twentieth-century.

Chapter 3

Alexandrian History and Thought: Contexts for the *Alexandria Quartet*: the Hosnanis as Allegorical Alexandrian Archetypes

*I, said the arrow, the aboriginal arrow,
I saw them go, Coptic and Mellifluous*

“Coptic Poem” – Lawrence Durrell

“Justine Hosnani: arrow in darkness”

“Character-Squeezes” Justine 216

Over-emphasising the Quartet's non-historical aspects whilst ignoring the tetralogy's engagement with history rides roughshod over the subtle dynamics of the inter-relationship between concrete historical circumstances and the literary imagination. Such dangers are in themselves sufficiently serious as to warn against creating too radical a dichotomy between literature and the history which provides its context. Some Egyptian critics, such as Mary Massoud, have sought to show the extent to which the tetralogy is a projection of the psychological and cultural insecurities of a dying imperialism on to an "Oriental" backdrop, which despite Durrell's insistence on the "reality" of the city of the tetralogy (J 7) bears no resemblance to the "real" Alexandria of history. Work by such critics differs from that of their Western counterparts in that it tends to be far more historicist in its approach and is far less concerned with the intricacies of post-modern and post-colonial critical theory. Such criticism is also fired by an element of a polemical anger at what these critics see as yet another "Orientalist" misrepresentation of Egypt by a European writer who is more interested in titillating his Western readership than embarking on a serious literary engagement with modern Egypt.

Thus, Mary Massoud contrasts what she sees as the fantastic nature of Durrell's Alexandria with Naguib Mahfouz's depiction of the city in Mirama, published ten years after the tetralogy:

[Durrell] was not, by any means, trying to convey an objective picture of Alexandria. In fact, this would have been quite inconsistent with everything else in the Quartet...Mahfuz's Miramar, on the other hand, is a tragedy, based on the assumption that truth is an objective fact, accessible to all who seek it. Therefore, it is quite proper that Mahfuz's Alexandria, unlike Durrell's, should be a true representation of the real Alexandria.

(98)

Thus, for Egyptian critics of the Quartet, its allegedly "fantastic" nature is in turn connected with what they see as the tetralogy's failure to relate to the lives of Egyptians in any serious way. This criticism is best summed up by the comment of Naguib Mahfouz, the Nobel Prize winning author of the Cairo Trilogy ⁵ that, "[The Quartet] is an interesting work, but it is about foreigners." (qtd. in Taylor 1990) Thus, it would appear that, for Mahfouz, the Quartet is primarily a European novel by a European writer that uses inter-War Alexandria as a colourful and exotic backdrop for a novel which deals with primarily European concerns. Mahfouz clearly has a point. The most of the Quartet's action takes place in the amoral world of Alexandria in the nineteen-thirties. This Alexandria became, as MacNiven notes, (Biography 288) even more desperate and decadent during the war-time years of the 1940s, where at one point the Desert War was

⁵ Mahfouz was born in 1911, a year before Durrell. His Cairo Trilogy, (1957 - 60) examines the political and social changes that Egypt underwent between the end of the Great War and the 1952 revolution.

raging only eighty kilometres away from Alexandria. This must have given the city a particularly hedonistic ambience: the European quarters of war-time Alexandria *would* have been a very different city to that which the name 'Alexandria' would conjure up in the mind of a native Egyptian writer.

However, Mahfouz's position, that the Quartet is "about foreigners" has a weakness: he fails to realise that the Hosnani family is at the centre of the novels (unless, Mahfouz, a secularist Muslim, betrayed an unconcious prejudice toward Copts in his comment about the Quartet and "foreigners"). This Coptic family are central to the tetralogy. Moreover, Durrell's depiction of the family is deep and incisive. The family is not a homogeneity; each Hosnani is depicted as having a distinct political views and distinct motivations. Durrell's Hosnanis are not stereotypes, they are portrayed with the same subtlety and sophistication with which he depicts the tetralogy's major European characters. The Hosnanis are complex, multi-faceted human beings often torn by conflicting motivations and desires. Of course, there is some truth in Mahfouz's criticism of the Quartet; too often in the tetralogy, Durrell is dismissive of ordinary Egyptians. Nonetheless, Durrell manages to make of the Hosnanis participants in and observers of some of the important developments in the Egyptian history of the first half of the twentieth-century.

Thus, Mahfouz's claim that the Quartet is "about foreigners", a claim which is echoed by many Egyptian critics of the tetralogy, seems hard to substantiate, at least not without some substantial modification. Although Durrell frequently resorts to the use of the Conradian imagery of an "African darkness" when describing the life of the *hara*, Alexandria's Arab quartet, the street-life of which is so brilliantly illuminated by Mahfouz, the Hosnanis of the Quartet can in no way be compared to, say, the passive

Africans of Conrad's Heart of Darkness. Therefore, this chapter will review the history of the city, beginning with the ancient history of the city, and will attempt to demonstrate the relationships between the history of Alexandria and the Alexandria Quartet. Furthermore, this chapter will investigate ways in which the Hosnani family act as allegorical figures reflecting Durrell's view of the Egyptian cultural and political scene in the mid-twentieth-century.

To fully appreciate Durrell's depiction of Alexandria in the Quartet, it is necessary to first describe something of the history of the city and the thought that took place within it. Durrell would have been familiar with much of the history which follows from his extensive collection of books on Egypt, which he used as source books for the Quartet: these include the poems of C.P. Cavafy; E.M. Forster's Alexandria: a History and Guide (1922); Baedeker's Guide to Egypt, 1929; The Milouds of Egypt by Bimbashi J.W. MacPherson (1941 -- the Quartet's Joshua Scobie is largely based on MacPherson); E.W. Lane's The Manners of the Modern Egyptians (1836); Sir Richard Burton's Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to Al-Medinah and Mecca (1898); Egypt by R. Talbot Kelly (1902); S.H. Leader's Veiled Mysteries of Egypt and the Rise of Islam (1915), Anthony De Casson's Mareotis: Being an Account of the History and Topography of the North-Western Desert of Egypt and Lake Mareotis (1935) and Modern Sons of the Pharaohs: a Study of Manners and Customs of the Copts (1918). Judging by Durrell's extensive underscoring and indexing of these books, he depended heavily on them as source books for the tetralogy, this is true of Leader's "Modern Sons" in particular. Durrell's copies of these and other books are to be found in the Durrell archive in the Morris Library at Southern Illinois Library in Carbondale.

Alexandria, one of several cities named "Alexandria" in the Hellenistic world, is

named after its founder, Alexander the Great, who founded the city in 331 BC as Egypt's new capital. However, cultural and commercial relations between ancient Egyptian and Greek civilisation had began far earlier during the Egyptian New Kingdom (1500 - 700 BC). Durrell alludes to the close intellectual and cultural relations enjoyed by ancient Egypt and Greece in his 1938 “Egyptian Poem”, which suggests that mathematics and philosophy were introduced from Egypt to Greece:

A disciple has crossed over by water.
 The acorn was planted.
 In the Ionian villa among the marble
 The fountain plays the sea's piano,
 And by the clock the geometric philosopher
 Walks in white linen... (Durrell Poems page 56, lines 6 - 11)

The site of Alexander's new Egyptian metropolis was carefully selected: it was situated on a thin isthmus of land with the Mediterranean to the north and the saline lake Mareotis behind; into Mareotis flows the Canoptic branch of the Nile. Alexandria was situated, as historian of the city Michael Reimer put it in his book Colonial Bridgehead: Government and Society in Alexandria 1807 - 1882, “between Egypt and the sea” (17). This hybridity (the city is neither Greek nor fully Egyptian but an amalgam of the two and of many other ethnic elements) is one of the essential features of the city of the Quartet (J 27).

From its earliest days, Alexandria was both a naval base and a commercial port,

functions which continue to the present-day. The island of Pharos guarded the city, standing about one kilometre out in the Mediterranean from the coast. Originally, it was connected to the mainland via a seven-stage causeway. Later, however, silt from the Nile caused the causeway to silt up, becoming dry land; this is what gave rise to the distinctive "hammerhead" shaped peninsula which is a distinctive feature of the city's topography. Either side of this "T" shaped peninsula are two harbours, the Eastern and the Western. The Western Harbour in particular is noted for the superb protection it offers from the elements, setting the scene for Durrell's "five fleets turning in their greasy reflections behind the harbour bar." (J 13) Napoleon Bonaparte similarly appreciated Alexandria's potential as a naval port, noting (not foreseeing the events of 1801) that, "all the fleets of the world could harbour here, and, in this ancient port, would be sheltered from the winds and from every attack." (qtd. in Reimer, 53)

Under the Ptolomies, Alexandria was made Egypt's capital, and trade expanded to include such items as textiles, papyrus paper, glass, oil, perfumes, wine and ebony. Trade became a royal monopoly and expanded to include frankincense and myrrh, gold, silver, and exotic animals. According to the Greek historian Strabo, Ptolomaic Alexandria had become 'the greatest emporium in the inhabited world. Alexandrian historian Mostafa El-Abbadi (81) observes that it was during the Hellenistic period that Alexandria's staggering commercial wealth underpinned its growth as a centre of art and pleasure, the "hedonism and art of Alexandria" and the "absolute devotion to sensual pleasure" of Classical Alexandria which Cavafy sought to evoke twenty-one centuries later. It is against this sensual Alexandria, a city both exotic and erotic that Durrell juxtaposed the modern city, a city of "a thousand dust-tormented streets" (J 13). For the Hellenophile Durrell, it was inevitable that the modern Alexandria would fall short of an idealised

image of the Greek city mediated through the writing of Cavafy and Forster. At the opening of Justine Darley makes clear his disgust that Alexandria, once the jewel in the crown of the Hellenistic world had become part of something alien and Other: "The Orient" (14). Durrell maintains this tension between the ancient and the modern city, the Hellenic and the Oriental Alexandria as a theme running throughout the Quartet; yet the ancient spirit of the city, its *deus loci*, lives on in the modern city, a metaphysical force controlling the lives of those the city used as its "flora" (13).

Ptolemy I adopted the deified Alexander as the guardian-genius of his city (El-Abbadi, 42-3). Alexandria's increasing wealth and fame attracted immigrants from the wider Hellenic world; such immigrants could find ready employment as mercenaries in the Ptolomaic army or working for the city's administration; later on Julius Caesar would complain that the Ptolomaic army consisted of "...men collected from among the freebooters and brigands of Syria and Cilicia and neighbouring regions; also many condemned criminals and exiles...All our own fugitive slaves had a sure place of refuge in Alexandria, and assurance of their lives as long as they registered themselves among the soldiers." (qtd. in El-Abbadi 43)

Thus, the rough and ready city of the Quartet; with its marauding bands of drunken, murderous sailors and brothels was in place as far back as Caesar's day. However, ancient Alexandria was far more than a bawdy *entrepôt*. Although classical Alexandria was, first and foremost, a commercial centre, the city's mercantile role was soon supplemented by a new ethos, that of world capital of culture and learning. According to El Abbadi (87), classical Alexandria was home to "the best minds in the world". Hellenistic Alexandria promoted and extended the arts and learning of Athens, whilst simultaneously connecting Greek thought with Egyptian, Jewish, Zoroastrian,

Hindu and Buddhist thought and culture. The key institution in this renaissance was the great library of Alexandria and its research centre, the Mouseion, which was established around 295 BC and which grew to contain several million manuscripts. Eventually, the Great Library of the Mouseion was no longer large enough to contain all the manuscripts it held, and so Ptolomy III had a “daughter library”, the Serapeum built. El Abbadi notes the Great Library held the entirety of the Egyptian sacred writings and two million volumes (84) including works on Zoroastrianism and Buddhism. Regarding the significance of Greek-Indian cultural exchange, scholar of Indian history Francis Watson writes:

The significance of the Indo-Greek encounter goes well beyond the brief span...of the Hellenistic rulers in northern India. Megasthenes at the court of Chandragupta Maurya, about 306 BC, had been struck to find among the Brahmins points of agreement with the Greek philosophers ‘concerning generation, the nature of the soul, and many other subjects’. But although doctrines corresponding to the Indian concept of causality (*karma*) and phenomenal illusion (*maya*) can both be read in Plato’s Republic (as also metempsychosis, which the Greeks claimed to derive from Egypt) there is nothing to prove the dominant direction, at this early stage, of a flow of ideas between Greece and India. (55)

Durrell, who spent his childhood in India and much of his twenties in Greece, maintained a life-long interest in the myths, theology and philosophy of both Greece and India;

Alexandria, with its rich and diverse intellectual heritage provided Durrell, syncretist and esotericist, with a superb setting for his tetralogy.

The Alexandria Quartet playfully intertwines themes derived from with philosophy, theology and science, such as the relationship between time, duration and remembrance. El-Abbadi (95) mentions that by the late first-century BC Alexandria had emerged as a leading centre for philosophical speculation. The Jewish Alexandrian philosopher Philo established a neo-Platonic philosophical tradition that interpreted the pagan philosophy of the Mousion in a way which was acceptable to Jewish monotheism. Early Christian scholars, such as Origen and Clement, built on Philo's work in the second and third centuries AD. Durrell remembers this period in Alexandria's intellectual history in his poem "Petron the Desert Father", (one of "Eight Aspects of Melissa" in the 1980 edition of Durrell's Collected Poems, but a separate poem in its own right in the 1960 edition), Petron has the "dense yellow" waters of Lake Mareotis "ringing" with "the insupportable accents of the Word", and who declared "...I dare not ask for what I hope, / And yet I may not speak of what I fear" (Durrell Poems 146, V: 24), possibly alluding to the difficulties and dangers involved in reconciling a religion based on monotheistic revelation with the pagan philosophy of the Greeks. Clement, in particular, sought to reconcile the Judeo-Christian scriptures with the latest developments in Greek thought, and attended the lectures of Ammonius Saccas on neo-Platonism, a system of philosophy which would be further developed by Plotinus.

El-Abbadi (100) describes Plotinus' philosophy as being based on the concept of the dualism of reason and matter, the intelligibles and the sensibles, and the supersensual and the phenomenal. For Plotinus, God is not the personalised God of Judeo-Christian revelation; rather he is the God of philosophy, he exists in the supersensual realm and is

the source of all being, the first cause, the Absolute One who is invisible and eternal. Thought and the soul proceed from this first cause and these too enjoy eternal, timeless life. By contrast, the sensual world is changeable and subject to division; for this reason the sensual world is the primary evil. Nonetheless, matter is a necessary evil, since mind must become matter and the soul must bring forth the body as its abode. As a result of its being formed from the immutable soul, the natural world still reflects some of the beauty and perfection of the superlunary worlds. Indeed, man, the most perfectible creature in the material world, can reunite with the primary source via the *unio mystica*. Since the soul by its nature belongs to the higher world its ultimate aim must be to free itself from the sensual plane of existence. Thus, for Plotinus, the perfect life consists of a life devoted to pure thought so as to attain purification or *katharsis*.

In Justine, Durrell has Justine remind Darley of Plotinus as one of the "founders" of the city; Plotinus' "great square Negro head" is "reverberating with a concept of God conceived in the spirit of pure intellectual play." (34) Plotinus' schema of a dualistic universe in which reason opposes matter underpins Durrell's depiction of Alexandria:

[Alexandria's] spiritual centre was the forgotten site of the Soma where once the confused young soldier's body lay in its borrowed Godhead; its temporal site the Brokers' Club where like Caballi the cotton brokers sat to sip their coffee, puff rank cheroots and watch Capodistria -- as people upon a river-bank will watch the progress of a fisherman or an artist. The one symbolised for me the great conquests of man in the realms of matter, space and time -- which must inevitably yield their harsh knowledge of

defeat to the conqueror in his coffin; the other was no symbol but the living limbo of free-will in which my beloved Justine wandered, searching with such frightening singleness of mind for the integrating spark which might lift her into a new perspective of herself. (J 35)

Durrell then goes on to compare Justine with Sophia [wisdom] the “sad thirteenth child of Valentinus”, who “fell not like Lucifer by rebelling against God, but by desiring too ardently to be united with him” (J 34), and thus became “the manifestation of matter”. In this way Durrell connects Alexandria with Plotinian ideas of the divided and changeable world of matter, which is the “primary evil”, for “...the whole universe of her city, of the world, was formed out of her agony and remorse. The tragic seed from which her thoughts and actions grew was the seed of a pessimistic gnosticism.” (35)

During his war-years in Alexandria, Durrell had undertaken research into Gnosticism at the Patriarchal Library (MacNiven Biography 273), and Gnosticism provides the Alexandria Quartet with an important underpinning theology, which Durrell would develop further in the Avignon Quintet. Gnosticism, another “Alexandrian hybrid” (J 27), was formed in the religious and intellectual crucible of ancient Alexandria. Like the Jews and Christians, the Gnostics believed in the existence of a supreme being; Gnosticism was based on a mystical knowledge of that being. This mystical knowledge was seen not as resulting from a rigorous application of the intellect, but as a gift from God, which could be attained by spiritual exercises and prolonged meditation. The Gnostics also taught that mankind and the world were, in Forster’s words, “the result of an unfortunate blunder” (Alexandria 73). For the Gnostics, human beings are “children of

a lesser god”, the *demiurge*; however, the Gnostics held that God the Primal Source took mercy on Man and sent Christ, part man, part God to guide and teach mankind.

Durrell maintained his interest in Gnosticism during the post-war period. MacNiven mentions Durrell writing to T.S. Eliot that “The Cabala”, a poem omitted from Durrell's 1946 collection of poems Cities, Plains and People, was “a sort of compressed synopsis for the 'Book of the Dead', this book being Durrell's working title for the earliest drafts of the book that would eventually become the Alexandria Quartet” (Biography 316). Durrell goes on to say that “Mr. Balthazar would be furious anyway...He is one of a secret cult of Gnostics -- only four or five left -- who have persisted in the ME [Middle East] since Roman times.” (316) This mention of a Mr. Balthazar, whom Durrell met in Beirut, is significant, since in the Quartet Dr. Balthazar is “the Platonic *daimon*” of Alexandria, the “mediator between its gods and its men”. Dr. Balthazar's Magic status is confirmed when Durrell has Justine ask him if she had understood him correctly at one of the meetings of his Cabal, here, Balthazar describes to Justine the central mystery of the *Gnosis* that “God neither created us nor wished us to be created, but that we are the work of an inferior deity, a Demiurge, who wrongly believed himself to be God?”(J 36) Durrell's Alexandrians are the inheritors of this Demiurgic hubris, for the city had “used us as its flora -- precipitated us in conflicts which were hers and which we mistook for our own....” (J 11) Durrell's Alexandrians seem unable to liberate themselves, as Plotinus recommended, from sensuality; they remain under the spell of the Demiurgic city and are unable to rid themselves of the hubris that continues to bind them to the world of sensation, Plotinus' primary evil: “Justine would say that we had been trapped in the projection of a will too powerful and too deliberate to be human

-- the gravitational field which Alexandria threw down about those it had chosen as its exemplars...." (J 19)

Plotinus' vision of the Primary Being that transcends the sensual order was carried over into Islam through Sufism, a form of Islamic mysticism that has been profoundly influenced by neo-Platonism. In Justine, Durrell perceptively refers to the Sufic *Ebed* prayer which the *muezzin* chants to the city's faithful:

"I praise the perfection of God, the forever existing" (this repeated thrice, ever more slowly, in a high, sweet register). "The perfection of God, the Desired, the Existing, the Single, the Supreme: the perfection of God, the One, the Sole: the perfection. Him who taketh unto himself no male or female partner, nor any deputy, equal or offspring. His perfection be extolled."

The great prayer wound its way into my sleepy consciousness like a serpent, coil after shining coil of words -- the voice of the *muezzin* sinking from register to register of gravity -- until the whole morning seemed dense with its marvellous healing powers, the intimations of a grace undeserved and unexpected, impregnating that shabby room where Melissa lay, breathing as lightly as a gull, rocked upon the oceanic splendours of a language she would never know. (J 25-6)

Here, Durrell acknowledges the transfer of the wisdom of ancient Alexandria to the Muslim city. Ironically, in the Alexandria of the nineteen-thirties, it is Melissa, a Greek Alexandrian, who is deaf to the ancient wisdom of her Hellenistic forbearers. For this

wisdom is now expressed in Arabic, “a language she would never know”. The transfer of wisdom has gone full circle; just as the Greeks learned sacred mysteries from ancient Egypt, so now the ancient mysteries of Plotinus are re-worked through the medium of devotional Arabic. The *Ebed* prayer is repeated in Clea, when Darley has gone to bed with Clea for the first time; however, in the more aware world of Clea, Clea, unlike Melissa in Justine, is awake to hear the prayer “...she stood to observe the climbing sun touch the minarets and palms with light: rapt and awake”, and Darley is possessed by “...a new freedom like a draught from what the Cabal once called 'The Fountain of All Existing Things'”(C 99). Concepts such as *katharsis* and the *unio mystica* reappear in the writings of Islam’s mystics, the Sufis; notably in the work of the thirteenth-century mystical poet Jalaladin Rumi. Darley recalls Rumi’s dervish order the *Mevlevi*s (the so-called “Whirling Dervishes”) dancing at Scobie’s *Milud*:

...Mevlevi dervishes suddenly took the centre of the stage...calmly, beautifully, they began to whirl, these “tops spun by God”, while the music of the flutes haunted them with their piercing quibbles. As they gathered momentum their arms, which at first they hugged fast to their shoulders, unfolded as if by centrifugal force and stretched out to full reach, the right palm turned upward to heaven, the left downward toward the ground. So, with heads and tall, rounded hats tilted slightly, like the axis of the earth, they stayed there miraculously spinning, their feet hardly seeming to touch the floor, in this wonderful parody of the heavenly bodies in their perpetual motion...I thought of the verses of Jalaluddin which Pursewarden used sometimes to recite. (C 269)

Like Durrell in the Quartet, Rumi is concerned with love as a counterpoint to death in a world which is confusing and hostile. The dance of the Mevlevi dervishes is intended to physically act out a neo-Platonic *katharsis* whereby the imperfect, material world returns to its divine Primary Source, “the right palm turned toward heaven, the left downward to the ground”. Darley’s appreciation of the *Mevelevi* dervishes’ dance, in which he juxtaposes the sublimity of the *Mevlevis* with the grotesque self-mutilation of the *Rifaia* dervishes, “Here a dervish drove a skewer through his nostrils, there another fell upon the point of a dirk, driving it up through his throat into his skull” (C 269-70), is part of the final farewell which the now self-realised Darley bids to Alexandria as the tetralogy reaches its conclusion.

Thus, the tetralogy acknowledges Alexandrian neo-Platonism, Gnosticism and Sufism and uses these as the philosophical and theological superstructure upon which the Quartet is built. To these three Alexandrian philosophies can be added a fourth, the *Kabbalah*. Darley has an active interest in the Kabbalah, since “the little suitcase containing the Hermetica and other books of the kind had always been kept under my bed, locked” (J 84); this “is not the place to try and write what I know of the Cabbala [Kabbalah⁶]...for these fragments of revelation have their roots in the Mysteries...which only initiates can share” (J 87). Indeed, Darley links his study of the Kabbalah with that of Sufism, for he continues, “For almost a year I had studied under Mustapha, a Sufi, sitting on the rickety wooden terrace of his house every evening listening to him talk in that soft cobweb voice. I had drunk sherbet with a wise Turkish Moslem.” (J 88)

The Kabbalah is a development of the process of interaction between Judaism

⁶ The Hebrew word derived from the verb “to receive” (a learned tradition) is transliterated into the Latin alphabet in various spellings, such as “Cabala”, “Cabbala”, “Cabbalah”, Kabbala, Kabbalah, and Qabala.

and neo-Platonist philosophy begun by Philo; it developed gradually in Alexandria and other Levantine cities during the late classical and early medieval periods. The Kabbalah has two forms, Rabbinic, which is properly part of the Jewish mystical tradition, and the Hermetic, which developed later in Renaissance Europe. The brief outline of the Kabbalistic tradition follows is derived from authoritative Rabbinical and Hermetic sources, Moshe Idel's Kabbalah: New Directions and Gershom Scholem's Origins of the Kabbalah; and Israel Regardie's The Complete System of Golden Dawn Magic and S.L. Mather's The Kabbalah Unveiled.

The Hermetic Kabbalah has its origins in the *Corpus Hermeticum*, an Alexandrian text of the first-century AD which concerns the rites and magic of Hermes Trimegistus, Durrell has Darley refer to "Balthazar's discourses on Ammon and Hermes Trimegistus" (J 151). This god was an Alexandrian hybrid that combines the Greek Hermes with the ancient Egyptian Thoth. Thus, Hermes Trimagistus was the god of writing and of magic. The Kabbalah envisages creation occurring from a series of ten emanations from *En Soph* the limitless, unknowable Primal Source of neo-Platonism. These ten stages of emanation or *sephiroth* begin with *Kether* or unity and proceed on to duality and so forth in descending pairs of opposites until the lowest stage of emanation is reached. This is *Malkuth*, the earthly sphere. To each *sephirah* is assigned a guardian angel, a demon, a planet, and numerous other correspondences from the physical and metaphysical worlds. The *sephiroth* are linked by twenty-two paths, to each of which is assigned a letter of the Hebrew alphabet, along with many further correspondences. Together, the *sephiroth* and the paths constitute the 'Tree of Life'. Sometimes, the path of emanation is drawn over the Tree of Life as a lighting strike proceeding from heaven to earth via the tree. Balthazar alludes to the way in which Kabbalists use the Tree of Life for personal and intellectual

development, “I am a Jew, with all the Jew's bloodthirsty interest in the ratiocinative faculty. It is the clue to many of the weaknesses in my thinking, and which I am learning to balance up with the rest of me -- through the Cabal, chiefly.” (J 83) The Kabbalah is also used for ceremonial magic, and for the “Great Work”, by which the Kabbalist seeks to heal a damaged creation by harmonising the psyche with the divine order; this is mentioned in Justine:

[Balthazar] spoke of the *fon signatus* of the psyche and its ability to perceive an inherent order in the universe, which underlay the apparent formlessness and arbitrariness of phenomena. Disciplines of mind could enable people to penetrate behind the veil of reality and discover the harmonies in space and time, which correspond to the inner structures of their own psyches' (89).

In a similar vein, Balthazar insists that “We are enlisting everything in order to make man's wholeness match the wholeness of the universe -- even pleasure, the destructive granulation of the mind in pleasure” (J 89). However, the *sephiroth* have their demonic equivalents, the *klippoth* (singular *klippah*). The word *klippah* derives from the Hebrew word for “husk” or “shell” and refers to the demonic opposite to the “Tree of Life”, known as the “Tree of Severity” or “Extremity”. Darley's quotation from the Hermetic Kabbalist Paracelus “Evil is good perverted” (J 37) alludes to the concept of *klippah*. Likewise, Balthazar's warning to Nessim, “*Omnis ardentior propriae uxoris adulter est* ...Passionate love even for a man's own wife is also adultery” (J 90) also refers to the *klippoth*, wherein a virtue is twisted or exaggerated until it becomes a vice.

Justine seems to understand how klippothic vice is a necessary correlative of sephirothic virtue when she condemns the word "love", " 'Damn the word', said Justine once, 'I would like to see it spelt backwards as you say the Elizabethans did God. Call it *evol* and make it part of 'evolution' or 'revolt'. Never use the word to me' " (J 65). Similarly, at his corrupt *wird* ostensibly a "night of God", but really an opportunity for bribery, Memlik Pasha quotes the words of the Persian Sufi theologian Al Ghazzali with a sense of klippothic inversion in which Ghazzali's idea of spiritual "intercourse" with God becomes subsumed beneath the words more earthly meaning: "The only way...to become united with God is by constant intercourse with him." (M 264) Like the neo-Platonists, Kabbalists see evil as an intrinsic part of creation. Kabbalistic opinion is divided between "optimists", who follow Plotinus and see the *klippoth* as a necessary stage in the process of neo-Platonic *katharsis*, and "pessimists", who follow the Gnostics in viewing the *klippoth* as being the result of a hubristic Demiurgic blunder.

Whether it is the result of *katharsis* or of the *hubris* of the Demiurge, the city of the Quartet is saturated by worldly evil; the city is "djinn-ridden" and Hamid, Darley's one-eyed Berber manservant regularly exorcises these djinn from every corner of Darley's apartment with his Islamic incantation "*Destoor, destoor*" (J 76). The Tree of Extremity is referred to in Mountolive in the Arabic song which Sir David Mountolive mishears, setting in train events that lead to his humiliation in the house of the child prostitutes (288). The Kabbalah attributes the primary cause of evil to the act of separation, wherein what was once united becomes divided, the boundary between one thing and another becomes a kind of "shell" or "husk". These shells, taken by themselves as an abstraction divorced from the original, undivided light are the dead residue of manifestation, the residue or refuse of the hidden life's organic processes, "the *grumus merdae* left behind

by criminals upon the scene of their misdeeds” as Durrell has a drunken Pursewarden put it (J 122). Just as each *sephira* has its corresponding angels and virtues, so each *klippah* has a corresponding demon and vice; the empty nature of the *klippoth* recalls the way in which folklore, along with modern horror fantasy, has evil manifest itself in empty, soulless bodies such as zombies, vampires and ghouls. T.S. Eliot's “The Hollow Men” provides a modernist interpretation of the *klippoth*:

Shape without form, shade without colour,

Paralysed force, gesture without motion;

Those who have crossed

With direct eyes, to death's other Kingdom

Remember us -- if at all -- not as lost,

Violent souls, but only

As the hollow men

The stuffed men. (Collected Poems 89, I: 11 - 18)

Thus, the unknown rapist who initiated Justine's psycho-sexual "Check" was “a man who, though still alive, *no longer existed*.” (J 68-9)

Hermetic Kabbalism underwent something of a revival in *fin de siècle* Europe, with the founding of Hermetic orders such as the Golden Dawn, of which the poet William Butler Yeats was a member. This revival received a further boost in the inter-war period when the concept of *klippoth* seemed to provide an explanation for the horror of the Great War and the subsequent spiritual wasteland that was inter-war Europe. By

the nineteen-thirties, flamboyant Kabbalists such as Aleister Crowley brought the Kabbalah on to the pages of the popular “scandal sheets”, so that it came to be seen as a rather *risque* version of the “parlour mysticism” mentioned by Pursewarden in Mountolive (116).

Durrell's description of Alexandria as an unhappy place which is inverted upon itself (J 12) with a controlling intelligence that “precipitated in us conflicts which were hers and which we mistook for our own” (11) suggests the *klippoth*: Alexandria as the demonic inversion of Augustine's City of God, for Durrell's Alexandria is a city of separation, death, impossible love and doomed sex. The virtue which accrues to the lowest *sephira*, *Malkuth* is “diversity”. This certainly accords with Durrell's Alexandrian cosmopolis, in which could be found:

...black, bronze and citron women, impenitent seekers for the money-flesh of men; flesh of every colour, ivory or gold or black. Sudanese with mauve gums and tongues as blue as chows'. Waxen Egyptians. Circassians golden-haired and blue of eye. Earth-blue negresses, pungent as wood-smoke. (B 164-5)

However, *Malkuth's* klippothic vice, stasis, also fits well with Durrell's Alexandria, because however much the tetralogy's protagonists try, they cannot overcome “a will too powerful to be human -- the gravitational field that Alexandria throws down about those it had chosen to be its exemplars.”(J 16) Similarly, the narrative voice of Cavafy's “The City” complains that “The City is a cage”, and in “The God Abandons Anthony”, Anthony has to die ‘with resignation’ which is ‘worthy of such a city’ (Durrell's

translation in Justine 221-2): whatever people do the city remains unchanged, only escape, Darley to his Greek Island, Clea to Syria and then to France, can break the spell.

Moreover, the klippothic demon of *Malkuth* is *Lilith*. Lilith means “woman of the Night” and is derived from the Hebrew word for night, “leila”. Leila Hosnani “The Dark Swallow” (C 267) is the calm epicentre around which the Quartet's conspiracy turns. Leila portrays Justine, another “woman of the night”, as a Lilith-like demoness, “...she is an adventuress; like a small dark snake coiled up at the centre of Nessim's life... Yes, she is just like me -- merciless in the pursuit of pleasure and yet arid -- all her milk has turned into power-love” (B 99). The word “milk” recalls the Semitic verbal root M-L-K which has the basic meaning “to possess”; the name *Malkuth* is derived from this root. However, Justine and Leila's possessiveness is inverted in on itself, “a kind of idolatry” (J 60) and is, therefore, *klippothic* or demonic. Following Groddeck's theories about the nature of physical illness, Durrell completes Leila's transformation from being the beautiful “Dark Swallow” to a Lilith-like hag by smallpox “melting” her beauty (M 58).

Balthazar heads the Alexandria section of a “Cabal” the inner circle of which was “scattered over the Mediterranean -- in Beirut, Jaffa, Tunis and so on.” (J 89) Balthazar says to Darley that these Kabbalists are “hunting for rational reasons for believing in the absurd” (82). Balthazar describes to Darley the work of the Cabal:

Alexandria is a town of sects and gospels. And for every ascetic she has always thrown up one religious libertine... “You speak lightly of syncretism...but you must understand that to work here at all...one must try to reconcile two extremes of habit and behaviour which are not due to the

intellectual disposition of the inhabitants but to their soil, air, landscape. I mean extreme sensuality and intellectual asceticism. Historians always present syncretism as something which grew out of a mixture of warring intellectual principles; that hardly states the problem. It is not even the question of mixed races and tongues. It is the national peculiarity of the Alexandrians to seek a reconciliation between the two deepest psychological traits of which they are conscious. That is why we are hysterics and extremists. That is why we are the incomparable lovers we are". (J 87)

Thus, Durrell places Alexandria's syncretic intellectual and cultural history at the very centre of the tetralogy. However, in the Quartet Kabbalism has political as well as spiritual dimensions; it is Balthazar's Cabal which provides a secret circle in which the main protagonists in Nessim and Justine Hosnani's anti-British plot can associate. It is significant that Balthazar speaks of Alexandria's "national peculiarity", as if Alexandria were a nation not a city, since the syncretic hybrid that is Alexandria has always stood "between Egypt and the sea".

Notwithstanding what Balthazar called Alexandria's "national peculiarity" (J 87), the hybridic city has continued to be a part of Egypt. However, the Levant does have a real-life cosmopolitan *entrepôt* around which a small state was established, the city is Beirut and the country is Lebanon. Lebanon was created by the French in the 1920s as a predominantly Christian political entity in the Levant, this small republic gained full independence in 1943. Beirut, like Alexandria, was a multi-ethnic cosmopolis with a large Levantine Christian population surrounded by an "Arab tide" (M 119).

Significantly, Durrell visited Lebanon and Syria on official business in 1943, it was while he was there he met a Kabbalist named Balthazar. War-time Syria was a place of extraordinary political intrigue, even as the Second World War raged Anglo-French rivalry in the Middle East continued unabated: British and French forces clashed in Syria over the future of the region (see Anthony Mockler Our Enemies the French: Being an Account of the War Fought between the French and the British in Syria, 1941 and A.B. Gaunson The Anglo-French Clash in Lebanon and Syria, 1940-5). This Anglo-French conflict is alluded to in Darley and Pombal's banter, " 'They say', he said, watching me keenly, 'that you are in the British *Deuxième*' " (B 103); furthermore, in Justine Darley mentions that "we captured a whole set of papers which delighted Scobie for they contained detailed memoranda upon French influence in Syria, and a list of French agents in the city. I noticed on one of these lists the name of the old furrier, Cohen." (151) Thus, Durrell has woven into the Quartet historical themes which relate to Anglo-French rivalry in Syria and the establishment of the Levantine-Christian statelet of Lebanon. Nessim Hosnani's Alexandrian Coptic plot has important correspondences with the Maronite Christian campaign of the nineteen-thirties and 'forties to separate Lebanon from Syria. Durrell's treatment in the Quartet of the historical themes of Anglo-French rivalry in Syria and Oriental Christian nationalism, along with his presence in Syria in 1943, the year Lebanon gained independence and the height of the Anglo-French crisis, leads one to suspect that Durrell, like Darley, played a role in the activities of the British *Deuxième*. Thus, Balthazar's "Cabal" is a cabal in both meanings of the word: it is both a secret occult society and it is a closed group dedicated to political intrigue; this dual aspect to Balthazar's circle serves as a reminder that, in Alexandria, religious and philosophical schism has always gone hand-in-hand with political plotting.

Having shown Alexandria's fittingness as a setting in which Durrell could explore his wider intellectual and philosophical interests, attention will now be turned to the relationship between the Alexandria of the Quartet and the historical city, focusing on the role of the Hosnani family, Durrell's "authentic" Egyptians, in mediating that relationship. Durrell was aware of the problem of the "lack of metaphysical resonance in proper nouns" in English and proposed the idea of a name as an "heraldic ideogram" to overcome this deficiency (MacNiven 467). In Arabic, names are important; personal, place, and family names are meaningful in a way that names in English have ceased to be. The name "Hosnani" is a fine surname for a Coptic Christian family. It is derived from the Aramaic salutation "Hosana" with which Christ was greeted on his triumphal entry into Jerusalem (Matthew 21. 1 -11, Mark 11. 1 - 11, Luke 19. 28 -40, John 12.12-19). Furthermore, the word "Hosana" is derived from the same Semitic root as Arabic names like Hassan or Hussein: the verbal root H-S-N carrying the basic meaning "to be good". "Hosana" is the imperative of the intensified second form of the verb coupled with the pronominitive suffix "na", meaning "us"; "Hosana", then, has the meaning of "make us better" or "improve us". Thus, the name 'Hosnani' refers both to the family's Christian background and the role of the Hosnani family in "improving" or elevating Egypt: Faltaus was a political activist; Leila an educated woman of culture. Nessim, the astute man of business, was educated in Europe; Narouz was a shamanistic figure (see Bynum "Shaman"), part prophet, part political agitator. In different ways, the Hosnanis correspond to political and cultural trends and tendencies that existed in Egypt in the 1930s, and which prefigure potential political and cultural directions for post-colonial Egypt to follow.

Ambassador Sir David Mountolive is a figure whom Nessim and Justine know

they must neutralise by placing him in a compromising position if they are to achieve their political goals: a Jewish Palestine and a Coptic state in Egypt. Mountolive's affair with Nassim's mother Leila has prepared the ground for this, and his lingering affection for the Hosnani family does compromise his effectiveness as an Imperial agent. The less politically sophisticated Narouz berates Nessim on account of the affair: "*You sold our mother*" (M 228). Meanwhile, Nessim is contemplating disposing of Narouz, should Narouz's more strident advocacy of the Coptic cause compromise his brother's plot, "I am faced with the terrible possibility of having to do away with Narouz." (M 213)

Durrell places the Hosnani estate in Karm Abu Girg. Anthony De Casson's Mareotis, one of Durrell's source books for the Quartet, mentions a Karm Abu Girg as being the site of "a most interesting early Christian building, of the fifth or sixth-century" (De Casson, 147), "beautiful paintings" of the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin taken from the site are now in the Alexandria Museum. However, as well as being a real-life early Coptic site, the etymology of the name Karm Abu Girg is also significant. "Karm" derives from the Arabic verbal root K-R-M: "to be fruitful or fertile". Specifically, "Karm" is a noun denoting "good or fertile land". In the colloquial Egyptian of the Delta, "Karm" can mean "a raised or high place"; in ancient Egyptian mythology, creation emerged from the primordial waters of Chaos as a fertile mound, a myth derived from the sight of small islands formed by the annual flooding of the Nile. Some Egyptologists think that these mounds were the original inspiration for the pyramids. "Abu" literally means "father"; however, in colloquial usage, *Abu* can mean "progenitor" or "possessor". "Girg" is Arabic for St. George, the Alexandrian who is patron saint of both the Copts and of England. Thus, Karm Abu Girg, site of the young David Mountolive and Leila Hosnani's brief affair is an heraldic *motif* with a mythic resonance

that unites England with Coptic Egypt via a common patron “friend of God”. The historical St. George was martyred for professing Christianity during the reign of Diocletian. The mythical St. George slew the dragon of bondage to earthly desire. Thus, “Karm Abu Girg” translates as “St. George’s Mount” and the name carries associations meaning “the fertile mound which brought forth the slayer of evil”: a fitting home for Nessim and Narouz, Coptic Egyptian insurgents against colonial English rule. Likewise, St. George’s status as patron saint of both England and the Copts serves as an ironic comment on Leila Hosnani’s relationship with David Mountolive, and of that between Britain and Egypt during the inter-War period. Durrell has Karm Abu Girg situated on the opposite side of Lake Mareotis from the Alexandrian cosmopolis, which Durrell described in his poem “Conon in Alexandria” as the “ash-heap of four cultures” (Durrell Poems page 127, line 1), on the edge of the Delta, heart of rural Coptic Egypt. Thus, the Hosnani home is situated between two worlds and on the edge of an “ash-heap”, rather like the Gatsby mansion in F.Scott Fitzgerald’s 1925 novel The Great Gatsby.⁷

Forster observes that Lake Mareotis would once have been sea (11), but silt deposited by the Nile not only brought about the formation of new land, but blocked the Canoptic branch of the Nile off from the sea, creating this shallow, saline lake, “...the wind gnashes by Mareotis, / Stiffens the reeds and glistening salt” (Durrell Poems page 130 lines 12 - 13). Reimer notes that the limestone geography of Alexandria and the existence of Mareotis ensued that the land around the city would become a separate geographical area, adjacent to, but distinct from, the Nile Delta. Thus, geographically, as well as politically and culturally, Alexandria is “between Egypt and the sea”, the city is not wholly Egyptian, as Durrell has Narouz observe:

⁷ The topography of East and West Egg in The Great Gatsby recalls that of Alexandria with its Eastern and Western harbours. Nessim, like Gatsby (born “Gatz”) was rumoured to be in anti-British gunrunning.

For this [the Nile Delta] was really Egypt -- a Copt's Egypt -- while the white city, as if in some dusty spectrum, was filled with the troubling and alien images of lands foreign to it -- the imitations of Greece, Syria, Tunis.”(B 70)

In a similar vein Mountolive reflects that Alexandrians are:

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

Alexandria's double nature enables it to be a portal, a gateway for Europeans into the other worlds of darkest Africa and the exotic Orient, “And when night falls and the white city lights up the thousand candelabra of its parks and buildings, tunes into the soft unearthly drum-music of Morocco or the Caucasus, it looks like some great crystal liner asleep there, anchored to the horn of Africa...” (B 152).

The two Hosnani brothers, Nessim and Narouz, are representative of two different aspects of Egypt: the country and the city, the Coptic Delta and cosmopolitan Alexandria. As MacNiven observes from information provided by the travel publisher, Michael Haag (391), the name "Nessim" (zephyr) is derived from "Shem El Nessim", (literally "sniffing the spring breeze") a holiday taken after Easter by Christian Egyptians and also adopted by many Muslims (J 52); thus the Easter-time connotations of Nessim Hosnani's given name allude linguistically to the idea of a national Coptic resurrection.

The name Narouz came into Arabic from the Persian; "Narouz" is the Farsi name for the Persian New Year. Since the Persian New Year falls in mid-Spring it is used by Copts to mean "Easter". In Arabic "Narouz" can also refer to a new beginning: a name replete with paligenetic overtones and well suited to Narouz Hosnani, the charismatic advocate of agrarian Egyptian nationalism. Thus, Nessim and Narouz embody two competing visions of an independent Egypt. One of the tensions in the novel is whether Alexander's vision of a Mediterranean, Hellenic Egypt with the Alexandrian cosmopolis as its capital city triumph over "Pharaohic nationalism" advocating "Egypt for the Egyptians"?

MacNiven contends that Nessim Hosnani is: "...symbolically, a descendant of the ancient Pharaohic rulers of the land" (*Biography* 391). However, an alternative reading makes better sense in the light of Durrell's allusions to modern Egyptian history hinted at in the names of the members of the Hosnani family: that Nessim Hosnani is an archetype of the "Mediterranean" nationalism of the Alexandrian cosmopolis, a kind of neo-Alexander. Nessim's house, in imitation of the Great Library of the ancient city, contained an "immense" studio and library (J 35). Intelligent and sensitive, stylish and scheming, Nessim embodies the "national peculiarity" of Alexandria (J 87). Tactful and

urbane Nessim (M 45) is able to befriend and guide his mother's lover and his wife's lover around "the cobweb of Alexandrian society" (J 50). Likewise, Nessim holds what the naive Darley of *Justine* thought were merely "boring receptions devoted to obscure political ends" (35), but which were actually the organising of an armed "*Jehad*" (M 218) against the British. Diplomatic Nessim is able to concur with his father and call Mountolive "a crusader" even as he soothes him after the verbal lashing handed out to him by the senior Hosnani (M 46). Where else in Egypt could the mercantile and mercurial Nessim Hosnani, incarnation of the Alexandria's *deus loci* Hermes Trimagistus, live and trade and do business but the Alexander's Egyptian capital, the Alexandrian *entrepôt*? In this bridgehead for colonial intrigue, Nessim is truly at home. The cotton boom had once again made Alexandria the greatest emporium of the Mediterranean, and the Hosnanis, educated and sophisticated "new Egyptians", were ideally placed to take political and economic advantage of this.

Embodying Alexandria in its Mediterranean, rather than its fully Egyptian aspect, Nessim's face was, "a Byzantine face...almond-shaped, dark eyed" (M 17). Faces similar to that of Nessim look out, surrounded by gold-leaf, the ancient Egyptian colour of eternity, from the mummy portraits produced in Roman Egypt between the first and fourth-centuries AD; these portraits were being unearthed during the nineteen-thirties and 'forties and examples of them were put on display at Cairo's Egyptian Museum, the Graeco-Roman Museum in Alexandria and the British Museum. The Egyptian vernacular art of these portraits aroused much interest when the portraits were discovered, because they break down the idea that discrete and homogenous Pharaohic, Hellenistic and Roman civilisations followed one after the other in Egypt. Synthesising elements derived from all three civilisations, these portraits indicate the hybridic and synthetic nature of

late-Classical Egyptian culture. Indeed, this art was pivotal in the development of later Byzantine aesthetics; Euphrosyne Doxiadis points this out in The Mysterious Fayum Portraits: Faces from Ancient Egypt: "...due to eastern influences there was a gradual formalistic change from Hellenistic art to the style of the Fayum portraits to that of Byzantine icons. Certain portraits embody these transitions..." (84). El-Abbadi also mentions a possible prototype Nessim Hosnani from late-Classical Alexandria in the person of Count Firmus, a wealthy Alexandrian merchant of Berber origin who raised a private army in support of Queen Zenobia of the Arab kingdom of Palmyra (who is remembered in the common Arabic female first name "Zeinab", which was also the title of the first Arabic language modern novel published in 1913) who rebelled against the Roman Empire in AD 378 and who declared himself Emperor in Alexandria (68). The rebellion ended with Firmus dead and Zenobia taken in triumphal procession. Nevertheless, Firmus and Zainab, an Alexandrian entrepreneur and a Semitic Levantine Queen rebelling against the declining Roman Empire corresponds closely to Nessim and Justine Hosnani plotting against the British.

Nessim's anti-British plot is truly Alexandrian. Audacious and secretive, the plot is predicated on a subtle deception of all around him, including friends and family. Nessim's vision of a post-colonial Egypt is Alexandrian too: a Europeanised, commercial Egypt; above all, it is a vision of a cosmopolitan Alexandria. As Nessim confides to Clea:

You know, we all know, that our days are numbered since the French and the British have lost control of the Middle East. We, the foreign communities, with all we have built up, are being gradually engulfed by the Arab tide, the Moslem tide. Some of us are trying to work against it;

Armenians, Copts, Jews, and Greeks here in Egypt, while others elsewhere are organising themselves...to defend our right to belong here only. (M 199)

Ironically, Nessim has to describe the Copts, the “true descendants of the ancient Egyptians” (M 41) as a “foreign community” in order to make his case to Clea, a mark of how politically marginalised the Copts had become in their own land. Nessim is not a “blood and soil” mystical nationalist like his brother Narouz. Rather, Nessim's vision of Egypt recalls the Hellenised Egypt of the Ptolomies. Nessim and Justine anticipate a cosmopolitan Alexandria, an independent *polis*: Nessim is an Alexandrian, rather than an Egyptian patriot. Significantly, Nessim becomes the repository for Alexandria's “gallery of historical dreams”, (J 176) by which the city's *deus loci* re-lives its ancient Alexandrian past in the present of Nessim's consciousness. In particular, Nessim relives in his mind Alexander's journey to Siwa (J 177-180), the event which was to lead to the founding of the city and was the beginning of the syncretic Hellenic-Egyptian Alexandrian civilisation, thereby directly equating Nessim with the city and its founder. Nessim's office was the centre of his business and political activities. Significantly, Darley likens it to “a sarcophagus of tubular steel and glass” (J 29) recalling the glass sarcophagus of Alexander the Great, patron-genius of the city, which supposedly still lies buried somewhere in the city.

Nonetheless, early on in Justine, in his initial description of “Prince” Nessim, Darley is at pains to distance the older Hosnani brother from the Alexandrian life:

...Nessim was princely in his detachment from the common greed in which the decent instincts of the Alexandrians -- even the very rich ones -- foundered. Yet the factors which gave him a reputation for eccentricity were neither of them remarkable to those who had lived outside of the Levant. He did not care about money, except to spend it -- that was the first: the second was that he did not own a *garçonnière*, and appeared to be quite faithful to Justine -- an unheard of state of affairs... This attitude was considered eccentric and high-handed in the extreme by the inhabitants of a city whose coarse and derived distinctions, menial preoccupations and faulty education gave them no clue to what style in the European sense was. (J 24)

This is a smoke-screen. Darley assumes that, "in this little world of studied carnal moneymaking he could find no province of operation for a spirit essentially gentle and contemplative." (J 25) Nessim had been educated in Germany and at Oxford, but, according to Darley, this "had done little but confuse him and unfit him for the life of the city." Darley sums up the Alexandrian's attitude toward Nessim thus: "Not to care about gain, that is what the Alexandrian recognises as madness." (25) However, it would be mistaken to depend on Darley's depiction of Nessim early on in Justine as the complete portrait. In Mountolive, a different aspect of Nessim's character emerges, less the Coptic squire (an appellation which Durrell borrowed from a chapter-title in De Casson's Modern Sons of the Pharaohs), but someone more devious, more Alexandrian. When David Mountolive meets Nessim in a Berlin night-club just before Mountolive takes up his post as British ambassador to Egypt, Nessim is described as having an

expression of “chaste cunning” (M 83); he speaks with “rabid coldness” and “increasing coldness” (83) and gives “a short, ugly smile” when speaking about his impending marriage to Justine.

Further on in Mountolive, Pursewarden is asked by David Mountolive to investigate the veracity of the Hosnanis' involvement in the alleged “Coptic conspiracy”. Whilst Pursewarden mistakenly absolves Nessim from involvement in any such plot, he remarks that “...he [Nessim] spoke it all with a tender, shy fury which interested me as being so out of keeping with the placid Nessim we both knew.” (117) Despite Darley's initial impression of Nessim as someone slightly unworldly, too naive to be a true son of Alexandria, the "Alexandrian" aspect of Nessim's character which is revealed in Mountolive is, nonetheless, alluded to in Justine. Darley interprets Nessim's changed demeanour as the onset of mental illness brought about by Nessim's knowledge of Darley's affair with Justine:

“What is happening to Nessim?”

“I no longer know. When there is something to hide one becomes an actor. It forces all the people round one to act as well.”

The same man, it was true, walked about on the surface of their common life -- the same considerate, gentle, punctual man: but in a horrifying sense everything had changed, he was no longer there. (J 184)

In Justine, Darley persists in his delusion that Nessim is unworldly, high-handed and somewhat eccentric. Darley's perception continues through to the conclusion of Justine despite Darley's observation that the King of Egypt had become a frequent visitor to

Nessim at Karm Abu Girg, a development which, Darley notes, had attracted the attention of the British diplomatic corps (183). Likewise, at the duck shoot on Mareotis where Capodistira is apparently killed, Darley still cannot see beyond his idea of a naive Nessim hovering on the edge of mental instability and harbouring potentially murderous feelings toward Darley on account of his affair with Justine, "All of a sudden, for the first time, I feel real fear as I watch the expressionless glitter of Nessim's eyes." (208)

The Hosnani family are the medium through which Durrell's Europeans interact with a fictive Egypt which transcends the Orientalist stereotypes of earlier European depictions of Egypt, and which begins to relate more closely to the Egypt of history. Narouz Hosnani is a rural foil to Nessim the urbane sophisticate. The Nile Delta is the heart of agricultural Egypt. Despite their various Muslim or Coptic origins, the numerous saint's days celebrated in the Delta region around the time of the equinoxes contain survivals from the folk-Paganism of ancient Egypt. In the tetralogy, Narouz Hosnani is an Egyptian archetype of the agrarian Delta. It is at a Coptic saint's day, that of St Damiana, (who, like St. George, was martyred in Egypt during Diocletian's "Great Persecution") that Narouz reveals himself to be more than just a deformed peasant, "Narouz of the broken face" as Pursewarden puts it (M 118). It is at this festival, attended by Copts and Muslims, that Narouz shows himself to be, a prophet of a resurgent rural Egypt; it is here he cries out to an enraptured audience, "The Nile... the green river flowing in our hearts hears its children. They will return to her. Descendants of the Pharaohs, children of Ra, offspring of St. Mark. They will find the birthplace of light" (M 125). Elsewhere, Narouz says that:

We must seek to embody the frame of the eternal in nature here upon earth, in our hearts, in this very Egypt of ours...We must wrestle here on earth against the secular injustice, and in our hearts against the injustice of a divinity which respects only man's struggle to possess his own soul...To rule is to be ruled; but ruler and ruled must have a divine consciousness of their role, of their inheritance of the Divine. The mud of Egypt rises to choke our lungs, the lungs with which we cry to living God. (M 230)

Here, Narouz is evoking a species of Egyptian nationalism, but it is not the nationalism of the Alexandrian cosmopolis, with its secular and intellectual underpinnings. Narouz is making an appeal to the hearts of his listeners to attune to a kind of rural "blood and soil" nationalism, the historical sense of which places modern Egyptians at the head of a continuous and unbroken chain of Egyptian tradition which reaches back to the very beginnings of history. For Narouz, the Nile, the Pharaohs and St. Mark are, in Eliotic terms, links in a chain of tradition which connect modern Egyptians, irrespective of religious affiliation, to the glorious past of their dead ancestors. For it was St. Mark, author of the second gospel, who is held by the Copts to have brought Christianity to Egypt, thereby establishing a Church older and more authentic than that of the West. It is Narouz's father Faltaus who supplies the intellectual underpinning to his son's mystical nationalism in his angry reply to the young Mountolive's *gaffe*, where Mountolive erroneously addressed the Hosnanis, as if they were Muslims:

Do you know what they call us -- the Moslems?" Once more his head wagged. "I will tell you. *Gins Pharoony*. Yes, we are *genus Pharonicus* --

the true descendants of the ancients, the true marrow of Egypt. We call ourselves *Gypt* -- ancient Egyptians. Yet we are Christians like you, only the oldest and purest strain. And all through we have been the brains of Egypt even in the time of the Khedive. Despite persecutions we have held an honoured place here; our Christianity has always been respected. *Here* in Egypt, not *there* in Europe. Yes, the Moslems who have hated Greek and Jew have recognised in the Copt the true inheritor of the ancient Egyptian strain. (M 41)

For Narouz's father, the Copt is the true Egyptian; Coptic nationalism is not exclusive to those who profess the Coptic faith, rather it is the Copt who offers to other Egyptians the clearest vision of what it is to be an Egyptian. The Copt is the most faithful servant of his ancient country, even under foreign rulers, provided those rulers recognise and respect the true status of the Copt in his own land. Within the mind of the Copt lives the Platonic *idea* of Egypt. However, Hosnani senior is old, embittered and crippled: a tired veteran of political struggles which go back to the beginning of the British occupation of Egypt in 1882. Nessim is better able to understand his father's message on an intellectual level; however, Narouz best understands that message in his heart. Nessim and Narouz translate their differing interpretations of Egyptian nationalism into action in different ways: Nessim is intellectual and calculating, Narouz is fiery and emotive. This sets up a tension between the two brothers which eventually has tragic consequences. As Paige Bynum observes, "Those critics who have sought a more significant place for Narouz in Durrell's schema see him as an incarnation of Egypt...Or they examine him as one half of the dimorphic pair 'city-country' represented by the Hosnani brothers" ("Shaman" 84).

Moreover, Bynum maintains that “Durrell does indeed intend to contrast Narouz and Nessim”. Significantly, Bynum sees Narouz, Durrell's “hirsute savage” as “more than just a representative of the ancient ways. He is also a primitive shaman.” (84) Bynum goes on to mention Narouz’s work to bring the saline wasteland on the edge of his plantation back to life (B 76) and his nurturing of eggs (M 26) as evidence of Narouz’s shamanistic calling. In a similar vein, Carol Peirce sees within the Alexandria Quartet a re-working of the ancient Egyptian myth of Isis and her consort Osiris, who must die in order to bring new life to the land. Peirce states that “...philosophically, the myth can be seen as a sort of perfected triangle of Plato. Osiris represents the spiritually intelligible idea, origin, word, Isis the material or receptive element, and Horus, the creation or perfected achievement.” (“Plutarch” 82) However, Peirce seeks to identify Osiris with Pursewarden and Isis with Pursewarden’s sister, Liza, with whom Pursewarden had been having a long-standing incestuous affair. The connecting logic here is that Isis and Osiris were brother and sister gods, who in turn corresponded with the incestuous relationships brought about by the principle of matrilineal descent within the Pharoenic royal household. Nonetheless, a case can be made for modifying Peirce's argument by making Narouz correspond to Osiris. This would create an explicit connection between Narouz and ancient Egyptian theology. Osiris, like his Phoenician counterpart Adonis, was a sacrificial fertility god. Eliot scholar Stephen Coote writes that at the mythic significance of Osiris “lies less in his function as a fertility god -- the guarantor that the Waste Land of the harvest will be redeemed -- than in the great leap of metaphor by which a god of fertility became a god of human resurrection.” (97)

In tending the Hosnani estates, especially in his land reclamation work, Narouz,

like Osiris, brings fertility to the barren wasteland. Sir James Frazer notes that, "reigning as a king on earth, Osiris reclaimed the Egyptians from savagery, gave them laws, taught them to worship the gods." (363) Likewise, Narouz's political manifesto delivered at the *milud* of Sittna Damiana is full of images of fertility and renewal and mentions the Nile on which Egyptian agriculture depends. The continuity which the Nile provides for Egyptian history corresponds to the conceptual continuity between the fertility cult of Osiris and the ressurective cult of Christianity. Durrell would have been aware of such correspondences through his reading of T.S. Eliot's The Waste Land; both Bynum and Peirce comment on the influences of Eliot's poem on the Quartet. Narouz's mission is to bring about a political and spiritual renewal to an Egypt which has been rendered a political and spiritual wasteland by the British occupation. However, on the day of his death, Narouz, like a true Osiris figure, was concerned only with his sacred mission to bring new life to the shattered winter wasteland:

He felt immeasurably aged now -- and yet, at one and the same time, as new to the world as a foetus hanging from the birth-cord. The land, *his* land, now brown and greasy as an old wineskin under the rain, compelled him. It was all he had left to care for -- trees bruised by frost, sand poisoned by desert salt, water pans stocked with fish and geese; and silences all day except for the sighing and groaning of the water-wheels...(M 301).

As keeper of the land, the trees, geese and fishes, Narouz is master of the fertile Egyptian landscape which so struck the young David Mountolive during the summer fish-drive at

the beginning of the story, "The splash of water, the hoarse cries, the snapping of beaks and wings, and the mad tattoo of the finger-drums gave the whole scene an unforgettable splendour, vaguely recalling to the mind of Mountolive forgotten Pharaohnic frescoes of light and darkness" (M 17). Here, as Mountolive's guide on the fish-drive, Narouz resembles the mythical Fisher King. Coote makes the significant point that "... the Waste Land of the Grail legends is due to the sickness of the Grail's guardian...it is the restoration of him and the consequent revival of his realm that is the central issue of the [Fisher King] tales." (100)

Thus, it is the crippled and dying Faltaus Hosnani who is the titular guardian of the Hosnani lands. However, Hosnani senior is sick and impotent. It is his son, Narouz, who will continue the work of national renewal; for during Hosnani senior's rant at the young Mountolive's *gaffe* it was Narouz who resembled "a well rehearsed acolyte" (M 43) and Narouz's face was like "a mirror reflected the various feelings of the conversation." (M 44)

Although a Copt, Narouz is as at ease with the Muslims of rural Egypt as with his co-religionists. For example, when he is with the desert Arabs he sings a "passionate pilgrim song" about a Muslim's longing for Mecca and his adoration of the Prophet and chanting 'All-ah, All-ah in a rapture of praise'⁸ (B 82). Similarly, Narouz is at home in the desert where the air is as "pure as a theorem" (85) and knows the "bountiful highways" (86) plied by caravans between Algiers and Mecca as well as any desert Arab. Narouz is able to converse with these Bedouin in the "thorny clicking of an unfamiliar Arabic" which Nessim is unable to understand. With the Bedouin, Nessim is made to feel like a "European, city-bred visitor" and feels as an Edinburgh gentleman might when

⁸ In fact, "Allah" ("[The] God") is the name given to the Supreme Being in the Arabic language liturgies of Oriental Christianity.

confronted by “some rude clan” of Highlanders. Narouz, on the other hand, has “plunged into the life of these Arabian herdsmen with the same intensity as he plunged into the life of his land, his trees.” (87) While Narouz appears to the Bedouin to be a “city-bred Alexandrian – almost a despised *Nasrany*” (a Christian, especially of the Western churches), in fact he could “out-shoot, out-talk and out-gallop any of them” (87); Narouz even calls for the arming of the Bedouin against the British (M 219), a rash call which alarms the more moderate elements in his brother’s Cabal, leading Nessim to first consider taking drastic action to silence his brother. Whilst the passage in Balthazar (87) emphasises the *difference* between the desert Arab and the Egyptian of the Nile valley, Narouz, an Egyptian archetype, is able to unite both the Arab and Egyptian aspects of rural Egypt.

Eventually, however, the stark differences the Hosnani brothers' personalities, politics, and approaches to Egyptian nationalism would lead to a falling-out between them. Although Nessim giggled with “excitement and joy” riding in the desert with his brother (B 85), the joy was not to last. According to Sir James Frazer, Osiris is killed by his brother Set, who had become jealous of Osiris’s wisdom. Set was the demonic *alter ego* to Horus, who, in parallel mythology, avenges Osiris. In Ptolomaic Alexandria aspects of Horus were seen as corresponding with aspects of the Greek god Hermes, thus Horus is linked, via Hermes Trimagistus, to the “Mercurial” Nessim. In Mountolive, Hosnani senior effectively disbars Nessim from participation in the political life of his country, albeit to save Nessim from a wasted life of frustration:

Then the father pointed at his eldest son. "Nessim", he said, "look at *him*.

A true Copt. Brilliant, reserved. What an ornament he would make to the

Egyptian diplomatic service. Eh? As a diplomat-to-be you [Mountolive] should judge better than I. But no. He will be a businessman because we Copts know that it is useless, *useless*". (M 44)

At this point, the "reserved" Nessim intervenes to bring his father's monologue to an end. However, further on in Mountolive Nessim the businessman enters clandestine politics with his participation in the "Coptic plot" and Zionist gun-running. Narouz's fire-brand rhetoric and preaching had attracted the attention of British Military Intelligence and Brigadier Maskelyne has prepared a report about the Hosnani plot (108); thus, Narouz's preaching threatens the activities of the Cabal of which Nessim and Justine are members. Nessim is placed in the contradictory position of being Narouz-Osiris' protector (Horus) and his potential executioner (Set); inevitably, the prospect of playing Set to Narouz's Osiris enters Nessim's mind:

It [Narouz's behaviour] raised once more the spectre of duties and responsibilities to causes he himself had initiated and now must serve. Ideally, then, he should be prepared in such a crisis to disown Narouz, to depose Narouz, even if necessary to...him! (He slammed on the brakes of the car, brought it to a standstill, and sat muttering. He had censored the thought from his mind, for the hundredth time...) (M 229-30).

Nessim puts the thought of assassinating his brother out of his mind, but not before he realises that his brother is in possession of a "poetic consciousness" and could even become a "religious leader" (M 231), thoughts which Nessim finds disturbing. He says to

Justine “ ‘All this unease comes from my fear that we may have to do him harm. But, even if we are endangered by him, we must never harm him, *never*. I have told myself that. I have thought the whole thing out. It will seem a failure of duty, but we must be clear about it. Only then can I become calm again. Are you with me?’ ” (M 232). Justine does not reply directly to her husband; rather than upset her husband's "calm" by demanding the course of action he would be loath to take, she changes the subject to Nessim's health. Narouz is assassinated at a duck shoot held by his brother. For the ancient Egyptians, winter was the time when the life-force personified by Osiris was at its lowest point: it is then that Osiris was to be killed. Murray (124-5) states that in pre-dynastic times, it was the Pharaoh himself who was sacrificed; the person of the Pharaoh was later replaced by a vicarious victim (and eventually the sacrifice had become purely symbolic, as in Christianity). The victim was to be killed in one of three ways: burning, asphyxiation, or by the letting of blood. Frazer (264) explores the linkage between this aspect of the Osiris myth and the Christian Resurrection, a linkage made by Narouz himself in his rhetoric which unties "Ra" with "St. Mark" in the one sentence (M 125). Narouz Hosnani is shot near the sacred *nubk* tree, “Here, long ago, he had stood and prayed with Mountolive under the holy branches, still heavy with their curious human fruitage; everywhere blossomed the *ex votos* of the faithful in strips of coloured cloth, calico, beads. They were tied to every branch so that it looked like some giant Christmas tree.” (M 304-5) Nessim is pale, but calm; he speaks in a 'small constrained voice' (305). Narouz has been sacrificed like Osiris, victim of a fratricidal murder. The scene is set; Narouz lies dying by the “sacred tree”. The tree's resemblance to “a Christmas tree” underlines the essential continuity between Osirian and Christian resurrection mythology; in the wasteland of colonial Egypt, however, the resurrection-

magic is negated. Unlike Christ pierced on the cross, Narouz's blood does not spill on the ground, for Narouz's wounds are "blue and bloodless" (308). Unlike Osiris, Narouz has no Isis as his consort, no-one to repair his broken body, no sexual bond with Egyptian womanhood. Instead, Narouz harboured a sterile and unrequitable yearning for Clea, a fair-haired, French-speaking European Alexandrian. Lacking an equivalent to Isis (or Mary), Narouz is incapable of achieving an Osiran resurrection. Consequently, Narouz's desire for Clea becomes turned in on itself, a *klippothic* shell that will haunt the world as a curse after Narouz's death. Narouz musters his dying breath for his anticipated final meeting with Clea, but she comes to Karm Abu Girg only reluctantly, as a favour to her friend Nessim. Clea thinks Narouz's feelings for her are "disgusting" (309). The ravages of the winter weather and a broken dyke (312) prevent Clea from reaching the house before Narouz dies. Karm Abu Girg reverberates with Narouz's voice which:

...burst from the hairy throat of the dying man a single tremendous word, the name of Clea, uttered in the cavernous voice of a wounded lion: a voice which combined anger, reproof and an overwhelming sadness in its sudden roar. (312)

As with Mountolive's affair with Leila, Narouz's unrequited desire for Clea illustrates the pessimism of the Quartet regard to the viability of love relationships between Egyptians and Europeans in the tetralogy's fallen Alexandria.

The servant-women of the house mourn Narouz with the trill ululations of the *zagreet* and chant traditional Egyptian formulae which echo the *Per-M-Hou* the ancient Egyptian "Book of the Dead": "Rise, my despair! Rise, my death! Rise my golden one,

my death, my camel, my protector! O rise beloved body, full of seed, arise!" (M 314)

There will be no resurrection: Narouz is dead; his body is prepared for burial according to the Coptic practice. He is placed in "a rough-hewn coffin" (M 320) which corresponds to the tree-trunk in which Set entombs Osiris' body (Frazer 362). However, Narouz will not be bodily resurrected. Rather, Narouz lives on as a *klippothic* shade, his curse that comes near to dragging Clea down to the underworld at the end of the tetralogy; however, Narouz's hex which is thwarted by the now self-realised Darley. Thus, the cycle of myth is broken. As in Eliot's The Waste Land, the old myths are of no use in the modern world, the wasteland of inter-war Egypt remains barren.

Along with the Greek and the Egyptian elements in Alexandrian society, a third ethnic element, the Arabic, is a major contributor to the Alexandrian "hybrid". The Arab General 'Amr ibn al As, "a poet and soldier" (J 253) conquered Egypt in 642 AD, sweeping away forever the Egypt of antiquity. The political and cultural map of the Near and Middle East was changed forever; the Egypt of the Pharaohs and the Ptolomies had vanished: in its place was a triumphant Islamic Caliphate. The Byzantine Empire was weakened, but would struggle on in decline another seven centuries. Western Europe's Renaissance lay six hundred years ahead, the other side of centuries of religious war between the Christian and Muslim worlds. Thus, early mediaeval Egypt was radically detached from its past. However, the pace of Arabicisation and of Islamicisation was slow, as Hourani (History) notes:

By the eleventh century Islam was the religion of the rulers, the dominant groups, and a growing proportion of the population, but it is not certain that it was the religion of the majority...while Arabic was the language of

high culture and much of the urban population, other languages still survived from the period before the coming of the Muslim conquerors.

(96)

In Alexandria, Greek continued to be spoken. Furthermore, Hourani goes on to observe that “Coptic Christians were still an important element in the Egyptian population by the fifteenth century...but their numbers were shrinking by conversion and the Coptic language of Egypt had virtually ceased to be used for any except religious purposes by the fifteenth century” (History 96-7). Nevertheless, the impact of the Arab invasion had an immediate and profound political effect on Alexandria, shattering Greek hegemony in the city. The memory of this event persisted even in the Hellenic literary imagination of the twentieth-century. Cavafy, for example, evokes Alexandria in the immediate aftermath of the Arab conquest in his poem “Exiles”, where the conquered city “goes on being Alexandria still”, with palaces stuffed with “war damaged” monuments which, nevertheless, will “still amaze you”. This Alexandria has become “smaller”, yet is still “wonderful”, and is still peopled by those Greeks ‘still left in the city’ (Cavafy Poems 146).

Whereas Durrell was fascinated by the Hellenic city, Arab Alexandria provokes altogether different feelings. In the Quartet the Arab-Egyptian aspect of Alexandria is a dark mirror of autrality from which the Imperial *ego* recoils in horror. In the following passage from Justine, Durrell evokes Conradian ideas of “darkness” focused on an image of an Egyptian woman:

This city has been built as a dyke to hold back the flood of African darkness; but the soft-footed blacks have already started leaking into the European quarters: a sort of racial osmosis is going on. To be happy one would have to be a Moslem, an Egyptian woman -- absorbent, soft, lax, overblown; given to veneers; their waxen skins turn citron-yellow in the naphtha-flares. (J 58)

Informed as it is by a phantasy of miscegenation, “racial osmosis”, this passage and similar passages in the Quartet are hard to dismiss simply as reflections of the day-to-day prejudices of the European communities in mid-twentieth-century Alexandria. Rather, such passages seem to articulate the deeper fears of Westerners living in colonial society afraid of being swamped by the “alien” society that surrounds them. Durrell’s treatment of his subject brings to mind Said’s comments on Flaubert’s description of Kuchuk Hanem⁹, an Egyptian courtesan, written nearly a century before Durrell wrote the Quartet:

...Flaubert’s encounter with an Egyptian courtesan produced a widely influential model of the Oriental woman; she never spoke of herself, she never represented her emotions, presence or history. He spoke for her and represented her. He was foreign, comparatively wealthy, male and these were the historical facts of domination that allowed him not only to possess Kuchuk Hanem physically but also to speak for her and tell his readers that she was “typically Oriental”. (O 6)

⁹ Kuchuk Hanem, an Egyptian courtesan from Flaubert’s Travel Diaries: the Persian nick-name means ‘little lady’.

Durrell was of course, writing within the wider tradition of English writing on Egypt. Durrell's immediate predecessor in Alexandria was E.M. Forster. Forster was the first writer to popularise and promote the work of C.P. Cavafy in English. Furthermore, his Alexandria: a History and Guide is widely regarded as one of the high-water marks of Imperial travel writing. Durrell relied heavily on Forster's Guide to provide a basic framework of the Alexandria of the Quartet. When writing Justine over a decade after he left Egypt, Durrell found the Guide to be a valuable *aide-mémoire* (Biography 431). Forster's understanding of the impossibility of cultural and political reconciliation between coloniser and colonised underpins the relationships between the protagonists of the Quartet. An example of this is Aziz's and Fielding's failed attempt at reconciliation at the end of A Passage to India (published in 1924 and based in part on Forster's experience of Alexandria during the Great War):

“Why can't we be friends now?” said the other, holding him affectionately. “It is what you want. It's what I want.”

But the horses didn't want it -- they swerved apart; the earth didn't want it, sending up rocks through which the riders must pass single-file; the temples, the tank, the jail, the palace, the birds, the carrion, the Guest House, that came into view as they issued from the gap and saw Mau beneath: they didn't want it, they said in their hundred voices, “No, not yet,” and the sky said, “No, not there”. (312)

A Passage to India explores the colonial subject's feeling that human relationships are circumscribed by an all-encompassing spirit of place which insists that human affairs are conducted on its terms; Durrell develops Forster's exploration of this theme. The Quartet is littered with the ill-fated relationships between European and Alexandrian: Narouz and Clea, Pursewarden and Justine, Justine and Darley, Darley and Melissa, and Mountolive and Leila. Despite the pessimism of the conclusion of A Passage to India, at least the faint possibility of humanistic empathy in colonial-colonised relationships is still present in Forster's work. However, in the Quartet, relationships between Westerners and Orientals are part tragic, partly comic and wholly farcical. In A Passage to India, Forster's humanism laments the fact that colonialism inhibits the growth of real understanding between peoples. In the Quartet, however, Durrell revels in exposing with withering irony the impossibility of ever believing, as Lord Balfour had in the nineteenth-century, that "we are there for their sake" (qtd. in O 33).

Although his humanism led Forster to question the humanity and morality of Empire, he nevertheless, transmits the 'historical sense' of the Victorian Orientalists to writers of Durrell's generation. The myth of Alexandria's destruction at the hand of child-like Arab barbarians fitted well with Orientalist perceptions of Arab civilisation during the British occupation of Egypt. In his Alexandria: a History and Guide Forster writes "Though they [the Arabs] had no intention of destroying her [Alexandria], they destroyed her, as a child might a watch" (66). In turn, Durrell mentions Forster's re-telling of this myth in Justine (253). Yet it has been acknowledged as far back as Gibbon's Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire that the story of the destruction of Alexandria's Great Library by the Arabs has no basis in historical fact. The destruction of the Great Library of Alexandria is viewed popularly as marking the turning point in Alexandria's fortunes from being a

world-class capital of commerce and learning to being a provincial Arab town. However, as Alfred Butler conclusively demonstrates in his The Arab Conquest of Egypt and the Last Days of Roman Rule “...the story [of the Arab destruction of the Great Library] makes its first appearance five hundred years after the event to which it relates [and] on analysis, the details of the story resolve into absurdities” (424). In fact, the Great Library of the *Mouseion* was probably destroyed in a conflagration brought about during Julius Caesar's siege of Alexandria, and the Library of the *Serapeum* was destroyed by a Christian mob during anti-pagan riots in AD 391.

Importantly, however, Durrell adapts the myth of the destruction of Greek Alexandria by the Arabs to make it one of the central metaphors of the Quartet. Durrell quotes the dying words of the soldier-poet 'Amr, “I feel as if heaven lay close upon the earth and I between them both, breathing through the eye of a needle.” (J 77) Here, sex with Justine has destroyed the old Darley, the naive Darley, “as a child might a watch”. The image of the fallen city, Alexandria “crashed about my ears” drives home the metaphor, linking the myth of the destruction of the ancient city of learning at the hands of an alien, Semitic warrior with the destruction, or dis-orientation of Darley's sense of selfhood by Justine, a female archetype of the Semitic, Levantine Other. Darley feels uncomfortable with this disruption of selfhood; he has just consummated his adulterous affair with Justine; as the couple leave Darley's apartment, Darley narrates, “I recall the furtive languor with which we dressed and as silent as accomplices made our way down the gloomy staircase into the street. We did not dare to link arms, but our hands kept meeting involuntarily as we walked, as if they had not shaken off the spell of the afternoon and could not bear to be separated.” (J 77) Here, Durrell is evoking the imagery of forbidden love in Cavafy's poem “Their Beginning”:

Their illicit pleasure has been fulfilled.

They get up and dress quickly, without a word.

They come out of the house separately, furtively;

and as they move off down the street a bit unsettled

it seems they sense that something about them betrays

what kind of bed they've just been lying on. (Cavafy Poems page 81, lines
1 - 6)

Darley continues. "It was as if the whole city had crashed about my ears; I walked about in it aimlessly as survivors must walk about the streets of their native city after an earthquake, amazed to find how much that had been familiar had changed." (J 77)

Metaphorically, Justine has done to Darley as 'Amr did to Alexandria, Justine with her "deep bevelled Arabian nose" (26) and "magnificent dark skin and hair" (74) recalls the Semitic aspect of the Alexandrian "hybrid", which is also recalled in the Fayum mummy portraits. Justine is "this most masculine and resourceful of women", who spoke to men with the "air of authority" adopted by women who are not dependent on men such as "Lesbians or women with money" (Alexandria is, according to Darley, a "dyke" to hold back "African darkness" [J 58]). Justine has shattered the assumptions upon which Darley's European sense of authority over ethnic and gendered autrality were predicated. Justine is "of that race of terrific queens which left behind the ammoniac smell of their incestuous loves to hover like a cloud over the Alexandrian subconscious." (26-7) Put psychoanalytically, Justine threatens Darley's shaky sense of European manhood with castration; recalling the vulgar usage of the term "pussy" and the phantasy of the

castrating *vagina dentata*: Justine is a “giant man-eating cat, like Arsinoe [the Ptolomaic *deus loci* of Alexandria]” (18), a “half-trained panther” (26) who can eat Darley and his likes for breakfast: “ ‘In his arms I felt mauled, chewed up, my fur coated with saliva, as if between the arms of some great excited cat’ I [Pursewarden] reeled. ‘Crumbs!’ I thought. ‘This is what Justine is doing to the poor bugger [Darley] – eating him alive!’” (M 113). It is this Justine, dark, alien, foreign, powerful and unknowable who shakes Darley to his foundations, as once 'Amr did to Alexandria itself. MacNiven notes that:

Justine had become the dominant character in the novel that Larry had long been calling by her name. Mythological, he reached beyond Aphrodite to Astrate, Ishtar, and her avatar, the lustful devouring queen Semiramis. The marriage of Aphrodite to Adonis had been celebrated in classical Alexandria: very well, Larry's geographical Justine would be as timeless as Cleopatra, as Isis. To bring myth into modern focus, Larry invoked the Marquis de Sade's Justine. (*Biography* 432)

Indeed, the Greeks had modelled their Aphrodite on the Astrate of the Semitic peoples of the ancient Levant. Durrell the philhellene was aware that his beloved Greek civilisation, his “free Hellenic world” (J 13) had roots in what he saw as the “darkness” of the Middle Eastern world. Sir James Frazer observes that, in Egypt and Phoenicia:

At the sanctuary of Astrate the death of Adonis was annually mourned... disconsolate believers shaved their heads... women who could not bring themselves to sacrifice their beautiful tresses had to give

themselves up to strangers on a certain day of the festival, and dedicate to Astrate the wages of their shame (335-6)

Whilst Nessim, Adonis-like, was risking his life for the sake of Coptic Egypt Justine, was paying homage to Astrate-Isis in her affair with the "indigent" (J 74) Darley, who was dedicating to Justine-Astrate the wages of his Imperial shame. Later in the novel, after Justine's disappearance, Clea writes to Darley to say that she had met Justine working on a kibbutz and that Justine had "chopped off her hair carelessly" (J 211). Frazer notes that the Egyptian Isis (whom he equates with Astrate and the Greek goddesses Demeter and Aphrodite) also shaved her head in mourning for Osiris (363). Could not the shaven-headed Justine-Isis be mourning the sacrificial death of her husband's brother Narouz, whose Osiris-like death is revealed later in Mountolive (300 - 313)? Frazer goes on to mention that in ancient Palestine "the signal for the celebration of the rites [of Astrate] was the flashing of a meteor, which on a certain day fell like a star from the top of Mount Lebanon into the river Adonis" (346-7). This image of a meteor in a night sky recalls Durrell's "character-squeeze" of Justine as "an arrow in darkness" (J 261). For Frazer, whilst the rites of the Semitic Goddess were "bloody and licentious", those of her Greek and Roman equivalents appealed to 'gentler spirits' (383). It is the dark, Semitic, savage Justine that throws Darley into the bloody and licentious rites of an Orient 'turned in on itself.' (J 13) Darley receives a deep wound in his sex (13) for which writing functions as a variation on the psychoanalytic concept of the "talking cure". Prior to his meeting Justine, Darley was confident in his masculinity and displayed a detached indifference to women born of a certain cynical *machismo*:

From time to time one of Georges' numerous girls strays into my net by calling at the flat when he is not there, and the incident serves for a while to sharpen my *taedium vitae*. Georges is thoughtful and generous in these matters for, before going away (knowing how poor I am) he pays one of the Syrians from Golfo's tavern in advance, and orders her to spend an occasional night in the flat *en disponibilité* as he puts it...if necessary I can even make love with relief, as one does not sleep very well here: but without passion, without tension. (J 19)

After his encounter with Justine, however, Darley is a mental and physical wreck, so much so that he has had to "escape" to his island, "a sick man" "deeply wounded in his sex", where he can "rebuild this city in his brain" (J 11-13). Thus, as with Cavafy's homosexual Alexandrian lovers, it is forbidden sex, here a sexual and emotional encounter between the "indigent" European Darley (27) and the dark, Semitic Justine, which brings about the dissolution of the naive Darley's sense of manhood. This sense of selfhood will only be restored to integrity after long periods of self-imposed exile, first two years in Upper Egypt, and then on Darley's Greek island, where he begins to write the Quartet. This idea of forbidden sexual encounters laying the foundations for future literature is explored in Cavafy's poem "Their Beginning", which concludes, "But what profit for the life of the artist: / tomorrow, the day after, or years later, he'll give voice / to the strong lines that had their beginnings here." (Cavafy Poems 81, lines 7 - 9) Artistic creation is subtly linked to the destruction of self when Darley remembers some lines from Cavafy's poem "The City" which "strike him with a new force -- as if the poetry had been newly minted" (J 77):

.....no ship exists

To take you from yourself. Ah! don't you see

Just as you've ruined your life in this

One plot of ground you've ruined its worth

Everywhere now -- over the whole earth.

(Durrell's translation of "The City" in Justine, 221, lines 20 - 24)

In Mountolive Durrell returns to the theme of "forbidden" love between a European and an Egyptian. Durrell's depiction of the affair between Sir David and Leila parallels that of Darley and Justine. In both affairs an Englishman -- Mountolive a high Imperial official and Darley an indigent writer -- strike up a relationship with one of the Hosnani women -- Leila and Justine respectively. Both affairs end up by visiting disastrous, destructive consequences on the men concerned: Mountolive ends up humiliated in the house of the child-prostitutes, whilst Darley suffers a breakdown. In both cases, a sexual encounter with Oriental autrality brings the integrity of Imperial constructions of masculinity and selfhood into question.

Since the tetralogy's conception of the "Oriental" is so closely tied with images of degradation and squalor, before investigating further the significance of the Quartet's European-Egyptian sexual encounters in detail it is necessary to further review the Islamic history of Alexandria so as to understand how Alexandria, once the 'greatest emporium in the world' and one of the world's great centres of learning came to be reduced to such a pitiful social, political and economic status vis-à-vis the modern West.

Reimer (26-7) cites important changes in international trade during the Age of Discovery as the chief reason underpinning the nadir of Alexandria's decline during the long Ottoman occupation of Egypt (AD 1517 - 1798). Reimer notes, however, that even in these dark days Alexandria was able to maintain regional significance the southern pivot of Ottoman trade between the mercantile Italian city-states of the Mediterranean, Arabia, and the Indian Ocean. By the mid-eighteenth century, however, Ottoman control over Egypt was weakening, Mamluke warlords based in Cairo effectively established control over most of Egypt. Yet, as Reimer observes, Alexandria was still able to retain its civic autonomy from, on the one hand, the Ottomans and, on the other the "aggressively exploitative, if quasi-indigenous despotism" of the neo-Mamluke regime in Cairo (26), precursors of the Quartet's Memlik Pasha.

Inevitably, disputes between the Ottomans and the Mamlukes led to a breakdown of law and order, Bedouin raiders and European pirates were able to extort protection money from Alexandria's civic authorities. Moreover, the breakdown of law and order meant that the quarantine systems which were present in comparable European ports such as Venice broke down. By the late eighteenth-century Alexandria has become a diseased city: the thousands of merchants, sailors, soldiers, dock workers, travellers and pilgrims who passed through Alexandria from infected areas brought disease. Syphilis became endemic, and Alexandria suffered outbreaks of plague, averaging two every five years, sufficient, Reimer notes, to counter any natural increase of population during that period. Reimer cites a mid eighteenth-century merchant as saying, "...the famous city of Alexandria is now reduced to three or four thousand refuged persons, from the different provinces of Turkey" (29 "Turkey" here means the Ottoman Empire, of which Egypt was a part).

Shortly before the French Revolution, French merchants gained concessions from the Alexandrian authorities to build "*Alexandrie Nouvelle*", consisting of warehouse buildings in the Alexandrian peninsula. This became the new commercial epicentre of the city in the late eighteenth-century and became the city's salvation. However, the heart of the Ptolomaic city was now the "*enceinte des arabes*", the home of poorer indigenous Alexandrians who either could not afford to move to the city's new commercial centre or could not make the necessary cultural adjustments required for life in what was becoming a European town. Thus, the cultural topography of the Alexandria of the Quartet was beginning to take shape. The area around the harbour became a mercantile European new town; linguistically and culturally it was French. However, to the south the Ptolomaic city had become the Arab quarter, a *bidonville* where the poverty and disease of the Ottoman period are still endemic; this quarter was a breeding ground for crime and vice and the rule of law hardly extended into its dark heart. In the *eneinte des arabs* the great buildings of antiquity had crumbled to virtually nothing and are forgotten. To be described as "a true child of the Mousion" in classical Alexandria would have denoted great learning; as Alexandria slowly embraced modernity the children of the Mousion lived in conditions of poverty and degradation.

During Ottoman times about forty Greek families were left in the city, a pathetic remnant left over from Alexandria's classical heyday. However, with the founding of *Alexandrie Nouvelle* a much larger number of Greeks involved in trade or shipping began to repopulate the city. Alexandria's native Egyptians, Muslims and Copts, worked in crafts, particularly textiles, or were traders, servants or labourers. Mamluke provocation of French activities in Alexandria formed the pretext for the French invasion of the city in July 1798, lead by Napoleon Bonaparte, who easily defeated the obsolete

Mamluke forces at the Battle of the Pyramids to occupy the entire country. However, The French occupation of Egypt was brief: Napoleon's forces were ejected from Egypt in disarray by the British, led by Lord Nelson, at the Battle of the Nile in 1801.

Nevertheless, the effects of the brief French occupation of Egypt were profound. Firstly, a fashion for all things Egyptian spread through the academic, scientific, artistic, literary and architectural scenes in nineteenth-century Europe. This fad first expressed itself in the "Egyptian" style in French First Empire decor in the first two decades of the nineteenth-century. This taste for an Egyptianised style remained popular throughout nineteenth-century Europe, and was given a boost in the nineteen-twenties following Howard Carter's discovery of the splendours of Tutankhamoun's tomb. By the nineteen-thirties, however, the enthusiasm for the Egyptian style had begun to wane and lapse into parody. An example of the late-end of Europe's cultural flirtation with Egypt is Karl Freund's 1932 film The Mummy (starring Boris Karloff in the title role); likewise, the Quartet is concerned with the Egyptian grotesque and stands at the terminal and parodic extreme of Europe's fascination with Egypt. However, European interest in Egypt was not restricted to cultural matters; the European powers began to take a serious interest in the commercial and economic possibilities of the country, and likewise started to consider its geographical and strategic significance in a world of global European empires.

The French occupation shattered the old political order in Egypt. In 1805 Muhammad Ali Pasha, an Ottoman prince of Albanian extraction, crushed neo-Mamluke power in Egypt and pronounced himself *Khedive* (viceroy) of Egypt on behalf of the Ottomans. However, in reality Ottoman power in Egypt was broken, and Muhammad Ali's status as a vassal to Constantinople was nominal. An "enlightened despot", Ali was determined to make Egypt a modern country, a rival to Europe. He modernised Egypt's

Army and attempted to set up the infrastructure needed to bring about the industrialisation of the country. As a result of Muhammad Ali's modernisation programmes, educated Egyptians were for the first time brought into regular, direct contact with the thought and culture of modern Europe. The mid-nineteenth century marks the rise of a Western-educated and Europeanised class of Egyptian entrepreneurs and intellectuals who by the early twentieth-century would spearhead the movement for Egyptian independence: in the Quartet this class of "new Egyptians" are represented by the Hosnanis.

One of the first thinkers to benefit from this contact with Europe was Muslim Egyptian Rafi' al-Tahtawi (1801-73), who was concerned with the articulation in Arabic of political liberalism and Egyptian patriotism. In his Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age: 1798 - 1939 Albert Hourani credits Tahtawi with being the first to "articulate the idea of the Egyptian nation". A pre-requisite of Tahtawi's learning was that he "acquired a precise knowledge of the French language" and an awareness of the issues involved in translating from French into Arabic. This knowledge acquired, Tahtawi set about reading in ancient history, Greek philosophy, geography, arithmetic and logic, modern history, French literature and, most importantly, the French thinkers of the seventeenth and eighteenth-centuries, such as Voltaire, Condillac, Montesquieu and Rousseau. Thus, through Tahtawi, the thought of the French Enlightenment left "a permanent mark on him, and through him on the Egyptian mind" (Thought 69). Other thinkers followed Tahtawi's lead, such as the encyclopaedist and language reformer Butrus al Bustani (1819-83), a Lebanese Christian who is strongly reminiscent of Durrell's Hosnanis. Bustani was particularly concerned "to revive the knowledge and love of the Arabic language". Bustani enormously contributed to the development of modern Arabic

expository prose, “a language true to its past in grammar and idiom, but made capable of expressing simply, precisely, and directly the concepts of modern thought”. From the circle he gathered round Bustani there came “the modern novel and drama in Arabic as well as Arabic journalism” (Thought 100). Seemingly then, Durrell was fifty years behind the times when he wrote that “nobody can think or feel only in the dimensionless obsolescence of Arabic” (M 24-5). However, in other respects, such as a passion for language, literature and Western thought, Durrell manages to incorporate much of Bustani in his depiction of Leila Hosnani. Bustani is typical of the new Egyptian elite that by the end of the nineteenth-century had become firmly established in Cairo and Alexandria. In a passage that is remarkably free from what Said would call “Orientalism”, the Edwardian Arabist R.A. Nicholson mentions in his A Literary History of the Arabs (1907, 469) that no less than “the cause of progress” had been furthered by the “numerous political, literary, and scientific journals” which, by the early twentieth-century, were “regularly issued in every country where Arabic is spoken”. Nicholson observes that “the science and culture of Europe have been rendered accessible in translations and adaptations of which the complete list would form a volume in its self”. This meant that “an Arab may read in his own language the tragedies of Racine, the comedies of Moliere, the fables of La Fontaine, Paul and Virginia, The Talisman, Monte Cristo”. For Nicholson this “neo-Arabic” literature was “only to a limited extent the heir of the old classical Arabic literature” and “even shows a tendency to repudiate its inheritance entirely.” (469) Thus, in the years immediately prior to the young Mountolive's arrival in Egypt, indigenous learning was being revived in Egypt by a young and dynamic class of “new Egyptians” after what Arab intellectuals regarded as the long Dark Age of Turkish occupation. At the opening of Mountolive Nessim and

Narouz Hosnani are shown as young men in their early twenties; their parents, Faltaus and Leila Hosnani, would have read Tahtawi and Bustani in their youth, and would be well-versed in the new “neo-Arabic” literature described by Nicholson. The achievement of Egyptian independence would depend on such people as Nessim, educated in England and Germany, (J 25) and his mother, Leila, who read scientific and literary journals in “four languages, which she knew as well as her own, perhaps better.” (M 24)

If Egyptian society was changing, so was the city of Alexandria itself.

Muhammad Ali's reforms had bought new life to the city. He had, politically and economically, “tied Alexandria to Egypt” (Reimer 56). These ties were strengthened during the reign of his grandson, Abbas (1848-54), who had the Delta Railway built, connecting Alexandria with Cairo. Reimer notes that the railway had the effect of bringing about the “transformation of the Delta into one vast export sector in the world commercial system” (56), whilst a submarine telegraph cable laid from Alexandria to Malta integrated Alexandria electronically in the growing world-market (114). World events were to work in the city's favour: the Crimean War disrupted trans-Mediterranean trade in agricultural products from Turkey and Russia; Egypt's fertile Delta provided an alternative source of such goods. Moreover, the economic effects of the American Civil War were a huge boon for Alexandria. American cotton imports vanished from European markets and the price of cotton quadrupled and for years after the end of the Civil War Egypt replaced the United States as Europe's principle supplier of cotton (110-111). By the 1870s, nearly all of Egypt's trade with Europe passed through Alexandria, and the volume of trade passing through the city had expanded several thousand-fold by the end of the century. It was this trade which made large-scale Egyptian landowners of the Delta fabulously rich: the city into which Nessim and Narouz's parents were born was truly a

boomtown. These economic changes were to have profound social effects on the population of Alexandria: in the last quarter of the nineteenth-century the population of Alexandria doubled as 60,000 internal migrants flocked to the city from other parts of Egypt; Nubians from Upper Egypt and Sudanese lent the city that flavour of "African darkness" that seems to have simultaneously fascinated and repelled Durrell. By 1900 Alexandria had a population of 120,000, close to the 150,000 mentioned by Darley for the city of the 1930s (J 132). Reimer (160) mentions the European population for 1878 as consisting of over twenty thousand Greeks, twenty thousand French and Italians, and around ten thousand others, including three thousand English. This shows a five-fold increase in the Greek population mentioned by Lane for the eighteen-thirties, and an even larger increase in the western European population of Alexandria in the same period.

However, in boom-town Alexandria, prosperity existed in the midst of sickness and poverty. Two of Durrell's source books for the Quartet, E.W. Lane's Manners and Flaubert's Travel Diaries date from the mid-nineteenth century. Both mention Alexandria's unhealthy condition, a condition which persisted into the mid-twentieth century. In such works the "dust-ridden", diseased city "owned by flies and beggars" (J 11) which is the setting for Durrell's tetralogy comes into view. Describing Balthazar, Darley states that: "As a doctor, he spends much of his working-time in the government clinic for venereal disease. (He once said dryly: 'I live at the centre of the city's life - its genito-urinary system: it is a sobering sort of place')." (J 82) In Durrell's fallen city, Balthazar is an esoteric theosopher and guardian of the Hermetic mystical tradition of the classical city, he is Alexandria's "Platonic *daimon*" (81). Yet he carries out his professional practice in a VD clinic, the "centre" of the modern city's life. Balthazar's clinic is a "sobering sort of place", the centre of a city haunted by those "who have been

deeply wounded in their sex” (J 12). Whereas metaphysical speculation once went on in the marbled halls of the classical city, in Darley's twentieth-century Alexandria such speculation must occur silently in the mind of a doctor as he paints syphilitic sores with iodine. Philosophical inquiry into the nature of the human condition is reduced to a base materialism, as Balthazar explains to Justine, “ ‘Ah! My dear, after all the work of the philosophers on his soul and the doctors on his body, what can we say we really know about man? That he is, when all is said and done, just a passage for liquids and solids, a pipe of flesh’ ” (J 82).

In this fallen Alexandria, Durrell's treatment of the theme of disease was, in part, inspired by the theories of Georg Groddeck who “combined the ‘Taoist identity of opposites’ with a theory of disease that explained all illness and even accidents in terms of a patient's unconscious needs” (*Biography* 298). Applying Groddeckian theory from the analysis of individual ills to the analysis of the ills of countries and cities, Durrell's dust-haunted, disease-ridden, fly-blown Alexandria in the *Quartet* becomes less a literal truth about the physical wretchedness of Egypt than a metaphor for the psychic decay which eventually undermines the vaingloriousness of Imperial pride. The Alexandrian psyche has absorbed the grand designs of great powers that have occupied her.

Alexandria, capital of memory, has witnessed the rise, decline and fall of many imperial powers and has internalised the social, psychological and sexual turmoil that this history has generated. In the tetralogy, the city's unconscious yearnings are then made manifest as the diseases and deformities that blight her population and the accidents and calamities that befall them.

Thus, the *Quartet* examines imaginatively the city's present through a prolonged

contemplation of the past traumas, recent and ancient, to which the Alexandrian psyche has been subjected. Edmund Keeley sums up nicely the relationship of history to myth in Cavafy's work, "The poet's purpose, when he makes use of history, is to discover the poetic...significance of what happened, not necessarily in the way it actually happened but in the way it ought to have happened if the underlying poetic significance were to be revealed." (100); this reading of Cavafy is also relevant to a historical reading of the Quartet and provides a clue to the relationship of the Quartet to historical Alexandria: in his selective re-creation of Alexandria *entre deux guerres* Durrell, the "poet who stumbled into prose" (Biography 507), selectively re-creates history by draping his characters in Keeley's "trappings of history" the better to dramatise, to render into poetry, the key mythic metaphors to be found in Alexandria in the hubristic afternoon of the British Empire.

Egypt's quasi-incorporation into the British Empire began in 1882. By the late-nineteenth century, Alexandria had become, in Reimer's significant phrase, "a Bridgehead of Colonialism". Reimer describes how quasi-colonial Alexandria became a "harbinger" of Egypt's future as a colonised nation, "...the symptoms of the colonial syndrome were evident in Alexandria before they appeared elsewhere in Egypt". This was because Alexandria advanced European colonialism by accelerating Egypt's economic dependence on a cash-crop, cotton. Maintaining the flow of European money into the city meant providing financial, legal and other privileges to European businesses, and hosting the country's "largest and most assertive colony of foreigners" (187); the privileges extended by the Khedives to European traders led inexorably to Alexandria's *de facto* colonisation. Although Alexandria paved the way for the colonisation of Egypt, ironically it was the ambition of the Khedives to make Egypt a nation to rival the Powers

of Europe that let in the British. The development of Egypt's infrastructure that had began with Muhammad Ali reached its zenith with the construction of the Suez Canal in 1869. A Frenchman, Ferdinand de Lesseps, persuaded the Khedive of the day that the project was sound. As historian of Egyptian modernity George Annesley points out, as much as the Suez Canal would become a lynchpin of world trade, its construction signalled the death-knell of the independent Egypt founded by Muhammad Ali. Annesley writes that the signing of the canal concession in 1854 was "the Black Day of modern Egypt's history" (131). The British opposed the construction of the canal, because as Annesley states, the Canal would become "in practice, if not in theory, a part of France and subject to French political opinion and French ambition". This new French interest in Egypt would impinge on British mercantile and imperial interests; the *Pax Britannica* enforced by the Royal Navy ensured that shipping routes to the East round the Cape of Good Hope were "at least safe and free from all foreign influence". The building of the Suez Canal would upset the balance between the European powers since "France, Italy, and even Russia would henceforth be some thousands of miles nearer to India than England herself." (133)

Egypt suddenly gained strategic importance to Europe's colonial powers; for Egypt's European communities this was the beginning of what historian of colonial Egypt Trevor Mostyn has called Egypt's "*Belle Époque*", the Egyptian equivalent to the British "Raj" in India. The canal's opening celebrations in 1871 were attended by representatives of all the royal households of Europe, except the British. The opening of the Canal was a significant moment culturally as well as politically and economically: the Statue of Liberty was originally intended to stand at the Canal's Mediterranean entrance, and Verdi's *Aida* was written to be performed at the Canal's opening ceremonies. Walt

Whitman wrote his poem "A Passage to India" in celebration of the canal's opening; some fifty years later, E.M. Forster would adopt the title of this poem for his colonial novel. Whitman's poem predicts the ultimate effects the Canal would have on Khedival Egypt with unknowing irony, "For we are bound where the mariner has not yet dared to go / And we will risk the ship, ourselves and all" (*The Works of Walt Whitman* 380, 9: 31-32). Mostyn states that, at the cost of bankrupting Egypt, the Khedive Ismail had Cairo transformed into "the Paris of Africa" (171). This chimerical city brings to mind the social world of the *Quartet*: an Egypt of European palaces and villas, of extravagant balls held by the European and Europeanised elites. This is a world where the French language, French *moeurs* are definitive of style and refinement; a world where the Second Empire style rubs shoulders with Art Nouveau, recalling Pombal's gaunt bedroom that was "vaguely *fin de siècle* and was as clean as a new pin, Oscar Wilde might have admitted it as a set for the first act of a play." (J 153) Durrell's Alexandria is sited at the decadent tail-end of this *Belle Époque*: as the tetralogy was being written Nassertie mobs tore down Khedive Ismail's African Paris.

Following the revolt of Ahmad 'Arabi, an Egyptian army officer, against the creeping colonisation of Egypt the Khedive was pressured into substituting for 'Arabi a placeman acceptable to Britain and France. In June 1882, Turkey tried to pre-empt a Franco-British occupation of Egypt by threatening to send an expeditionary force to Alexandria. This threat provoked an immediate response from the British. The Royal Navy began the bombardment of Alexandria, and on 21st August, a British force occupied the Canal Zone. De Lesseps furiously telegraphed 'Arabi for support saying "*Jamais les Anglais n'y pénétreront, jamais, jamais!*", (Traill 57) but it was in vain, for 'Arabi replied that he could not hold the zone, and retreated to fortifications at Tel El Kabir. In the

battle which followed ten thousand Egyptian troops were killed at the cost of fifty-seven British dead. De Lesseps' dream of a Gallicised Egypt made wealthy by the Canal was dead: the British occupation had begun.

Unlike predominantly Arab Cairo, Alexandria, still very much a Greek and French city, was never fully able to accept the reality of the British occupation. De Lesseps' desperate cry to 'Arabi "*Jamais*" runs as a refrain throughout the Quartet as '*Jamais de la Vie*', the title of the ubiquitous Alexandrian pop-song which haunts Darley's recollection of the city; *Jamais de la Vie* is also the name of Justine's favourite perfume (M 206).

Durrell pays homage to the history of the British in Egypt in Clea. As Darley rummages through Maskelyne's personal effects, following the Brigadier's death in action against Rommel's *Afrika Korps* in the Western Desert:

There was a faded photograph taken of him following his return from Egypt in 1882. It showed him dressed in a white pith helmet, red jacket and blue serge trousers with smart black leather gaiters and pipe-clayed cross belts. On his breast was pinned the Egyptian War Medal with a clasp for the battle of Tel El Kabir and the Khedive's Star. (232)

The description of Maskelyne senior's uniform is significant: Tel El Kabir was one of the last major actions in which the British "redcoat" tunic with pipe-clayed cross belts was worn. The Imperial troops who fought at Tel El Kabir wore khaki (Persian for "earth-coloured"), which would be adopted as the universal field dress of the British Army in 1885. The British Army of occupation was a modern, almost twentieth-century army;

their bolt-action rifles and explosive munitions looking forward to the Great War.

Durrell's *vignette* of the elder Maskelyne is also important; the photograph of Maskelyne's grandfather in his Victorian uniform and decorations from the battle of Tel El Kabir and the death of Brigadier Maskelyne in the Desert War of the nineteen-forties bracket the entire history of the British in Egypt between two acts of military heroism. However, while Maskelyne senior is decorated in a major campaign, his grandson is killed in a "desert sortie": the Empire that had lived by the breech-loading rifle was dying under the withering fire of the *Afrika Korps*. Thus, Durrell's use of the word "tradition" in the passage above is significant: the literary tradition of Orientalist writing provides a commentary on a military tradition of war and occupation in the Orient. In "Tradition and the Individual Talent" Eliot states that, "No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead." (38) Clearly, Eliot's "dead" are "poets" and "artists"; however, Durrell's ironic use of this concept of tradition is a reminder that, in colonial writing, the "dead" are also the fallen of the colonial wars. Later on the same page, Durrell invokes Eliotic "tradition" a second time, "Was it not, I wondered, a story of success -- a success perfectly complete within the formal pattern of something greater than the individual life, a tradition." (C 232) The significance of the passage describing the career of the Maskelynes in Egypt is developed in two important essays on the Quartet. Roger Bowen observes that "the closing of a family chronicle is also the end of an imperial narrative. Almost the entire history of Britain in Egypt, from 1882 and the bombardment of Alexandria to the Second World War are contained in the story of grandfather and grandson." ("Toybox" 9) In a similar vein, Maskelyne provides the

underpinning concept for Anne Zahlan's "The Destruction of the Imperial Self in Lawrence Durrell's Alexandria Quartet", "Indistinguishable from the mask he wears, Maskelyne is clearly of the imperial past... [he] disappears without trace in the desert sands of Egypt, casualty of a dying sense of self" ("Destruction" 8). Keith Douglas' lines "Simplify Me when I'm Dead"¹⁰ work well as an epitaph for both Maskelyne, lost without trace in a desert skirmish, and for the British Empire:

Time's wrong-way telescope will show

a minute man ten years hence

and by distance simplified.

Through that lens see if I seem

substance or nothing: of the world

deserving mention or charitable oblivion... (Douglas Poems page 74, lines

19 - 24)

Following his death in the Western Desert, Maskelyne is posthumously "simplified":

"There was little enough to inherit save a few civilian clothes of an unsuitable size, and a credit account of fifteen pounds in the Tottenham Court Road Branch of Lloyd's Bank."

(C231-2) The meagreness of his few belongings suggest that Maskelyne, the servant of Empire, carried out his duty with no expectation of material reward, only the "charitable oblivion" that Empire could award its devoted subjects who had "done their bit". Empire itself, seemingly so vast and mighty even in its dying days, is now largely forgotten or

¹⁰ Throughout this work, all quotations from Keith Douglas' poetry are taken from the 1998 edition of his Complete Poems; this will be cited as "Douglas 'Poems'".

ignored; it is consigned to a less than charitable oblivion by a Britain that still struggles to come to terms with its post-Imperial identity a full fifty years after Empire's demise: only old men and "learned men" in universities are left to "leisurely arrive at an opinion" on Empire.

The British occupation of Egypt had a profound effect on the fundamental nature of the British Empire. The make-up of that empire in the fifty twentieth-century years left to it after the occupation of Egypt would be fundamentally different to the British Empire of the Victorians. As Tigner notes in Modernisation and Control in Colonial Egypt: 1882 - 1914 Victorian statesmen preferred informal Empire to direct political controls, the occupation of Egypt was, "a decisive event in the break down of the old order of informal empire. The strategic importance of Egypt to the British was so great that the British could not permit Egypt the luxury of a proto-nationalist movement...the occupation ensued." (390) Moreover, in order to stay ahead of their European rivals, the British were "forced to expand up the Nile valley to protect their control over Egypt." (390) The occupation of Egypt was a key event which initiated Europe's "scramble for Africa", the European penetration of Africa in the late nineteenth-century that was the historical context for Conrad's Heart of Darkness.

Regarding the Egyptian political scene, Hourani notes that by the early twentieth-century, there existed two distinct trends in secular nationalism in the Middle East. On the one hand, there were the pan-Arabists, who envisaged a unified Arab nation extending from the Atlantic to the Persian Gulf; and on the other hand there were nationalists who saw countries such as Egypt, Iraq and Syria as distinct national entities which had distinct histories and cultures. It is to this second group of nationalists that the Hosnanis of the Quartet most closely correspond. For secular regional nationalism

offered the Christian minorities of the Middle East the possibility of articulating a political voice which had so long been denied them under Turkish rule. If the Hosnanis find their cultural equivalents in the stylish, Western educated, polyglot Arab bourgeoisie which Hourani has described in his History (339), then the intellectual equivalents of the Hosnani's are to be found in Christian secularist thinkers such as Shibhi Shumayyil (1850 - 1917) and Farah Atun (1874 - 1922), described by Albert Hourani in his Thought. Farah Atun was a Lebanese Christian journalist and novelist who lived variously in Tripoli, Alexandria, Cairo and eventually in New York, where he edited an influential Arabic language journal *al Jamia'* the readership of which were mainly Christian Arab exiles in the New World. For Atun, the separation of the temporal and spiritual power in Christianity made it easier for Christians to be tolerant than Muslims, but he was at pains to point out that, "if Europeans were now more tolerant, that was not because they were Christians, but because science and philosophy had driven out religious fanaticism, and the separation of powers had taken place." (257) Shumayyil, with his utopian vision of Muslims and Christians united in a common national cause corresponds most closely to Narouz Hosnani the "preacher" (M126), who addresses both Copts and Muslims who have come to celebrate the *mulid* of *Sitna Damiana* (121) as "Descendants of the Pharaohs, children of Ra!" (M 125) On the other hand, the more cosmopolitan, well-travelled and philosophical Atun corresponds better to Nessim, "Oxford had tried to make him [Nessim] donnish, but they had only succeeded in developing his philosophical bent to the point where he was incapable of practising the art he most loved, painting." (J 25) The ideological, cultural and political position of Durrell's fictive Hosnanis is pre-figured by "new Egyptians" such as Shumayyil and Atun, who were calling for a the communities of the Christian Levant to take an active part in their countries' political

future. Whilst Faltaus Hosnani would have imbibed in his youth the thought of the first generation of European-educated Egyptians such as Tahtawi, his sons would have had as mentors secular Oriental Christian thinkers such as Atun and Shumayyil. Atun was at pains to dissociate the Eastern Christians from the Western missionaries; Eastern Christians were the "real" Christians who were not responsible for what Western Christendom had done in the East. Thus, when the young David Mountolive visits the Hosnanis in 1918. Faltaus Hosnani echoes much of Shumayyil's thought, "there have never been any differences between us and the Moslems before they [the British] arrived; the British have taught the Muslims to discriminate against them [the Copts]" (M 40). He supports Atun's view that eastern Christians are "real Christians" and those of the West are impostors who use religion to further the cause of colonialism: "Your Bishop of Salisbury openly said he considered these Oriental Christians as worse than infidels, and your Crusaders massacred them joyfully... Yet we are Christians like you, only of the oldest and purest strain." (41) Stressing the Coptic-Muslim harmony that existed before the British occupation, Hosnani senior insists that the Copts were "Christian Egyptians, fully integrated into the Moslem state." (42) For Leila Hosnani the Copts are "the most brilliant, indeed, once the key community in our own country." (45) Like the historical Christian secularists, the Hosnanis have learnt from Europe but are not slaves to it. The Hosnanis seek to play an active role in Egypt's political affairs.

Durrell spent his time in Egypt working for British Intelligence during the Second World War. Given that British Intelligence would see any indigenous articulation of political power as a plot against the British presence in Egypt, could not the origin of the Quartet's fictitious "Coptic Conspiracy" lie in British misgivings about Christian secularist movements in Egyptian politics? In the atmosphere of wartime Egypt with

Rommel only a day's drive from Alexandria, British colonial paranoia about 'restless natives' would have reached a climax. Anticipating the Second World War from the vantagepoint of the First, Hosnani senior taunts the aspiring British Imperialist David Mountolive with the threat that, one day, the Copts may side with Germany if Britain would not allow them their place in Egyptian society, “ ‘The only Christian Orientals fully integrated into the Moslem state? It would be the dream of Germans to discover such a key to Egypt, would it not?’” (M 42-3). Thus, when Mountolive meets Nessim unexpectedly in Berlin, he learns that Nessim had just been negotiating with Krupps, the German armaments manufacturer (M 84). So who were the Hosnanis? In an editorial in “The International Lawrence Durrell Society Herald” Ian MacNiven states that:

In...an unfavourable review of Boutros Boutros-Ghali's Egypt's Road to Jerusalem: A Diplomat's Struggle for Peace in the Middle East, Fouad Ajami makes several references to Durrell. Although Boutros-Ghali was born in Cairo, Ajami states that he is, “in his way the perfect Alexandrine. He might have walked straight out of Durrell's Alexandria...indeed, there has always been a belief that it is from Boutros-Ghali's life, and around him, that Durrell had spun one of the principal characters of the Alexandria Quartet: Nessim Hosnani”... Ajami...chides Durrell for not having been 'discreet in his portrait of Nessim; his man also had married a Jewish woman'. Boutros-Ghali's wife's name is Leia; did Durrell have the Boutros-Ghali family in mind, add an “L” to produce Leila, and transfer the name to Nessim's mother?’ (Herald 20)

Quite possibly, MacNiven is correct in this identification. However, rather than view Durrell's characters as direct equivalents of specific historical persons, it is better to view Durrell's Hosnanis as allegorical figures which embody various political, social and cultural tendencies with which Durrell had become familiar during his intelligence work in war-time Egypt. In the light of Hourani's description of secular Christian intellectuals of the early twentieth-century Middle East, correspondences between Nessim Hosnani and a prominent Coptic "new Egyptians" such as Boutros Boutros-Ghali are only to be expected. Certainly, the Ghali family played a central role in the formation of the influential pro-independence *Wafd* party in the early twentieth-century, as they had played a significant role in earlier Egyptian politics, " 'And when Gohari died where did Mohammed Ali turn?' 'To Ghali Doss' said Narouz again, delightedly." (M 42): the *Wafd* party undertook the first steps toward securing real independence for Egypt and in which Copts played a prominent role.

The Hosnanis can be seen as allegorical figures each representing different aspects of the social and political *milieux* of the Egypt of the Quartet. This is fitting: the Classical world's use of allegory and personification had its origins in Hellenistic Alexandria. The Ptolomaic city soon grew to a size that had never been seen before in the Mediterranean world. In this seething cosmopolis, ordinary people, not only philosophers, became aware of the hugely divergent destinies of individual people: why would one man become an Alexander yet another end life as a beggar? The increasing uncertainty of Hellenistic society promoted a belief in deities who were personifications of abstract concepts, such as *Kairos* (Chance), *Tyche* (Fortune), *Eros* (Love), *Hypnos* (Sleep) and *Nike* (Victory). These deities were represented by allegorical figures whose physique, pose, expression, dress, hairstyle, and objects associated with them indicated the abstract principle which

they embodied; Philo incorporated this allegorical method into his philosophy. The city of Alexandria was represented allegorically; a series of large, circular mosaics made between the first-century BC and the third-century AD are on display at Alexandria's Graeco-Roman Museum and depict Alexandria personified as "The Mistress of the Sea": a dark Graeco-Egyptian female figure wearing a headdress in the shape of an ancient Greek merchant vessel, these mosaics recall the description of Justine in Balthazar "...someone beautiful, dark and painted with great eyes like the prow of an Aegean ship..." (116). Thus, it is fitting then that Durrell resorted to allegory in the tetralogy, for the Alexandria Quartet re-introduces the allegorical method to its city of origin. Durrell's "heraldic" method is a development of the modernist's 'mythic method' and it enables a sophisticated use of allegory to take place. However, Durrell's characters work as allegorical figures not simply in the realm of myth, but also in the history of modern Egypt and its politics, intrigues and scandals re-figured imaginatively in the fallen city of the dusk of Empire; the heraldic method also allows a writer who had been in the employ of the Empire's intelligence services at a crucial point in history to write about recent, significant events in Egyptian history whilst avoiding the constraints imposed upon him by the Official Secrets Act.

Thus, the entire Hosnani family can be viewed as allegorical figures representing the secular Christian intellectual and political currents described by Hourani and which surrounded Durrell during his sojourn in Egypt. In the nineteen-twenties, liberal Egyptian nationalists formed a political party, the *Wafd*, to negotiate with the British on the issue of Egyptian independence.

This chapter has reviewed the history, cultures and intellectual movements of

Alexandria from antiquity until the beginning of the twentieth-century, and has sought establish their relevance to the Quartet. The following chapter will examine the inter-war history of Alexandria and offer a detailed historical-allegorical reading of Mountolive. In particular, it will closely examine the affair between David Mountolive and Leila Hosnani and will argue that this affair can be read as an allegorical interpretation of the relationship between Imperial Britain and the Egyptian *Wafd* during the period 1918 - 1945.

Chapter 4

Britain in Egypt: the "Coptic" Plot Thickens; the Mountolive-Hosnani Affair as Political Allegory

"We...with all we have built up, are gradually being engulfed by the Arab tide, the Moslem tide. Some of us are trying to work against it; Armenians, Copts, Jews and Greeks here in Egypt, while others elsewhere are organising themselves." Mountolive p. 199.

"...the Copts can accept either full equality and freedom in a united Egypt, or secession and the establishment of an independent state for the Copts. Assimilation and segregation are not acceptable any more, neither by the Copts nor by the international community."

Dr. Imad Boles of the British Coptic Association in a letter to The Guardian newspaper (London and Manchester), January 2000

Whilst in Egypt to "improve his Arabic" (M 11) the young David Mountolive junior in the British Diplomatic service "of exceptional promise" had forgone both "home and local leave" (M 22) to stay with a family of wealthy Coptic landowners, the Hosnanis, in order to learn the "*moeurs*" of Egypt (M 22). During this time, the young Mountolive and Leila Hosnani, wife of the crippled head of the Hosnani household and mother of Nessim and Narouz Hosnani, become lovers (M 18). For the young Mountolive "formally educated in England, educated not to wish to feel" (M 18) the experience of living with the Hosnanis brought about a cultural disorientation, "But here, seen from the vantage point of someone inside the canvas his own imagination had painted, he had suddenly found the exotic becoming completely normal" (M 22). Here, Mountolive's perception of Egypt as a canvas which his imagination had painted exemplifies Saidian "Orientalism", wherein Orientalism's subject is rendered "Oriental" by the projection of the Western imagination on to it: "the Orient is an idea that has a history and a tradition of thought, imagery and vocabulary that have given it reality and presence in and for the

West. The two geographical entities thus support and to an extent reflect each other.” (O 5)

In his novel Tancred, Benjamin Disraeli writes that “the East is a career”, referring to the Imperialist burden of imposing Western thought upon the "natives", a concept similar to Kipling's “white man's burden”. Said, however, interprets Disraeli's words as meaning that “the East was something bright young Westerners would find to be an all consuming passion.” (5) Writing the Quartet twenty years before Said's Orientalism was published, Durrell's depiction of the young David Mountolive anticipates Said's reading of Tancred and Saidian Orientalism. However, Durrell's depiction of Mountolive's situation goes beyond Said in an important respect: for Said, the configurations of power between the Occident and its subject, the Orient, underpins the *Orientalisation* of the Eastern Other by the Occidental Ego. Said illustrates this by reference to Flaubert's depiction of Kuchek Hanam his paradigmatic "Oriental" woman:

There is little consent to be found, for example, in...Flaubert's encounter with an Egyptian courtesan...she never spoke of herself, she never represented her emotions, presence or history. He spoke for and represented her. (O 5-6)

However, as mentioned earlier, by the end of the First World War the nature of the power relationship between colonised and coloniser upon which Orientalism is predicated had changed. In the Alexandria Quartet Durrell provides, through his depiction of David Mountolive, a stereotype of a young British Orientalist in Egypt. However, the Egypt of the Quartet is the Egypt of the twentieth century; Durrell began writing the Quartet in the

mid nineteen-fifties in an atmosphere impregnated with the political and cultural anxieties that accompanied decolonisation. In this changed world, the Orientalism of the young David Mountolive is not the uncomplicated projection of power from a dominant Europe to a submissive Orient. Historical events have forced the dialectic between Europe and the Orient from the stage of thesis, the right of a “superior” Europe to dominate the "Orient", to that of antithesis: the struggle between the dominator and the dominated concerning the right to rule. From this antithesis the Quartet anticipates some sort of synthesis, whereby the right of Europe to rule in the East is compromised or curtailed. Such a settlement, of course, must include the “new Egyptians” represented in the Quartet by the Hosnanis.

In the tetralogy, Durrell's dyed-in-the-wool imperialists would have had little inkling of the internal weaknesses inherent in Empire and the threat posed to the integrity of Empire by the new, educated indigenous elites that had arisen within its territories. Thus, as Pursewarden points out to Mountolive, whilst Brigadier Maskelyne is able to conceive of “ ‘a good show for the Raj’ ” or “ ‘not such a good show for the Raj’ ” he is too single-minded ever to be able to conceive of a really bad show for the bloody Raj.” (M 107) In the Levant Trilogy, another sequence of novels concerned with the British in mid-century Egypt, Olivia Manning attributes a similarly single-minded naivety to one of her protagonists, Simon Boulderstone:

They [Boulderstone, Harriet Pringle and Miss Brownall] arrived in Egypt, fresh and innocent, imbued with the creed in which they had been brought up. They believed that the British Empire was the greatest force for good

the world had ever known. They expected gratitude from the Egyptians and were pained to find themselves barely tolerated. (24)

In a similar, cultural and political environment, David Mountolive is no longer able to project his Orientalist phantasy of Egypt onto his passive subject in the manner suggested in the writings of mid-nineteenth century Orientalists such as Flaubert and Lane.

Mountolive's Orientalism is still an act of imagination (M 22), but rather than being a simple projection on to an Other, Mountolive's naive imaginings at the Hosnani mansion undermine the basis of his European sense of selfhood and objectivity by becoming the "vantage point" (M 22) from which he perceives the world around him. The young Mountolive is no longer the masterful Orientalist studying his subject as if it were an insect under a microscope; rather, he is aware of being a character "inside the canvas his own imagination had painted" (M 22); in mistaking his phantastic projections for reality Mountolive is deluded, Mountolive's Orientalism has become exactly an ideology in the Marxian sense of ideology as "false consciousness". Marxist literary critic Christopher Hampton (3) describes how such ideology is generated by the class which controls it; as a result, ideology 'throws up idealised reflections of these underlying conditions' which are transformed into 'eternal laws of nature and reason'. Thus, although the ideas, values and beliefs of politically and economically dominant groups are represented as being "natural" and "permanent", in reality they are the "historical and transitory products of the changing social process that shapes people's lives" and are "an indirect and often distorted reflection of that struggle for rights and needs".

Thus, armed with his self-deceiving Orientalist ideology, Mountolive feels that

the “open sesame of language” has allowed him to “penetrate” a ‘foreign country, foreign moeurs’ (M 22). Just as Durrell described himself as a “third-generation Anglo-Indian”, so David Mountolive is a third-generation Orientalist: Mountolive's father, a scholar of Pali had long ago gone native and retreated to “a Buddhist lodge near Madras.” (M 98) Mountolive junior's knowledge of Oriental languages is a key, an “open sesame” (the phrase derives from *Alfi Lailin wa Laila*, the collection of stories set in tenth-century Baghdad but written in thirteenth-century Cairo; the collection is known in English as “The Thousand and One Nights” and was, via the translations of Lane and Burton, a prime source of Orientalist imagery during the nineteenth-century); however, this “open sesame” would not allow Mountolive to penetrate the secrets of his Oriental subject in the way that his father's generation of Orientalists had done. Rather than unlock a country, the linguistic key held by David Mountolive fatally unlocks the psycho-sexual recesses of his own mind to the influences of the Oriental “Other”. David Mountolive uses the word “penetration” to describe his entry into the world of the Hosnanis, this word carries obvious sexual nuances. However, when David Mountolive does get to penetrate an Egyptian woman sexually, Leila Hosnani turns out to be nothing like Flaubert's Kuchek Hanem, who could neither “speak for herself nor represent herself”.

David Mountolive was effectively abandoned by his father as a result of his father's “going native”; Mountolive grows up as a mummy's boy. Durrell describes Mountolive's last night in England on the eve of his return to Egypt as Ambassador in terms which suggest mother-son incest:

... his mother overheard his groans and knew from old experience what they meant; she materialised out of the darkness by his bed bringing the

comfort of ancient familiarity and the one specific which, since childhood, she had used to comfort his distress. She always kept it handy now, in the cupboard beside her bed. Salad oil, warmed in a teaspoon over a candle-flame. He felt the warmth of the oil penetrate and embalm his brain, while his mother's voice upon the darkness soothed him with promises of relief.

(M 100)

Durrell portrays the would-be Orientalist Mountolive as possessing an infantile mother-fixated sexuality. Mountolive might fancy that in penetrating Leila's body he is, by extension, penetrating Egypt herself. However, it is the feminine, supposedly passive Egyptian woman Leila, a personified Egypt, that psychologically penetrates Mountolive. In a similar vein, during the fishing expedition on Mareotis which opens Mountolive, the future ambassador appears to fantasise about the possibility of sexual penetration by Narouz Hosnani, the Fisher King fertility figure, as the homoeroticism of the following passage, replete with images suggesting anal sex, shows:

Behind him he could hear the hare-lipped younger brother Narouz grunting at every thrust of the pole while the lurch of the boat echoed in his loins. The mud, thick as molasses, dripped back into the water with a slow flob flob, and the pole sucked lusciously. It was very beautiful, but it stank so: yet to his surprise he found he rather enjoyed the rotting smells of the estuary... "Narouz," he said, "I am so happy," as he listened to his own unhurried heart-beats. The youth gave his sly hissing laugh and said: "Good, good," ducking his head. "But this is nothing. Wait. We are closing

in." Mountolive smiled. "Egypt" he said to himself as one might repeat the name of a woman. "Egypt". (M 12)

Whereas the earlier generations of Orientalists had "penetrated" Egypt to make "her" theirs, Mountolive phantasises about being "penetrated" by the very Egypt he seeks to control.

At the end of his introduction to Orientalism, Edward Said states that his purpose in writing the book was to contribute to "a better understanding of the way cultural domination has operated." (28) Said suggests eliminating the terms "Orient" and "Occident" altogether' (O 28) and quotes from the Marxist critic Raymond Williams who calls for "an unlearning of the inherent dominative mode". In his 1958 work, Culture and Society 1780-1950: Coleridge to Orwell Williams asserts the need to:

... move towards a more actual and more active conception of human beings and relationships [this] is to realise a new freedom. Where this can be experienced, the whole substance of one's thinking is transformed. There is a further shift in experience, cognate with this, when we think again about human growth, and its human tending, in a spirit other than the long dominative mode. (335)

In many respects, the young Mountolive is anticipating the advice of Said and Williams. In his relationship with Leila and in allowing his sexualised and romanticised view of Egypt to "penetrate" him, Mountolive is trying to break away from the old dichotomy between Occident and Orient: he is seeking to transcend the "long dominative mode" of

the British occupation of Egypt. Nevertheless, Mountolive is restricted in his attempts to go beyond the boundaries imposed by the political realities of the Occupation. Moreover, the 'canvas his own imagination had painted' is in itself only another Orientalist panorama of Egypt, even if Mountolive is not aware of it. Mountolive is classically Orientalist in viewing Egypt as an unchanging essence; Mountolive's description of Egypt as seen from the perspective of the Hosnani estate, a feudal Egypt unchanged for centuries (M 22), hardly corresponds to the realities of the world of the "new Egyptian" Hosnanis. These misconceptions lead the naive Mountolive to make a fatal error: he fails to see how he is being manipulated by the Hosnanis. The Hosnanis are far from being the passive subjects of Orientalist lore; rather they are complicit in a long-term plan to get the British out of Egypt. The Hosnanis play on Mountolive's well-intentioned innocence; he is being set up so as to see only that which the Hosnanis wish him to see. Even the youthful Mountolive's affair with Leila is initiated at the suggestion of Faltaus, Leila Hosnani's crippled husband (M 30); this affair sets in motion a chain of events that will span three decades and will lead, ultimately, to the humiliation of Ambassador Sir David Mountolive in the house of the child prostitutes (M 287 - 295).

Whilst the young Mountolive's impulse to follow Williams and Said and "unlearn the inherent dominative mode" might have been laudable in a writer or an artist, it is hardly a fitting attitude of mind for a future colonial administrator. Thus, the young Mountolive is riven with psychological tensions and contradictions: he is confused over the nature of his sexuality; his Orientalist mindscape sits uneasily with his humane and humanistic impulses which, in turn, contradict the imperatives of his chosen profession. His heart tells him that his personified Egypt should be an equal partner in an honest relationship, whilst his professional training tells him that Egypt must be dominated:

Mountolive is left confused and dis-orientated. Leila Hosnani is, however, older and wiser than Mountolive; she is also more sexually experienced, more cultured, better-educated and better read than he is (M 31). The would-be penetrator of foreign *moeurs* soon feels "... the vertiginous pleasure of losing an old self and growing a new one to replace it...He had begun transplanting a whole huge world intact from his imagination into the soil of his new life." (M 22) Here, Mountolive is experiencing a slippage of the contours of his European, masculine selfhood at the hands of a feminised, Orientalised 'Other'. Such a slippage would have been unimaginable to the Orientalists of Flaubert's "dominative" generation.

However, the figure of Sir David Mountolive does not correspond directly that of any historical British diplomat. Donald Kaczvinsky points out ("Chronology" 594) that the chronology of the career of Sir David Mountolive closely parallels that of Sir Miles Lampson (later Lord Killearn), who arrived in Egypt in the summer of 1934 as British High Commissioner in Egypt, becoming Britain's first Ambassador to Egypt in 1936, a post which he held until 1946. Nevertheless, the historical Sir Miles Lampson was quite unlike the confused, vulnerable and dithering Sir David Mountolive of the Quartet. An imposing figure of 6' 4", Lampson was an ardent imperialist in the mould of Lord Cromer. In many ways, Lampson was ill-suited for the role of Ambassador to an independent Egypt. Historian of the modern Arab world Peter Mansfield records that "...most Egyptian politicians were overawed by Lampson's personality...but Lampson scarcely bothered to conceal his contempt for the Egyptian monarchy and its representative to whom he was in the habit of referring to as 'that boy'" (272); Durrell scholar Anne Zahlan notes that "Unlike the ineffectual and always gentle David

Mountolive of the Quartet, Sir Miles was awe-inspiring, aggressive and arrogant..." ("Destruction" 10).

Thus, Lord Killearn is unlikely to be a direct source for David Mountolive.

MacNiven suggests that Durrell's friend Sir Walter Smart, who was Oriental Councillor at the British Embassy in Cairo during the Second World War, as a possible source for Mountolive, since Smart, who was married to an Egyptian woman Amy Nimr. Nimr was the daughter of the founder of a major Arabic language newspaper. Like Leila she combined "a great erudition with an almost childlike love of ingenuousness" (241). In Spirit of Place (72-3) Durrell mentions that Smart ("Smartie") was fluent in French, Greek, Persian and Arabic, and that he was a scholar of the Orient, a collector and a patron of the arts. If Killearn was a survival from Victorian Imperialism, then Smart represents the more "humane" Orientalism of the changed world of the mid-twentieth century. The Quartet's David Mountolive is neither Killearn nor Smart. Rather, he is a composite figure who combines elements of both men, along with something from various characters that Durrell had met in his career in the British Diplomatic Service. Rather than representing any one individual, Mountolive of the Quartet is an allegorical representation of late-Empire itself who embodies aspects of the movement towards the "actual and active" concept of human relationships advocated by Williams and Said. David Mountolive represents the well-meaning aspects of the British Empire in Egypt in pre-War years, the generation of do-gooding Imperialists who took it upon themselves to take up the paternalistic "white man's burden". These Imperialists were no longer simply colonial overlords: liberal concepts of duty to the Empire's subjects had replaced the outright economic exploitation of the previous century. On the other hand, the British were still foreign rulers in an alien land who still had to maintain a presence in Egypt to

deter their European rivals. Additionally, Britain had to contend with political agitation from the various contending and competing parties, such as Arab nationalists, Islamists, liberals, communists and monarchists, that had a stake in shaping Egypt's post-colonial future. From being colonial overlords, the administrators of the British occupation were having to adjust to the counter-action which the "antithesis" of the colonised was working on the "thesis" of Imperial domination; Sir Walter Smart exemplifies this tendency. However, the tetralogy's David Mountolive lacked Smart's sophistication; the result was confusion and prevarication.

This confusion and prevarication is reflected in the relationship between David Mountolive and Leila Hosnani. To Mountolive, Leila was, like Egypt herself, a "beautiful enigma"; however, the inexperienced young Mountolive was unable to see beyond this stereotype represented by this "enigmatic" Oriental. He writes that, "in her naturalness [was] a perfect simplicity of spirit and in her extravagant nature a temperament which had been denied its true unfolding." (M 23) This denial of Leila's "true unfolding" was the result of her arranged marriage to a man much older than herself which resembled "a merger between two companies" (M 23). Leila had wanted to be a doctor, but she was "unable to escape "the narrow confines of Egyptian thought and society." (M 24) Durrell's depiction of Leila is one of an intelligent, ambitious woman frustrated by the limitations that the society in which she was born placed upon women. Thus considered, Durrell's depiction of Leila realistically encapsulates the dilemma faced by many educated Egyptian women of his day, who were forced to sacrifice the professional ambitions which education had aroused within them on the altar of traditional family values.

However, just as the character of David Mountolive can be read as an allegory

standing for particular aspects of the British Imperial psyche, so the character of his lover can be read allegorically. Leila's confinement in the Hosnani estate notwithstanding, Durrell's depiction of Leila is positive and sympathetic. Leila entertained "a hunger for the world of books" (M 23); she had completed her studies at Cairo "brilliantly". Leila had visited Paris several times and had "fell in love with it as we all do"; beautiful and rich, she was known in Alexandrian society as "the dark swallow". Yet Leila was no idle beauty; she had an active curiosity about the world. To satisfy this curiosity she "subscribed to books and magazines in the four languages she knew as well as, perhaps better than her own" (M 24-5).

In his History (338-9) Albert Hourani offers an insight into the lifestyle of the new indigenous bourgeoisie in the rapidly changing Middle East between the two World Wars. In this revived Arab world the new mass-media developed rapidly in parallel with a reformed Arabic language and Cairo's newspapers were read throughout the Arab world. In Cairo and Beirut educational, scientific and literary publishing houses multiplied; there were cinemas in Cairo and Alexandria from 1914. In 1925 the first Egyptian movie was made, based on the first modern Arabic language novel, Mohammad Hussien Haikal's Zainab (1913). By 1939 Cairo had become the centre of the new Middle Eastern film industry and by the eve of the Second World War local and national radio stations broadcast talks, music and news in Arabic across the Arab world. This revival of Arabic language, literature and culture, and the parallel rise of Arabic-language mass-media would gradually bring about a cultural and linguistic homogenisation of the Middle East, which in turn would lead to calls for Arab unity and would strengthen the region's specifically pan-Arabist political movements. This was the rapidly modernising Arab world that Durrell entered as a refugee from Greece in May 1941. The dynamic

growth of the new Arabic language media and literature occurring at that time makes Durrell's assertion that "nobody could not think or feel...in the dimensionless obsolescence of Arabic" (M 25) seem strangely anachronistic. Maybe this ignorance is understandable since, as Hourani observes, "more Arabs spoke French or English [but] few Europeans knew Arabic or had any concern for Islamic culture". Durrell has Leila Hosnani "pleasantly astonished" by the Mountolive's "respectable Arabic" (M 25). The Arabic cultural renaissance of the first half of the twentieth-century was in large part underpinned by Arabic-speaking Middle Easterners translating the culture of the Enlightenment into their own language. Thus, fluency in one or more European languages was an identifying attribute of the "new Egyptians" typified by Durrell's Hosnanis. Hourani asserts that "Travel, education and the new media" helped to create a world of taste and ideas which these "new Egyptians" shared, and that the phenomenon of bilingualism was widespread; indeed "French might virtually replace Arabic as the mother tongue" among this new social class who would avidly take in "foreign newspapers or broadcasts". Indeed, the intellectuals of this class 'needed to read more in English or French than in Arabic" and were in the habit of going to Europe for the summer and might "spend several months there". This Europeanised lifestyle led to changes in the tastes and attitudes of the "new Egyptians", "different ways of furnishing a room [and] entertaining friends; different modes of dressing, particularly for women, whose fashions reflected those of Paris." (History 339)

If Hourani's description of the new Egyptian bourgeoisie is compared to Durrell's depiction of the Hosnanis many points of congruence will be apparent. However, Leila Hosnani accords with Hourani's description of the "new Egyptians" extraordinarily closely. She is a brilliant, multi-lingual graduate of the new Cairo University, a

vacationer in Europe and lover of Paris. Leila is an avid reader of books and journals in several European tongues and a follower of European taste and fashion. In this way Leila is an allegorical figure standing for a certain Egyptian *type* from the inter-war years. She represents a certain attitude among the new, indigenous bourgeoisie. She is a particular vision of educated Egyptian womanhood, an exemplary representative of a new social class of growing political importance who share a vision of an independent Egypt.

The class of new Egyptians which is allegorised in the person of Leila Hosnani founded a pro-independence political movement called the *Wafd*. The allegorical reading of Mountolive which follows derives its historical and political perspectives on Egyptian history in the inter-war period from a range of authoritative texts which deal with modern Egyptian history from Western and Egyptian points of view: George Annesley's The Rise of Modern Egypt: a Century and a Half of Egyptian History 1798 - 1957; Hamid Enayat's Modern Islamic Political Thought; Albert Hourani's Thought and his History; Taha Hussein's Wafdist cultural manifesto of 1938 The Future Culture of Egypt; Khalidi and Anderson's The Origins of Arab Nationalism; Peter Mansfield's The British in Egypt; Janice Terry's The Wafd 1919 - 1952: Cornerstone of Egyptian Power; and Warburg and Kupferschmidt's Islam, Nationalism and Radicalism in Egypt and the Sudan. These works outline the background to the formation of the *Wafd*. By 1918 the British occupation of Egypt was thirty years old; the country had become a British Protectorate, the British High Commissioner and his advisors were the *de facto* rulers of

the Egyptian Sultanate during the First World War. Abusive soldiers of the British Empire filled the streets of Cairo and Alexandria, and the Great War had had a devastating effect on the Egyptian economy. Annesely describes the situation in Egypt¹¹ at that time, "The war years witnessed a marked falling-off in British diplomacy especially in Egypt; promises were broken, misunderstandings created...even the *fellahin* became estranged, with the result that Egyptian nationalism was welded into a solid block." (320) By the early years of the twentieth century Egypt was blessed with a Europeanised intellectual elite that rivalled that of Europe itself; these organised themselves into a delegation (in Arabic a "*wafd*") to negotiate with the British for independence immediately after the end of the Great War in 1919 (71-4). This *Wafd* was headed by Sa'ad Zaghlul, a talented lawyer of moderate nationalist views who had risen to become Minister of Education in 1906 and Vice-President of the Legislative Assembly from 1913 until the outbreak of the Great War, when the assembly was abolished by the British. The *Wafd* presented themselves to High Commissioner Wingate two days after the Armistice was signed, 13th November 1918, their demand: *istiqlal tamm* -- complete independence (79). It is significant that the action of the Quartet also begins in late 1918, with the young David Mountolive's stay at the Hosnani mansion and his affair with Leila Hosnani. The correspondences in date between Mountolive's first encountering the Hosnanis and the founding of the *Wafd* reinforce the idea that the Hosnanis are an allegorisation of the *Wafd*. These correspondences can be traced through

¹¹ During the Great War, Egypt was in a diplomatically ambiguous position. Turkey's entry into the war created a situation which Britain could not tolerate. Despite the British occupation, Egyptians were still nominally Ottoman subjects and the Khedive paid tribute to Constantinople. In practice, however, Egypt had long since ceased to be part of the Ottoman Empire; rather she was part of the British Empire, although this fact had been concealed by a diplomatic fiction. After the Ottoman Empire joined the Central Powers, Britain declared all ties between Egypt and Constantinople severed and made Egypt a British protectorate in December 1918. With Turkish suzerainty over Egypt dissolved, the pro-British Prince Hussein Kamil was installed as Sultan of Egypt. Hussein was succeeded by the autocratic Fu'ad in 1919. During the social unrest of the early 20s, Fa'ud proclaimed himself King of Egypt, a title that the British, fearing popular sentiment, allowed him to retain.

the history of the *Wafd*. Firstly, it is significant that the tetralogy's Hosnanis are Copts. Terry notes that, "The inclusion of the influential Coptic community, the largest Christian minority in Egypt, unified the nation and in the process provided the *Wafd* with some of its most able strategists. Nor should the considerable financial contributions of the Copts be underestimated." (72) Naguib Mahfouz has one of his Coptic characters, Riyad Qaldas, refer to this state of affairs in Sugar Street the third volume of the Cairo Trilogy:

All of us Copts are Wafdist. That is because the Wafd Party represents true nationalism. It's not a religious, Turkish-orientated party like the National Party. The Wafd is a populist party. It will make Egypt a nation that provides freedom for all Egyptians, without regard to ethnic origin or religious affiliation. (135)

Mahfouz has Riyad speak these words in the same early nineteen-thirties time-frame as Durrell has Darley arrive in Alexandria: to some of the less politically astute among Britain's colonial administrators, the *Wafd* may well have seemed to be "a conspiracy among the Copts" as Durrell's Brigadier Maskelyne entitled his intelligence report into the activities of Nessim Hosnani (M 108). Warburg and Kupferschmidt also note the prominent role played by Copts (including the Ghali family) in the *Wafd*, "...the common pursuit of both Muslims and Copts [was] to achieve their goal: independence. Five Coptic personalities must be mentioned in this context: Sinut Hanna, Murqus Hanna, Wisa Wasif, Wasif Ghali and Makram 'Ubayd." (313) The activities of these men correspond closely to those of Durrell's Coptic conspiritors, such as the Hosnanis and the

superbly named Serapamoun, "...by far the most important of the Coptic cotton-kings" who had "...played a decisive role in supporting the community movement which Nessim had initiated" (M 217); the name Serapamoun recalls the hybridic Egyptian-Hellenic deities of Classical Alexandria, as do the names of many prominent Copts in real-life Egypt. The prominent Copts in the Wafdist "community movement" included Sinut Hanna, a Coptic member of the legislative assembly, who propagandised for the *Wafd* with a slogan which recalls Narouz's nationalist preaching, "Nationalism is our religion and independence, our life", a slogan which even drew praise from the religious leader of Egypt's Sunni Muslims, the *Sheikh al Azhar* (313). Likewise, Murkus Hanna, Wasif Ghali and Wisa Wasif were wealthy Coptic landowners, "cotton-kings" who dedicated their lives and their ample resources to the Wafdist cause: Wasif Ghali was the second son of the assassinated Coptic Prime Minister of Egypt, Butrus Ghali. Like Nessim Hosnani, Makram 'Ubayd was a Europeanised Copt who maintained close friendships with figures in the British administration in Egypt. Warburg and Kupferschmidt mention 'Ubayd as "the most outstanding political personality among the Copts" (314), a description corresponding to Hosnani senior's description of his son Nessim as, "A true Copt, brilliant, reserved" (M 44). George Khayyat, a Copt who converted to Protestantism, but who became a member of the Coptic congress, gave the *Wafd* another slogan which recalls Narouz's preaching, "Religion belongs to God, the fatherland and to all the citizens". When asked about the *Wafd's* attitude toward Egypt's different religions Khayyat replied that the *Wafd's* policy was for "equal rights and equal duties for all" (314); the ecumenism of Khayyat's Wafdism finds its echo in Nessim Hosnani's statement that "for us there was no real war between the Cross and the Crescent. That was an entirely Western European invention... the Moslem was never a persecutor of the Copts

on religious grounds.” (M 45) The *Wafd* were actively supported by prominent members of Egypt's Jewish community as early as 1919. In the thirties, in reaction to the formation of pro-German Islamist groups, the *Association de la Jeunesse Juive Égyptienne* was formed. Its Arabic language newspaper *Al Shams* (The Sun) called for full Jewish participation in all aspects of Egypt's political and cultural life and the adoption of the Arabic language by Egyptian Jews. The Association was formally affiliated to the *Wafd* and called for “true Egyptian Judaism -- patriotic, Arabic-speaking, wearing the *tarbush* rather than the European hat”, along with the withdrawal of British military forces from Egypt (361). Significantly, even Egypt's Zionists declared their sympathy with the aspirations of the Wafdist Nationalists, whose purely Egyptian nationalism did not conflict with Zionist aspirations for a Jewish homeland in Palestine in the way that pan-Arab nationalism did; indeed, left-wing Zionist groups such as *Halvri HaTzair* and *HaShomer HaTzair* groups formerly co-operated with the *Wafd*. Warburg and Kupferschmidt observe that culturally and politically Egyptian Jews and Christians “found themselves in exactly the same position” (362) as they tried to articulate a political programme surrounded, as they saw it, by an “Arab tide” (M 119) and living in a country groaning under an unwanted foreign occupation.

This evidence of Zionist co-operation with the *Wafd* is significant when the relationship to Durrell's fictional Hosnanis to the historical Wafdists is considered. In the tetralogy Nessim Hosnani's wife Justine was an Alexandrian Jew; moreover, Durrell has his imaginary Coptic conspirators involved in gunrunning with the historical Zionist underground fighting the British presence in Palestine. Nessim wins Justine's hand in marriage when he disclosed that, “...since the French and the British have lost control in the Middle East...We...are being gradually engulfed by the Arab tide, the Moslem tide.

Some of us are trying to work against it; Armenians, Copts, Jews, and Greeks here in Egypt, while others elsewhere are also organising themselves.” (M 199) Nessim asks Justine rhetorically who will take the place of Britain and France in the Middle East? His answers by saying that “there is only one nation which can determine the future of everything in the Middle East. Everything – and, by a paradox even the standard of living of the miserable Moslems themselves depends upon it, its power and resources.” This country is “Palestine”, for Nessim continues, “If only the Jews can win their freedom, we can all be at ease. It is the only hope for us, the dispossessed *foreigners*” (M 200), for while the French and British have “no longer the will to fight or even to think”; recalling the collaboration between the Coptic-dominated *Wafd* and the *Association de la Jeunesse Juive Égyptienne* Nessim continues “...with the Jews there is something *young* [Durrell’s emphasis] there: the cockpit of Europe in these rotten marshes of a dying race.” (M 201)

When Nessim’s plot is discovered, Justine flees to Palestine to work on a “Jewish Kibbutz” (J 202), which Clea describes as a “Communist settlement” (J 211); Justine’s connection with a leftist kibbutz corresponds to the Wafd’s connections with left-wing Zionist groupings such as *HaShomer HaTzair*. Durrell has been criticised for “smearing” the Copts with the Quartet’s fictitious Coptic conspiracy. MacNiven explains Durrell’s incorporation of a gunrunning plot into the Quartet by having Durrell use aspects of the anti-British uprising in Cyprus, “A phase of Cyprus’ complicated history that was to find its way into the Alexandria Quartet, albeit with a shift in location and actors, was the part the Cypriots had played years earlier in running guns to Israel to arm the Irgun, the Stern Gang and armed Jewish insurrection... Larry would transfer this activity wholesale to the Copts of Egypt -- who were innocent of the charge.” (Biography 423) Since Justine was written with the noise of EOKA bombs and bullets reverberating in Durrell’s ears

(MacNiven *Biography* 433-6), it may well be the case that Cypriot gun-running to insurrectionist Zionists gave Durrell the idea of using a gun-running plot to underpin the action in the *Quartet*. However, the tetralogy's Coptic plot as easily be based on British perceptions of the *Wafd*. For the die-hard Imperialists in the British administration, who regretted the fact that Egypt had never been formally incorporated into Empire, all Egyptian independence movements were "conspiracies". Thus, the *Wafd* were "the Extremists" (Terry 94); these Imperialists could only see the *Wafd* as being anti-British, dominated by Copts, and as co-operating with the anti-British Zionist insurgents in Palestine. Warburg and Kupferschmidt emphasise the extent to which Egyptian nationalism, Wafdism and the Copts were becoming evermore interdependent during the inter-War period; thus, with the *Wafd* "the national movement of the Copts received a new dynamic impetus" (314), and the *Wafd* had become "the political home of the Copts." (316)

Like Durrell's Hosnanis, the *Wafd* were Egyptian nationalists, not pan-Arabists. The Wafdist national consciousness had its grounding in what Terry calls "the long and glorious history of Nile civilisation" (72); thus, the *Wafd* drew on the collective "historic sense" of all Egypt's historical periods, especially the Pharoenic and Hellenic epochs. The leading figure of the Egyptian literary and cultural Enlightenment of the first half of the twentieth-century was the Wafdist Taha Hussein (1889 - 1967). Born blind in the rural Delta, Hussein was destined to become a *qar'i* or Qur'an reciter ("It was no surprise that he [the *qar'i* at Memlik's *wird*] should be word-perfect, for in Egypt the blind preachers have a faculty for memorizing which is notorious [M 265-6]); instead, although he had begun his studies at the Islamic university *al Azhar*, the rare opportunity of a scholarship enabled Hussein to embark upon a scholarly career that would gain him a

doctorate in the Classics from the Sourbon. Back in Egypt Hussein was soon acknowledged as both the *doyen* of Arabic style and a master of the classical and modern languages of Europe; Hussein was also a novelist, poet, philosopher, literary and cultural critic and educationalist. Hussein became Dean of the Faculty of Arts at Cairo University and minister of Education in the Wafdist government of the late nineteen-thirties. Hussein's 1938 book, Mustaqbal al-Thaqafa (translated into English as The Future Culture of Egypt) had a significant impact on mid-century Egyptian, Mustaqbal was concerned with the cultural policies and alignment of an independent Egypt. The year of the book's publication is significant, since the Anglo-Egyptian treaty of 1936 had formally ended the British occupation only two years before. In this book Hussein posed an important question:

Is Egypt East or West?...is the Egyptian mind Eastern or Western in its imagination, perception, comprehension, and judgement? More succinctly put: “which is easier for the Egyptian mind, to understand a Chinese or a Japanese, or to understand an Englishman or a Frenchman?”... The Egyptian mind has had no serious contact with the Far Eastern mind; nor did it live comfortably with the Persian mind. The Egyptian mind has had regular, peaceful and mutually beneficial relations only with Greece and the Near East. In short it has been influenced from the earliest times by the Mediterranean Sea and the peoples living around it. (4)

Hussein compares the Turks who dominated Egypt for many centuries to “the barbarian invaders” who invaded the Roman empire but who, nevertheless, came eventually to

embrace all the positive things from Graeco-Roman culture. Hussein lauded the “Three elements of the European mind: Greek civilisation with its literature, philosophy and art; Roman civilisation, with its political institutions and jurisprudence; and Christianity, with its appeal to charity and to good works.” (10) Hussein finds these three elements of the “European mind” also underpinning Egyptian history and the Egyptian interpretation of Islam. He then concludes that “In sum... we will not find any evidence to justify the thesis that there is a fundamental difference between the European and Egyptian minds.” (10) For Hussein, Egypt's goal under the *Wafd* is “to become equal partners in civilisation with the Europeans.” (15) On the Copts Hussein, himself a Muslim secularist, writes, “The Coptic Church is an ancient Egyptian glory, a mainstay of the Egyptian nation...Its new glory must be worthy of its past and we should not permit the religionists to cling to a misguided conservatism that would dim this glory and undermine its greatness.”(139) Thus, both a Philhellenic “Mediterraneanism” and a “Pharohnic” concept of nationalism underpinned the *Wafd*'s educational and cultural policies, defined Wafdist nationalism, and shaped Wafdist ideas on the regional and geo-political orientation of a future independent Egypt. Taha Hussein's views on the significance of the Coptic Church to the rest of Egypt reads almost as if it were a Hosnani manifesto. The elder Hosnani pleads that “we [Copts] are *genus Pharonicus* -- the true descendants of the ancient Egyptians, the true marrow of Egypt” (M 41), while Narouz preaches that, “Our Egypt, our beloved country... The Nile, the green river flowing into our hearts hears its children. They will return to her. Descendants of the Pharaohs, children of Ra, offspring of St. Mark. They will find the birthplace of light.” (M 125) Both rhetorically and in substance Narouz's impassioned pleading for a reborn Egypt echoes Hussein's Wafdist cultural manifesto *Mustaqbal*. Similarly, Hussein's identification of Egyptian with Greek thought recalls the

roles of Nessim Hosnani who represents the Hellenic and Mediterraneanist aspects of Wafdism. The *Wafd* attracted Egypt's literary elite during the nineteen-twenties and 'thirties. Hourani notes that Wafdist ideas were "expounded by a number of gifted writers, not all of them adherents of the *Wafd*, but sharing to some extent a general attitude toward politics and society". These writers, among them figures of the stature of Ahmad Amin, 'Abbas al Aqqad, Tawfiq al Hakim and Taha Hussein were "all masters of Arabic style with a European education' and 'were the first group of novelists in modern Arabic." (*Thought* 325) Thus, the *Wafd* provided the political and cultural context for the emergence of Egyptian literary modernism; simultaneously, it underpins the political allegory embedded in Durrell's *Quartet*.

The *Wafd* were in power throughout most of the nineteen-thirties, when the action of *Justine*, *Balthazar* and *Clea* takes place. Hussein's *The Future Culture of Egypt* was published in Arabic in 1938, and was published in English in 1954 as Durrell was assembling his sources for the tetralogy. Durrell stayed in Egypt from 1941 to 1945; Hourani records that from 1942 to 1944 Taha Hussein was a special advisor to the Egyptian Ministry of Education on the establishment of the University of Alexandria, and from 1944 Hussein was that university's first Rector, a post Hussein retained until his re-appointment as Education Minister beginning in 1950 (*Thought* 338). Given the prominence of Wafdism in war-time Egypt and its status as a counter-weight to the pro-Axis Egyptian monarchy, and given Durrell's employment in the British intelligence services in war-time Egypt, it is hard to believe that Durrell was not familiar with the *Wafd* and prominent Wafdist.

Hourani writes of the University of Alexandria that:

... his [Hussein's] idea was to make it not a replica or overflow of the existing university in Cairo, but a real university free from the pressure of the [British controlled] ministry [of education] or the mob, setting its own standards and attracting the best among students and teachers, open to the Mediterranean, heir of the whole history of Alexandria and a centre of classical humanism. (Thought 338)

Such a project seems likely to have appealed to Durrell, the Philhellene exiled in Alexandria. Durrell's friend in Alexandria, Gaston Zananiri, shared with Hussein's university the goal of reviving a trans-Mediterranean culture (Biography 286). Indeed, as MacNiven relates (Biography 320), Gwynn Williams and others of Durrell's colleagues in the Personal Landscape group of British poets in war-time Egypt had taught at the University of Alexandria, and that Durrell had once considered teaching at the university himself. Again, with this familiarity with the University of Alexandria, the seat of academic Wafdism, it would be highly unlikely that Durrell would have been unfamiliar with the *Wafd*, or with the views of prominent academic Wafdists such as Taha Hussein.

The founding of the *Wafd* in 1919 presented the British with both a dilemma and an opportunity. The dilemma was that a generation after the suppression of the 'Arabi uprising in 1882, the British were faced with an Egyptian independence movement which had wide popular support among Egyptians of all sects, occupations and social classes. The movement had among its founding fathers the very finest cultural, literary, political and legal minds in Egypt, people who had been educated in Europe to the highest level. Moreover, the *Wafd* enjoyed the enthusiastic financial support of Egypt's new, indigenous mercantile class. Such a movement could not simply be suppressed by force of arms as

Ahmad 'Arabi's military *coup* had been. Indeed, the more astute within the British colonial administration saw within Wafdism a potential opportunity for Britain. Weakened economically and militarily after the Great War, Britain was in no position to hold on to all of her colonial possessions by *force majeure*; moreover, the British public had no desire for involvement in the open-ended cycle of colonial wars that had typified the Empire of the late nineteenth-century. On the other hand, Egypt was of vital strategic importance if Britain were to retain India, the jewel in her Imperial crown. A Wafdist Egypt would be pro-European, and if treated well might be pro-British. Such an Egyptian government could easily be persuaded to allow Britain a garrison in Suez to protect the canal. Furthermore, in a Wafdist Egypt Britain would have a political and military ally in the eastern Mediterranean, which could be developed into an important market for British goods. Finally, a pro-British independent Egypt under the *Wafd* would act as a check to other Western powers in the region; and the establishment of a multi-confessional Egyptian nationalist state would alter the wider movement for political independence in the eastern Mediterranean and Middle East in favour of a system of discrete nation states to the detriment of the Islamist and pan-Arabist movements which posed a wider threat to European interests in the region. Terry records High Commissioner Wingate's mixed feelings regarding the original Wafdist delegation of 1919, "I must admit that their attitude was generally correct and...their contentions would appear to have been dictated by pure patriotism". Wingate thought it possible that at long last Egypt's "inarticulate masses" had become articulate and "were about to reap the results of our patient labours of the past forty years", the result of which could be "complete Egyptian regeneration on political lines dear to the British democracy." (80) Thus, Wingate admitted that the attitude of the *Wafd* seemed "generally correct", and

acknowledges the popular, regenerative and democratic aspirations of the party. Terry notes that, aware of the political climate in Egypt in 1919, Wingate supported the idea of Wafdist leader Sa'ad Zaghlul's delegation to London to lobby for independence, "...[Wingate] recognised the climate of Egyptian opinion in 1919 demanded that some concessions be made. He felt that if properly handled the Wafdist leadership would not be intractable, but could be persuaded to work with the British along moderate lines." (96) This, then, was the political climate in real-life Egypt in 1919 when Durrell has young David Mountolive staying with the Hosnanis.

In the allegorical reading of Mountolive which follows, characters in the novel correspond not to particular individuals, but to movements and tendencies within British-Egyptian politics during the inter-war years. As with other characters in the Quartet the name "David Mountolive" has symbolic importance as a "heraldic ideogram": the name refers to the biblical Mount of Olives. In Paradise Lost John Milton describes the Mount of Olives as "that opprobrious hill" (pages 161-2, I: 403), the "hill of corruption" and the "offensive mountain" (page 162, I: 443). This is because, according to the Old Testament King Solomon set up sacred sites dedicated to the gods of Israel's pagan Semitic neighbours, "And the high places that were before Jerusalem, which were on the right hand of the mount of corruption, which Solomon the king of Israel had builded for Ashtoreth the abomination of the Zidonians, and for Chemosh the abomination of the Moabites, and for Milcom the abomination of the children of Ammon the king did defile." (II Kings: 23: 13) Moreover, it was on the Mount of Olives that King David (hence David Mountolive) went to weep barefoot following the rebellion of Absalom (II Samuel 16: 30), Jehovah's punishment for David's "great sin", his adultery with Bath-Sheba and his murder of her husband, Uriah the Hittite (II Samuel 11). Furthermore,

Solomon's apostasy was the result of his loving "strange women", including an Egyptian, "the daughter of Pharaoh." (I Kings 1 -25). In the New Testament Jesus' Olivet discourse predicts "wars and commotions" and that "nation shall rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom." (Luke 21:10) Solomon's Israel marked the high-water mark of the short-lived Israelite empire, yet the *nadir* of Israelite power rapidly followed Israel's Solomonic *zenith*. Something similar was true of the British Empire in the post-War years, where the pre-War Empire on which "the sun never set" almost totally disintegrated in the fifteen years between the end of the Second World War and the publication of the last volume of the *Quartet* in 1960. Sir David Mountolive, representative of the last, decadent phase of the British Empire in Egypt had an adulterous love-affair with a "daughter of Pharaoh", Leila Hosnani ("...we are *genus Pharonicus*, the true descendants of the ancients" [M 41]); further, it was loving such a "strange" or "Other" woman that caused Ambassador Mountolive to commit such a serious dereliction of duty as wilfully turning a blind-eye to the Hosnanis' Coptic-Zionist plot, thereby accelerating the decent of Britain's star in the Levant.

Thus, summarising the *dramatis personae* of Durrell's allegorical drama, Nessim Hosnani can be viewed as representing the educated, Europeanised, cosmopolitan indigenous elite of Alexandria and their representative in the *Wafd*. Narouz, on the other hand, stands for the populist Egyptian nationalist that were attached to the *Wafd*; Leila Hosnani is the *Wafd* itself. Faltaus, her crippled and dying husband corresponds to the earlier generation which kept the torch of Egyptian nationalism alight during the years which followed the British suppression of the 'Arabi revolt. Brigadier Maskelyne represents the die-hard remnant from the Imperialism of the nineteenth century who thought that the British Empire could and should continue into the twentieth century

unchanged. David Mountolive corresponds to the newer twentieth-century generation of Imperialists in the mould of High Commissioner Wingate and Sir Walter Smart who were prepared to admit to the presence of things worthy and progressive in Egyptian society of the first half of the twentieth-century, and who were prepared to entertain the idea of some kind of self-rule for the country. Pursewarden is a hapless British writer who wanders into Egypt during this crucial period in her history without fully understanding the significance what goes on in front of his eyes; thus, Pursewarden's position parallels that of Durrell and his colleagues writing for the poetry journal Personal Landscape as reluctant exiles in war-time Egypt.

It must be stressed, however, that this schema is not a simplistic template to be imposed on Mountolive in order to arrive at a final, authoritative and crudely historicist reading of the novel. As has been discussed, the Quartet is a complex interplay between differing points of view, containing a plethora of philosophical, literary, mythological, psychological, cultural, social and political sub-texts played out with ironic humour against vividly painted Egyptian backdrops. The purpose of this allegorical reading of Mountolive is not to impose a rigid historicist conformity on to the novel; it is to uncover a hidden political history within the most objective and "straightforward" of the novels that make up the Quartet, the better to understand the historical underpinnings of the tetralogy as a whole. Its conventional and naturalistic form notwithstanding, Mountolive provides the key to the fuller understanding of the Quartet. Durrell himself confirmed the centrality of Mountolive to the rest of the Quartet when he wrote to Henry Miller that, "This big novel [Mountolive] is as tame and naturalistic in form as a Hardy; yet it is the fulcrum of the Quartet and the rationale of the thing... You may yawn your head off over Mountolive and whisper, 'Shucks'." (Biography 327)

The historical *Wafd* was pro-independence and against the British occupation, but it was also Anglophile. The early Wafdists, Sa'ad Zaghlul among them, did not want enmity between Britain and Egypt, but a "new relationship". Distinguished Wafdists such as Taha Hussein envisaged Egypt and the nations of Europe as "equals and partners" (Hourani Thought 330). The love affair between Leila Hosnani and the young Mountolive embodies the Wafdist desire for a "new relationship" (Terry 96) with Britain and the attraction that idea had among some within the British administration. However, Mountolive harboured confused feelings toward Leila. His emotions toward Leila rubbed up against his upper-class English education, "an education not to feel" and Mountolive's "social man" within him was "overripe" before the "inner man had grown up." (M 18) Moreover, his textbook on Egypt, E.W. Lane's Manners, alluded to by Durrell's reference to Mountolive's learning Egypt's "*Moeurs*" (M 22) was nearly a century out of date; Lane's Orientalist classic was an irrelevance with regard to the modern Egypt represented by Leila. Mountolive's externalised Imperial self, a mode of selfhood on the very cusp of anachronism, was unused to the "introspection" (M 28) that this intimate encounter with an Other demanded. The result is that Mountolive is confused, almost repelled, by Leila's Anglophilia, since it does not fit in with the image of the "Oriental" which he presumes he has fallen in love with (M 29-30). Rather than come to terms with Leila as she is, Mountolive attempts to project the nineteenth-century Orientalist visions of "Burton, Beckford, Lady Hester" (M 22) onto Leila. Mountolive and Leila are moving in opposing trajectories: he wants to use Leila as a way into the "Orient":

Through her eyes he began to see Egypt once more -- but extended through a new dimension. To have a grasp of the language was nothing, he

now realised; for Leila exposed the hollowness of knowledge when pitted against understanding' (M 31).

On the other hand, trapped by the dead weight of Egyptian tradition into a life of domesticity at Karm Abu Girg, Leila, like the *Wafd* and Hournai's new Egyptians, looked to Europe:

Naturally, she went several times to Paris with her parents and indeed fell in love with it as we all do, but when it came to attempting to breach the barriers of Egyptian habit and to escape the parental net altogether -- escape into a life which might have nourished a clever brain -- there she struck upon the rock of her parents' conservatism. She must marry and make Egypt her home, they said coldly, and selected for her among the rich men of their acquaintance the kindest and most able they could find. (M 24)

Mountolive's confusion in his relationship with Leila Hosnani corresponds to the confused approach that the new generation of twentieth-century Imperialists adopted toward the *Wafd*. In 1919, Imperial bureaucrats in London were convinced that the *Wafd*, the "extremists", were simply enemies, and they conspired to undermine Zaghlul's delegation before it had even left Egypt. Others in Egypt, such as Commissioner Wingate, could write admiringly of the *Wafd's* "generally correct, articulate patriotism" of an "Egyptian regeneration" (Terry 80). Similarly, Durrell illustrates the incredulity felt by the Imperial mindset when the real Other replaces its Orientalist representation by

having the love-struck young Mountolive “in 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.” (M 32-3)

Like Taha Hussein, Leila does not want to be “of the East”. Hussein adopted Kipling's adage “East is East and West is West, and never the twain shall meet” but used this as a statement on Egypt's Europeanness, adding: “[the Khedive] Isma'il's statement that Egypt is part of Europe should not be regarded as some kind of boast or exaggeration, since our country has always been part of Europe as far as intellectual and cultural life is concerned, in all its forms and branches.” (9) Likewise, Leila had dreamt of continuing her studies in Europe; unfortunately, the “dark confines” of traditional thought and society had prevented this (M 24). Taha Hussein would have sympathised with Leila's predicament, since, as Hourani points out, the emancipation of women and their access to all levels of higher education was part of his Wafdist educational programme (Thought 325).

When Leila met the young Mountolive, she had long been living in a sexless marriage to her husband who was twenty years her senior. As with Clifford Chatterley in D.H. Lawrence's 1928 novel Lady Chatterley's Lover, Faltaus Hosnani's “progressive atrophy of the musculature” had long since confined him to a wheelchair (M 19). Leila's “lonely life” had rendered her “unprepared” for the arrival of the young Mountolive and she flirted with Mountolive in front of her husband with “pleasurable delight”, her hands “ringless”. Leila's enrapture with the young Mountolive corresponds to the position of the early Wafdist who saw in the younger generation of British administrators the possibility of securing a “reasonable agreement with Great Britain” which would give Egypt “internal autonomy” but which would still “safeguard legitimate British interests” with a

"liberal" constitution for an "independent" Egypt in which "Muslims and Copts were united in the sacred bond of national loyalty." (Hourani *Thought*, 325) To achieve this, Wafdist leader Sa'ad Zaghlul "appealed to the liberal conscience of Britain." (324)

However, Arab nationalist and Islamist critics of the *Wafd* frequently berated the party for its uncritical view of European culture and civilisation, especially that of that of the British occupiers of Egypt. Thus, Leila's husband, the crippled senior Hosnani who "told me [Leila] to take you [Mountolive] for a lover" (M 30), is observed by Narouz practising loading and aiming his pistol repeating "And now if she should fall in love, you know what you must do." (M 38) Whether Leila, Mountolive, or both would be on the receiving end of the senior Hosnani's gun-play is not made clear; however, the old man's jealousy corresponds to real limitations which traditionalist elements in Egyptian society placed on the *Wafd's* Europeanism. For such traditionalist elements there was a fine yet crucial distinction between the *Wafd's* adopting Western methods as a tactic to gain independence for Egypt and the heart-felt Europeanism of important Wafdists such as Taha Hussein. Likewise, in the tetralogy's allegorisation of Egyptian history Faltaus Hosnani distinguished between encouraging Leila's affair with Mountolive as a tactic to save his sexless marriage with her and the possibility that this affair might re-awaken Leila's love of Europe which his marriage to her was arranged to confine.

This tension within the *Wafd* between the traditionalism of the Pharoenic nationalists of the Egyptian interior and the Europe-focused modernity of the *Wafd's* Mediterraneanists comes to the fore during an argument between Nessim and Narouz, when Narouz says to his elder brother: "Mountolive... that British swine... You sold our mother to him Nessim. You knew it would cause our father's death." (M 229) It is Narouz's long-standing resentment of his mother's affair with Mountolive that fuels his

ill-starred desire for Clea, as if Narouz felt that he could undo the harm done by his mother's transgression by himself crossing sexually the barrier separating Orient from Occident. The more-calculating Nessim has, however, better learnt the art of deploying sex in politics: the Mountolive-Leila affair was an ace-in-hand for Nessim, since Ambassador Mountolive's residual affections for Leila and her family bought Nessim valuable time in which to disperse the conspirators once his plot was uncovered. As for the hapless Narouz, he ended up doubly crossed: assassinated, possibly at his brother's command, and spurned on his death-bed by Clea, who had become the object of his psycho-sexual fixation. Narouz's sexual frustration corresponds to the political frustration of Egypt's peasants, for whom Narouz stands as a heraldic ikon, during a period in which Egypt's politics were a three-way fight between the British, the aristocrats of the Pasha class who supported the palace, and the *Wafd*. The political frustration of peasant Egypt, would later boil over in the nineteen-fifties and give Nasserism the impetus that would propel it to power, sweeping away both the Pasha class and the *Wafd*, along with much of the cosmopolitan Alexandria of the Quartet. One of the reasons why the Nasserite revolution occurred was because it was the Army, which was Nasser's powerbase, not Egypt's largely urban and bourgeois political parties, that offered the *felahiin* of the Delta or the *saidis* of upper Egypt, who made up the bulk of Egypt's soldiery, a means by which they could effect political change.

Leila Hosnani's view of the young Mountolive and the England he appeared to represent was as stereotypical as the young Mountolive's Orientalist expectations of Leila. Leila loves Mountolive because he "is English" (M 30). On their desert liaison, Leila tries to sweet-talk the young Mountolive by quoting, "one of her favourite authors" evoking an England which is "undegenerate in race; a race mingled of the best northern

blood”; these Englishmen have “the firmness to govern, and the grace to obey”; they have “a thousand years of noble history”; their England is a “faithful servant of time-tried principles” and is “worshipped in her strange valour.” (M 29) Leila has made a fetish out of an archaic vision of England. This is too much for the young Mountolive, who was educated to follow Flaubert and Lane's generation of Orientalists in projecting fetishised images of an Oriental other onto a feminised Egypt, (“ ‘Egypt’, he said to himself as one might repeat the name of a woman.” [M 12]) As Anne Zahlan notes, Mountolive is “the ‘new’ and frustrated Englishman all too painfully aware of the deprivation of self visited upon him by the decline of his country's Empire” (“Destruction” 11). David Mountolive's psychological condition parallels the political condition of the British Empire between the wars.

Mountolive is ill-prepared for the process of fetishised psycho-sexual projection to be reversed on to him. His skull “reverberates” at the “book-fed dream this Copt had discovered” (M 29). He asks himself “why had she elected to love Mountolive's England through him rather than Mountolive himself.” (M 30) In an ironic reversal of European colonialism's paternalistic “mission to civilise”, Leila Hosnani “set herself to make a man of him [David Mountolive]” (M 30). The white man has become the brown woman's burden. Nevertheless, Mountolive is astute enough to realise that Leila was “in love with the stone effigy of a dead crusader.” (M 30) Thus, Leila and Mountolive's relationship (and by extension that between the *Wafd* and Britain) is, at the outset, fatally undermined by the lovers' unrealistic expectations of each other. The stage is set for the Quartet's allegorical tragi-comedy of errors.

In 1919, Sa'ad Zaghlul and his delegation were petitioning both the British Prime

Minister Lloyd George and US President Wilson to be allowed to go to London to lobby for independence for Egypt. Terry notes that High Commissioner Wingate was caught in the horns of a dilemma not unlike that faced by Sir David Mountolive when he is forced to choose between the demands of his position as representative of His Majesty's Government and his friendship with the Hosnanis. Wingate "was caught between growing nationalist sentiment and the opposition to it in London. He had to operate between these two poles, trying to placate each side and attempting the impossible task of bringing the two contradictory sides together". Wingate was "confident that he could persuade the Foreign Office that the *Wafd* should be received in London" (88) and was even preparing passports for Zaghlul and his delegation. Wingate's flirtation with the early *Wafd* corresponds with the contemporaneous love affair between the young Mountolive and Leila Hosnani. However, even as Wingate was making preparations for the delegation to go to London, more reactionary Imperialists were plotting to have Wingate removed from his post in Egypt and placed elsewhere, on the grounds that the Arabic-speaking Wingate had used the "highly irregular" methods of "private interviews" (88-9) with the *Wafd*; near to Mountolive's denouement Sir David spurns Leila with the words "I cannot discuss an official matter with a private person." (M 283). Wingate was replaced by General Allenby, commander of British forces in Palestine. Zaghlul and his would-be delegates were arrested and deported to Malta. This first stage in the story of Britain's relationship with the *Wafd* has come to an end. As with David Mountolive and Leila, time and distance will keep the *Wafd* and sympathetic British ears distant. "It was over. Ended" as Durrell writes of Mountolive's departure from the Hosnani estate (M 49).

During the early 1920s, waves of unrest swept Egypt; there were assassinations,

communal and anti-British riots in Cairo and Alexandria. The *Wafd* denounced this violence; nevertheless, the country was becoming ungovernable, and the British realised the need to make serious concessions to Egyptian independence. In 1923 a constitution was written up which declared Egypt to be a constitutional monarchy, and Sa'ad Zaghlul returned from exile, landing in Alexandria to "tumultuous acclaim" (Terry 154-7). In January 1924, elections were held in which all males over twenty-one years of age could vote. The *Wafd*, now transformed from a mere delegation to a full-blown political movement, swept the board, gaining 190 out of 214 parliamentary seats. In March of that year, the first democratically elected government in Egyptian history was formed. As Annesley notes, "it was a memorable day for modern Egypt, the day in which for the first time a representative government took over the reins with the idol of its people at its head." (353) Fu'ad, the Sultan of Egypt, could now call himself "King". However, full independence was still a long way off. Britain insisted on several "reserved points" (Annesley 350) which compromised independence. These "reserved points" signified that there would be no significant modification to Britain's military occupation of Egypt; Britain regarded the presence of its troops in Egypt as a guarantee of the security of the Suez Canal and a deterrent to any aggression from abroad. Britain also insisted on managing Egypt's military and foreign policy and *Sirdar* of the Egyptian army would continue to be a British officer. Also, Britain reserved the right to safeguard the rights of Egypt's foreign minorities and would thereby insisted on the continued employment of British officials in the main departments of the administration, particularly the ministries of the Interior, Finance and Justice (350). Although the "reserved points" severely restricted the freedom of action for the new Egyptian government, the British government indicated its willingness to negotiate agreements on these matters (353).

Allenby, suspicious of the *Wafd's* ultimate intentions, played off the party against the authoritarian and illiberal monarch, the better to weaken the both of them (Terry, 154). Tensions began to appear, with Fu'ad objecting to Zaghlul's appointment of a Copt, Marqus Hanna, as Minister of Justice, recalling the laments of the senior Hosnani regarding the position of Copts in the Egyptian administration (M 40-5). Durrell mocks the presence of British officers leading Egyptian forces with his description of Joshua Scobie conducting a military band celebrating Sir David Mountolive's arrival in Egypt as Ambassador: "An aged *Bimbashi* with a glass eye stood before the band, also at attention -- albeit rather shakily." (M 133) However, the issue of the British leadership of Egypt's armed forces precipitated the first serious crisis the *Wafd* had to face. The *Sirdar* (Commander-in-Chief) of the Egyptian army, General Sir Lee Stack, was assassinated in November 1924.

Annesley records that among the seven British demands made to Egypt's parliament immediately after the assassination of General Stack were a fine of £500,000 (a considerable sum of money at that time) to be paid immediately to His Majesty's Government, the withdrawal of all Egyptian forces in the Sudan, and the withdrawal of all opposition to Britain's right to protect foreign communities in Egypt. Failure to agree to these demands would lead to his Majesty's Government taking "appropriate action to protect its interests"; a threat backed up by the presence of British warships in Alexandria's harbour (357). Moreover, the British used the Stack assassination as an opportunity to smear the *Wafd*. During the trial of Wafdists accused of complicity in the murder, lurid stories of secret societies dedicated to the violent overthrow of British rule came to light. These stories involved gunrunning rings and a warning to Allenby from Chaim Weizmann, President of the World Zionist Organisation, to guard against attempts

on his life (Terry 176-9). These stories of Wafdist and Coptic conspiracies which threatened armed anti-British insurrection and the gun-running with Zionist connections were Imperialist propaganda with no basis in reality; indeed, the *Wafd* eventually managed to discredit Allenby's smears. However, it is indicative of how hard-line British imperialists such as Allenby, allegorised in the tetralogy as Brigadier Maskelyne, viewed the *Wafd* and the entire issue of Egyptian independence. As the received wisdom that Durrell would have taken in during his sojourn working under Sir Miles Lampton's neo-colonial administration, this rather distorted British view of the *Wafd* and its activities is plainly the origin of the *Quartet's* "Coptic conspiracy".

In August 1927, Sa'ad Zaghlul, weakened by years of prison and exile died, his *obiter dictum*: "*Je suis fini, je suis fini*" (Terry, 197) illustrating the extent to which the leader of Egyptian nationalism favoured French, a language he "knew as well as [his] own, perhaps better..." (M 25). Following Zaghlul's death, the *Wafd* was riven by a rancorous power struggle during which Zaghlul's activist wife, Safia, withdrew from politics; her final act in the *Wafd* was to recommend Mustafa Nahhas to succeed Zaghlul. Nahhas became president of the *Wafd* in September and his long leadership of the *Wafd* is described by Annesley as "dictatorial" (389). Lee Stack's murder, the British re-occupation, Zaghlul's resignation, his death and the ensuing power struggle left the political credibility of *Wafd* seriously undermined. The party lost political momentum and a great deal of membership and support that it never fully recovered.

The débâcle of Sir David Mountolive's first meeting with his ex-lover Leila Hosnani in nearly twenty years (M 277 - 285) has parallels with this decline in the fortunes of Wafdisim and Britain's relationship with the *Wafd* as the Second World War approached. After leaving Egypt in 1919, David Mountolive does not return to Egypt

until he arrives as Britain's first Ambassador to Egypt in, according to Kaczvinsky's chronology, January 1934, a couple of years prior to Sir Miles Lampson's real-life appointment to that post. During the inter-war years, the Wafdists took heart from the election of Britain's first Labour government, for Ramsey MacDonald had expressed sympathy with the Wafdist cause whilst in opposition. MacDonald and Zaghlul exchanged a series of warm telegrams, in which Zaghlul had addressed MacDonald as "your expansive benevolence". These exchanges correspond to Mountolive and Leila's epistolic relationship: "David! Today as I looked in the mirror as critically and cruelly as I could, I found myself entertaining a thought which for years now I have rigorously excluded. The thought of seeing you again." (M 57) Regrettably, Leila was not to meet Mountolive in the summer as she had planned, since the smallpox that disfigured her intervened. Likewise, there was no meeting between the British Labour government and the *Wafd*: the Labour government fell in October 1924 and the Conservative administration that replaced it was unsympathetic to the *Wafd*. Within months Zaghlul had resigned in the aftermath of the Stack affair.

Gradually, Leila and Mountolive's correspondence resumes, but she has changed. As a result of her disfigurement from smallpox, she has adopted the veil (M 59) and, like Safia Zaghlul, has retreated back into domesticity. During Leila's sickness, Mountolive takes up correspondence with Nessim. With her husband, Faltaus, dead and Leila a housebound invalid, leadership of the Hosnani household has passed to Nessim, who represents a new generation in the history of the Egyptian independence struggle. Similarly, the years 1925-7 marked the end of an era; the original *Wafd* had lost its momentum. Most of its luminaries had died, retired or had their political careers halted by being placed on a British blacklist of suspected subversives which had been drawn up

during the Stack affair and which remained in force until the mid-40s. Nevertheless, the *Wafd* does not die; rather, the Wafdist torch is taken up by a new generation. Durrell portrays Nessim Hosnani as being Europeanised, educated and intelligent; he has an astuteness in business, as a negotiator and as an alliance-builder which is new. Similarly, the new generation of Wafdists, men like Nahhas, retained something of the *Wafd's* original idealism; however, these ideals were tempered with a pragmatism which comes from the experience of practising practical politics in government. It was these Wafdists who, in 1936, were to negotiate the Treaty of Alliance with Great Britain which was to give Egypt its first taste of independence.

Leila Hosnani, meanwhile, retired “an eccentric and veiled recluse” to the summer house in the garden of Karm Abu Girg with her dreams, her memories and pet snake to remember her experiences of Europe and to read European literature (M 59), just as the *Wafd's* old guard would have been doing. Continuing his epistollic relationship with Leila, David Mountolive refreshes Leila's memory regarding European details as his diplomatic career carries him around the Continent. Mountolive realises that the formal leadership of the household has shifted from Leila to Nessim; however, he is fixated on the idea of the Hosnani brothers as personal friends and on Leila's Anglophilia. Unlike Melissa, Mountolive does not know that “They [the Hosnani brothers] secretly hate the British” (M 179); Melissa's pillow-talk confession of this information causes Pursewarden to understand the veracity of Maskelyne's report “Nessim Hosnani: A Conspiracy Among the Copts”. Mountolive, however, fails to appreciate fully that Nessim is devious and moves in a world of anti-British conspiracy and subterfuge. Mountolive's miscalculation as to the Hosnanis motivations will have serious consequences for all concerned.

It is in the course of his correspondence with Leila that Mountolive first encounters Pursewarden. Pursewarden has been appointed by the Diplomatic Service to head a British cultural mission in Egypt, "I don't know what D.H.Lawrence can offer a Pasha with seventeen wives." (M 103) Zahlan notes that Pursewarden, "like his creator [Durrell] has two jobs: the one to judge and act in the political sphere the other to apprehend some pattern in the doings of men and turn it into art." ("Destruction" 10) Zahlan, picks up on the strong biographical similarities between L.G. Pursewarden and L.G. Durrell. For although Pursewarden "is not a man blessed with even theoretical certainties" ("Destruction" 10), Zahlan maintains that Pursewarden, the " 'new' and frustrated Englishman all too painfully aware of the deprivation of self visited upon him by the decline of his country's empire", is capable of articulating "a considered opposition to British Policy in the Middle East as it appeared in the late thirties." (11)

If Zahlan's identification of Pursewarden is true, Pursewarden's opposition to British policy in the Middle East may also be Durrell's. Durrell wrote into the tetralogy something of his own disputes with the diplomatic service during his sojourn in Egypt, for the issue of how Britain should relate to the *Wafd* was still as live an issue in war-time Egypt as it had been in the Egypt of the nineteen thirties. Indeed, King Farouk's flirtations with the Axis powers caused Britain to promote the *Wafd* as a counter-weight to the palace. Be that as it may, the entry of Pursewarden into the plot is significant, since, as Zahlan recalls:

Pursewarden engages with the Raj-possessed intelligence officer Maskelyne in a fierce struggle over the Palestine conspiracy and the involvement in it of an Egyptian friend. Pursewarden resists -- to the point

of dereliction of duty and probably well beyond -- the unmasking of his friend and the exposure of the plot. ("Destruction" 11)

The next major development in the history of Wafdist Egypt came in 1929, when the autocratic Sultan Fu'ad found an excuse to dismiss the *Wafd*, keeping the *Wafd* out of power for three years: Fu'ad resented the idea of democratic government, because he saw it as an unnecessary impediment to kingly rule. In response to the *Wafd*, the British adopted a policy of my-enemy's-enemy-is-my-friend in their dealings with Fu'ad, helping Fu'ad to bolster the power of the Pasha class of Turco-Circassian land-owners, appease ultra-conservative clerics at al-Azhar, promote the ideologies of Islamism and pan-Arabism and implement the beginnings of Arabicization. As Terry and Hourani note, the *Wafd* did not sit by quietly and let the Monarchy or the British reassert an autocratic government; the *Wafd* did try to prevent their fledgling democracy from being ousted from its Egyptian nest by the twin cuckoos of British Imperialism and the dictatorship of the house of Mohammad Ali, but they had lost the initiative. Progressive British opinion was thereby marginalised as an effective political force in the Middle East. As the nineteen-thirties progressed, Britain's old Empire-hands also promoted pan-Arabism and Islamism in Egypt the better to marginalise the "conspirators" in the *Wafd*: ironically, the pan-Arabist ideology that inspired the Free Officers to finally oust the British from Egypt in the nineteen-fifties had been actively encouraged by the British two decades earlier. Durrell was aware of this British support for pan-Arabism and fictionalised it in Mountolive:

The Arab Union, etc....My dear chap, why are we thinking up these absurd constructs to add to our own discomfiture -- specially as it is clear to me that we have lost the basic power to act which alone would ensure that our influence remained paramount here? (M 104)

British-sponsored pan-Arabism envisaged an Arabised Egypt joining hands with the newly created Hashemite kingdoms in Arabia and Trans-Jordan to put pressure on another thorn in Britain's Middle Eastern side, the Zionist settlers in Palestine. Hourani describes the process, "...the Arabs had complained that the policy of establishing a Jewish National Homeland would prevent Palestine becoming part of an independent Syrian or Arab state...in the same year [1938] the British government formally recognised the interest of other Arab countries in the problem of Palestine, and the existence of something called an Arab world...." (Thought 293). However, there were problems to be surmounted in the promotion of pan-Arabism in Egypt, as Hourani notes in his discussion of the pan-Arab activist Sati Husri:

He [Husri] spent much of his time trying to convince the Egyptians that they were part of the Arab world. Even in the 1930s...the main current of Egyptian nationalism was Pharoenic or Mediterranean, not Arab, because the Arab nationalists of [this] generation tended to look towards Baghdad rather than Cairo, and to think of the Arab nation as ending at Sinai.
(Thought 315-6)

The political landscape of the Alexandria Quartet now comes more clearly into focus. On the one hand, British Empire-hands in Cairo supported the absolutist ambitions of King Fu'ad against the *Wafd*, figuring that a tame despot was easier to control than a popular and democratic political movement; this meant tacit British support of Fu'ad's pan-Arab and Islamist ambitions: in the tetralogy, the essential players here are Brigadier Maskelyne and Memlik Pasha. On the other hand, British administrators who recognised the need for change and who were more politically progressive and culturally enlightened than the traditionalist British Imperialists gave half-hearted support to the *Wafd* and their vision of an Egyptian nationalism based on the principles of the European Enlightenment and drawing on Egypt's Pharoenic and Mediterranean history.

In his missive from Egypt back to Ambassador in-waiting Sir David Mountolive, Pursewarden, like Durrell in real-life a Diplomatic Service junior, alludes to the political situation in Egypt that resulted from Fu'ad's pan-Arabist and Islamist tendencies and from Britain's indulgence in the King's attempted re-orientation of Egyptian politics.

Pursewarden's letter betrays a sympathy with the Wafdist position: Britain's pro-Arab policy in the Middle East is “neither coherent nor a policy”; Egypt cannot be “held together just by encouraging just what is weakest and most corrupt”. British support of pan-Arabism is a mistake: “to add Arab unity to all the other currents which are running against us seems to be to be an engaging folly”; for Britain is deluded, “Are we still beset by the doleful Arabian Nights dream fathered on us by three generations of sexually disorientated Victorians whose subconscious reacted wholeheartedly to the thought of more than one legal wife?” (M 103) Moreover, Pursewarden accurately assesses Britain's declining strength as a colonial power. The “romantic Bedouin fever” of the likes of T.E. Lawrence and Gertrude Bell is anachronistic; unlike inter-war Britain, the Victorian

Orientalists that Lawrence sought to emulate “believed in fighting for the value of their currency; they knew that the world of politics was a jungle.” (M 104) Pursewarden's list of the social ills facing Egypt could have come from the pen of a Wafdist: “the abyss which separates the rich from the poor which is positively Indian”, the population is “doubling itself every second generation” and the new European-educated middle classes feel alienated and marginalised from Britain's Egyptian policy (M 104). Moreover, Britain is directly encouraging a nationalism based on “a fanatical religion” (M 104). Pursewarden's solution is “to re-orientate policy and build Jewry into the power behind the scene here”; in historical Egypt the *Wafd* offered Egypt's Jewish and Christian minorities precisely the real governmental responsibilities which Fu'ad's Arabism and Islamism would deny them.

After the British and the *Wafd*, the third key player in the mid-twentieth-century power struggle for control of Egypt were the Pashas. In the *Quartet* the name “Memlik Pasha” is a “heraldic ideogram” signifying the Pasha class of traditionalist Muslim landowners from whom Fu'ad drew financial and political support. This class are the descendants of the Ottoman ruling class and the Turco-Circassian Mamlukes. In *Memlik* Pasha Durrell paints a satirical caricature of this often indolent and reactionary class. Memlik's “nights of God” (254) were ostensibly Koran recitals, but in fact were opportunities for bribery and blackmail (258-9); this alludes to the hollow religiosity of many members of the Pasha class. Likewise, in the nineteen-thirties Wafdists were shielded from prosecution by the British for involvement in real or imaginary “conspiracies” by paying bribes to Fu'ad's henchmen (see Anneseley) who owed their position to “nepotism” (M 255). A *Wafd* tamed by becoming corruptly beholden to the clique around the throne was useful to Fu'ad in that it enabled him to use a compromised

Wafd to offer the Egyptian public a progressive veneer to his dictatorial ambitions. Moreover, although by now the *Wafd* was seriously weakened as a political force, Fu'ad could still obtain leverage over the British by portraying the *Wafd* as a serious threat to British interests that only he could contain. Memlik's access to secret British intelligence files obtained in Palestine (M 267) alludes to the historical fact of tacit co-operation between Britain and Fu'ad to counter the threat that they perceived Wafdisim and Zionism to be to their interests. However, Britain's support for Fu'ad was not unconditional. Terry notes that, "The British too pointedly did not wish Fu'ad to become totally autocratic, they insisted on the removal of any palace advisor who seemed either too anti-British or was too subservient to Fu'ad." (227) Accordingly, "Journalists also began to question why the politicians lacked direction. In one Musaweer [a leading Arabic language newspaper] article entitled "What did we lose between 13 November 1919 and 13 November 1934?" the writer openly blamed not only the British, but also the corrupt Egyptians for the lack of meaningful democratic reforms in Egypt. (Terry, 228). Fu'ad died in April 1936. When the *Wafd* were re-elected by popular vote in May of that year, a hard-headed Wafdist negotiating team lead by Prime Minister Nahhas along the Copts Wasif Butrus Ghali, Interior Minister; 'Ubayd, Foreign Minister; and Nuqrashi, Communications Minister, negotiated with a British team led by Sir Miles Lampson the 1936 Treaty of Alliance between Britain and Egypt. This treaty ensured Egypt a contingent independence and a seat at the League of Nations. This was the *Wafd's* greatest achievement. However, within this achievement lay the seeds of the party's downfall, a victim of both its own success and larger historical developments in Europe. Terry describes the dilemma facing the *Wafd*:

Herein lay the basic problem, for the treaty had no sooner been signed, than many Egyptians, particularly the youth, demanded evidence that the patron-client relations between the British and Egypt had ended. As Britain became increasingly concerned over gathering war clouds in Europe, it became proportionately impossible for the Wafd to sustain its claims of having achieved independence. While the Wafd might “crown Nahhas with laurels”, the signing of the treaty produced a wave of anti-Wafdist and anti-British demonstrations. (235)

This passage describes the historical-political tensions which underpin the action of Justine, Balthazar and Mountolive in which an enfeebled and imperilled British Empire desperately tries to regain control of events after it has 'lost the basic power to act' (M 104).

Fu'ad's teen-age successor, King Farouk (who would quickly degenerate into a corpulent and dissolute premature middle age) dismissed Nahhas in 1937 and rigged the general election the following year to ensure a defeat for the *Wafd*. In the early years of the Second World War, Farouk flirted with the Axis, taking an Italian wife and surrounding himself with Italian advisors (the “little doll-like Italian Rafael”, by profession a “barber and procurer”, kept Memlik Pasha company and “sweetened the dullness of official work by suggesting pleasures whose perversity might ignite a man who appeared to have worn away every mental appetite save that for money” [M 257]). Farouk was bound by the 1936 treaty of Alliance with Britain; however, Farouk's “degree of cordiality with Britain tended to oscillate as the tide of war ebbed and flowed during the early indecisive years of the war.” (Anneseley 383) It is early in 1936, near the

“Christian Christmastide” during King Fu'ad's final illness, that Sir David Mountolive finally has his reunion with Leila Hosnani (M 272). Memlik Pasha's investigation into the activities of the Hosnanis are “not yet complete” (271); in fact, they are delayed for as long as Memlik can continue to “pluck” (273) Nessim's fortune (258-268). Memlik's blackmail of Nessim and his dishonest “investigations” on behalf of the British allude to the real state of affairs between Britain and Egypt's monarchy during the mid to late nineteen-thirties. It was a relationship of intrigue and hypocrisy: on one hand, Britain and the Egyptian King had a perceived shared interest in hamstringing the *Wafd*; on the other hand, Britain desperately needed to retain control over the Suez Canal in order to maintain the integrity of her Empire.

Leila, corresponding to the “old” *Wafd* of Zaghlul cannot understand the anti-British passion of her sons, who correspond to the “new” *Wafd* of Nahhas, she beseeches Mountolive, “...but what he [Nessim] told me about Palestine! My blood ran cold. To do something against the British! How could I! Nessim must have been mad. (M283) Leila pleads with Mountolive for clemency and understanding for Nessim before she goes to seek refuge in Kenya (M 275). Mountolive is initially full of sympathy for Leila's plight, “my poor Leila” (275). However, when he meets Leila, it is as if he is meeting a stranger: he does not recognise the voice (279). Leila speaks with a “gobbling inconsistency” and with “indiscretion”, veiled in a darkened Hansom cab, Mountolive can only see Leila's hand, which seems “Chubby and unkempt” and she smells of “orange water, mint, Eau de Cologne and sesame”. Mountolive recognises her for what she is “an old Arab lady” (M 280). Leila unveils. Mountolive is presented not with his beautiful, sophisticated lover of yore, but with “a plump and square-faced Egyptian lady of uncertain years, with a severely pock-marked face and eyes drawn grotesquely out of true with the antimony-

pencil" (281). Her eyes are "sad"; her lips trembling. Her skin is blotched and cicatrised "like the skin of an elephant"; her breath smells of whisky. Mountolive realised that, "he did not recognise her at all!" (281). In real-life Egypt, the Musaweer newspaper had asked "what have we lost between 1919 and 1936?" Mountolive and Leila could well have asked themselves the same question. Where once Mountolive had felt love, he now only felt pity verging on disgust towards Leila (M 282). The Mountolive-Leila allegory is reaching its tragic climax. The dynamic young *Wafd* of the nineteen-twenties is on its last legs; as the Second World War looms on the horizon, it has become old and disfigured. The *Wafd's* old guard is passing away, the new generation of Wafdists, represented by Nessim and Justine are more hard-headed and hard-hearted, are more prepared to resort to violence to achieve their goals; this Mountolive cannot fathom, "What could any of them hope to gain by a successful Jewish insurrection? Mountolive believed too firmly in the English mystique to realise fully that anyone could have lost faith in it and the promise in might hold of future security, future stability." (M 248) Instead, Mountolive chose to fool himself that the plot was not in earnest, that it was "simply a piece of gratuitous madness; a typical hare-brained business venture with a chance of large profits!...How typical of Egypt! Yet, strangely, how un-typical of Nessim!" (248)

Mountolive's procrastination and prevarication in his relationship with Leila has caused that relationship to wither on the vine. What is left from the heady days of 1919 is but a cruel parody of days gone by. As with Mountolive and Leila, so with Britain and the *Wafd*. Nessim once confided in Pursewarden:

... We think of ourselves as Egyptian patriots, but knowing how stupid and backward the Arab National element is, and how fanatical, we do not

think it can be long before there are violent differences between the Egyptians and yourselves. They are already flirting with Hitler In the case of a war... who can tell? The Middle East is slipping out of the grasp of Britain and France day by day. We minorities see ourselves in peril as the process goes on... a compact and extremely rich group of Coptic bankers and businessmen could exercise an influence out of all proportion to their numbers. We are your fifth column here in Egypt, fellow Christians... for England should see us as a bridgehead in the East, a friendly enclave in an area which daily becomes more hostile to you. (M 117)

The Arab Nationalist's "flirting with Hilter" is based on historical fact, pro-German sympathies on the part of Islamically-minded Egyptians dated back to the Great War when a victory for the "Central Powers" (the German Reich under Kaiser Wilhelm, the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the Ottoman Caliphate) was seen as a means by which Turkish hegemony over Egypt could be restored. Thus, Mahfouz has the Cairo Trilogy's Patriarch, Ahmad Abd al-Jawad, pray "When?... When?... Only the Lord knows. All we read about are British victories. Will they really win or will the Germans and the Turks be victorious in the end? Answer our prayer, O God." (Palace Walk 13) However, like Durrell's Hosnanis, the Trilogy's younger protagonists are predominantly Wafdists, to the extent that the entire work can be read as a sustained meditation on the hold of Wafdisim on middle-class Egyptians during the inter-war period and their disillusion with the *Wafd* in the immediate post-War period. Surely, Nessim's compact and rich group of Copts in the Quartet corresponds to the leading lights of the *Wafd* who also inspire Mahfouz's protagonists in his Trilogy. Nessim's belated appeal to the British to see the

Copts as Britain's "bridgehead" in Egypt anticipates the title of Michael Reimer's book on Alexandria, Colonial Bridgehead; moreover, his warning with regard to the pro-Axis sympathies of Egypt's Islamists recalls the sympathies of an earlier generation of pro-Turkish Egyptians portrayed by Mahfouz via characters such as Ahmad Abd al-Jawad. In failing to respond imaginatively to the *Wafd*, Britain, held back by its old Empire-hands, lost a golden opportunity to encourage in Egypt the establishment of a friendly, democratic and liberal state which was secular, multi-ethnic and multi-confessional in its cultural ethos and pro-British in its political outlook. As late as 1936, Wafdists like Taha Hussein saw the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of Alliance as a "sacred bond of alliance between Egypt and Europe." (Hourani Thought 347) Hussein's devotion to Europe corresponds to Leila's continuing devotion to Mountolive. However, Mountolive squandered the opportunity to develop that relationship just as Britain missed its historic opportunity to inculcate democracy and liberal values in Egypt.

Mountolive recoils from Leila's request to help her son, belatedly adopting a stance of professional detachment. Mountolive and Leila's friendship, is ended with Mountolive's curt officialese, "I cannot discuss an official matter with a private person" (M 283). Mountolive's rejection of Leila parallels Clea's rejection of Narouz: these twin rejections emphasise one of the main themes of the Quartet, the impossibility of meaningful relationships across colonialism's cultural divide; this theme was also explored by Forster in A Passage to India. Significantly, Mountolive's final words to Leila were "waspish" (283). In his rejection of "exotic" Leila, Mountolive, who had been "formally educated in England, educated not to wish to feel" (M 18), had reverted to his White Anglo-Saxon Protestant *sang-froid*. In the fallen city that is Durrell's late-colonial Alexandria the synthesis of opposites is impossible; Goethe's idea of the creative human

force as the action of the energising male force upon the receptive body of *das Ewigweibliche* -- the eternal feminine that which is for ever outside of it -- meets its *klipphotoic* negation. Both personally and politically the only option open to Mountolive is withdrawal from the threat posed by a demonised autrality.

Mountolive's moral retreat in the face of this autrality corresponds to the political attitude of the British in the Egypt of the nineteen-thirties, who would prefer to horse-trade with the corrupt and authoritarian Egyptian monarchy than to give due recognition to the *Wafd* as the mature expression of Egyptian nationalism. Hournai has described this historic indecisiveness as Britain's 'failure of nerve'; Pursewarden writes to Mountolive about Britain's having "lost the basic power to act" (M 104). Ashamed of himself, Mountolive gets drunk in the Arab quarter dressed in the absurd disguise of a *tarbush* and dark-glasses. Mistaking the solicitations of a pimp for the pious invocations of a "venerable old sheikh" (288), Mountolive proceeds to his final humiliation in the house of the child prostitutes (293). The incident at the child-brothel also alludes to Britain's shameless kow-towing to the most degenerate and corrupt elements in the Egyptian body-politic in the years leading up to the Second World War. Mountolive was unable to see the Hosnanis for what they were, "new Egyptians", or refused to do so. He could have had Leila as a wife or as a lover; instead, he ended up humiliated in a brothel. Correspondingly, Britain would not or could not come to terms with Egypt as a modern nation. Instead Britain favoured Fu'ad and Farouk over the *Wafd*, and fanned the flames of pan-Arab nationalism, thereby sowing the seeds of its final humiliation at Suez whilst putting pay to the Wafdist vision of a Mediterraneanist Egypt.

The final stage in the history of Britain's relationship with the *Wafd* began in February 1942, an exasperated Sir Miles Lampson (who, unlike Mountolive, had no

qualms about being “free to act”) invaded King Farouk's 'Abdin palace in Cairo with a military escort that included armoured cars and tanks. Now of the opinion that the liberally minded Wafdists would prove more reliable allies in the war against the Axis than Farouk Lampson gave the King a gun-point ultimatum: re-instate the Wafdist government or abdicate. Egypt was now effectively re-occupied and Egyptian independence was shown to be a sham; Egypt reluctantly declared war on Germany and Japan in February 1945. Although it formed a competent post-War government, the *Wafd* never recovered from the reputation of being a pro-British puppet which it had acquired as a result of the 'Abdin incident; the *Wafd* was swept from power for good in the Free Officers' *coup d'état* of 1952. Of course, at 'Abdin, Lampson was acting at a time when Britain's national survival was at stake and there was the real danger of Farouk's handing Egypt over to the Axis. Nevertheless, the 'Abdin incident was a political watershed and inspired a generation of young nationalist officers in the war-time Egyptian Army, Gamal 'Abd al-Nasser among them, to remove the British from Egypt by force.

In Clea, set in war-time Alexandria, Dr. Balthazar announces Leila's death in exile in Kenya (264). It is worth remembering that "*wafd*" means "delegation" in Arabic when reading Durrell's 1943 “Coptic Poem” (Durrell Poems pages 114-5) which speaks of “A Coptic delegation, going to Ethiopia, / Disappeared up one morning like the ghost in Aubrey”; the departing delegation left behind only the acrid, sweaty stench of failure, the smell of “Rancid goat-butter and the piss of cats”. This delegation's sudden disappearance recalls Leila Hosnani's hasty flight from Egypt to Kenya ("Ethiopia") following the uncovering of the Hosnani plot. The departing delegation is watched by “...the arrow, the aboriginal arrow” (115), which recalls Durrell's 'character-squeeze' “Justine Hosnani: arrow in darkness” (J 216).

When it was all too late, Mountolive had written to Leila “I bless you, I thank you with all my heart that through you I am at last able to receive the precious gift which can never come to those who are ignorant of its powers.” (C 266) Even at this late stage, Mountolive can only conceive of the virtues of his relationship with Leila in terms of what it did for him. According to Kaczvinsky (“Chronology” 594), Leila died in 1942, making her death contemporaneous with Lampson's war-time conversion to Wafdism. Like the *Wafd*, which wanted for Egypt both independence and a European-orientated cultural policy, Leila “fell between two stools, two lives, two loves” (266). Balthazar eulogises Leila, “the Dark Swallow!... We shall never look upon her like again!” (267).

Had the British come to terms with the *Wafd* in its early years, Egypt might have been saved the pains of Arabicisation under Nasser and the consequent flight of Greeks and exodus of Jews from Alexandria. Thirty years of Egyptian-Israeli war might have been avoided as might the failed experiment with pan-Arabism, the Islamicisation of Sudan (over which Egypt and Britain shared a condominium) and the post-War rise of Islamist terrorism in Egypt itself: all this tragic history may not have happened had Britain had the imagination and the moral and political courage to take up the challenge presented by the *Wafd*. Even during the dark days of the Second World War Britain would have had a steadfast ally against Fascism and Nazism in a democratic and cosmopolitan Wafdist Egypt, and would not have had to worry about the fickle, pro-Axis Farouk or the machinations of some pan-Arabists and Islamists who saw in Nazi Germany an ally against Zionism. In Mountolive, Durrell has brilliantly allegorised Britain's 'failure of nerve' in the Middle East. The following chapter will focus on Alexandria during the nineteen-forties, and will use Durrell's Egyptian poetry to link the

historical city in which Durrell lived from 1941 - 1945 with the imaginative city of the
Alexandria Quartet.

Chapter 5

The Nineteen-Forties: Durrell as a Refugee in War-Time Egyptian Exile; Durrell's Egyptian Poetry as a Key to The *Alexandria Quartet*.

*To all who turn and start descending
The long sad river of their growth:
The tidebound, tepid, causeless
Continuum of terrors in the spirit,
I give you here unending
In idleness an innocent beginning*

Until your pain become a literature.

Lawrence Durrell: "Cities, Plains and People"

As have preceding chapters, this penultimate chapter will continue a chronological progression through Egyptian history and will relate this history to the Alexandria Quartet. This chapter will cover a time-scale which extends from the late nineteen thirties to the post-Second World War period in which the tetralogy was composed. However, a key difference between this chapter and those before it is that during the time-frame covered by this chapter Durrell was actually living in Egypt. Thus, whilst retaining its historical focus, the chapter will investigate Durrell's exile in Egypt during the nineteen-forties and his poetry written around the time of his sojourn in Egypt. This chapter will investigate ways in which this poetry pre-figures important aspects of the Alexandria Quartet, beginning with Durrell's experiments in using ancient Egyptian myths a few years prior to his flight to Egypt and ending with the impact of war, exile and life as a refugee which influenced Durrell's post-War poetry and prose. This investigation into the relationship between Durrell's Egyptian poetry and the prose of the tetralogy will identify common strands connecting the two bodies of writing. These

connections will include the use of myth, Egyptian "colour", characterisation, character, and ancient and contemporary history. This chapter will contend that knowledge of Durrell's Egyptian poetry is helpful to the understanding of key aspects of the Alexandria Quartet and offers insights into what the tetralogy's Durrell's lost "Book of the Dead" may have been like.

Durrell's interest in Egypt preceded his war-time exile there. His first work with an Egyptian theme was "Egyptian Poem", which was written in Corfu in 1938. The Egypt of this poem is ancient Egypt, not the country of "dust tormented streets" owned by "flies and beggars" of the nineteen thirties and 'forties that is the setting for the Alexandria Quartet. "Egyptian Poem" alludes to the religion of pharohonic Egypt. On Corfu, Durrell had read E.A.Wallis Budge's translation of The Egyptian Book of the Dead with great interest; Ian MacNiven mentions that Durrell found himself "tremendously moved by the hymns to Ra" and wanted to "swallow the sun and feel it in my navel this summer" and "Undress and run." (Biography 154) Durrell wrote in an unpublished poem "Sun", "Gambol in Ra, whose torpor melts the body. / Dissolve in poem as ink from heavy nipples. MacNiven also recalls that Durrell "began to outline his own 'Book of the Dead'; twenty years and many changes of direction later it would emerge as The Alexandria Quartet" (Biography 154). Durrell's "Book of the Dead" would use the outline of the Egyptian Book of the Dead as an underpinning myth, much as Joyce had used Homer in Ulysses and Eliot had used the myths of sacrificial gods, such as the Fisher King, Adonis and Osiris in The Waste Land.

A letter to Durrell in Egypt from T.S.Eliot dated 13th February 1942 comments on the loss of a substantial part, around one hundred thousand words, of the manuscript for Durrell's "The Book of The Dead" during the author's flight from Crete. Doubtless,

Durrell fully intended to persevere with his “Book of the Dead”, for Eliot comments: “I have not the slightest doubt that 'The Book of The Dead' will be all the better after such a painful mutation of the phoenix”. Fifteen years later, the first volume of this “Book of the Dead” would appear as Justine (Biography 154). The ancient Egyptian's influence on Durrell should not be underestimated; for example, MacNiven also records that Durrell was amazed at the sight of hieroglyphic murals depicting the Egyptian Book of The Dead when he was shown around freshly excavated Queens' tombs near Giza (243), and that “[the] sense of an immense past, reaching back even further than that of Greece, would provide both the historical cut stone of the Alexandria Quartet and a counter-balance to the sordid present.” (254)

The translation of the Egyptian “Book of the Dead” which Durrell read on Corfu was one of most important translations from Ancient Egyptian into English and it had a considerable influence on Durrell's Egyptian poetry. Budge's translation of The Book of the Dead had been published in London in 1898, a century after the discovery of the Rosetta Stone, which allowed the decipherment of Egyptian hieroglyphics. In his introduction to the Pert-em-Hru, Budge traces the origin of the book's rites to the worship of a city's guardian deity, for “the first form of all of the book of the dead consists of words or petitions addressed to ‘the god of the city’”, this aspect of the ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead anticipates Durrell's interest in the concept of the *Deus Loci*. Budge states that the prime purpose of the book was to benefit the deceased by giving him the power to have and enjoy life everlasting which he required in the life beyond the grave (71) and to enable the deceased to make his way in the underworld without let or hindrance and to overcome his enemies (477). The ability of the Book of the Dead to help the deceased make his or her way in the underworld without let or hindrance is

important, for to attain life everlasting the deceased “would encounter the foes that attacked Osiris in the underworld” (477) thus, the calamities which befell the god would come upon [the deceased] also. In order to prevent such calamities the deceased had to win over Thoth, the scribe of the gods and the Egyptian god of writing and magic, this was achieved by making Thoth an offering of a palette and an ink-jar (562). Thoth would then secure for the deceased the protection and triumph that the god had secured for his brother Osiris” (562-4). In relation to the Quartet, a work that is very much concerned with writing, magic and the magic of writing, Thoth is a most appropriate protector for the soul journeying through Durrell's Alexandrian underworld. Durrell incorporates the Book of the Dead's theme of writing and magic as a key to a maze-like underworld into the Quartet, protagonists such as Darley and Pursewarden use writing to find their way through the underworld of fallen Alexandria, whilst figures such as Balthazar and Capodistria use the Cabal like magicians, to shape the history that is emanating out of the modern city to their own ends. Durrell's provisional titles for The Black Book in 1936 were “Lover Anubis” and “Anubis”, after the Egyptian dog-headed god of the dead (Biography 132); these titles illustrate Durrell's interest in using ancient Egyptian themes in his literature. “Egyptian poem”, written in 1938, rehearses some of the central themes of ancient Egyptian religion: the going down of the sun as a metaphor for death, the journey through the underworld, and the possibility of resurrection. Thus, “And to-day death comes to the house. / To-day upon the waters the sunset sail” (Durrell Poems page 56, lines 1 - 2), death is equated with the “sunset”, which, in an effective juxtaposition “sets sail”, alluding to the boat in which the Egyptian sun-god, Ra journeyed through the underworld of the night. “The disciple” who “crossed over by water” (l. 6) refers to the river crossing that the Egyptians believed the dead made to approach the underworld,

whilst the following line, “The acorn was planted” (l. 7) is a reference to new life beginning as an old one ends, and to resurrection. Sir James Frazer points out that the origin of the Egyptian belief in resurrection centred around the cult of Osiris who was “a personification of the corn, which may be said to die and come to life again every year”; the cult of the god was “a charm by sympathetic magic to ensure the growth of the corn” (377). Indeed, this magic is still practised in modern Egypt, in the “modern, but doubtless ancient, Arab custom of burying ‘the old man’, namely, a sheaf of wheat, in the harvest-field and praying that he may return from the dead, we see the germ out of which the worship of the corn-god Osiris was probably developed” (378). As well as being a corn-god, another aspect of Osiris was that of tree-spirit. According to Frazer, “this may perhaps have been his primitive character, since the worship of trees is naturally older than the worship of cereals”, the appropriately Osirian Narouz is murdered by the sacred *nubk* tree which is “like some giant Christmas tree” (M 305), which is set in the fields that he has reclaimed from the salt water of Lake Mareotis. Correspondingly, an image of Osiris was made from a sacred tree which had been ceremonially cut down. This image was “kept for a year and then burned” (Frazer, 380), and with each ceremonial felling, a new tree was planted: “the acorn”. Having set up its theme of death and resurrection, “Egyptian Poem” moves to a Greek scene:

In the Ionian villa among the marble
 The fountain plays the sea's piano,
 And by the clock the geometric philosopher
 Walks in white linen while death
 Squats in the swallow's eye. (ls. 8 - 12)

Durrell had written “Egyptian Poem” on Corfu (Biography 277); ancient Egyptian civilisation had crossed the Mediterranean in archaic times via trade between Egypt and firstly the island of Crete and later the Greek mainland. This commercial and cultural intercourse between Africa and an archaic Europe, and the subsequent transmission of Egyptian mathematical and technical knowledge to Greece laid the foundations of the trans-Mediterranean civilisation which the Wafdist intellectual Taha Hussein wished to revive as a model for modern Egypt. Concerned as it is with themes of death and re-birth, “Egyptian Poem” suggests that civilisations die and are re-born in an altered form: two millennia after ancient Egypt's initial contact with archaic Crete, Hellenistic Alexandria was born as the power of the pharaohs faded finally; the *Ka*¹² or spiritual energy of Egypt being refreshed by the culture of Greece at the height of its powers. Plutarch's accounts of ancient Egyptian religion provide an important cultural link between ancient Egypt and the Classical world, and of both of these with The Alexandria Quartet. Carol Peirce's essay, “That ‘one book there, a Plutarch’: Of Isis and Osiris in The Alexandria Quartet” discusses the influence of Plutarch's account of ancient Egyptian religion on the tetralogy, in particular arguing that Durrell has incorporated Osirian imagery into his depiction of Ludwig Pursewarden and elements of Isis into that of Liza Pursewarden. In ancient Egyptian myth, Isis and Osiris were both lovers and siblings, as are Durrell's Ludwig and Liza Pursewarden. Liza Pursewarden herself makes this connection in Clea, when she explains to Darley the nature of her relationship with her brother:

Later, when he [Pursewarden] started looking for a justification for our love instead of just simply being proud of it, he read me a quotation from a book. ‘In the African burial rites it is the sister who brings the dead king

back to life. In Egypt as well as in Peru the king, who was considered a God, took his sister to wife. But the motive was ritual and not sexual, for they symbolised the moon and the sun in their conjunction. The king marries his sister because he, as God the star, wandering on earth, is immortal and may therefore not propagate himself in the children of a strange woman, any more than he is allowed to die a natural death.' That is why he was so pleased to come to Egypt, because he felt, he said, an interior poetic link with Osiris and Isis, with Ptolomy and Arsinoe -- the race of the sun and the moon!' (C 191).

Thus, Egyptian myth and theology clearly informs an important aspect of the tetralogy's plot. However, the impact of Egyptian religion on the Quartet goes deeper still, for if Pursewarden was a type of an Osirian god-king who could not suffer a natural death, he would need to pass safely through the Alexandrian underworld: he does not, like Narouz, he dies. Durrell's use of Egyptian myth in "Egyptian Poem" continues with "The dogs are Muzzled. Lord, / See to the outer gate, our protection" (ls. 13 - 14). Much of the Pert-em-Hru consists of hymns, spells and charms that the soul of the deceased must remember and use during its journey through the underworld to defeat various supernatural foes, pass particular tests and challenges, and win over deities. As the soul passes through the underworld, it passes various "gates" which separate the different stages of the journey. Often, it is at these gates that the various formulas of the Pert-em-Hru are to be deployed. The most serious challenge the soul must face is the weighing of its heart by the god of death, the dog-god Anubis. If the Pert-em-Hru is used effectively, the soul will be able to pass this crucial test, and proceed to the *Sekhet-Hetep*, the "fields of peace", the Egyptian

heaven. Thus, with Anubis "muzzled", the soul can go forth in the words of "Egyptian Poem" to "rest between the born and the unborn" (line 15), "exempt" (l. 18) from the tests to which lesser souls may be put, because this soul has gained "friends in the underworld." (l. 19) The phrase "friends in the underworld" refers to the different gods and demons that the soul is able to win over or bind by judicious use of the formulae of the *Pert-em-Hru* in the hereafter.

The heraldic figures of the *Pert-em-Hru*'s ancient Egyptian theology, such as Anubis, Thoth and Horus, find their equivalence in similarly heraldic figures in the *Alexandria Quartet*. Just as the soul in the *Pert-em-Hru*'s underworld must win over the gods, so Darley must win over figures such as Dr. Balthazar, Clea, Melissa, Mnemjian and Scobie, and bind demons such as the Hosnanis in the Alexandrian underworld of the nineteen thirties and 'forties. Pursewarden, a sacrificial king figure, has his literary reputation revived posthumously by his sister-lover Liza-Isis' revelations to Darley, "How very much of Pursewarden's poetry became crystallised and precise in the light of all this new knowledge!" (C 189) Thus, Pursewarden, who died by his own hand in a state of moral crisis and confusion is "saved" in death for posterity, just as Osiris's broken body is re-assembled and brought back to life in the underworld by the ministrations of Isis; Narouz, conversely, lacks an Isis-redeemer and is bound in the underworld by the decisive action of the now self-realised Darley (C 250-3).

The possibility of having "friends in the underworld" may have provided the agnostic Durrell with some comfort in the face of the loss of loved ones, in particular his father, who had died in 1928, and helped reconcile Durrell to the eventuality of his own death, thereby lending to Durrell's proposed "Book of the Dead" an aspect of personal biography that is apparent in the *Alexandria Quartet*. Another source for Durrell's idea

of a modern “Book of the Dead” can be traced back to Durrell's Himalayan childhood and his interest in the lives of the Tibetan lamas who lived near to him (MacNiven Biography 36). This interest was revived whilst Durrell was living on Corfu, where he read W. Y. Evans-Wentz's translation of the *Bardo Thödol*, the Tibetan “Book of the Dead”. According to MacNiven, “Larry was equally concerned with the afterlife and with rebirth, but the Christian variety was closed for him: life after death had to follow the Egyptian recipe of mummification, or the Tibetan ritual of the *Bardo Thödol*” (Biography 118). Durrell was attracted to the Buddhist rejection of the idea that an individualised soul would continue to live on after death, since this rejection corresponded to Durrell's rejection of the discrete ego among the living. MacNiven adds that “horror of the father who had faded away into insanity and death” (Biography 118) underpinned Durrell's scepticism regarding the survival *post-mortem* of the individual soul.

A key part of the imagery of “Egyptian Poem” is that of the swallow, “Death enters and the swallow's eye / Under the roof is no larger and darker / Than this scent of death” (ls. 3 - 5); correspondingly, one of the most powerful spells in the *Pert-em-Hru* is “The Chapter of Making the Transformation into a Swallow”. It begins:

'Nu [the soul's mentor in its voyage through the underworld], triumphant, sayeth "I am a swallow, I am a swallow...I am pure at the great place of the passage of souls, I have done away with my sins. I have put away the offences which appertained to my members on earth. Hail ye great beings who guard the doors, make ye a way for me, for behold, I am like unto

you...I have overthrown mine enemies upon earth and yet my perishable
body is in the grave." (521)

The commentary in the *Pert-em-Hru* says, "If this chapter is known by the deceased, he shall come forth by day, he shall not be turned back at any gate in the underworld, and he shall make his transformation into a swallow regularly and continuously" (146-7): friends in the underworld indeed. Like the soul in the *Pert-em-Hru*, the *Quartet's* Darley is only able to survive the living hell of war-time Alexandria by invoking and winning over the tetralogy's ikonic and heraldic figures. This methodology reflects the "ikonic" nature of the very *heira glyphika* in which the *Pert-em-Hru* was inscribed and of the *heira grammata* in which they were written.

"The Egg" (1939), another poem that alludes to ancient Egyptian religion, seems obscure on a first reading. However, when a reading of the poem is informed by ancient Egyptian myth, its meanings begin to clarify and the reader becomes aware of its interesting connections with the *Alexandria Quartet*. It begins with a question:

Who first wrapped love in a green leaf,
And spread warm wings on the egg of death,
That my heart was hatched like a smooth stone,
And love in a green leaf locked? (Durrell *Poems* page 70, lines 1 - 5)

Paige Bynum writes that Durrell generally uses egg imagery to "denote psychic growth and creativity" ("Shaman" 84). Thus, in "A Small Scripture", a broken egg provides a "visible testament" to the "murder of self" to "reach the Self" and in "The Poet" the poet's

birth is represented as a mental "hatching"(Durrell Poems: 80, 30). Likewise, in Balthazar, "Clea's first stirrings of psychic development carry with them 'the sensation of a yolk inside her separating from the egg'" (84-5). Egyptologist Dorothea Arnold comments on the significance of the egg in ancient Egyptian myth:

Egyptian theologians speculated about the creation of the world...they spoke of a miraculous egg placed on a hill surrounded by the primeval waters. The egg hatched and from it flew a bird that was a god who brought forth light ending chaos and marking the beginning of things...the egg a symbol of the divine creation of the cosmos. (55-6)

Thus, new life is incubated in an egg; however, by bringing new life into the world, an egg also ensures future death. Dylan Thomas explores a similar idea in his poem "Ballad of the Long-legged Bait", "*The oak is felled in the acorn / And the hawk in the egg kills the wren*"(Complete Poems of Dylan Thomas page 155, line 164, italics in the original).

Yet the egg still denotes "psychic growth and creativity" because, although "my heart was hatched like a smooth stone" (l.3), and love is locked away, love is only "in a green leaf locked" (l.4); this suggests that since love is locked in a leaf, something delicate which can be gently unfurled. Thus, the poet grows in creativity as, in his passage through life, he faces the challenges thrown at him by the major emotions: pity is "naked" (l.5) and "fell in with the scorpion" (l.7); passion is "without a leg" (l.9) and "a vessel in darkness but without a compass" (l.12); anger "first opened the book of the egg" (l. 13), since by bringing new life into the world the egg must inevitably bring future death. Viewed this way, the poem's "book of the egg" becomes a "Book of the Dead"; this

"book" is a sacred text, a "bible". However, it is the bible of a fallen city, a "bible of broken boys and natural women" (l. 14); this kind of "bible" recalls Darley's Alexandria where there are "more than five sexes and only demotic Greek seems to distinguish among them", and where "The sexual provender which lies at hand is staggering in its variety and profusion" (J 11-12). Finally, it is Time that wears away life and makes the dead out of the living. However, in "The Egg" it is time which is "wrapped in a green bay-leaf" (l. 20): Time is bound as once was love and, life done, "a Roman summer covers the underworld / O remember the heart hatched like cold stone, / And love in a green leaf locked" (ls. 18 - 20). Like the soul in the *Pert-em-Hru*, the poet, having undergone the travails and challenges of life, finds peace and contentment in the "Roman summer" of the underworld. Similarly, having undergone the trials and tribulations of the underworld that is fallen Alexandria, by the end of *Clea* the self-aware Darley has embarked on writing the tetralogy (282), with the possibility of following Clea to the Roman summer of France where grows "the bitter-sweet herb of self-discovery" (279), just as Durrell eventually settled down with his third wife Claude (née Vincendon) in the "Roman summer" of his life at Sommieres in Provence, haunt of "Caesar's vast ghost"¹³.

The *Pert-em-Hru* contains another powerful hymn, "The Chapter of Making the Transformation into a Living Soul, and of not Entering into the Chamber of Torture" is also a spell to ensure the soul's safety in the underworld, A triumphant Nu declares:

I am the first-born god of primeval matter, that is to say, the divine soul,
even the souls of the gods of everlastingness, and my soul is eternity. My
form is everlastingness, and my body is eternity. I am the creator of the
darkness who maketh his habitation in the darkest parts of the sky which

¹³ *Caesar's Vast Ghost* (1989 originally entitled "Provance Entire") was Durrell's last book.

formeth the division betwixt heaven and earth. I am the divine exalted
being that is Lord of the land of Tebu. I am the soul, the creator of the god
Nu who maketh his habitation in the underworld. (550-1)

Like “The Egg”, this chapter of the *Pert-em-Hru* the hymn is concerned with effecting a transformation that enables the soul of the deceased to “live” in the underworld and avoid the “chamber of Torture”, the Egyptian hell. The poem is concerned with effecting a transformation whereby an “unwrapped” love binds time and achieves mastery over pity, passion and anger, thereby mitigating what is, according to Sartre, the hell that is Others¹⁴.

The mythic meanings attached to the egg in ancient Egyptian religion are linked to the Pharaohic concept of kingship, and this, in turn, is incorporated into the *Alexandria Quartet*. The pharaohs were seen as incarnations of Osiris's son Horus, the falcon-headed god. “He [the Pharaoh] came from the egg, he was the Falcon in the Nest, he sat upon the Horus-throne of the living” (Murray: 134). In the *Pert-em-Hru*, Nu declares that “the place of my incubation is unseen and my egg is uncracked” (551); whilst in *Mountolive* Leila Hosnani tells the young Mountolive that Narouz “Has been locked away in the incubator for forty days. To-morrow he will return” (M 26). Mountolive knows that “the hatching of eggs by artificial heat was an art for which Egypt had been famous from the remotest antiquity and was delighted to be informed about this process” even “the strange technique by which egg-heats are judged in default of a thermometer by placing the egg in the eye-socket.” (27) Thus, symbolically Narouz becomes the Horus-king, a prophet-pharaoh who emerges after spending a symbolic forty days in the underworld of the tomb-like incubator, “a long, low building of earth-brick,

constructed well below ground-level”, (26) to call his people to revolt against the British occupation (M 125, 230). In their travel book Egypt: a Travel Survival Kit, Wayne *et al* point out that the altars in the remote Coptic monasteries of St. Anthony and St. Paul, situated in the Eastern Desert, “the Devil's country”, are adorned with Ostrich eggs (419). These eggs are a Coptic symbol of the Resurrection, rather as Easter Eggs are in the West: at the Coptic monastery where he hears Narouz preach, Pursewarden notes that “It was pre-Christian...The long hanging lamps had ostrich eggs suspended under them” (M 122-3).

One of the Arabic name for Easter is *Eid el Ba'ath* (festival of the Resurrection), *Ba'ath* having the dual meaning of "Easter" and "resurrection". This "resurrection" can refer to the Christian Resurrection, or to the political and cultural resurrection of a Middle East freed from colonial rule (which for Arab nationalists also includes the rule of the Ottoman Turks). The historical *Ba'ath* Party was founded in Syria in 1943, at which time Durrell was visiting Syria and Britain and France were coming to blows over the possession of Syria. The party's founder Michel Aflaq was a Syrian Arab nationalist of Christian origin. Before its corruption at the hands of the cliques surrounding Saddam Hussein, in Iraq and Hafiz Al Asad in Syria, Ba'athism was a resolutely secular ideology which rapidly attracted the Christian and other Arab religious minorities into its ranks. Albert Hourani notes that Baathism's appeal was "primarily to the new educated class...and to communities outside the Sunni Muslim majority: Alawis, Druzes and Christians” (History 404). Thus, Durrell's portrait of Narouz Hosnani as a revivalist Coptic nationalist contains close correspondences to anti-colonial groups in several Middle Eastern countries, such as the Ba'athists of Syria,¹⁵ that had national re-birth as

¹⁵ In Kabbalistic terms, Saddam Hussein could be understood as the *Klippothic* (demonic) aspect of Durrell's 'hirsute savage', Narouz Hosnani.

the core of their political programme. Narouz's exhortation to "Descendants of the Pharaohs, children of Ra, offspring of St. Mark" (M 125) specifically links the Coptic religion to that of the ancient Egyptians; correspondingly, by the mid-twentieth century the Levantine Christians' call for *ba'ath* had a clearly political aspect. In some respects, Christianity was the natural successor to the ancient Egyptian religion, which finally died out only in the sixth century AD. By then, Christianity, the "call of St. Mark", had spread beyond the Romanised elite of Egypt's capital, Alexandria¹⁶, to reach the peasantry of the Delta and the Nile valley. Christianity's promise of resurrection to eternal life through Christ rendered obsolete a religion based around expensive mummification rituals and complex negotiations with gods and demons as a means for achieving life eternal. Narouz Hosnani's exhortation to Egypt's "Children of St Mark" is a rallying call to all Egyptians, Christian and Muslim, for a national resurrection and insurrection against the British. However, the *Pert-em-Hru* insists that "the place of my incubation is unseen and my egg is uncracked." Unfortunately, in the *Quartet*, the sacred magic has been broken, the place of Narouz's spiritual incubation is no longer "unseen" by the enemy, for Leila has allowed the young Mountolive ("you sold *our* mother!" [M 228]), future satrap of the British occupation into Narouz's sanctuary, where Mountolive was "initiated" into the most intimate secrets of incubation. The egg cracked, quite literally, for Narouz went mad and, like Osiris, suffered death at his brother's hands.

To summarise the first, or pre-War, phase of Durrell's "Egyptian" poetry, before he had arrived in Egypt, Durrell had undertaken a substantial reading in ancient Egyptian theology and myth, chiefly Budge's translation of the Egyptian Book of the Dead the *Pert-em-Hru*; this he supplemented with a study of the Tibetan Book of the Dead the *Bardo Thödol*. The influence of this reading is apparent in Durrell's pre-war poetry in its

¹⁶Cairo was founded by the Fatimid dynasty of Arab Shia' in AD 969.

use Egyptian themes. Moreover, it was around this time that Durrell started work on an ambitious novel, his “Book of the Dead”, which, eventually would emerge as the Alexandria Quartet. This “Book of the Dead” would utilise mythic and other themes from the Pert-em-Hru and the Bardo Thödol. However, following the invasions of France and Greece, Durrell found himself suddenly and reluctantly thrown up on the shores of real-life war-time Egypt; this Egyptian exile would add another Egyptian layer to his “Book of the Dead”, but one derived from a different Egypt to that of the pharaohs.

On the first of May 1941, at four o'clock in the morning, Lawrence Durrell, wife and child in tow, arrived in the port of Alexandria from Crete, refugees from the Nazi invasion of Greece. Under the 1936 Anglo-Egyptian treaty, Egypt was committed to an alliance with Britain. However, for Britain, the imperatives of total war outweighed the niceties of proper diplomatic procedure. Britain had all but re-occupied Egypt, throwing into doubt the outcome of two decades of Wafdist struggle for Egyptian. Alexandria and its maritime facilities had, therefore, become a *de facto* allied asset in the eastern Mediterranean and had become subject to German bombing raids. Thus, a victory over British forces in Egypt would give the Axis control of the Suez Canal and establish a chain of supply linking German and Italian forces in north Africa with the Japanese who threatened to advance through Burma to seize control of India from the British and meet the Germans in the Middle East, giving the Axis control over both India and Middle Eastern oil. During the "Desert War" of 1940-43 fierce fighting raged across the Sahara Desert as first Italian and then German forces fought to wrest control of Egypt from Britain. Although in Egypt Durrell was safe from immediate danger, in May 1941 there would have been no way in which he could have predicted the outcome of the Desert War. Durrell described his state of mind whilst in Egypt as follows:

I was in such a stupefied condition all the time I was living there...It wasn't until the battle of El Alemein that victory began to seem a possibility. It was all over as far as we could see; it seemed as though it could take a hundred years to wipe out the Germans, they were so strong. Although they didn't admit it, that was what everyone was feeling, and it led to a sense of frustration and boredom: spleen and despair. It was neither here nor there whether one lived or died. Better dead, one thought. (1974, 60)

Darley's return to a bomb-ravaged Alexandria in Clea reflects the vista that must have greeted Durrell when he arrived at Alexandria as a refugee that May morning:

...an ironclad lying dumbly on its side, a corvette whose upper works had been smeared and flattened by a direct hit -- gun-barrels split like carrots, mountings twisted upon themselves in a contortion of twisted agony. Such a large package of grey steel to be squashed at a single blow, like a paper bag. Human remains were being hosed along the scuppers by small figures with a tremendous patience and quite impassively (C 28).

Durrell could have had no idea what future lay in store for him in an Egypt that could fall into Axis hands at any moment. Nevertheless, with his first novel, The Black Book, (1938) behind him, Durrell was well on the way to developing an established literary reputation. Accordingly, his welcome to the city had a literary flavour. John Cromer Braun, one of a group of wartime English poets writing for Salamander, a poetry

magazine based in Cairo and run by British servicemen, was the Field Security sergeant who took Durrell's passport. Braun recalls his meeting with Durrell as follows:

As the passengers filed off, for the most part a pathetic line of retired school teachers, professors, widows and other expatriates from Athens or the Peloponnese, a stocky and round faced figure...came to the gangway. I took his passport and read "Lawrence Durrell."

"Writer?"

"Yes"

"Once of the Villa Seurat?"

"Yes"

"Friend of Henry Miller?"

"Yes, anything wrong with that?"

"Not at all, would you step aside please?" (Selwyn, xxviii).

Durrell spent his first few hours in Egypt in a slit-trench in Alexandria dock discussing writers and writing by the light of tracer-bullets from an anti-aircraft barrage put up to chase off German bombers. No doubt this was a refreshing introduction to the city after the perils and traumas of flight across the Mediterranean together three underpinning elements of the Alexandria Quartet: Egypt; war; and the British writer in exile.

Unfortunately, over a hundred thousand words of Durrell's "Book of the Dead" had been lost during Durrell's flight from Crete. The draft of his "Book of the Dead" was not all that Durrell would lose before he left Egypt: his marriage to his first wife Nancy would

not survive his stay there. Using the threat of invasion by Rommel's forces as a pretext, Nancy, like Melissa in the Quartet, left Egypt for Palestine and Durrell forever in 1942 (Biography 258-9). Durrell would leave Egypt with his second wife, Eve Cohen, an Alexandrian of Spanish-Jewish ancestry. As Artemis Cooper explains, there is much of Eve Cohen in Durrell's portrait of Justine; like Justine, Eve Cohen had been "poor", often "hungry and barefoot". This was because her father was "not very good at his trade of money-lending." Like Justine, Eve Cohen considered herself to be an Alexandrian rather than an Egyptian: her family had never taken Egyptian citizenship and were officially "stateless aliens." Eve "only spoke Arabic to servants." (255) Fittingly, Durrell's dedication in Justine reads "To EVE, these memorials of her native city." Cooper describes the acrimony surrounding the Durrell-Cohen marriage, "...her parents were so opposed to the idea of her marrying Durrell that they were prepared to have their daughter declared insane and committed, and even hauled the Chief Rabbi of Alexandria into their camp." However, all this was to no avail, since Eve fled to Tanta in the Delta where she "found sanctuary with Durrell's old friend Paul Gotch -- who had received a telegram from Durrell saying, 'Lock this girl in the loft and don't let her out of your sight.'" Eventually the Chief Rabbi managed to calm Eve's parents, but not before Durrell resorted to increasing the status of the couple's marriage certificate in the eyes of Eve's parents by persuading a friend to "emblazon the document with the largest and most magnificent red seal the British Embassy could provide." (258)

Regrettably, there may have been some justification in Eve's parents' opposition to her marriage to Durrell; in 1955 she eventually left Durrell whilst he was writing Justine in Cyprus amid yet further acrimony. Nevertheless, the highly-charged emotional atmosphere of Durrell's Egyptian sojourn, painful as it must have been, did enable

Durrell to add a psychological dimension to his re-written “Book of the Dead”, which was gradually emerging as a psychological novel underpinned by a mythic-heraldic Egyptian structure. G.S. Fraser notes that “Durrell's originality...lay in using the conventions of the psychological novel as a framework for a vision of reality based on myth” (1968: 129). This is a solid analysis as far as it goes; however, the tetralogy excels as literature because Durrell is able to make the tetralogy's mythic and psychological play take root in shifting historical sands of the previous forty years which shaped the psychological and cultural landscape of Durrell's late-'fifties readership; this period included Britain's relationship with its colonised "Others"; the decadence of the inter-War Empire; the war in the Western Desert; the rise of “native” nationalism; the Empire's post-war decay; and Britain's terminal Imperial decline.

Similarly, the Quartet explores post-War themes such as the meaning of “modern Love” which was a pressing social issue in Britain as the post-War world of the nineteen-fifties gradually gave way to the "swinging" world of the 'sixties and 'seventies; the so-called “sexual revolution” of the nineteen-sixties had its roots in the final dissolution of Victorian sexuality in the social maelstrom of the Second World War. Another post-War anxiety explored by the Quartet concerns the military consequences of relativity theory; the Second World War ended by ushering in the Atomic age, ending as it did with the Atom-bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the ultimate refinement of the Allies' strategy of the concentrated bombing of enemy cities. The A-bomb was the fruit of the technological application of relativity; the much-feared mushroom-cloud of “The Bomb” cast its long shadow over the cultural landscape of the post-War world, as is illustrated by Nevil Shute’s somber end-of-the-world novel On the Beach (1959) . Although in terms of its historical overview the Quartet looks back to the nineteen-thirties and 'forties, in its

exploration of themes such as “modern love” and relativity, the tetralogy is very much a work of the 'fifties. Moreover, the Second World War destroyed the world in which Durrell was born, lived, and had developed as a writer; the war blew away the Imperial world of the Raj and *Pax Britannica*, a strong colonial France that was still a world power, and free Greece. The war made of Durrell a refugee: he was unwillingly washed up on the African littoral where he was unwanted and unknown, and he did not know when or whether he would ever leave this Egyptian exile. Nonetheless, Durrell seemed to arrive at literary maturity in the sexual, psychological and cultural crucible that was war-time Egypt. The cultural dis-orientation brought about by being an unwanted itinerant in an unknown culture and the experience of being a refugee amid the sudden collapse of old certainties was to provide for Durrell's post-War writings a cutting-edge that enabled him masterfully to fashion the nineteen-fifties *zeitgeist* into a literary work of art. Themes of exile and isolation figure prominently in the poetry that Durrell wrote during the Second World War and in the immediate post-war period. For example, in “In Europe”, a post-war “recitative for a radio play” Durrell expresses some of the existential and metaphysical aspects of the exilic experience:

We are getting the refugee habit:

The past and the future are not enough,

Are two walls only between which to die:

Who can live in house with two walls? (Durrell Poems page 136, lines. 40

- 44)

Here Durrell is reaching out beyond the conventional understanding of Time as past and future and is anticipating his “four-decker novel whose form is based on the relativity proposition” (“Note” to Balthazar n. pag.). The refugee, like the dweller in a bombed-out house, knows that two walls, two dimensions alone cannot support life. All that the refugee and the exile have with which to re-build a new present are the memories that they carry with them, which encapsulate their essence:

You are getting the refugee habit:

You are carrying the past in you

Like a precious vessel, remembering

Its essence, ownership and ordinary loving. (page 138, ls. 51 - 52)

Thus, “thinking of [his] friends - of Justine and Nessim, of Melissa and Balthazar” at the beginning of Justine, Darley writes in order to “return link by link along the iron chain of memory to the city which we inhabited so briefly together....” (J 11), so as to breakdown the two-dimensionality of the refugee's experience of time and to make the past give life and meaning to the present. Thus, the Alexandria Quartet was written in a post-War world with:

.....all boundaries being

Broken down, dissolving, vanishing.

Migrations are beginning, a new habit

From where the icebergs rise in the sky

To valleys where corn is spread like butter... (page 139, ls. 74 - 78)

As the Quartet was being written, political boundaries were being broken down, Empires were vanishing and new nations coming in to being. Migrations of refugees and the dispossessed, of migrant workers from the farthest flings of a dissolving Empire were changing the face of the Imperial metropolis; London, “hub of the Empire”, was becoming like Alexandria; cosmopolitan, multi-ethnic and multi-confessional. The old frontiers “mean nothing anymore”, material wealth is likewise denuded of value and meaning:

Peoples and possessions,
Lands, rights,
Titles, holdings,
Trusts, Bonds... (ls. 79 - 82)

As he was writing “In Europe”, Durrell began to meditate on the possible literary uses of his Egyptian experiences, guarding this collection of memories as if it were “a precious vessel” (l. 53). He would later return to these memories of the refugee experience and of exile in the tetralogy. “In Europe”, however, develops exilic themes which Durrell first explored in his Egyptian poetry. In Egypt, Durrell co-operated with Robin Fedden and Bernard Spencer, two poets of pacifist sympathies who were teaching at the Fuad al Awal University, in the publication of Personal Landscape, a poetry magazine. The first volume of Personal Landscape was published in January 1942. The magazine differed from much of the expatriate poetry that was produced in war-time Egypt in that, as MacNiven puts it, the poetry of Personal Landscape was:

...intended to emphasise the personal values, even, pacifist ideals, [that were] in danger of being submerged by the war effort: those "personal landscapes" which obstinately continue to exist outside national and political frontiers. (247)

Fedden's pacifism was born of conviction: he mentions that he served in the Quaker Ambulance Unit in the "brief and perplexing" (Selwyn 2) Syrian campaign of 1941, in which British and French troops fought for control of Syria. In the same volume, Fedden says of Durrell that, "Of Durrell's attitude towards the war I was always uncertain, though he regarded with high irony the propaganda work which engaged him...he was clearly irked by the canalisation of thought and response which the atmosphere of war-time Cairo imposed." (2)

However, in spite of Personal Landscape's overall attitude to the war, which ranged from Fedden's pacifism to Durrell's ironic scepticism, the magazine did publish some of Keith Douglas' poetry which was inspired by the direct experience of conflict, material that, in Fedden's eyes went beyond "the lamentable level of various Middle East anthologies of 'war poetry' " (14). Fedden's view of the importance of the experience of exile and the effect of exile on the creative writer corresponds closely to Durrell's view. As Fedden observes in an essay entitled 'An Anatomy of Exile' in Personal Landscape: An Anthology, published in 1945:

Though some of the contributors to this anthology have left, or lost, their homes and families in Greece and elsewhere in the European continent, it

is not to the tragedy of exile that the word is here applied but rather to its stagnation. The latter may or may not occur against a tragic background, but always threatens when an individual is isolated for any length of time in an alien context which he does not understand and in which circumstances alone have placed him. (7)

Twelve years before Justine was written, Fedden anticipates aspects of Durrell's depiction of Egypt and Egyptians: Egypt's climate is "designed for Europeans to visit, not live in."

(8) Fedden complains that the climate and the landscape are "flaccid" and asks "what is a poet to do in a country where spring and autumn are indistinguishable?" Fedden discovers the "poetic truth" that Egypt's fields are not soil but "bone-mould and excrement." For Fedden, the European exile in Egypt walks "on the dead and their deposits", as one might when walking on the battlefields of the Western Front. However, in Egypt one walks on the dead not because a great slaughter has taken place there, but because of the country's great antiquity, for the dead "of countless generations, packed like sardines, stuff the earth," which "bursts with corpses." (9) Despite being surrounded by the detritus of the past, Fedden complains of a "lack of historical continuity"; where, unlike in Europe, there is no medieval historical link between the ancient and the modern worlds: in Fedden's view there is in Egypt just a "Turkish hiatus", echoing the concern of Wafdist intellectuals such as Taha Hussein who saw the long centuries of Mamluke and Turkish rule as a "Dark Age" that cut off a future Mediterraneanist Egypt from its ancient trans-Mediterranean past. Moreover, in "Islamic Africa" the current of thought "sets towards Mecca", the European is inevitably "swimming all the time against the stream", like a "vegetarian among head-hunters or a pacifist in war-time." (10) Even in the

cosmopolitan life of Alexandria or Cairo which offers “almost the only life available outside of the great blind stream of Islam”, the life of the European exile in Egypt is a “nightmarish unreality.” Thus, Fedden's view of Egypt is remarkably similar to that presented by Durrell in the Quartet. In the tetralogy, the past enjoys an after-life in the present, as in Nessim's daydream fantasies, for example (J 156 - 159). Yet Darley and the novel's other European protagonists depict Alexandria's Arab, African, and Muslim present in terms of corruption, degeneracy and squalor. Egyptian exile seems to have affected the sensibility of Durrell and Fedden in similar ways. A “Middle Eastern” school of exilic English poetry was beginning to emerge.

Apart from the cultural disorientation felt by the exile poets in Egypt, there was a sense of outrage at the greed of “Levantine” Alexandria. Bernard Spencer's poem “Behaviour of Money” published in Personal Landscape depicts an Alexandria corrupted by commercial greed:

And the town changed, and the mean and the little lovers
 of gain
 inflated like dropsy, and gone were the courtesies
 that eased the market day;
 saying “buyer” and “seller” was saying “enemies.” (page 70, ls 11 - 15)

In this city, “the poor were shunted nearer to beasts”, and “the rich became a foreign community” and “quiet folk” have “gone nasty”. However, Spencer's poem is making a general point about mercantile greed; his “mean and little lovers of gain” could be found in any major city. Durrell and Fedden, on the other hand, seek to identify a species of

greed that is exclusively "Levantine". Fedden's description of Levantine life as "money and money values, a total absence of taste and tradition, and a pseudo-French culture" is echoed by Durrell's description of Alexandrians in a 1944 letter to Diana Gould: "The *tarbush*, the dark suit, the rings, the French accent; the scrofula, the riches, the pox, the food." (qtd. in Durrell 1969, 76) This view in turn informs the Quartet where "not to care about gain" is "what Alexandria recognises as madness" (J 25). Moreover, the mercantile materialism of Durrell's Levantines has in turn corrupted them both sexually and existentially, for "Syrians, heavy in their dark suits, and yellow in their scarlet tarbushes" display "a self-interest, a narcissism which comes from sexual exhaustion expressing itself as a possessive symbol." (57) Here, the trappings of material wealth, of possessive symbols function fetishistically in the place of sexual potency and existential authenticity.

Thus, if Victorian Orientalism and Conradian imagery of "darkness" influenced Durrell's view of Egypt's indigenous poor, his view of Egypt's Oriental middle, mercantile and upper classes is influenced by an attitude toward the "Levantine" which was commonplace in the first half of the twentieth-century. Such an attitude was propagated by, for example, the Italian Fascists, who were anxious to distinguish the "European" Italians from other Mediterranean peoples. Benito Mussolini, for instance, believed that "Italians belonged to an Aryan race that was ethnically homogeneous and superior to others -- he had been particularly anxious to stress their superiority to Spaniards, Romanians, Greeks and "Levantines." He was seriously worried that "Levantine" qualities might have entered Italy with the slaves imported by the Roman empire" (Mack-Smith, 221), and such views were by no means exclusive to the fascist right.

This view of the "Levantine" was anti-Semitic in the wider sense of a prejudice

against Semites in general: this prejudice applied not simply to Jews, but also to Syrians, Lebanese, Maltese, Egyptians and other people of the eastern Mediterranean who were viewed by Europeans as variously greedy, corrupt, effete and degenerate. The endorsement of anti-Semitic sentiments by modernist poets of the calibre of Ezra Pound (“the yid is a stimulant, and the goyim are cattle...” [Canto LXXIV]) who actively propagandised for the Fascists during the Second World War, and T.S. Eliot, who had declared in 1934 that “What is still more important is unity of religious background; and reasons of race and religion combine to make any large number of free-thinking Jews undesirable” [1934: 41]), awarded a certain literary respectability to anti-Semitic attitudes.¹⁷ Durrell's anti-Levantinism partakes in a wider sentiment prevalent in the time in which he wrote, and aspects of it can be found in both his Egyptian poetry and the tetralogy.

Durrell's 1946 poem “Levant” partakes in this attitude toward the “Levantine” and evokes a city “where tills grew fat with cash / and the quills of Jews invented credit” (Durrell Poems page 143, lines 11-12) as merchants traded in “Gum, oats and syrup / The Arabians bore” (ls 1 - 2). Although the city of this poem is not specified as Alexandria, the reference to “lamps” seems to allude to the Pharos lighthouse, and the description of the city as “this ant-hill for grammarians” brings to mind Alexandria's *Museion*:

After this, lamps

Confused the foreigners;

Boys, women and drugs

Built this ant-hill for grammarians

¹⁷ Eliot's refusal ever to reprint his 1934 essay 'After Strange Gods' in which the offending (and offensive) statement about 'free-thinking Jews' appears amounts to a substantial retraction of it on Eliot's part.

Who fed upon the fathers fat with cash,
 Turned oats and syrup here
 To ribbons and wands and rash
 Patents for sex and feathers,
 Sweets for festivals and deaths. (ls. 24 - 32)

This city, with its "boys, women and drugs", its well-fed city fathers, festivals, sex and death is certainly close to the mythical Alexandria of the Quartet, if not to the historical city and the city as portrayed by the Alexandria writers who immediately preceded Durrell: Cavafy and Forster. However, unlike the work of Cavafy and Forster, a distinct trait of anti-Levantinism runs through Durrell's poem:

Nothing changes. The indifferent
 Or the merely good died off, but fixed
 Here once the human type "Levant". (ls 33 - 35)

If Durrell's Levantines are neither "good" nor "indifferent", they must be, by implication, "bad". These Levantines living "By the promiscuous sea upon this spit of land" (l. 40) are "fine of tooth" with "soft hanging lashes to the eye" (l. 37) but live in state of "mad friendship and sadness." (l. 39) This Levantine world, with its languid beauty by a promiscuous sea, can, in true anti-Semitic style, be bought for a few pieces of silver, since the poem ends by observing that this is "Something money or promises can buy" (l. 41). Thus, this poem encapsulates the Alexandria of the Quartet: Durrell's Levant is a shallow, commercial world; a place which is, according to the anti-"Levantine"

mindscape, befitting a “shallow” people caught between the desert and the sea who are unaccustomed to the heights and profundities of mind possessed by a European “artist”, as represented in the tetralogy by Pursewarden or, in Clea, by Darley himself.

So Durrell's "Levantine" are shallow and commercial, yet in “The Anecdotes: At Alexandria” the very food on offer in the Egyptian *souk* (market) reinforces the poet's feelings of alienation, and his Egyptian women are “tubs of clear flesh”, and the *fellahin* are “niggers”:

Is this life more than the sum of its errors?

Tubs of clear flesh, egyptian [sic] women:

Favours, kohl, nigger's taste of seeds,

Pepper or lemon, breaking from one's teeth

Bifurcated as the groaning stalks of celery. (Durrell Poems page 206, lines 7 - 12)

This bracketing of race between images of spice re-appears in the Quartet:

The old herb-woman selling herself every night on the flat ground among the razed houses -- a sulky mysterious whining...Our room is bulging with darkness and pestilence, and we Europeans are in such disharmony with the fearful animal health of the blacks around us. The copulations of the *boabs* shaking the house like a palm tree. Black tigers with gleaming teeth. And everywhere the veils, the screaming, the mad giggle under the pepper trees, the insanity and the lepers. (J 54)

Likewise, the image of Egyptian women as “tubs of clear flesh” is expressed in the Quartet in different words:

Their feelings are buried in the pre-conscious. In love they give out
nothing of themselves, having no self to give, but enclose themselves
around you in agonised reflection – an agony of unexpressed yearning that
is at the opposite of tenderness, pleasure. For centuries now they have
been shut in a stall with the oxen, masked, circumcised. Fed in darkness
on jams and scented fats they have become tuns of pleasure, rolling on
paper-white blue-veined legs. (J 58)

Even though Durrell has created structures distancing himself from these passages (they are Durrell writing about Darley, reading Arnauti's account of Justine's early life) the passages do seem shockingly racist by the standards of the turn of the twenty-first century. Nevertheless, it is also true to say that Durrell's anti-Levantinism, like his Orientalism, is not the strident prejudice of an ardent believer in a hierarchy of races. Throughout the tetralogy European assumptions of superiority over Alexandria's various Levantines, Arabs and Africans are undermined by a sardonic irony, such as where Mountolive dresses up as what he assumes to be a typical “Levantine,” “*‘un homme quelconque’*, a Syrian business-man, a broker from Suez, [or] an airline representative from Tel Aviv” (M 285), this leads to his humiliation, yet it is the absurdity of the Ambassador's Levantine get up, not the absurdity of the “Levantines” themselves that Durrell is targeting. This is an ironic take on a tradition of professional Orientalists, from

E.W.Lane in the eighteen-thirties to T.E.Lawrence in the nineteen-twenties, who sought to enhance their expertise through cultural cross-dressing. Durrell's use of racial and ethnic stereotypes is due, at least in part, to his status as a reluctant exile in a strange land; moreover, careful reading of at least some of the tetralogy's seemingly overtly Orientalist passages reveals that it is the pretensions of Empire that are the real subjects of Durrell's mocking irony.

Moreover, the atmosphere prevailing in wartime Egypt was far from "normal": it was one of widespread fear combined with boredom. For Europeans tapped in war-time Egypt sex provided a cheap and readily available antidote to the psychological effects chronic fear. This heady atmosphere was another factor that influenced Durrell's portrayal of Egypt in both his poetry and in the Quartet. MacNiven notes that "The British were forced to make condoms available to the troops and to set up several centres to treat venereal disease" (Biography 237); this caused Durrell to "emphasise a sexual licence and venality more appropriate to wartime than to the pre-war setting of the first three volumes of the Alexandria Quartet" (237). Nevertheless, among Egyptians the feeling remains that Durrell painted an unfair portrait of Alexandria by using the highly exceptional conditions that prevailed in the city during the Second World War to make a general statement about Egypt. In his introduction to Return to Oasis: War Poems and Recollections from the Middle East, 1940 - 1946 (1980), Durrell vividly describes the extraordinary conditions experienced by British exiles, expatriates and servicemen and women in war-time Egypt:

In Egypt the sense of alienation and distance was made even more marked by the apparent normality of everyday life. People flown out from bombed

and rationed England starred aghast at the bulging shops, the crowded night-clubs, the blazing lighted thoroughfares of Cairo made all the more grotesque by the glaring poverty of the Fellaheen, by the beggars that flocked everywhere. (1980 xxiv)

Nevertheless, Durrell does concede that the tense atmosphere of wartime Egypt had a positive effect on the philosophical and artistic sensibilities of the British:

Perhaps the heightened sense of death in the air gave a new resonance to life. People thought that they might die without having really tangled with any of the great religious or philosophical problems of the time. One suddenly realised that, after all, the British were at bottom, poets and poetry lovers, and not just football philistines. It took moments of dearth like this to bring it out of them. (xxiv)

Durrell's feelings of alienation and disorientation in war-time Egypt provide his Egyptian poetry with its unifying theme, that of exile and separation from friends, loved ones, from Europe and above all from the Hellenic *milieux* that had proved so inspiring to Durrell in the nineteen-thirties. In "Mareotis", inspired by a lakeside walk with Diana Gould (later Menhuin) and dedicated to her, Durrell develops Fedden's observations on the Egyptian seasons, juxtaposing the sterile Egyptian Spring "Where the wind gnashes by Mareotis / Stiffens the reeds and glistening salt" (Durrell "Poems" page 130, lines 12 - 13) with the other Spring enjoyed "everywhere" (l. 1) else that is "...smiling and entire, stirring from sleep" (l. 4). In this exilic spring, the poet laments that he is held in Egypt on a "rationed

love” (l. 11). This “rationed love” may be an allusion to the deterioration of Durrell's marriage to Nancy, his first wife, who had accompanied him to Egypt from Crete; at the same time, this “rationed” love refers to Durrell's love of Greece and Europe and the circle of friends he had there. The maintenance of this love depends on impersonal media such as telegrams and unreliable war-time mail, access to which like so much else in war is “rationed”. This situation further heightens the poet's sense of alienation:

Birds begin, swindlers of the morning.
 Flowers and the wild ways begin:
 And the body's navigation in its love
 Through wings, messages, telegrams
 Loose and unbodied roam the world. (ls. 5 - 9)

“Mareotis” also introduces the broody lakescape that augurs the tetralogy's weighty and sinister events: the duck shoot at which Capodistria is supposedly killed (J 183 - 194), Balthazar's arrival on Darley's island (“there is no spring in the Delta, no sense of the refreshment and renewal of things” B 13), the fish-drive attended by the young Mountolive (M 11 - 20), and Narouz's assassination on the Hosnani estate (M 300 - 320). For, in the tetralogy, the wind which “gnashes Mareotis” is always a wind of ill-omen, a device that is anticipated in “Mareotis”:

And in the ancient roads the wind,
 Not subtle, not confiding, touches once again
 The melancholy elbow cheek and paper. (ls. 14 - 16)

“By The Lake” (the first of Melissa's “Eight Aspects”) does not explicitly state that lake in question is Mareotis, although the line “Melissa, by this Mediterranean sea-edge” (Durrell “Poems” page 146, l. 18) hints strongly that it is, since Alexandria is situated on a strip of land half a mile wide that separates Mareotis from the Mediterranean “between Egypt and the sea.” The “Melissa” of the Quartet, like the Melissa of the poem has had many lovers, but has gained little from this experience:

How many several small forevers
 Whispered in the rind of the ear
 Melissa, by this Mediterranean sea-edge,
 Captured and told?
 How many additions to the total silence?

Surely we increased you by very little,
 But as with a net or gun to make your victims men? (ls 16 - 22)

The loneliness implied by the line “How many additions in total silence” recalls Purswarden's question to Melissa at the dance in Mountolive, “*Melissa, comment vous défendez-vous contre la solitude?*” and her poignant reply, “*Monsieur, je suis devenue la solitude même*” (167-8): it is a little later that Melissa accidentally reveals the reality of the Hosnani conspiracy to Purswarden; Melissa's comment leads directly to Purswarden's death. Melissa also appears in “A Bowl of Roses”, which takes its title from a line of Cavafy's, “ ‘Spring’ says your Alexandrian poet / ‘Means the remission of

the rose” (Durrell Poems page 225, lines 1 - 2); however, Durrell's roses are forlornly “trapped in tin blue bowls” (l. 6) in “...this tattered old cafe, / by the sea-wall...” (ls 3 - 4). This suggests the impossibility of meaningful love, symbolised by "roses" amid the melancholy of Durrell's exilic "blues". As in 'Mareotis' this poem evokes a grim, wintry Alexandria that emphasises the deadening alienation of the refugee experience:

It would take more than this loving imagination
 To claim them for you out of time,
 To make them dense and fecund so that
 Snow would never pocket them, nor would
 They travel under glass to great sanatoria
 And like a sibling of the sickness thrust
 Flushed faces up beside a dead man's plate. (ls 13 - 19)

The poet thinks of Melissa among these "trapped" roses, but can only focus on “other roses”, which have been “outworn by our literature” (l. 8), and “The poet's portion, a black black rose / Coughed into the helpless lap of love / Or fallen from a lapel -- a night-club rose” (ls 10 - 12). The “black, black rose” grimly evokes the blood clots coughed up by an archetypal tubercular Romantic poet; similarly, it recalls the consumptive illness of the Melissa of the Quartet. Likewise, words "fallen" and "night-club" correspond to both the Melissa of the poem and of the tetralogy: the Quartet's Melissa worked as a dancer-prostitute in an Alexandrian night-club, and was, therefore, in a somewhat Victorian turn-of-phrase "fallen", like the city of Alexandria itself. The appearance of the same Levantine character, Melissa, in both the tetralogy and Durrell's Middle Eastern poetry

illustrates the process by which Durrell's Egyptian exile led the author to add a further layer to the text of his mythic *opus*, the re-written “Book of the Dead”, a layer based on Durrell's experiences in war-time Egypt.

Another of the Quartet's female protagonists, Clea, appears in “The Anecdotes: In Beirut.” In “The Anecdotes”, written along with the “Conon” poems in Argentina in 1947-8, Durrell has the poet “Sipping the terrible beat of Time” (Durrell Poems page 210, XIV: 7) where “the Greek wind ran” (l. 13) after a period of “twenty years” (l. 1) separation from his friends. Here the poet “talks about the past as if it were not dead” (ls 8-9) and remembers Clea by name from a wintry Arabic exile:

Then of poor Clea: her soul sickened in her face
Like flowers in some shadowy sick-room,
.....
Can we afford to consider ourselves more fortunate?
Lips I would have died to hear speak
Now held in complete sesame here
By the fire of blue sea-coal,
In Beirut, winter coming on. (lines 14 - 15, 21 - 25)

In reality, the winter in Beirut (the 1960 edition of Durrell's Collected Poems has "Tunis") is little more than a few weeks of drizzly rain and a drop in temperature during January; most of the rest of the year is hot and sunny; generally, it is hotter and sunnier than Durrell's beloved Greece. Yet, however atypical they are of the normal climate of the Middle East, the cold, winter and rain figure prominently in Durrell's Middle Eastern

poetry. By consistently depicting the Middle East as uncharacteristically cold, Durrell has developed a metaphor for the isolation and alienation that he constantly felt while living there. Winterscapes are prominent in many key passages of the Quartet too, thereby bringing the metaphor from the poetry to the prose.

“By The Lake” anticipates another of the Quartet's major themes, that of perception. In the “Note” that introduces Balthazar, Durrell writes, “this is not Proustian or Joycean method -- for they illustrate Bergsonian ‘Duration’ in my opinion, not Space-Time. The central topic of the book is an investigation of modern love.” “By the Lake” is concerned with the problems of perception and sees Durrell experimenting with the "prism-sightedness" or “multi-dimensional effect” that was to become a distinguishing feature of the Quartet:

If seen by many minds at once your image
As in a prism falling breaks itself,
Or looking upwards from a gleaming spoon
Defies: a smile squeezed up and vanishing
In roundels of diversion like the moon. (Durrell Poems page 146, lines 1-5)

Here perception is either doubly shattered, firstly by the refraction of light within the prism, secondly by the shattering of the falling prism, or it is distorted across the round surface of a gleaming spoon. The shattered prism recalls the multi-dimensional technique of Cubism, whilst the distortion of the image in the curved, gleaming spoon recalls the curvature of space-time in Einsteinian physics: both Cubism and relativity provide the

tetralogy with a conceptual underpinning. In her essay "Lawrence Durrell and The Vanishing Author" Chiara Briganti has observed that “in a way, each character in the Quartet is a Cubist painting. Each one is revealed as a process, with a number of constant traits and a few changing ones, exactly as, for instance, in Picasso, all the formal qualities of an object are synthesised into a single characteristic.” (43) In this essay, Briganti identifies the Cubist or prismatic aspect of Durrell's writing. Durrell has Darley describe this "prism-sightedness" in Justine:

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

Likewise, mirrors play tricks with perception in “By The Lake”:

This dark soft eye, so liquid now and hoarse
With pleasure: or your arms in mirrors
Combing out softly hair
As lovely as a planet's and remote. (ls 12 - 15)

Durrell returns to the concept of literary multi-dimensionality again in Clea, where he has Darley read Pursewarden's posthumous letters to him, “My Conversations with Brother Ass”:

No, but seriously, if you wished to be -- I do not say original but merely contemporary -- you might try a four-card trick in the form of a novel; passing a common axis through four stories, say, dedicating each one to the four winds of heaven. A continuum, forsooth, embodying not a *temps retrouvé* but a *temps délivré*. The curvature of space itself would give you stereoscopic narrative, while human personality seen across a continuum would perhaps become prismatic. (C 135-6)

With his reference to four-dimensionality and a "continuum", Pursewarden seems to be describing a 'relativity novel'. Durrell's use of concepts derived from Cubism and relativity in his poetry enables Durrell to create a distance between himself and his work and create a poetics of "impersonality" which, in certain of its aspects, resembles the impersonality of Eliot and Pound. For example, the "Cubist" shattering of the discrete ego, the knowing "I", in much of Durrell's poetry shares points of similarity with the shifting narration of The Waste Land. In the tetralogy, Durrell takes this impersonalism a stage further by supplementing Cubist and relativistic methods with his idea of a "Heraldic Universe", an associative concept that seeks to transcend logic by returning to the world of sympathetic magic and pre-rational primitivism, thereby further dissolving the post-Cartesian personalism of "I". Durrell's "Heraldic" ideas were developed during his Egyptian exile, as his essay "The Heraldic Universe", which was written during his Egyptian exile and published in Personal Landscape shows:

Poetry by an associative approach transcends its own syntax in order not to describe but to be the cause of apprehension in others: transcending logic it invades a realm where unreason reigns, and where the relations between ideas are sympathetic and mysterious -- affective -- rather than causal, objective, substitutional.

I call this the Heraldic Universe, because in Heraldry the object is used in an emotive and affective sense -- statically to body forth or utter: not as a victim of description...(73).

In the tetralogy Durrell's attempts to split the post-Enlightenment concept of personality by abandoning the Victorian objectivity of the omniscient narrator (except in Mountolive, where this naturalism is used as a foil to the "prism-sightedness" of Justine, Balthazar, and Clea). Instead, Durrell developed a method of novelistic writing which embraced multiplicity of both character and point-of-view. Durrell's Heraldic method does much to disrupt the valorising aspect of language; however, being a creation of language, Heraldic writing cannot abandon symbols. Rather, it embraces them; Durrell has Pursewarden write, "Symbolism! The abbreviation of language into a poem. The heraldic aspect of reality! Symbolism is the great repair-outfit of the psyche, Brother Ass, the *fond de pouvoir* of the soul." (C 138) Further on in Clea, Durrell has Darley reflect on "Pursewarden's" Heraldic method, "...the configuration of my own life had taken its shape from the properties of those elements which lie outside the relative life -- in the kingdom of what Pursewarden calls the 'heraldic universe.'" (C 177) The symbolist, Cubist, relativistic and impersonalistic aspects of the tetralogy were recognised as soon as Justine was published, yet they had their beginnings in Durrell's exile in the Middle

East and the poetry he wrote there. Archaic and “primitive” art were a direct inspiration for Picasso and the early Cubists; indeed, the very hieroglyphs in which the ancient *Pert-em-Hru* was written suggest, millennia before the advent of Cubism and modernism, a certain "prism-sightedness", as W.V. Davies, a scholar of ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics suggests:

A figure was reproduced two-dimensionally, in what was deemed to be its "characteristic" aspect; in the case of a complex figure, it might be necessary to embody more than one aspect in a single representation....[illustrative of this] is the figure of an old man leaning against a walking stick...it is not an organic whole. Close inspection will show that the figure is a composite, with the major parts of the body shown from different points of view. The head, the front breast, the arms and the legs are in profile view; the eye, the shoulders, and the rear breast are in frontal; and the navel in three-quarters. It is a picture of the body that combines in a single figure as many as possible of its essential aspects. (14)

Here Davies is discussing not a major carving, but one hieroglyphic figure in a bass-relief funerary text symbolising “an old man”. Durrell, who was "spellbound" at the sight of the funerary texts covering the walls of the Queen's tombs at Giza (*Biography* 242) seems to have incorporated aspects of this ancient "prism-sightedness" into his modernistic splitting of the individual ego in the *Quartet*. A further influence on Durrell's impersonalism is the Buddhism of the Tibetan *Bardo Thödol*. Although these

experiments with multiple perception can be detected in some of Durrell's pre-Egyptian work, it was the bitter experiences of exile, the refugee's feelings of alienation and of the fragmentation of self that Durrell experienced in Egypt that lent a heartfelt poignancy to what might otherwise have been merely a writer's half-informed musings on themes taken from science and philosophy. In the opening sequences of Justine, Darley really is convincing as the (self?) portrait of a personality fragmented by mental and emotional breakdown in the process of reconstructing itself by tracing the "iron chains of memory" (J 11).

Durrell had begun to explore themes of psychological and social fragmentation in his 1938 novel The Black Book. T.S. Eliot said of The Black Book:

I shall be glad...first if anything can be done to make this book publishable in England; if not, I shall be glad to see it published abroad; and in any case, I look forward with keen anticipation to the next book you write after this. (qtd. in Biography 160)

As Kaczvinsky points out, The Black Book anticipates the Alexandria Quartet in its use of multiple narration. The Black Book's two narrators, Lawrence Lucifer and Death Gregory each provide, in alternate passages, their perspective of their life at the Regina Hotel, this structures the novel as if it were a series of alternate stripes. The problem with the "stereoscopic" effect of The Black Book is that both Lucifer and Gregory present 'essentially the same understanding of reality'. In the Alexandria Quartet, however, "the alternating stripes of The Black Book have become...separate layers of a 'palimpsest'...superimposed one on top of the other, giving a complex vision of reality."

(1997 50 - 51) Evidence that Durrell intended The Black Book to be part of a series come from a letter he sent to Eliot from Alexandria in 1945, which “outlined the three major fictions and themes that he had planned during his days in Corfu”:

Agon	Pathos	Anagnorisis
The Black Book	The Book of the Dead	The Book of Time
The Dislocating	The Uniting	The Acceptance & Death

(Biography 305).

If it is accepted that “The Book of Time” is the Avignon Quintet, Durrell's outline shows that he had planned his life-time output of major novels whilst on Corfu in the late nineteen-thirties. However, the Alexandria Quartet differs from The Black Book and the Avignon Quintet in the extent to which Durrell's personal anguish at his exile in alien Egypt pervades the tetralogy. Likewise, the tetralogy differs from Durrell's other major works in the extent to which it engages with the events of a crucial period in the history of Egypt and of the British Empire. The Quartet is forged in the crucibles of bitter personal experience and tumultuous historical change to a far greater extent than is The Black Book or the pentalogy.

The view that the tetralogy is primarily an "intellectual" and "poetic" work has gone on to dominate criticism of the Quartet through the four decades since the tetralogy was published; indeed, in the passage from Clea quoted above, Durrell has Darley refer to Alexandria as a “mythical city” (although this contradicts Durrell's assertion in Justine that 'Only the city is real'). This appears to correspond nicely with the dominant view in Durrell criticism that the Quartet is essentially an ahistorical novel that is entirely

concerned with metaphysical issues and which has little or no connection with the historical city. Yet, in the same sentence, Darley states that he, Arnauti, and Pursewarden (characters that are all prismatic refractions of Durrell himself) were "confined" in the mythical city in which the action of the tetralogy takes place. When applied to a city or a country, rather than to a room or a cell, confinement is close in meaning to "exile". It may be that the experience of exile assisted Durrell in seeking to overcome stereotypical objectivism by deploying "prism-sighted" or "multi-dimensional" techniques.

Other modern writers, such as Beckett, Joyce, Lawrence or Henry Miller who, in their differing ways, have attempted something similar, have undergone some experience of exile, self-imposed or otherwise; Eliot, who was born into an Anglo-American family in St. Louis Missouri moved to England permanently and so far as to transform himself into an English "gent". If Durrell first found his poetic voice in voluntary exile in Greece, Durrell's literary experimentation in a mythic Alexandria and his success as a novelist are rooted in his real-life experience as a refugee in Egypt in the Second World War. This exile was a traumatic experience, but, as Durrell repeats in "At The Long Bar", a further poem which is a meditation on the melancholy of the artist-in-exile, "*The sickness of the oyster is the pearl*" (Durrell "Poems" page 243, line18 -- italics from the original). This is to say that the "pearls" of Durrell's writing, his poetry, and later the Quartet, arise out of the malady of exile. The oyster surrounds the irritant grain of sand with mother-of-pearl, to make a smooth, precious ball to sooth and smooth the sand's irritation. The writer in exile surrounds the pain of alienation with precious words to transform the emotional pain of his situation into art or "a literature": the "stringing of pearls" is an established metaphor for the versification of tales of frustrated love in Arabic and Persian poetry. However, there is the ever-present danger that writing would prove the writer's undoing,

that it would break him just as the oyster is fatally broken when its pearl is harvested. Moreover, the poem alludes to the psycho-sexual aspects of Durrell's Egyptian exile, since the oyster is reputedly an aphrodisiac and its form and taste have a clear sexual symbolism. The Alexandria Quartet was the particularly lustrous pearl that was harvested from the most profound depth of Durrell's psyche; the loss of Durrell's original "Book of the Dead" proved to be a service to literature, since it is inevitable that the Alexandria Quartet with its various intertwined Egyptian *motifs* would prove a greater work than the original 'Book of the Dead', but at what price to the author? Durrell's "Cities, Plains and People" hints at the existential pain he experienced during the protracted birth of his "Book of the Dead":

To all who turn and start descending
The long sad river of their growth:
The tidebound, tepid, causeless
Continuum of terrors in the spirit,
I give you here unending
In idleness an innocent beginning

Until your pain become a literature. (Durrell Poems page 159, lines 39 - 45)

As Robin Fedden made plain in his Personal Landscape essay "An Anatomy of Exile", the exile of the poets of the "Middle East School" was not simply a spatial and temporal exile, but one with profound psychological and cultural aspects. Exile profoundly

changed these writers both as poets and as people, and not always for the worse. Despite Durrell's frequent whinging about Egypt in his letters to the friends, not everything went badly for Durrell in Egypt. Indeed, for all the personal anguish it caused him, Durrell's reluctant exile in Egyptian may have been the making of him, artistically. However, it may well not have seemed that way to him at the time; "The Anecdotes: In Cairo" explore Durrell's feelings of alienation in his Egyptian exile:

Nostos home: *algos* pain: nostalgia...

The homing pain for such as are attached:
Odours that hit and rebuff in some garden
Behind the consul's house, the shutters drawn:
In the dark street brushed by a woman's laugh.
Ursa Major to the sailor could spell wounds,
More than the mauling of the northern bear,
At the hub of the green wheel, standing on the sea.

Home for most is what you can least bear.
Ego gigno lumen, I beget light
But darkness is also of my nature.
(For such as sail out beyond
The proper limits of their own freewill.) (Durrell Poems page 203: II lines
1 - 13)

Here Durrell's exploration of the Greek etymology of the word "nostalgia" creates a firm link between the underpinning concept "nostalgia" and Durrell's yearning for Greece. The "Great Bear" (wittily punned with the verb "to bear" as in "to carry a burden") that is exile and alienation mauls the poet, who, like a sailor at sea looks out across the Mediterranean from Alexandria's harbour towards Greece. The Latin *Ego gigno lumen* cleverly sets the Alexandrian scene by alluding to the vanished Pharos lighthouse, the light of which defines the extent to which Alexandria allows freewill, "...the city which used us as its flora -- precipitated in us conflicts which were hers and which we mistook for our own: beloved Alexandria!" (J 11)

"Alexandria" also explores themes of alienation and exile. The poem dedicates "these whirling autumn leaves" (Durrell Poems page 154, line 4) to "...the lucky ones who have lovers or friends / Who move to their sweet undiscovered ends" (ls 1 - 2). As in "Mareotis", Durrell unusually evokes not the brilliant Egyptian sun, but the wintry aspect of Alexandria's climate, Durrell's stock metaphor for melancholy and alienation in Egypt. Also, the "lucky" lives of those who are overseas is contrasted poet's dejected mood, "As for me I now move / Through many negatives to what I am." (ls. 8 - 9) The poem contains several Alexandrian motifs which occur later in the Quartet: "Promontories splashed by the salty sea" (l. 5); the trams (l. 6); the Pharos, which stands "between Greece and all I love" (ls 10 - 11); the sea-wall (l. 22); and the Woolfian "Lighthouse, like a Samson blinded..." (l. 32). Although this Alexandria is "At the doors of Africa" (l. 40), the weather seems almost English, recalling Bournemouth, the paradigm town of bourgeois English sea-side respectability from which Durrell fled to Corfu: "By tides and faults of weather, by the rain / Which washes everything, the critic and the lover" (ls 38 - 39). Perhaps this recalls similar feelings of alienation that Durrell experienced during his

years in England (1923 - 1935), which separated his Indian childhood from life as an emerging writer in Greece and Paris. However, "Alexandria" develops the theme of alienation further than does "Mareotis". The poet complains of "doors shut" (l. 13) and of living "locked inside" (l. 13), alluding to a deeper existential and psychological mode of alienation of which his Alexandrian exile is only a particular manifestation. This Alexandria, like that of the Quartet, is situated on the edge of an African Otherness and is "...like / the wife of Lot - a metaphor for tears" (ls 41 - 42). Likewise, this Alexandria is also a place of penitence and "self-discovery" (C 279), where the poet is "learning to suffer and not condemn." Moreover, the 'free Hellenic world' (J 12) is not entirely lost, the biting northern wind that blows over Alexandria from the Mediterranean has at least some connection with Greece in that it has been "condemned by Greece" (l. 51), rejected by or, like Durrell himself, expelled from Greece and has taken flight across the sea to Alexandria. Although it has been "condemned" by Hellenism's epicentre, the exiled wind still carries within it something of the Promethian Greek fire, since it goes inland where it "smokes the fires of men" (l. 52), and catches the lovers "at their quarrel in the sheets" (l. 54) and the artist "...at his papers/ Up there alone, upon the alps of night" (ls. 56 - 57).

In his Alexandrian exile, the poet is forced to rely on memory to furnish himself with a shadow of the life which he once knew. Just as Darley is forced to "return link by link along the iron chain of memory" (J 12), at the outset of the tetralogy, "Alexandria" emphasises the importance of focused, deliberate remembrance for the writer in exile:

And so in furnished rooms revise

The index of our lovers and our friends

From gestures possibly forgotten, but the ends

Of longings like unconnected nerves,
And in this quiet rehearsal of their acts
We dream of them and cherish them as Facts. (Durrell Poems page 154
lines 15 - 20)

This transformation of the ambiguities of lived existence to the "facts" of memory anticipates the Bergsonian and Proustian aspects of the Quartet and looks back to the poetry of Baudelaire; whilst the "facts" of exilic memory are put to the test in the distorting and multi-faceted mirror of relativity; whilst the idea of revising the “index of our lovers and our friends” via “gestures possibly forgotten” can be found in Cavafy's poetry of reminiscence, such as “Since Nine O'clock” or “Long Ago”:

.....
A skin as though of jasmine...
That August evening -- was it August? --
I can still just recall the eyes: blue, I think they were...
Ah yes, blue: a sapphire blue. (Cavafy Poems page 38, lines. 4 - 7)

A further link connecting Durrell's 'Alexandria' with the work of Cavafy can be found in the lines “...the queer student in his poky hot / Tenth floor room above the harbour...” (Durrell Poems page 155, lines 43 - 44) who hears “The sirens shaking the tree of his heart / and shuts his books, while the most / Inexpressible longings like wounds unstitched / stir in him...” (ls 45 - 48) seems to be a direct allusion to Cavafy's twenty-three year old “and very good looking” devotee of books in “He Had Planned to Read”

(Cavafy Poems page 92, line 26). However, Durrell's "queer" student is no Cavafian homosexual, for Durrell's eroticised bookworm is stirred by "some girl's unquiet ghost" (l. 48). Cavafy's young man, on the other hand, has had his "ideal flesh" "penetrated" (ls. 8 - 9). Nevertheless, in his 1960 poem "Cavafy" Durrell seems fascinated with the world of Cavafian eroticism:

And here I find him great. Never
To attempt a masterpiece of size --
You must leave life for that. No
But always to preserve the adventive
Minute, never to destroy the truth,
Admit the coarse manipulations of the lie.
If only the brown fingers franking his love
Could once be fixed in art, the immortal
Episode be recorded -- *there* he would awake
On a fine day to shed his acts like scabs,
The trespasses on life and living slake

In the taste, not of his death but of his dying:
And like the rest of us he died still trying.
(Durrell Poems page 253, lines 21 - 34).

Durrell's exploration of Cavafy's homosexual love poetry anticipates the Quartet's theme of the exploration of forbidden "modern" love: the inter-racial love between Mountolive

and Leila; Narouz's unrequited love for Clea; the brother-sister incest between Pursewarden and his Liza; Scobie's "pederasty" and transvestism; Justine's "nymphomania"; the child-sex available in brothels; and numerous adulterous relationships, including Darley and Purewarden's parallel affairs with Justine. Indeed, Durrell's Alexandria, "the great winepress of love" is a place where "...there are more than five sexes and only demotic Greek seems to distinguish among them." (J 12)

As important as Cavafian "colour" is to the Quartet, the dominant themes in Durrell's Egyptian poetry remain isolation, alienation and exile. "Conon in Alexandria" continues these themes. The city is a Fitzgeraldian "Ash-heap of four cultures" (Durrell Poems page 127, line 1), anticipating the city of the Quartet which had "five races, five languages, a dozen creeds" (J 11). Events after the Second World War, culminating in Suez 1956, would add a fifth wasted culture to Alexandria's ash-heap, that of Imperial Britain. Again, Durrell implies that in the Egyptian heat is the winter of his discontent: the poem has a bleak winter setting: "...winter rain rings and whitens" (l. 3), and the poet has endured "four Februaries" (l. 28) in the city and complains that:

You would think that thoughts so long rehearsed

Like the dry friction of ropes in the mind

Would cease to lead me where in Greece

The almond-candles and the statues burn. (p 128, ls. 30 - 33)

Alexandria has become the rock to which Conon's Prometheus is tied, for he has been "...four years bound here" (l. 5). Like Darley in the Quartet, Conon is "A solitary

presumed quite happy" (l. 9); this description corresponds to the description of the men of Alexandria in Justine "...the sick men, the solitaires, the prophets..." (J 12). Conon is occupied by "Writing those interminable whining letters"; Conon's voice is plainly recognisable in Durrell's real-life correspondence from Egypt, where he seems to be a man presumed happy by distant friends, but who is being consumed by an internal anguish that occasionally percolates out to the outside world in the form of "whining letters". As with "Alexandria", the poet's sole consolation is that the Mediterranean rain that finds him so dejected in Alexandria must also have fallen upon Greece; he "presumed" (l. 14) that this rain had "Blown against wet lips and shutters out of Rhodes" (l. 13). The port and Pharos separate the poet from his friends, and he is tormented by "nightly visitations" of memories of the Greek islands. Having set this dismal scene, the poem then concentrates on Conon's state of mind. The stars "...press idly on the nerves" (l. 29) weighing on his mind as "Points of dew in a universe too large / Too formal to be more than terrible" (ls. 31 - 32). Somewhat in the manner of Keith Douglas's "Simplify Me When I Am Dead", the poem has some future historian passing judgement on his dead subject:

Would you say that later, reading

Such simple propositions, the historian

Might be found to say: "The critic

In him made a humour of this passion....." (Durrell Poems page 74. lines

36 - 40)

Just as the “learned man” of Douglas's poem (Douglas Poems page 74 line 10) passes the reductive comment that the poet's skeleton indicates that “ ‘He was of such a type of intelligence’, no more.” (l. 11), so Durrell's historian reduces the poet's musings to “The equations of a mind too conscious of ideas” (Durrell Poems page 128 line 40). Canon's isolation is underscored by the historian's observation that it is the abstract products of the rational mind that were able to escape the poet's exile, not real human experience: “Fictions, not kisses, crossed the water between them ?” (l. 41); thus, the poem makes a point about the specific state of mind of the poet in exile. However, the poem also seems to be making a more general point about the existential contradiction of the creative writer. The writer depends on a real human experience, “kisses” for inspiration. However, as real pieces of human existence these “kisses” are transitory, what survives, what “crosses the water” that is death and thereby projects the writer's existence into the posthumous future are “fictions”, the contrived products of the individual mind. In this way, Durrell suggests that, poetry seems to be a way of overcoming the contradiction between the fleetingness of physical existence and sensation and the reductive “fictions” of the written word. This is a contradiction which presents itself most clearly in the objective form of the novel. Poetry, on the other hand, goes beyond and beneath the purely rational by using a language of symbols that attempts to go “beyond the ego”, as Durrell put it in his Key to Modern Poetry (77). Durrell's theoretical articles in Personal Landscape present an interesting insight into his attitude toward his poetic work; poetry contains an element of “nonsense”, but he points out that, “nonsense is more like good sense with all the logic removed.” It is this suppression of logic, syntax and causality that makes poetry what it is:

At its highest point poetry makes use of nonsense in order to indicate a level of experience beyond the causality principle. You don't quicken or laugh at nonsense because it is complete non-sense; but because you detect its semblance to sense.

Logic, syntax, is a causal instrument, inadequate for the task of describing the whole of reality. Poems don't describe, but they are sounding boards which enable the alert consciousness to pick up the reverberations of the extra-causal reality for itself. (1945, 73)

Durrell's poetic theory clearly informs the Alexandria Quartet, which is structured so as to disrupt the chain of causality that, up to the advent of modernism, had been the basic underpinning of the objectivist Victorian novel. Durrell explains this clearly in his "Note" that prefaces Balthazar:

The first three parts [of the tetralogy], however, are to be deployed spatially and are not linked in a serial form. Time is stayed...the subject-object relation is so important to relativity that I have tried to turn the novel through both subjective and objective modes (n. pag.)

Earlier modernists used different techniques to disrupt normative causality; for example, in The Waste Land Eliot deploys a highly intertextual word picture to break the chain of logical causality; in Ulysses Joyce retells an ancient myth within a modern day to achieve a similar effect, and in Finnegans Wake uses associative techniques to breakdown the syntactic and etymological logic of English. In the Quartet Durrell is

particularly concerned with achieving a relativistic disruption of time. This allows Durrell both to cut a synchronic slice through Egyptian history from the most ancient times up to the nineteen-forties and then to let these eternal "presents" interact simultaneously in his mythic fallen city, and to investigate how duration through time provides, via relativity, a way in which the multiplicity disguised by the idea of a holistic *cogito* can be opened to view.

"Conon in Alexandria" similarly turns on its axis through subjectivity to objectivity to offer an assessment of the psychological dimensions of the poet's Middle Eastern experience:

And later by the hearthstone of a philosophy

You might have added: "The desert, yes, for exiles.

But its immensity only confines one further.

Its end seems always in oneself." (Durrell Poems page 129 lines 50 - 54)

In Justine, on Darley's Greek island, Darley and Melissa's child "finished the hearth-stone of the house together...We buried the rings Cohen bought for Melissa in the ground under the hearth-stone, according to the custom of this island (J 15)." The child is from the union of Coptic Nessim and Greek Melissa, and old Cohen was Darley's rival for Melissa's affections. It is as if the old Alexandria of "five races" in the Quartet had been reified as a "philosophy" in "Conon in Alexandria". Interred under the hearth-stone, buried like so much of ancient Egypt, all that is left for Darley and for Conon is the alienating present. Just as Alexandria is a place for "solitaries" (J 12), so the desert that surrounds it is for "exiles" (l. 51), with the heart of its desolation rooted in the self, where

"immensity" (l. 52) finds its end: neither town nor countryside, population nor desolation can alleviate the existential anguish of the writer in his Middle Eastern exile.

Immediately following this contemplation, however, the poem switches abruptly to random elements of the exilic existence that momentarily command the poet's attention, "A gown stained at the arm-pits by a woman's body. / A letter unfinished because the ink gave out." (ls. 55 - 56)

This anticipates aspects of the prose style of the Alexandria Quartet, where Darley's philosophising on his predicament is disrupted when random aspects of the often sordid reality of Alexandria suddenly interrupt the flow of ideas. For example, early in Justine Darley is on the verge of articulating a powerful theory about Alexandria's "gravitational field", "Justine would say that we had been trapped in the projection of a will too powerful and to deliberate to be human -- the gravitational field which Alexandria threw down among those it had chosen to be its exemplars..." (16). Darley's deliberations fade off into four dots, " "; suddenly the bustle of Alexandria intervenes:

...The shuffling of white-robed figures from the station yards. The shops filling and emptying like lungs in the Rue de Soeurs. The 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. Ringing of silver on the money-changers' counters. The iron grill outside the bank still too hot to touch. (J 16)

“Conon in Alexandria” contains lines and parts of lines printed in italics which can stand on their own as aphorisms and appear as though these have been written separately from the main body of the poem:

The lovers you describe as *'separating each other*
Further with every kiss': and your portrait
 Of a man *'engaged in bitterly waiting*
For the day when art should become unnecessary', (ls 57 - 60)

These aphoristic lines are recognisable from the Quartet, where they, or their near equivalents, occur, as do: “*Partings like these are lucky. At least they wound*” (l. 50); “*Freedom alone confines*” (l. 62); and “*Music is only love, looking for words*” (l. 71).

Durrell's “Cairo”, the second of the “Eight Aspects of Melissa” (“Cairo” was published separately as “The Night” in the 1960 edition of Durrell's Collected Poems), continues Durrell's central theme of exile and alienation:

Cut from the joints of this immense
 Darkness upon the face of Egypt lying,
 We move in the possession of our acts
 Alone, the dread apostles of our weakness. (Durrell Poems page 147, II
 lines 1 - 4)

Here, “Cut off” signifies isolation and losing contact with friends; this is the situation in which Durrell found himself in Egypt. However, “cut off” can also refer to Alexandria

which geographically is “between Egypt and the Sea” and hence is “cut off” from the rest of the country. Being “cut off” from “the joints of this immense darkness upon the face of Egypt lying” has the primary meaning that the poet is cut off from a “darkness” which is lying on Egypt's face, this “darkness” refers to the Conradian darkness of Africa.

However, as a further layer of meaning darkness can be taken to refer to the Second World War and the occupation by the Axis of much of Europe, including Greece. The poet has fled from this darkness and has found refuge “on the face of Egypt” amid a different, African darkness. The poem's protagonists find themselves “...in possession of our acts / Alone, the dread apostles of our weakness” (ls 3 - 4); this recalls the way in which the prime-movers of the Quartet, Mountolive and Nessim, gradually become aware of their impotence in the face of events that they imagined they controlled.

Mountolive goes from thinking that “now, as an Ambassador, he must forever renounce the friendship of ordinary human beings in exchange for their *deference*” (M 132), to a feeling of “incredulity and shock” (180) after Pursewarden's suicide, which had “transferred the whole weight of the moral problem [of the conspiracy] onto Mountolive's own shoulders” (186-7). Similarly, a “Workpoint” at the end of Balthazar mentions that Mountolive had become “swayed by the dangerous illusion that he was free to conceive and act.” (249) Likewise, Pursewarden's death caused Nessim to realise that he had been:

...so long self-deluded by the same dreams of a perfect finite action, free and heedless as the impulse of a directed will, now found himself, like his friend, a prey to the gravitational forces which lie inherent in the time-spring of our acts, making them spread, ramify and distort themselves; making them spread as a stain will spread on a white ceiling. (M 214)

Tolstoy discusses this question of agency at length in his epilogues to War and Peace.

"Chance", together with "genius" seem to bring Napoleon to power (424-5), but, once he has reached the apogee of that power it is "chance" again which seems to bring about Napoleon's downfall. However, the power driving this "chance" remains mysterious.

Similarly, in the Quartet, rather than engage in a detailed analysis of causality and agency in Egyptian politics in the nineteen-thirties, Durrell observes events from his "prismatic" perspectives and leaves the reader to decide what event brings about which result.

Like Mountolive and Nessim, the protagonists of "Cairo" find themselves "...alone..." (l. 4), succumbing to the existential loneliness which attaches to the realisation of the contingency of individual action. They are "the dread apostles" of their "weakness" (l. 4), fated to spread the gospel of the ultimate futility of an individual's action-in-the-world; this is the existentialism of the alienated outsider. Meursault, Albert Camus' *étranger* exemplifies the alienated individual who is "cut off" from the social and cultural contexts that give meaning to his actions. Camus scholar Patrick McCarthy notes that in *L'Étranger* Meursault feels that his identity is being menaced by his mother; this overlaps with his feeling that his identity as a *pied-noir* is being menaced by Algeria's Arabs (47). These twin psychoanalytic and political motives underlie Meursault's apparently pointless killing of an Arab in a brawl (although Camus suggests that the reason behind Meursault's subsequent execution is that he did not show sufficient grief at his mother's death -- McCarthy observes that in nineteen-forties Algeria no French court would have condemned a *pied-noir* to death for killing an armed Arab [59]). The same psychoanalytic and political strands underpin the motivations of Darley, an itinerant Briton in colonial Egypt: Darley's sexual identity is threatened (or "wounded", [J 12]) by

Justine at the same time as anti-colonial political movements in which she is heavily implicated threaten the British presence in Egypt and Darley's "Imperial selfhood".

In "Cairo", however, an ordinary Egyptian street-scene at dusk restores some humanity to the protagonist's desolate state: "At the stable-door the carpenter's three sons / Bend over a bucket of burning shavings / Warming their inwardness..." (ls. 6 - 9). This tender human scene becomes "quite unearthly" (l. 9) "As the candle-marking time begins." (l. 10), signalling fragmentation of human existence when it is stretched out across measured time: Cavafy used the image of candles marking time to make a similar observation regarding being and time in his poem "Candles": unused time is warm and vivid, "Days to come stand in front of us / like a row of burning candles -- / golden, warm, vivid candles" (Cavafy Poems, page 8, lines 1 - 3); however, time passed is altogether more sinister, "Days past fall behind us, / a gloomy line of burnt-out candles; / the nearest are still smoking, / cold, melted, and bent" (ls 4 - 7). Yet for Durrell's protagonists metaphysical succour is at hand, for elsewhere "Three little magi" are "under a vast Capella" (Durrell Poems page 146, line 10), whilst the golden tears of a Mary-like "she" "troubles heaven" and fall down on the poet's window as Alexandria rain (l. 12). Rain, seen in the Arab world as a mercy from heaven, restores a sense of peace to a human world that the contingency of action and the passage of time can render meaningless:

The children rapt, the mauve street swallowed,
The harps of flame among the shadows
In Egypt now and far from Nazareth. (ls. 14 - 16)

The Christian references of this poem are obvious, and this may seem a strange poem for Durrell, a man who had been “cured of formal Christianity for good” to have written. However, Christianity, at least in its primitive form, can be said to be the archetypal religion of Alexandria, a syncretic faith that combines Semitic monotheism and messianism with the resurrection-magic of the ancient Egyptian Osiris and the Gnosticism of St. John's gospel. It was then liberally seasoned with Greek thought and left to marinade in the theological kitchen that was Alexandria in the first decades AD, from which it emerged to spread across the Roman world. Viewed thus, Christianity was only the most successful of various syncretic cults, such as Mithranism and the cult of Isis, that were born out of the fury of theological speculation in ancient Alexandria and which rose to challenge paganism in the later Roman Empire. Durrell, a(n) (a)gnostic had a great interest in ancient Egyptian religion as a mythic schema; this respect extended to Egypt's native interpretation of Christianity. MacNiven reports that in 1977 during his first visit to Egypt since he left Alexandria in 1945 “Larry spoke so feelingly about the Copts -- 'the original, first real Christians' -- comparing their prayers to the 'pretty weak stuff' of European Christianity...” (Biography 629). These Copts are Faltaus Hosnani's *genus pharonicus*, “Christians like you, only of the oldest and purest strain” (M 41). Fittingly, Durrell's Egyptian poetry anticipates this view of the Copts with a paean to Christianity in its Egyptian form, for Durrell and the senior Hosnani view the Christianity of the Copts as “original” Christianity.

Continuing the Egyptian-Christian theme, “Petron, The Desert Father” (“Petron” is also the title of Hugh Sykes Davies’ 1935 poem) recalls the formative years of Christianity. Again, the scene is Mareotis, the “dense yellow lake” (page 149, l. 5) “On the sand trash of an estuary near Libya” (l. 4) which is recognisable from Durrell’s depictions of the lake in the tetralogy:

The lion-dust of the desert: prophets’ tombs turned to zinc and copper at sunset on the ancient lake. Its huge sand-faults like watermarks from the air; green and citron giving to gunmetal, to a single plum-dark sail, moist, palpitant: sticky-winged nymph. (B 13)

The lines “Waterbirds sailing upon the darkness / Of Mareotis, this was the beginning” (ls. 1 - 2) evoke the creation scene in Genesis, “In the beginning God created the heaven. And the earth....” And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters’ (Genesis 1 1:2). These lines also recall the ancient Egyptian’s belief, based on their observations of the Nile’s seasonal flooding, that creation took place when a mound of mud rose above the waters of primordial chaos. Thus, Mareotis reverberates “With the insupportable accents of the Word” (l. 6). Situated on this *locus* of primordial creation, Petron, the desert theologian, like Christ, “...illustrated to the ordinary...” (l. 8), eschewing “The elegant psychotics on their couches / In Alexandria...” (ls. 10 - 11) who could not tempt him “With talk of business, war, and lovely clothes.” (l. 12).

As well as standing for the desert fathers, real figures in Egypt’s philosophical and

theological history, Petron also anticipates the tetralogy's Narouz Hosnani, who Durrell depicts as a charismatic Coptic Egyptian revivalist who ministered to the "ordinary" in and around the Delta "Descendants of the pharaohs, children of Ra" (M 125), and who, in contrast to his brother Nessim had little time for what he saw as the effete and decadent world of Alexandrian society. Whereas Nessim was at home in the Alexandrian world of commerce, guns and fine clothes "...there was no detail of the business that he did not know; while hardly a transaction he made did not turn out to be based on a stroke of judgement" (J 25), Narouz preferred to preach and prophesy in the Delta and desert, " 'He is a preacher, really' [Nessim] said with amazement. 'That is why he goes to see Taor.' He explained that Narouz often rode into the desert to visit a famous woman saint..." (M 126): Narouz's mentor, it seems, was a desert mother.

In a different vein, the figure of Petron incorporates aspects of the British soldier-poets of the Desert War, such as Keith Douglas and Hamish Henderson whose poetry was deeply concerned with the psychological and existential dimensions of mechanised desert warfare; for such poets the decadence of Alexandria, only a day's drive from El Alemain, was of secondary importance. Like Petron, Douglas had "...heard / Girls' lips puff in the nostrils of the fife" (Durrell Poems page 149 ls. 17 - 18) through his affair with his Alexandrian lover Milena, who is described in Desmond Graham's biography of Douglas (151). Yet, as Petron rejected the pleasures of Roman Alexandria, so Douglas rejected the pleasures that war-time Alexandria offered to soldiers newly arrived from blitzed and rationed "Blighty", "a pioneer in pleasure on the long / Linen-shaded colonnades..." (ls 16 - 17). Douglas rejected the prospect of a "cushy" war as a camouflage trainer or cavalryman policing riotous Arabs in Syria and deliberately went against orders to travel to the Western Desert and see action at El Alamein (1946, 17). Petron the desert father

had rejected the life of the 'unreal city' and embraced the wilderness with the motto "...I dare not ask for what I hope / And yet I may not speak of what I fear' " (ls 19 - 20).

Petron's motto is poignantly apt when applied to Keith Douglas's twin convictions that, on one hand he was destined to become a major poet, but that on the other he would not survive the war. Poems of the calibre of "*Vergissmeinnicht*" and "How to Kill" communicate what Ted Hughes has described as "...the unifying generalisation that shed the meaning and urgency into all his observations and particulars: not truth is beauty only, but truth kills everybody. The truth of a man is the doomed man in him or his dead body." ("Introduction" to Keith Douglas: Selected Poems [1964]). Petron the desert father illustrated the redemptive truths of primitive Christianity to "...the ordinary those / Who found no meaning in the flesh's weakness" (ls 8 - 9); Douglas the desert poet illustrated to a similarly ignorant audience the reductive ("Simplify Me When I'm Dead") truths of a *weltanschauung* which in the nineteen-fifties would be popularised to young poets and philosophers of Douglas's generation as *existentialism*. Yet Douglas did not live to wrangle with the dictum "no more poetry after Auschwitz" ("Introduction" to Keith Douglas: The Complete Poems [1987]). Douglas had come to understand that it is the certainty of non-existence which raises the possibility of authentic human existence, as "On a Return from Egypt" (written, like "Petron", in six-line stanzas) attests:

And all my endeavours are unlucky explorers
 come back, abandoning the expedition;
 the specimens, the lilies of ambition
 still spring in their climate, still unpicked:
 but time, time is all I lacked

to find them, as the great collectors before me.

(Douglas Poems, page 132, lines 13 - 18)

Like Douglas, Petron the desert father decided to forsake the attractions of Alexandria for the wilderness, the better to seek the annihilation of the self:

Now dense as clouded urine moved the lake

Whose waters were to be his ark and fort

By the harsh creed of water-fowl and snake,

To the wave-polished stone he laid his ear

And said: 'I dare not ask for what I hope,

And yet I may not speak of what I fear.'

(Durrell Poems page 150 lines. 25 - 30)

MacNiven notes that, ironically, Durrell's final word on the war was "a German one, *Gleichgültigkeit* – indifference" (Biography 318). Neither Durrell's temperament nor his attitude to the war predisposed him to seek out, as Douglas did, danger and risk his life in order to arrive at a point of pure action in which poetry and action were one, a concept similar to the "harmony of pen and sword" of the post-War Japanese writer, Yukio Mishima. Egypt, however, was to plant its literary lilies into Durrell's sensibility. These lilies were to be harvested, arranged and put on public display in the Alexandria Quartet.

Durrell began writing "Egyptian" poetry before he had set foot in Egypt with "Egyptian Poem" (1938) and "The Egg" (1939), explorations of Egyptian theology and myth, contemporary with his beginning his pre-war "Book of the Dead". In the Egypt of

the Second World War, Durrell's poetry explored themes of exile and alienation. In some of Durrell's Egyptian poetry, as in the Quartet, Durrell's literary response to his exile was a reaction of shock and horror at the sordid realities of colonial Egypt. The social, political and cultural conditions which prevailed in colonial Egypt presented him with a shocking contrast to what he had read of the Egypt of the pharaohs and the Ptolomies; however, too often in this writing Durrell projects his revulsion at what he sees around him onto indigenous Egyptians who he sees variously as being representatives of "Levantine" mercantilism or "African" darkness. Others of Durrell's Egyptian poems, however, explored deeper issues than the knee-jerk reaction of the writer to colonial squalor. Poems such as "Mareotis" (1945), "The Anecdotes" (1948) and "Conon in Alexandria" (1945) explore themes derived from the experience of exile, such as cultural and psychological alienation, and the illusory nature of individual agency. Durrell would later explore these themes in prose in his depictions of the Quartet's major protagonists: Darley, Nessim, Pursewarden and Mountolive.

Of this group of poems it is "Conon in Exile" (1942) that most clearly evokes the charged atmosphere of the Quartet where a diffused sexuality and dissolute sexual activity are blended with a wider frustration and with boredom, exile and alienation. One lover "Let down her hair over my exercises / But was hardly aware of me; an author" (Durrell "Poems" page 107: I, lines 3 - 4); the body of another was "Warm and rosy from the oil like a scented loaf, / Not human any more -- but not divine as they had hoped" (II 7 - 8). The frustration of exile spoils the poet's relationship with yet another, "The lovely Ion, harmless patient and in love. / Our quarrels disturbed the swallows in the eaves, / The wild bees could not work in the vine" (III 3 - 5). In these lines, "the swallows" refer back to Durrell's experiments with Egyptian myth in his pre-exilic "Egyptian Poem",

which now seem naive from the perspective of exile in wartime Egypt. "The eaves" puns on the name "Eve" Cohen, whilst "wild bees" alludes to "Melissa" who occurs both in Durrell's Egyptian poetry and in the Quartet; "the vine" anticipates Darley's description of Alexandria as "the great winepress of love" (J 12); Durrell's ikonic usage of such words as "swallow" "vine", "eaves", "bees" and so forth anticipates the "heraldic" methodology of the Quartet. The poet can remember "...bodies, arms, faces" (IV 3), but has forgotten their names. Nevertheless, Conon is able to salvage some existential authenticity from this sexual, emotional and psychological chaos:

Finally I am here. Conon in exile on Andros
 Like a spider in a bottle writing the immortal
Of Love and Death, through the bodies of those
 Who slept with my words but did not know me.
 An old man with a skinful of wine
 Living from pillow to poke under a vine. (Durrell Poems page 108 V 1 - 6)

Conon comes to realise "I have put down women's names like some / Philosophical proposition. At last I understand / They were only forms for my own ideas" (V 4 - 7).

These lines are close in concept to the passage in Clea where Darley realises:

...and in my own life (the staunchless stream flowing from the wounded
 side of Time!) the three women who also arranged themselves as if to
 represent the moods of the great verb, Love: Melissa, Justine, and Clea.
 (177)

In the arms of his lovers, Conon realises that he “lays with myself”, and knows “only coitus with the shadows.” If “shadows” can be taken to mean ghostly “shades” then Conon's book, the “*Of Love and Death*” (V 3) becomes another form of the “Book of the Dead”, a book of the living dead where the alienation of exilic existence only emphasises the inauthenticities of “modern love.” Only the poet's remembrance of, and longing for, the world outside of exile lends authenticity to his experience, “By our blue Aegean which forever / Washes and pardons and brings us home.” (V 16 - 17)

“Conon in Exile” thus returns to Greece where Durrell first conceived of writing his “Book of the Dead.” The link between the Egyptian *Pert-em-Hru* and the *Alexandria Quartet* is this: in the *Pert-em-Hru* the soul undergoes a journey through the underworld where it is confronted by various gods and demons which it has to bring on to its side or bind by deploying the hymns and spells contained in the book. This achieved the soul goes on to rest in peace. In the *Alexandria Quartet*, L.G. Darley, a cipher for the naive pre-exilic Durrell, enters the ancient city of Alexandria, a fallen terrestrial “underworld” haunted by the ghosts of the ancient Egyptians and Greeks, now populated by “Levantines” and “Darkness” and occupied by the British. Here, he is confronted by a series of Heraldic characters, some benign, some malignant. These he has to master using the charms and spells of the modern world, literature, philosophy and “modern love”. After passing through a series of tests and challenges, he has, by the dénouement of *Clea*, transformed himself from naivety to artistic and existential maturity and leaves his exile in Alexandria, passing on to his *paradise terrestre* (*Biography* 306), a Greek island, where he proceeds to write his own “Book of the Dead”. It is impossible to say to what extent Durrell's lost “Book of the Dead” resembles the *Alexandria Quartet*; however, the

Pert-em-Hru and the *Bardo Thödol* have clearly influenced the tetralogy. Durrell's Egyptian poems that were written before his exile in wartime Egypt, "Egyptian Poem" and "The Egg" show the influence that ancient Egyptian myth and theology has had on the underpinning structure of what eventual emerged as the Alexandria Quartet. Significantly, it took the real-life experience of flight from the Axis invasion of Greece and exile in the Egypt of the Second World War to lift the Alexandria Quartet from being simply a modernistic experiment with myth into something more hard-edged: a work informed by the bitter-sweet struggle for existential authenticity in a world of exile and alienation.

This alienation notwithstanding, Durrell's thin volume of ribald verse, Premature Epitaphs, printed privately in a limited edition as a Christmas present for friends, attests to the fact that Durrell still managed to enjoy a lively social life in Egypt. Durrell was able to cultivate and maintain his circle of friends despite the melancholy and dejection expressed in his exilic poetry. MacNiven comments on the effects of Durrell's exile by commenting that in Cairo Durrell "had enjoyed his part in setting up Personal Landscape, and had confirmed friendships begun in Athens while adding to his acquaintance people such as Ines Walter, the Smarts, and Freya Stark." Moreover, his experiences in the "power centre of the [British] Embassy" had "stocked his memory and notebooks with enough episodes and colour for a dozen novels." (Biography 262)

Durrell seems to have been less happy in Alexandria than in Cairo, but nonetheless he found in Alexandria a contemporaneous "colour" and squalor that would lend the Alexandria Quartet, its ironic and elegiac qualities with regard to both the waning British Empire and the dying Egyptian monarchy of King Farouk. Artemis Cooper notes that Durrell was "impatient with the day-to-day Alexandria" describing the

fallen city as “this smashed up broken down shabby Neapolitan town, with its Levantine mounds of houses peeling in the sun...no music, no art, no real gaiety” where there was “ ‘NO SUBJECT OF CONVERSATION EXCEPT MONEY.’ ” However, Cooper notes that Durrell was “fascinated by the contiguity between this small-minded Alexandria with its sinister corruptions, and the ancient capital of beauty and arcane learning which Forster and Cavafy had awakened.” (245) Despite the loss of the first draft of his “Book of the Dead” Egypt provided the material that would later allow the Alexandria Quartet to arise, phoenix-like from the “Ash-heap of four cultures”; nevertheless, Durrell was determined to get away from Egypt as soon as possible. Following the fall of the German garrison defending Rhodes, Durrell moved to that island, with Eve Cohen, “his only tie with Egypt” (MacNiven Biography 305) and almost immediately began writing his book on Rhodes, Reflections on a Marine Venus. Of Durrell's return to Greece MacNiven writes that “Ulysses returning to Ithaca could hardly have felt greater elation than Larry landing at the beginning of June 1945 on a Greek island after his exile in Egypt.” Indeed, in Reflections on a Marine Venus Durrell describes how, on awakening on “that first Rodian morning”, he “...still half drugged with sleep, burst into the Aegean water, clear and cold as wine.” (Biography 306)

Durrell was not to return to Egypt for thirty-two years, but the influence of Egypt and exile on Durrell's development as a writer was profound. Unless either scholarly endeavour or good fortune brings to light the lost manuscript of Durrell's 1940 “Book of the Dead”, his Egyptian poetry, offers the clearest insight into the key Egyptian phase in the development of the work that would eventually emerge as the Alexandria Quartet.

In summary, Durrell's Egyptian poetry has four distinct phases. Firstly, there is

Durrell's poetry of the late nineteen-thirties that used ancient Egyptian theology as the heraldic core of a modernist experiment in mythic method. Secondly, there is Durrell's poetry written in exile in Egypt (or soon afterwards) which elaborates this mythic core. This poetry is of three types, firstly "word-pictures", such as 'Mareotis', that contribute to the "colour" of the Quartet, then "Levantine" poems, such as "Alexandria" (1946), which recall Durrell's initial impressions of Egypt. This group of poems again anticipate aspects of the tetralogy's "colour" and have some importance as historical vignettes. Thirdly, there are philosophical poems such as "Cities, Plains and People" (1943), "Conon in Exile" (1942) and "Conon in Alexandria" (1945) which lay the foundations for some of the structural and philosophical underpinnings of the Quartet. Lastly, there are Durrell's post-War Egyptian poems, for example the "Anecdotes" (1948) "Eight Aspects of Melissa" (1946), "A Bowl of Roses" (1953) and "Cavafy" (1960), which offer a more considered and deliberate assessment of the psychological, literary and cultural aspects of Durrell's Egyptian exile. The influence of all three phases of Durrell's Egyptian poetry can be strongly felt throughout the Alexandria Quartet. Moreover, much of this poetry anticipates important elements of the "colour", plot and characterisation of the tetralogy in its final form.

Thus, the Quartet returns to and expands many of the themes which Durrell explored in his Egyptian poetry. The Pharoenic and Ptolomaic histories of Alexandria that Durrell uses in his Egyptian poetry also weave in and out between the tetralogy's main plot strands to replay themselves in the work's present. Both the poetry and the tetralogy contain more contemporary references to and influences from Durrell's immediate literary predecessors in Alexandria, Cavafy and Forster. Character sketches of some of the tetralogy's key personalities, such as Melissa and Clea are developed in the

first instance in Durrell's Egyptian poetry. Other aspects of the Alexandria Quartet which are anticipated in the Egyptian poetry include methods and modes of characterisation, images from the Second World War, themes of exile and alienation and an ironic farewell to the world of the British occupation of Egypt. The importance of Durrell's Egyptian poetry to understanding the Quartet cannot be overstated; furthermore, Durrell sustained his interest in some of the themes that run through both his Egyptian poetry and the tetralogy, such as his interest in Egyptian myth, magic and religion, throughout his writing career. These appear again in the Avignon Quintet.

Durrell acknowledged the debt that the Alexandria Quartet owed to his poetry, saying just after he completed the tetralogy "Poetry turned out to be an invaluable mistress, because poetry is form, and the wooing and seduction of form is the whole game." (Biography 485) Fittingly, it was the commercial success of the Quartet that persuaded Faber to publish the first editions of Durrell's Collected Poems in 1960. Nevertheless, it would be a pity if the success of the prose masterwork were to cause his poetry to be overlooked. For, its relationship to the Quartet aside, Durrell's poetry has a distinctive charm of its own and is the vehicle for a unique and fascinating voice.

Durrell's poetry provides an essential link between his imaginative re-creation of his fallen Alexandria in the tetralogy, and the historical war-time city in which the tetralogy was conceived. The concluding chapter of this work will examine the political, cultural and socio-historical climates of the post-War period 1945 - 1960, and Durrell's responses to it, with particular reference to the Quartet. The conclusion will also review the main historical and social strands that this study has identified within the Quartet and the implications of this history for the analysis of the tetralogy and for literary theory which concerns itself with colonial and post-colonial writing. This work will conclude by

arguing that the tetralogy should be read as a paradigmatic text in the study of both colonial and post-colonial writing and will present the case for a revival of scholarly interest in Lawrence Durrell and in the Alexandria Quartet in particular.

Chapter 6:

In Conclusion

**Another wears out humbly like a craft:
Red wells where the potter's thumb
Sealed his jars of guaranteed oil.
That fluent thumb which presses
On history's vibrating string,
Pressing here, there, in a wounded place.**

Lawrence Durrell, "The Lost Cities" (1948).

As an epigraph to her essay "Missing Link" Dianne Vipond quotes Raymond Federman, "All great fiction, to a large extent, is a reflection of itself rather than a reflection of reality." (54) Notwithstanding Durrell's comment that the characters and situations in the tetralogy are "entirely imaginary" ("Note" to Balthazar, n. pag.), this dissertation has taken the position that the investigation of the ways in which the tetralogy "reflects on itself" has been conducted almost to the exclusion of the study of the social and historical contexts of the Quartet. Accordingly, this work has attempted to let history enter into the discussion of the Quartet via the side-door of Federman's qualification "to a large extent". Whilst wishing to avoid acquiring a "New Historicist" tag, the research underpinning this dissertation indicates the relevance of H. Aram Veeser's concept of historicism to the study of the tetralogy. Veeser's propositions can be summarised as follows: every expressive act is embedded in a network of material practices, literary and non-literary texts circulate inseparably, and no discourse, imaginative or archival, gives access to unchanging truths or unalterable human nature (2). This study has attempted to contextualise the tetralogy in terms of the history in which it is embedded and investigate the relationship between the literary text of the

Quartet and non-literary texts and contexts that inform it in order to cast light upon the “public life realities” that “control” the Quartet (Bowen, “Toybox” 17). Durrell may have had good reason to embed such “public life realities” deeply into the tetralogy and cover his tracks by stressing the “entirely imaginary” nature of the Quartet. As a civil servant Durrell had worked for the Imperial administration during crises such as the Desert War and the Anglo-French conflict in Syria during the Second World War and the EOKA crisis in Cyprus during the mid nineteen-fifties. Likewise, Durrell had been given sensitive post-War postings such as British-mandated Rhodes, Cold War Yugoslavia and Peronist Argentina. Thus, Durrell would have been bound by Britain’s draconian Official Secrets Act not to put any experience or knowledge he gained in an official capacity into his fiction in too obvious a manner. However, shortly after insisting that the tetralogy is “entirely imaginary”, he seems to somewhat undermine this insistence with the syntactically tricky qualifier “Nor could the city be less unreal” (“Note” to Balthazar). Of course, Durrell’s post-War, post-Imperial, post-Suez readership would have been better placed to read the Quartet in the contexts of political and other events that were unfolding at the time without the “post-Hiroshima Proust” having to spell-out his literary game-plan too obviously. Interestingly, in the 1960 edition of Durrell’s Collected Poems “Anecdotes XIV” mentions “In Tunis, winter coming on”, whereas the 1980 edition, compiled over twenty years after Durrell had quit the Diplomatic Service, has “In Beirut, winter coming on”; the 1960 edition replaces “Beirut”, a Levantine city which Durrell had visited on official business during 1943, a politically sensitive year, with “Tunis”, a city Durrell never visited. However, the 1980 edition brings the poem more closely in line with Durrell’s lived experience by restoring “Beruit” in place of “Tunis”.

By the mid-nineteen-fifties, Durrell was living on Cyprus. As Durrell set out, amid the gunshots and bomb-blasts of the EOKA uprising against British rule, to write the Alexandria Quartet, the cosmopolitan culture of the Alexandrian *entrepôt* in which the tetralogy is set was being swept away. During the post-War decades of the nineteen-fifties and 'sixties, the old European empires collapsed as a wave of decolonisation swept the world. Some of the most violent of these upheavals took place in the Middle East. A conference of Arab leaders met in Alexandria in September 1944 (by 1945 this conference had become a permanent institution, the Arab League) dedicated to promoting Arab unity, ridding the Arab world of colonialism and preventing the establishment of a Zionist state in Palestine (Mansfield, 291). By 1946, British forces had withdrawn from all of Egypt except the Canal Zone. However, Egyptian participation in the abortive 1948 war against the nascent state of Israel proved a military and political disaster for Egypt (292). Young officers in the Egyptian army put the blame for Egypt's defeat on King Farouk, who during the war years had been transformed from "a handsome boy-king" to a "cartoon satire of middle aged debauchery" (293). Egypt's "sham democracy" was unravelling and unrest spread throughout Egypt, targeted at the Monarchy, the British, and the country's Greek and Jewish communities.

In October 1951, Nahhas Pasha, Egypt's last Wafdist Prime Minister, abrogated the Anglo-Egyptian treaty which he himself had signed and approved by plebiscite fifteen years earlier (Lacoutre 105). This treaty provided the political backdrop for the Alexandria of the Quartet, as Pursewarden complains to Ambassador-Designate Sir David Mountolive, "...the High Commission is vanishing after a rule of -- since 1888? -- and will not leave behind even the vestiges of a trained civil service to stabilise this

rabble-ridden grotesque which we now apparently regard as a sovereign state.”(M 105)

For Roger Bowen, the 1936 treaty is significant because:

The Egypt he [Durrell] recreates is already re-shaped following the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of 1936; the High Commission is no more, and Britain now sends an ambassador to Cairo, capital of an ostensibly independent kingdom. The imperial wings have been significantly clipped. ("Toybox" 11)

For Bowen, the tension between “European possession of the Middle East” and “the winds of change that will in time dispossess the European” is at the heart of the tetralogy (17). In positioning the historical events surrounding decolonisation “at the heart of this complex sequence of novels” (17) Bowen has admirably insisted that the tetralogy should not be read as a Federmannesque “reflection of itself” but as a text which is deeply embedded in the historical events which accompanied its genesis. Indeed, Bowen's allusion to British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan's “winds of change” speech is insightful. Macmillan delivered this speech to the South African parliament in February 1960 as an appeal to Voerward's South Africa to recognise the reality of decolonisation. At exactly that time, the first reviews of Clea were appearing in the press. Consequently, Macmillan's speech could not have had a direct influence on the tetralogy. However, Macmillan's “winds of change” speech alluded to an earlier speech made by Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin in 1934, which mentioned “the winds of nationalism” that were sweeping over the Empire (Macmillan Tides of Fortune 232); Baldwin's speech coincides with the rise of Wafdism in nineteen-thirties Egypt (and Darley's arrival in

Alexandria), and looks forward to the Anglo-Egyptian treaty of 1936. Thus, the tetralogy stands astride the nexus between the colonial world of 1934 in which Baldwin acknowledged growing the force of indigenous nationalism in the Empire and the post-colonial world of 1960 in which Macmillan tried to convince Pretoria of the permanence of decolonisation.

This transition from the world of colonial Empire to the post-War world of post-Imperial nation-states is reflected in the tetralogy's depiction of Egypt. As this work has sought to demonstrate, the Alexandria Quartet allegorises Britain's hot-cold relationship with the *Wafd*. In Egypt during the immediate post-War years, the *Wafd* turned decisively against a war-weakened Britain; the *Wafd* hoped that playing an anti-British card would help recover some of the popularity the party had enjoyed before the Second World War. This pandering to popular sentiment was in marked contrast to approach of the *Wafd* of the inter-War years which had hoped for a “new relationship” with Britain and which saw the 1936 treaty as “a sacred bond between Egypt and Europe”. This earlier *Wafd* had been liberal in its politics, humanistic in its philosophical outlook and culturally pro-European and Mediterraneanist. However, the post-War *Wafd* was adopting the dangerous strategy of fanning the flames of anti-British and anti-European sentiment in order to co-opt the mass support which was beginning to form around pan-Arabist and pan-Islamist groupings. Historian of the Egyptian revolution Jean Lacoutre notes that the abrogation of the treaty was “enough to bring back to the *Wafd* government's support the masses of people who had been disappointed by its handling of public affairs”; however, all over Egypt feelings were at a fever-pitch of patriotism that was threatening to turn into xenophobia (105). Wafdism's endgame is also reflected in the Quartet: Leila had once seemed to the young Mountolive to be “a beautiful enigma” (M 23). However, after

Mountolive rejected Leila's special pleading on behalf of Nessim (M 282-3) Mountolive's attitude toward Leila changed, "...she had *been* Egypt, his own private Egypt of the mind; and now this image had been husked, stripped bare" (M 284). The idea that for Mountolive Leila had been "stripped bare" and "husked" suggests that Mountolive's fetishistic fantasy of Leila as a personification of Egypt had now been drained of all the positive associations that Mountolive had projected on to it, in Kabbalistic terms all that was left was a klippothic shell or "husk". Having fled Alexandria to Kenya (where in the mid-fifties another anti-British uprising was underway) Leila had become, to paraphrase Eliot, a "paralysed force" exiled far away from the fallen, Demiurgic Alexandria. Leila was dying of "heartsickness" (C 266) capable merely of "gesture without motion", a "hollow" woman, "stuffed". For Mountolive, "Every impulse, every desire had faltered and faded out" (M 284); the Dark Swallow had become a demonic harpy, Leila had become her klippothic *alter-ego* the demonic Lilith. Correspondingly, in the real-life Egypt of the early nineteen-fifties a situation had arisen where, "Since the [1936] treaty's abrogation Britain considered the *Wafd* unacceptable...and had made up its mind to destroy it at any cost." (Lacoutre 105) Simultaneously, a murderous klippothic energy spread throughout Egypt. Inspired by a negative patriotism that expressed itself not simply as political opposition to the British occupation, but as a xenophobic hatred of Europeans, Greeks, Jews and *nasranis* in general, mobs tore down and set fire to the Europeanised parts of Alexandria and Cairo. British-owned establishments, as symbols of the occupation and all the injustices and inequalities that accrued to the occupation, were the special targets of the mob's ire. Trevor Mostyn, historian of Egypt's '*Belle Époque*' recalls the massacre of Britons at Cairo's Turf Club which followed a shoot-out in the Canal Zone city of Ismailiyya between men of the Lancashire Regiment and Egyptian

police whom the British suspected of aiding and abetting anti-British terrorism. In this action fifty Egyptian police were killed at the cost of only five British lives. The Cairo mob vented its spleen against any Britons it could lay hands on:

British members...were brutally attacked with crowbars. The crowds doused the furniture and paintings of Cromer, Kitchener, Gorst and Lloyd with paraffin and the building was soon blazing. British corpses were flung into the flames and several Britishers who tried to rush from the foyer were grabbed by the crowd and flung into the fire to be burnt alive.
(169)

In a similar vein, D.J. Enright recalls in his Memoirs of a Mendicant Professor the mass-paranoia that prevailed in Alexandria at this time:

...I was walking along the Corniche...I remarked jokingly to my friend that we were approaching an anti-aircraft gun, installed to protect Alexandria against Israeli attacks, and that, although no attempt had been made to camouflage it, we would be well advised not to stare as we passed. We fixed our gaze in front of us, perhaps a little too fixedly, for some bystander, bored with the long Sunday afternoon, conceived the thrilling notion that we might be Jewish spies. Quickly a crowd gathered, and cries of 'Yahudi!' [Jew]...broke the calm of the Corniche. (100 - 101)

The political changes that were reverberating through Egypt were threatening the viability of the British occupation. Moreover, Alexandria's non-Arab communities were also coming under pressure. The first to be affected were Alexandria's Jews. Although elements of this community could trace their origins back to the Ptolomaic city, they now found themselves trapped between the competing nationalist ideologies of Zionism and Arab nationalism. Gudrun Kramer, a historian of Egypt's Jewish community, observes that:

The steady rise of Egyptian nationalism and even more so of anti-Zionism gradually rendered the Jewish position in Egyptian society precarious...the war of 1948 made political activity for the Jews of Egypt virtually impossible, and the war of 1956 ended not only all political activity, but communal life altogether. (1987, 79)

Many Alexandrian Jews had no choice but to take a reluctant refuge in Israel, Europe or North America. This twentieth-century exodus of Jews from Egypt was bringing about the death of the cosmopolitan Alexandria of the Quartet, in which Jews such as Balthazar, Justine and old Cohen figure prominently.

Thus, by the early nineteen-fifties, the “three-cornered fight between the King, the English and the *Wafd*” (Lacoutre, 105) had already begun to wrent apart the social fabric of Alexandria which is depicted in the Quartet. As Egypt sunk deeper into anarchy, the Free Officer Movement, a cabal of middle-ranking army officers recruited mainly from lower-middle class Muslim families, seized power and declared a Republic on 26th July 1952. Not one to say goodbye to Alexandria's *deus loci* then fall on his sword as Mark

Anthony had done, King Farouk left from Alexandria to end his life in exile. By 1954 the most prominent of Free Officers, Gamal Abd El-Nasser, had replaced the bland General Naguib as president of the new republic. Nasser had fought in the 1948 Arab-Israeli war. On returning to Egypt after the war he wrote that “...the Arab circle in my eyes had become a single entity” (Nasser, 64). Thus, Nasser's explicitly Arab (and implicitly Sunni Muslim) nationalism replaced the Egyptian nationalism of the *Wafd* as the dominant political ideology in Egypt. Nasserism's defining ideology was “Arab Socialism” and one of the founding principles of this ideology was land nationalisation. As Alexander Kitroef points out in his Greeks in Egypt, this last policy brought about the decline of Alexandria's Greek community, since the revolutionary regime nationalised the cotton sector. This measure sliced the top off of the Greek community's social pyramid and deprived of their economic power, the cotton merchants left. Kitroef concludes that it was inevitable that “as the Egyptians gained their true independence, the Greeks would lose ‘their’ Alexandria.” (181)

Thus, as the Quartet was maturing in Durrell's mind, the Alexandria of “five races, five languages, a dozen creeds” (J 11) was being undermined by Nasser's policy of rapid Arabicisation. In 1945 Durrell's friend Gwyn Williams had commented on the diversity of Alexandria's ethnic mix:

Names of people I remember seeing there [Alexandria] symbolise this mixture: Zananiri, Sachs, Baddaro, Menasce, Zogueb, Suarez, Salinas, Kerekreti, Barber, Perides, Fumaroli, Papasunessiou, Oumoff, Barukh, Baladi. Sects and philosophies flourished. There was Gaston Zananiri's dream of a new Mediterranean culture, rescued from World War II. It was

out of this varied and dying ferment that Larry [Durrell] invented his
Alexandria Quartet. (qtd. in MacNiven Biography 303)

Zananiri's Mediterraneanist dream is not dissimilar to the ideas of the Wafdist intellectual
 Taha Hussein, who stated that:

The Egyptian mind has had regular, peaceful and mutually beneficial
 relations only with the Near East and Greece. In short it [the Egyptian
 mind] has been influenced from the earliest times by the Mediterranean
 Sea and the various peoples living around it. (4)

Yet within a decade of Gwyn Williams' observation, the political changes that were
 sweeping Egypt had consigned multi-ethnic Alexandria to history. Nasserite Arab
 nationalism meant that Egypt was not so much being Egyptianised as Arabised. As
 Kramer observes, "For Muslim Egyptians...the transition from Egyptian patriotism to
 pan-Islam and pan-Arabism was not so difficult provided Egypt was not defined in terms
 of Mediterranean-European but of Islamic culture" (1987, 165). Thus, Nasser's new
 republic was named "The United Arab Republic" (UAR), and during the nineteen-fifties
 and 'sixties Egypt became increasingly embroiled in the Palestine question (the 1967 Six
 Day War against Israel was as much of a humiliation for Nasserism as the Suez Crisis of
 1956 had been for Britain) and several abortive attempts were made to create a formal
 federation between the UAR and the "radical" Arab states east of Suez: Iraq, Syria and
 North Yemen.

All those who the new regime considered to be “Egyptians”, such as Bedouin, Berbers, Copts, Fellahin, Nubians, Saidis, and others (but not Greeks or Jews) were now also, henceforth, “Arabs”. However, Nasserist nationalism did obtain for Egypt the *istiqlal tamm* (total independence) which Sa'ad Zaghlul had demanded from the British thirty-three years earlier. By 1956 Nasser's Egypt was confident enough to announce the nationalisation of the Suez Canal. In response, Britain and France (with Israeli assistance) attempted to re-occupy the Canal zone, but the attempt failed because as Britain and France's power in the Middle East declined, that of the United States and the Soviet Union increased. The logic of the Cold War demanded that both England and Egypt host American bombers to threaten northern and southern Russia respectively; however, Britain's anachronistic Imperial pretensions in Egypt were preventing Egypt's acceptance of American bases. In his Rise and Fall of the British Empire Lawrence James states that soon after John Foster Dulles had taken over the State Department Dulles noted that Britain's continued presence in Egypt was a “psychological block” preventing Egypt from entering an anti-Soviet pact (572). Nasser, on the other hand, had attended the Bandung conference of non-aligned states the previous year. There he became convinced of the merits of “positive neutralism” by leaders of so-called “Third World” countries (in the nineteen-fifties the term denoted non-alignment, not under-development), among them decolonised countries, such as India and Indonesia, which had recently undergone decolonisation. Such a policy enabled economically and militarily weak countries to exploit the rivalries of the two superpowers so as to secure the maximum help from both superpowers, but with the minimum of commitment to the long-term strategic aims of either the United States or the Soviet Union. In his Withdrawal from Empire General Sir William Jackson, one of the last British Army officers formed in the mould as Durrell's

Maskelyne, notes that “Nasser was to prove an apt pupil in the art of neutralist double-cross.” (146) Indeed, the Chinese Prime Minister Chou-En-Lai had persuaded Nasser to forget his Muslim distaste for Communism and to seek arms from the Soviet Union. Consequently, Britain's ill-conceived adventure in Suez brought threats from the Soviet Union. However, the United States, who were also anxious to court Nasser, declined to support Britain against the Soviets and Britain had to withdraw from Egypt once and for all; General Jackson called the Suez Crisis “a Greek tragedy of entirely American making.” (145) The humiliation that resulted from Britain's failure in Suez signalled to the world the fact that post-War Britain was no longer able to act independently on the world stage. Ultimately, all this geo-politicking was in vain: the then United States Army Airforce forsook Egypt and relocated to İnçilik in southern Turkey, a base that still exists and stood NATO well against Iraq during operation Desert Storm in 1990-1. Durrell alludes to Britain's post-War Imperial impotence when he wrote the “Workpoint” in Balthazar: “Mountolive was swayed by the dangerous illusion that now at last he was free to conceive and act -- the one misjudgement which decides the fate of a diplomat” (B 249); Suez had shattered the illusion that Britain was “free to act” and this misjudgement proved fatal to what remained of the British Empire.

Roger Bowen has commented on the significance of the post-War history of Britain in the Middle East to the Alexandria Quartet:

In July of 1956, at a speech in Alexandria, Colonel Nasser announced the nationalisation of the Suez Canal. Later that summer Durrell completed Justine and sent it off to Faber; the first reviews appeared in February the following year. In the intervening months, the Suez crisis had added a

final chapter to Britain and France's control of Egypt. John Holloway has insisted that 'public life realities'...have a firmer control on the Quartet than might first appear. The tension between a European 'possession' of the Middle East, its version of the Orient, and the winds of change that will dispossess the European is at the heart of this complex sequence of novels. Durrell not only revisits the Egypt he knew during his wartime sojourn but also acknowledges a post-war history of Arab nationalism and western imperial decline. ("Toybox" 17)

For Bowen, this post-War history is referred to allegorically in the story of Sir David Mountolive's humiliation in the house of the child prostitutes (M 285 - 296), which follows on immediately from Mountolive's final spurning of Leila. This event leads Bowen to observe that, "The patterns of defeat which increasingly define the momentum of Mountolive are a product of the cultural divide which defines the entire world of the Quartet. It is the East which defeats the West" ("Toybox" 16). Bowen concludes that, "This sub-text of historical and political awareness is in part woven into the novels throughout the refabrication and concomitant deconstruction of the orientalist tradition" (17). Thus, for Bowen, the Quartet presents the "vanished world" of Empire "elegaically and ironically." (9) This work has confirmed much of Bowen's insightful historical analysis of the Alexandria Quartet; however, it has attempted to go beyond Bowen to explore further the relationship between the Quartet and the "public life realities", the historical, political, social and cultural realities of twentieth-century Egypt and of Britain in Egypt, which underpin the tetralogy. What follows is a review of this exploration on a chapter by chapter basis, proceeding from chapter two.

The second chapter of this dissertation explored three theoretical methods that might usefully be employed in a social-historical analysis of the Quartet: Saidian Orientalism, the concept of Eliotic "tradition" and Conradian "darkness". Edward Said's theoretical paradigm of "Orientalism" is of obvious import to the reading of the tetralogy undertaken in this study. Indeed, it was Roger Bowen's fine application of Saidian theory to the study of the Quartet in his essay "Closing the Toybox" that provided the initial starting point for this dissertation. However, as Aijaz Ahmad has shown, Saidian theory is not without its contradictions, especially in the way it seeks to mate Nietzschean anti-humanism with the high tradition of liberal humanism as articulated by Erich Auerbach. Thus, this work set out to re-emphasise the traditional and humanistic elements of Saidian "Orientalism", the better to clarify a tradition or continuum of Orientalist writing that would place the tetralogy at the "terminal" (Bowen "Toybox", 9) extreme of 'late Orientalism'. In so doing, this work posited a parallelism between Saidian "Orientalism" and the Eliotic concept of "tradition": Eliot's concept is an "inclusive" concept of tradition in that it seeks to synthesise an impersonal 'mind of Europe' from the literary texts and works of art produced on the European continent from archaic time through to the modernist present; on the other hand, Said's "Orientalist" tradition is "exclusive" in that it is concerned with Europe's finding its self-definition against pathologised or demonised "Others". The Alexandria Quartet stands at the terminal end of these two inter-related traditions; moreover, in the "prism-sighted" tetralogy these two traditions splinter under the weight of the contradictions inherent with them. Bowen states that Durrell's Orientalism is "more often self-conscious, playful and ironic" ("Toybox", 11). As a note of caution, emphasis should be placed on the phrase "more often". For while it is clear that Durrell's Orientalist usages are "no longer wholly institutional", there are

many passages in both the Quartet and the Alexandrian poetry where Durrell certainly does participate in a discourse which is "controlling" and which "compartmentalises" and "structures" in no uncertain terms a culture which Durrell problematises as alien (11).

This work seeks to modify Bowen's unproblematic formulation whereby the Quartet charts a "post-war history of Arab nationalism and imperial decline" ("Toybox" 17) where "the East defeats the West." (16) Whilst acknowledging the general thrust of Bowen's argument, this study has shown that the politics of post-War of Egypt were far more complex than the simple expulsion of a parasitic colonial presence. Communities such as the Greeks and the Jews were forced to abandon Egypt under Arabicisation. Moreover, Nasser's Arabicisation programme did not arise from a consensus, but privileged one group in particular, Sunni Muslim Egyptians of Arab descent of the lower-middle classes. As a result, political and cultural positions such as Wafdist Mediterraneanism and Pharaonic nationalism were suppressed. This is not to denigrate the achievements of Nasserism. In purely utilitarian terms Nasserism probably achieved for Egypt, with its huge population of urban and rural poor, the "Arab tide" (M 119) living in "African darkness" (J 158) who peopled Alexandria's "Arab-smudged streets" (J 47) who seem so repugnant to Darley in the Quartet, the greatest amount of good for the largest number of people, at least in the short to medium-term. However, the Nasser revolution had its price: the loss of Egypt's cultural diversity and political heterogeneity. In the longer term, this loss made Egypt poorer culturally and quite possibly economically. Bowen's simple dichotomy between East-West, Arab-Imperialist does justice neither to the historical reality of mid-twentieth century Egypt nor to Durrell's imaginative re-working of that history in the Quartet. For the tetralogy, with its numerous mirrorings, its relativism and its shattering of the notions of selfhood on the part of both

the colonising Europeans and the colonised Egyptians anticipates the idea of the “hybrid space” or “third space” postulated by postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha, which emphasises the mutualities and negotiations that take place across the colonial divide where the relationship between the coloniser and the colonised is far more complex, nuanced and politically fraught than is suggested by either by Said's Orientalist paradigm or by Roger Bowen's application of Saidian principles to the Quartet. Bhabha's description of the tradition of the “people of the pagus” could easily have been written to describe the hybridic protagonists of the Alexandria Quartet:

At this point I must give way to the *vox populi*: to a relatively unspoken tradition of the people of the pagus -- colonials, postcolonials, migrants, minorities -- wandering peoples who will not be contained within the *Heim* of the national culture and its unisonant discourse, but are themselves the marks of a shifting boundary that alienates the frontiers of the modern nation. (315)

For Bhabha, these people “articulate the death-in-life of the idea of the ‘imagined community’ of the nation...” (315). In the Quartet these people who “speak the encrypted discourse of the melancholic and the migrant” (315) can be found among the tetralogy's protagonists. These include British protagonists, itinerant writers like Darley and Pursewarden (and Durrell himself) and the old sea-dog Scobie who were wandering sons of Britain's once global Empire, yet who found life in England itself small-minded and stifling. Gaston Pombal offers a Gallic equivalent to Darley and Pursewarden. Likewise, the ethnic, confessional and cultural diversity of the Quartet's Alexandrian protagonists,

among them Balthazar, the Hosnanis, Justine, Melissa, Nimrod, Nur Pasha, who are variously Greeks, Jews, Copts and Egyptian Muslims gives the lie to the claim of post-colonial Arab Egypt of Nasserism to what Bhabha calls "unisonance", political like-mindedness and cultural *homonoia*. Similarly, the tetralogy's "hybrid" Alexandria (J 24) is home to a host of characters who are neither fully Egyptian nor European, such as Hamid, Darley's Berber manservant, Mnemjain the Armenian barber or Halima the Hosnani brother's Sudanese wet-nurse. Such characters demonstrate another aspect of Bhabhaian hybridity in that they can be seen as part of "Marx's reserve army of migrant labourers who by the speaking foreignness of language split the patriotic voice of unisonance..." (315). Finally, there are characters such as the part-Albanian, part-Nubian Memlik Pasha, Melissa's Jewish-Greek Alexandrian sugar-daddy old Cohen, and the Italian-Alexandrian Cervionis, who all embody Bhabha's *unheimlich* hybridity. Such characters partake in what Bhabha calls "Nietzsche's mobile army of metaphors [and] metonyms" who disrupt the "the worn-out metaphors of resplendent national life..." (315). The radical hybridity which Durrell reveals in the Alexandria Quartet undermines the claims of both the British Empire and Arab Nationalism to have established a political regime founded upon tradition, consensus, social cohesion, the rule of law, public order, cultural harmony or national identity. Further, Durrell's achievement here is not simply literary and imaginative. The allegorisation of the relationship between the late British Empire and real-life Egyptian political movements rooted Durrell's phantastic Alexandria in the Kabbalistic *Malkuth*, the fallen city of historical time. This synthesis of history and metaphysics, psychology and biography, focused as it is on a trans-temporal Alexandrian *locus*, is the Alexandria Quartet's great intellectual achievement.

The second chapter of this dissertation also addresses the question of relevance of the Quartet's dénouement in Clea to a "historical" reading of the tetralogy. For Darley, writing Justine on his Greek island was part of his convalescence from the physical illnesses, psychological complexes and existential inauthenticities which resulted from his stay in the "Orient." Darley's life as an exiled European hedonist in the midst of the Oriental "Other" was a kind of transformation by ordeal, which took him out of the behavioural, emotional, imaginative and sexual strait-jackets in which embourgeoisified England sought to bind him. This "Oriental" experience caused within Darley a heightened sensuality and an enhanced sexuality. Thus, although at the beginning of Justine Darley is a weak and confused figure, by the end of the tetralogy he emerges as a Magus figure, a man of extraordinary physical and mental resources: a man made superman by bitter ordeal. Darley's transformation is confirmed near the end of Clea, when the self-realised Darley saves Clea from drowning, thereby overcoming the hex Narouz has put on her by bringing her back to life with his sexualised kiss-of-life (251). Narouz's curse on Clea was cast with his deathbed cry "Clea!" (M 313). If Narouz could not possess her in life, then maybe he could drag her down to the underworld with him. Darley's struggle to rescue Clea at the end of the Quartet pits Darley's will against that of a demonic Narouz, Briton against Egyptian, the modern against the feudal, St George rescuing the maiden from the dragon. However, with this victory comes not a further reinforcement of his presence in Egypt, but a flight from the "Orient" to France where he hopes to meet Clea and where the "bitter-sweet herb of self-discovery" (C 279) can flourish. In Darley's victory over the ghost of Narouz, in which he saves an imperilled white woman from a representative of the forces of African "darkness", there is a phantasy of wish-fulfilment. Darley is enacting on behalf of Europe a final victory over

its demonised Oriental *alter ego*. Thus, a dying colonialism snatches a final victory from the jaws of Imperial decline. Durrell's imaginative re-working of Imperial wish-fulfilment illustrates the extent to which the tetralogy partakes in the Orientalist tradition. Yet writing at the very end of the Orientalist literary tradition, Durrell understands that being locked into a dialectic of pathologised auality was profoundly unhealthy for both the "Orient" and the West, and that a separation of the ways was the only "healthy" option for both Britain and Egypt. Britain's Imperial administrators, however, were not so far-sighted, and their messy attempts to hold onto Egypt led to the humiliation of Britian in front of the rest of the world at Suez in 1956.

Acknowledging that "clear dangers" attach to a wilfully ahistorical reading of the Quartet, chapter three surveys the relationship of Alexandrian thought and history to the tetralogy. The chapter challenges Naguib Mahfouz's assertion that the Quartet is "about foreigners" (qtd. in Taylor 1990), citing the Hosnanis as allegorical figures that link the world of the Quartet with the real-life world of Egyptian politics and society in the middle-third of the twentieth-century. Before considering this matter in detail, the chapter reviews the history of Alexandrian thought and its relevance to the tetralogy. Of key importance here is the neo-Platonism of Plotinus and the three mystical traditions that grew out of it, the Jewish and Hermetic Kabbalahs, (heretical) Gnostic Christianity and Sufism, the Islamic mysticism of the benevolent *Mevlevi* and sinister *Rafai* dervishes. These mystical traditions are important for three reasons: they provide the tetralogy's philosophical-theological superstructure which supplements the work's deep structural mythology derived from the Per-M-How; they provide the Quartet with exotic Alexandrian "colour"; and they help to fix in the reader's mind the idea of a particularly Alexandrian (rather than Egyptian) philosophical and cultural *weltanschauung* that

encompasses and synthesises the fallen city's history in its pagan, Christian, Jewish, Islamic and modern modalities.

The chapter then examines the significance of the Hosnanis in detail. Following on from Durrell's idea of proper names as “heraldic ideograms” (*Biography* 467), the Arabic etymology of the names of the Hosnanis and of their estate “Karm Abu Girg” is examined. This examination reveals a deep symbolic resonance that connects ancient Egypt to the Egypt of the mid-twentieth century via Coptic Christianity. The chapter also demonstrates how Leila and Nessim Hosnani represent the class of Europeanised “new Egyptians” who were preparing to take over the reins of political and economic power from a floundering British colonialism during the inter-War period. The study of the Hosnanis is further developed by contrasting the Hosnani brothers, Narouz and Nessim, and with investigating correspondences between these two characters and two parallel strands in inter-war Egyptian politics. Thus, Nessim represents Mediterranean Egyptian nationalism, with its focus on mercantile Alexandria; Narouz, on the other hand, represents the Pharaohic nationalism of Egypt's agrarian Delta. Chapter three concludes by reviewing the modern history of Alexandria from the French invasion of 1798 through to the end of the Great War, when *Mountolive's* “historical” narrative begins. Developing a line of investigation initiated by other historicist scholars of the tetralogy such as Roger Bowen and Anne Zahlan, this historical overview demonstrates the extent to which the history of nineteenth and early-twentieth century European colonialism in Egypt is embedded in the *Quartet* and informs its portrayal of the Egypt of the nineteen-thirties and 'forties.

Chapter four is a considerable expansion of the Hosnani allegory. The love affair

between David Mountolive and Leila Hosnani is treated as an allegorical account of the relationship between the British colonial administration in Egypt and the *Wafd*, the historical Egyptian nationalist movement in which Copts and other “new Egyptians” figured prominently and which promoted a liberal political agenda and an Egyptian cultural identity that incorporated both Mediterranean and Pharaohnic aspects. This allegorical reading of Mountolive foregrounds the Quartet's sophisticated and sensitive treatment of Egyptian history during the first half of the twentieth-century. The Hosnani allegory allows Bowen's historical reading of the Quartet to be further expanded and developed by going beyond the narrow dichotomy of the British Empire and its supposed nemesis, Arab Nationalism.

Indeed, among the various ideologies that compete in mid-century Egypt to replace the British Empire, “Arab nationalism”, the Arab's permutation of King Otho of Greece's *Megali Idea*, is unique in that it does not appear in the tetralogy directly -- there is no character or group of characters that represent Arab nationalism in the way that the Hosnanis represent the *Wafd*. Rather, Arab nationalism is conspicuous by its absence in the Quartet; it is only mentioned twice (on both occasions in Pursewarden's long letter to Sir David Mountolive [M 101-129]): once as a threat to both British interests (M 104); and again as and the interests of the Hosnanis (M 117). Thus, Arab nationalism, the real-life victor in the struggle for Egypt's post-colonial future, is presented in the tetralogy as being the worst possible outcome for the Quartet's British and Egyptian protagonists. Yet rather than play an active role in the tetralogy's plot, the spectre of Arab nationalism haunts the minds of the Quartet's characters as if it were a nightmare that has intruded into Durrell's imaginative dream world from the real world that exists outside of the novel, subtly influencing their actions.

In the Quartet, as in the historical Egypt of the years 1919 - 1952, there is a three-cornered fight for control of Egypt with the British, the Hosnanis and Memlik Pasha corresponding to the real-life struggle for control of Egypt between the British, the *Wafd* and the clique around the throne who derived from the Turco-Circassian Pasha class, descendants of the Ottomans and Mamelukes. Durrell's description of Memlik with his blood "haunted by an Albanian father and a Nubian mother" (M 255) is an astute sketch of Egypt's Turco-Circassian pasha class -- the power behind the throne -- whose forefathers hailed from the Balkans and the Caucasus, but who married into the native Egyptian clans of the Nile valley and the Arab tribes of the desert. Rather than representing "real and ordinary power" (Bowen "Toybox", 17) that "mocks" (16) the imperialism of Sir David Mountolive, Memlik represents one faction in a three-way power-struggle. Arab nationalism poses a threat to all three interest groups, but is being used by the British as a counter-weight to the Palace and the liberal intellectuals of the *Wafd*. This state of affairs is confirmed by Pursewarden:

Meanwhile there is the steady growth of a vocal and literate middle-class whose sons are trained at Oxford among our cosy liberalisms -- and who find no jobs waiting for them when they come back here. The *babu* is growing in power, and the dull story is being repeated here as elsewhere. "Intellectual coolies of the world unite."

To these internal pressures we are gracefully adding by direct encouragement, the rigour of a nationalism based in a fanatical religion. I personally admire it, but never forget that it is a fighting religion with no metaphysic, only an ethic. The Arab Union, etc....' (M 104).

Nessim Hosnani plays a similar game. He stresses to Pursewarden that the French and British have nothing to fear from “Egyptian patriots” such as the Hosnanis, yet adds that “knowing how stupid and backward the Arab National element is, and how fanatical, we do not think it can be long before there are violent differences between the Egyptians and yourselves. They are already flirting with Hitler.” (117) The “Egyptian patriotism” of the Hosnanis is, of course, an ideological position which is quite distinct from that of Arab nationalism. In its Pharaohnic aspect advanced by Narouz Hosnani, Egyptian patriotism favours Muslim-Coptic co-operation (M 121); however, the Mediterranean aspect of Egyptian nationalism, represented in the tetralogy by Nessim, suggests co-operation with Zionist fighters in Palestine to create a Christian Levantine statelet based around Alexandria: this corresponds to a real division in non-Arab nationalist conceptions of Egyptian identity in the inter-War period. Alexandria's “national peculiarity” (J 87) recalls that of Lebanon, founded in 1943 as a small Maronite Christian-majority state established around another cosmopolitan Levantine *entrepôt*, Beirut. Indeed, the marriage of Nessim, an Oriental Christian, to Justine, a Sephardic Jew, corresponds the political community of interest that existed between the Maronite Christians and Israeli Jews in Lebanon and Israel, the two small Levantine states that were founded during the nineteen-forties as “homelands” for their respective ethno-confessional groupings. This Maronite-Zionist alliance continued up until the Spring of 2000 in the form of Israel's support for the predominantly Maronite South Lebanon Army militia as a buffer protecting Israel from the militant Islamist Shia militia *Hizbollah*. Thus, the Quartet does rather more than portray a simple two-way struggle between East and West, Arab nationalism and British imperialism, as Bowen suggests. Instead, the tetralogy is

informed by a sophisticated and insightful knowledge of the complex power struggles that were taking place between on the one hand the British, and on the other Egypt's various ideological and ethnic groupings in the four decades between the end of the First World War and the Suez crisis of 1956. "Public life realities" do, indeed, exercise a far firmer control over the Quartet than is often realised.

Chapter five provides an examination of Durrell's "Egyptian" poetry written between 1938 and 1960, which looks for evidence in this poetry of the Quartet's development through time. In this chapter, the poetry is divided into three categories: pre-exilic, exilic and post-exilic poetry. In the first category are poems such as "Egyptian Poem" and "The Egg". These poems were written in the late nineteen-thirties which pre-date Durrell's sojourn in Egypt. Such poems are important since they reveal Durrell's earliest interest in ancient Egyptian myth, theology and philosophy which he intended to use as a mythic structure for his "Book of the Dead". This book was lost during Durrell's flight to Egypt, yet it formed the basis of the series of novels that would eventually emerge as the Alexandria Quartet. In the second category are poems that were written during Durrell's enforced stay in Egypt from 1941 to 1945. In this group of poems some of the Quartet's key protagonists, such as Clea and Melissa begin to appear, as do the impressionistic word-pictures describing location; "Mareotis" is a good example of this poetry of location. Central to this group of poems, however, is its exploration of separation and cultural and psychological alienation as in "Conon in Alexandria", where the poet turns in on himself to rely on memory (J 11) as a rock to which he can hold fast against the psychological and existential torrent in which he is immersed. This exploration of the psychological and existential dynamics of alienation is one of the key themes of the Quartet. Durrell's post-exilic Egyptian poetry provides a more considered

response to the themes explored in his poetry of exile, but from a temporal remove; in this respect the post-exilic poetry has a similar relationship to the poetry of exile to that of Clea vis-à-vis Justine, Balthazar and Mountolive. Durrell's lost "Book of the Dead" would no doubt have been an interesting, if somewhat derivative, development of the "mythic method" of earlier modernists; however, bitter experience of exile in war-time Egypt ensured that the Alexandria Quartet was something greater, "an epitaph" (Bowen "Toybox" 17) for the lost world of colonial Egypt inscribed on the tomb-stone of Empire with the mallet and the chisel of painful lived experience.

The literary significance of the tetralogy is has yet to be fully assessed; however, it must be admitted that the status of the work has slipped alarmingly since the nineteen-sixties. From the perspective of the first years of the twenty-first century, it is difficult to imagine the excitement that the Alexandria Quartet generated when it was published over four decades ago. The magazine Books and Bookmen posed the question "Lawrence Durrell, is he the only great novelist of the fifties?" (January 1960, 8). Cyril Connolly wrote in his review of Justine "Love and Landscape" in the London Sunday Times that "in Justine...he [Durrell] has found a form, a blend of imagination and memory, of analysis and dream poetry and prose which, in the sun of Alexandria and in the shade of Kavafy, to come into his own" (3rd February 1957), thereby confirming Durrell's status as a great imaginative writer. Reviewing Justine in the London Daily Telegraph, on the other hand, John Betjeman wrote of Durrell's ability to describe Alexandria realistically, "...but here, you must admit, is someone who can write and make you smell, hear and fear the ancient mixture of races and creeds, of great riches and fearful poverty that have seethed in Alexandria for centuries" ("Love and Alexandrian Squalor" 1st February 1957). Such critical acclaim made life easy for Faber's publicists; a full-page

advertisement "Lawrence Durrell: The Alexandria Quartet" which appeared in the Times Literary Supplement (5th February 1960, 79) quoted a number of leading British and European critics: John Davenport in the London Observer observed that "One has no hesitation in acclaiming this [Justine] as a great novel"; likewise, Walter Allen, writing in The New Statesman asserted that "Mr Durrell's four-decker novel is obviously going to be a major work of fiction of our time." In the same advertisement, Richard Mayne of the London Sunday Times said of Durrell "His prose beguiles us with marvels of virtuosity" and Peter Green of The Bookman wrote that the Quartet "represents one of the most exciting, original and creative achievements in English literature that has turned up during the last half-century." Yet greater praise was forthcoming from the advertisement's European critics: Francois Erval wrote in L'Express, "*Lawrence Durrell a écrit le roman de la contingence et il a réussi ce que d'innombrables romanciers ont rêvé de faire: il nous a donné un roman absolument moderne*"; whereas Manuel de Deigez in Combat thought that "*Depuis Proust, nous n'avions pas expérimenté une oeuvre si obsédante, une si invincible présence romanesque, c'est-à-dire une telle puissance poétique.*" Hamburg's Die Zeit announced "*Ein neuer Anwärter auf den Nobelpreis!*" ("A new candidate for the Nobel Prize!"); whilst Zurich's Die Weltwoche enthused that "*Justine ist in den höchsten Tönen gepriesen worden; Proust und Joyce wurden zu Vergleichen herangezogen, die Verleihung des Nobelpreis gefordert...Das Buch ist ein Meisterwerk*" ("Justine has been praised in the highest tones possible; its prestige has been compared almost to that of Proust and Joyce...the book is a masterwork!") Even allowing for the fact that these quotes had been specially selected by Faber for publicity purposes, it is difficult, reading through Durrell's extensive collection of press-cuttings now in the Durrell archive at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale,

to find much serious dissent from the near-consensus that existed in the late nineteen-fifties and early 'sixties that the Quartet was one of the great works of twentieth-century literature and that Durrell was a writer of considerable significance. The many comparisons of Durrell to Joyce and Proust were not empty rhetoric; many critics were convinced that the Quartet was the post-War apogee of the modernist project that had been initiated by writers of Joyce's generation and that Durrell really was a "post-Hiroshima Proust" who had succeeded in adding to Bergsonian and Proustian "remembrance" a new dimension inspired by Relativity theory: Martin Green's sceptical essay "Lawrence Durrell: A Minority Report" was just that, a minority view.

Unfortunately, the passage of four decades has not been kind to Durrell's reputation or that of his Quartet. Despite the fact that in France and the United States a reasonable academic interest in Durrell and the tetralogy has been maintained, in the United Kingdom this is not the case. The tetralogy has all but disappeared from view for both academe and the book-reading public. An extreme example of the low esteem in which the tetralogy is often held at present comes from the travel book Egypt: The Rough Guide, "Endless sexual and metaphysical ramblings by one of the twentieth century's most over-rated writers, occasionally relieved by dollops of Alex atmosphere." (651) Although the Rough Guide is not a publication dedicated to the critical or scholarly study of literature, its comments on literature by Cavafy, by Egyptian writers, such as Mahfouz, and on other Western writers on Egypt such as Forster are well-informed and intelligent. Moreover, the Rough Guide's readership, college-educated backpackers, are the very people who, two decades ago, would have considered Durrell, along with Cavafy and Forster and Mahfouz, to be essential background reading for a trip to Egypt.

In part, the decline in the Quartet's status can be seen as a reaction against its

subject matter, the messy decline of Empire. Discussion of the end of Empire remains deeply unfashionable in a Britain that still wallows in its Second World War nostalgia and which, forty years after the effective end of Empire, still likes to imagine itself as a major player on the world stage. The academic study of some of the writers of high Empire, such as Kipling, has revived recently now that the world that they depicted is no longer part of living memory. Likewise, the study of post-colonial literature from Africa, Asia and the Caribbean is flourishing. From this literature has come some of the high-water-marks of twentieth-century writing, one only need recall Achebe's Things Fall Apart or Ngugi's A Grain of Wheat to appreciate the significance of this body of post-colonial literature. Much of this literature and the critical and scholarly work that has resulted from it concentrates on two themes, the celebration of what have come to be known as 'other literatures' of the "Third" or "developing" world and a polemical vehemence directed against the British Empire, colonialism, neo-colonialism and "Orientalism" in its contemporary guises. This process of "decolonising the mind" has led for a call for the "repositioning of the centre" so that "the emergence of the modern west" was no longer the organising principle of literature teaching in the decolonised world (Ngugi, 94); such a proposition may make perfect sense in, for example, the post-colonial Kenya of Ngugi Wa Thiong'O, an African Marxist writer and critic. However, for many scholars of postcoloniality in the West the study of "English" has become the study of "english". In this connection postcolonial critics Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin assert in The Empire Writes Back that:

The very existence of post-colonial literatures undermines any project for the literary study in english which is postulated on a single culture

masquerading as an originating centre...the English canon is radically reduced within a new paradigm of english studies. (196)

This "radical" reduction of the "English" (as opposed to the "english") canon has left no room for such a challenging work as the Alexandria Quartet.

It is true to say that certain of Durrell's attitudes towards ethnicity and gender must seem reactionary and antediluvian to undergraduate students born decades after the tetralogy was published. For example, the Nubian beater Faraj is described as having a "black barbaric face" (J 188) and the guests at the Cervoni ball dance to "nigger" jazz (B 188). As for gender, Pombal procures for "girls" who are allowed to "stray" into Darley's "net" to sharpen his *taedium vitae* "*en disponibilité*" (J 19). Yet to condemn Durrell's *moeurs* by the standards of a later generation is to fail to acknowledge the fact that social attitudes are determined by their historical context and are changed by historical processes. It can be disturbing to revisit the Imperial mindset, steeped as it is in ideas of about the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon race. A post-Holocaust mind would recoil in horror at the correspondences between the Imperial and the Nazi concepts of racial superiority contained in Anthony Trollope's 1873 assertion that "Of the Australian black man we may certainly say he has to go. That he should perish without unnecessary suffering should be the aim of all who are concerned in the matter" (qtd. in Boehmer 32); this sinister aspect of European Imperialism was most perfectly described, albeit with a disturbing moral ambivalence, in Conrad's Heart of Darkness. Trollope's position was extreme, even by the standards of his day; more typical of later Imperial thinking was to view Empire as a mission to civilise the world which, for all its worthiness, was a

wearisome burden. This thought was best expressed Rudyard Kipling's 1899 poem "The White Man's Burden":

.....

Take up the White Man's burden --
 And reap his old reward:
 The blame of those ye better,
 The hate of those ye guard --
 The cry of hosts ye humour
 (Ah, slowly!) toward the light:--
 'Why brought ye us from bondage,
 Our loved Egyptian night?'

(The Works of Rudyard Kipling, page 324)

Although unambiguously a life-long Imperialist, in Kipling can be found the beginnings of the ironic attitude to Empire which distinguishes high Empire from later Empire writing. When Kipling wrote "The White Man's Burden" the disaster of the Great War, which would render the Imperial metropolis a moral and cultural "wasteland" and which would leave Kipling devastated by the loss of his son on the Western Front, lay fifteen years in the future; however, the Boer War demonstrated some potentially fatal flaws in the Imperial edifice, as Kipling's 1903 poem "The Lesson" acknowledges, "It was our fault, and our very great fault -- and now we must turn it to use / We have forty million reasons for failure, but not a single excuse" (Kipling, Works 300). Picking up the torch of later Imperial writing, Durrell began publishing in 1936, the year of Kipling's death and

his work exemplifies the continuing shift toward irony and parody in British attitudes to Empire¹⁸. To impose a moratorium on literature which uses, for example, the word "nigger" would be to prohibit the study of Conrad, Durrell, Kipling and Trollope and this has not happened (at least not in the United Kingdom -- in the American university system there have been calls to ban the teaching of works by writers such as Mark Twain for precisely that reason); moreover, the subtleties that distinguish the attitudes of high and later Empire writing toward issues such as "race" would be blurred by a totalising concept of political incorrectness.

The world of Conrad and Kipling has passed from living memory and is regarded, therefore, as being safely "the past". Durrell, on the other hand, introduces to today's readers a world of crumbling Empire which is historically close-at-hand and which begs disturbing questions about the consequences of Britain's disengagement from Empire. Not that Conrad and Kipling have always been regarded as being writers from the "safe" past. For example, Chinua Achebe's 1977 essay "An Image of Africa", branded Conrad as "nothing but a bloody racist". It is, therefore, important to read Durrell as a man of his time. Roger Bowen's portrait of Durrell as a "playful" post-War deconstructor of Empire who "restores [the Orientalist tradition] only to subvert" ("Toybox" 17) does not accord with Durrell's own view of Empire, which is expressed most clearly in Bitter Lemons, the only one of his books in which Durrell comments directly on decolonisation and the end of Empire from an overtly political perspective:

¹⁸ Irony and Parody quickly became the predominant feature of post-War representations of Empire, as the 1967 film Carry on up the Khyber attests. In this film a hapless Highland regiment the 'Devils in Skirts', led by a burlesque version of Sir David Mountolive, Sir Stanley Rough-Diamond (Sid James) protect the Raj's Afghan frontier from the machinations of a local potentate the "Khazi" of Kalalabad (Kenneth Williams), relying on the natives' belief that the soldiers are invincible because 'they wear nothing beneath their kilts'. 'Khyber Pass' was soldier's rhyming-slang for "arse" and "Khazi", a Hindi derivation, meant "latrine".

...they [the British Imperial administrators in Cyprus for whom Durrell worked] lived by the central colonial proposition which, as a conservative, I fully understand, namely, "If you have an Empire, you just can't give away bits of it as soon as you are asked." I differed with them only in believing that in Cyprus we had an issue which could be honourably compounded, and that we should lose by force everything that could be gained by diplomacy. (155)

Such sentiments do not sit well with the current consensus to be found in academe and in the wider society that Empire was "a bad thing" but is safely "past". Yet for Durrell, writing only a decade after hundreds of thousands of lives were lost in the inter-communal violence which followed Britain's hasty and ill-thought through withdrawal from India and the sub-continent's subsequent partition, the idea that Britain had a moral and political duty to control the pace of decolonisation would have seemed sensible and humane. However, rather than engage directly with the issues involved in investigating the British literature of post-War decolonisation, many of today's generation of postcolonial theorists feel squeamish about the fact that Durrell's crumbling Imperial world is no more distant than their own birthdays. The world of Imperial withdrawal in which the Quartet was conceived is evoked in an anecdote from historian of Imperial decline Lawrence James:

Some years ago I was told by one who had been among the last British Servicemen to leave the Canal Zone that as his boat drew away from the Port Said quayside, an Egyptian youth raised his robe and passed water

onto the soldiers below. One looked up and took a shot at him...it was, in a way, oddly symbolic of the past thirty years or so of Britain's presence in Egypt. (572)

The dichotomy of power represented on the one hand by the urinating Egyptian penis and on the other by the British soldier's rifle is a reminder of the vast military and economic superiority that, even in withdrawal, Britain enjoyed over a country such as Egypt. In the main the occupation collapsed not because Egyptians had forced Britain out of their country, but because Britain was "no longer free to act" (B 249; M 214; M 270: Durrell's turn of phrase may allude to the words of EOKA leader George Grivas, who called a cease-fire in 1956 in the face of intensified British counter-insurgency action against EOKA but reserved the right to "freedom of action", the right to resume armed struggle, if he saw fit) before the post-War world's two hegemonic geo-political players, the United States and the Soviet Union. The Alexandria Quartet comments ironically on this "past thirty years or so of Britain's presence in Egypt"; Durrell would have understood the symbolism of the urinating Arab, in 'returning fire' the British squaddie is reclaiming some freedom of action from the "gravitational field of politics" (M 270), rather as Darley reclaims his personal autonomy by quitting Egypt for "self-discovery" in France (C 278).

If post-colonial literature is celebrated whilst the writing of the Imperial "overlap", works such as the Quartet which blur the divide between the colonial and post-colonial literary "moments", are either vilified or are studiously ignored, then the cultural, political and other issues arising from the British Empire and Britain's Imperial decline will remain inadequately addressed. These issues are important, for they have

contemporary cultural, pedagogic and political resonance both in post-Imperial Britain's multi-cultural, cosmopolitan cities and in the post-colonial nation-states that emerged out of the wreckage of Empire. During the days of Empire, most notably in India, English literature was used as an instrument of Imperial propaganda, and sections of British academe were complicit in this particular use of literature. Currently, the trend has shifted towards the wholesale adoption of the "postcolonial paradigm", as the vast number of academic posts currently advertised in areas such as "postcolonial studies" attests. Yet for British academe to vault from a paternalist to a postcolonial view of literature without having given serious consideration to the process of transition indicates an unwillingness to address uncomfortable questions about the end of Empire and the processes by which Empire was 'handed back'. British identity in a splintering: the idea of "Great Britain" seems increasingly an anachronistic hang-over from the Victorian and Edwardian hey-days of Empire; on the one hand Britain is devolving into its constituent parts, whilst on the other hand Britain is becoming ever-more politically and economically integrated into the European Union. Thus, the future of Britishness as an identity is one of the most pressing cultural and political issues in contemporary Britain. This is indicated by number of books published between 1998 and 2000, such as Vernon Bogdanor's Devolution in the United Kingdom, Peter Hitchens' The Abolition of Britain, David Cannadine's Britain in Decline?, Norman Davies' The Isles, Andrew Marr's The Day Britain Died, Tom Nairn's After Britain Jeremy Paxman's The English, John Redwood's The Death of Britain, Keith Sutherland's (ed.) The Rape of the Constitution? and Michael Wood's In Search of England. Like terminal Byzantium, post-colonial "Britain", a white-dwarf star remaining after the super-nova of Empire, is contracting toward the historical and geographical epicentre from which it arose, irradiating the

cultural universe with pulsars of irony. Byzantine historian Steven Runciman comments on the pathetic humanism and touching "wistfulness" of Byzantine art in the very last decades before Constantinople was captured by the Turks in AD1452, and comments that this art was "curiously out of keeping with the sombre political and economic background of the time." (178) Similarly, the British art and literature of the decades since the Second World War have shown an increasing tendency toward irony to the extent that by the turn of the twenty-first century British art and literature is becoming increasingly parodic, as if to acknowledge that Britons now live in a post-EU "United Kingdom" that has lost its *raison d'état*. The Alexandria Quartet, which stands near the beginning of this ironic trend (Justine first introduces herself to Darley at a lecture he has given on Cavafy with a question about "the anti-nomian nature of irony" [J 27]), is an uncomfortable reminder that Britain's near ubiquitous aesthetic of irony has its origins in two World Wars and a catastrophic post-War Imperial collapse. As such, the tetralogy says nothing about Britain's future, but speaks eloquently on the cultural and political circumstances underpinning its decline and its ambiguous and perplexing present; too many in today's Britain prefer to ignore such a work of literature and leave unanswered the questions which it poses.

With regard to Egypt, the tetralogy also conjures disturbing spectres from recent history. It challenges conventional assumptions regarding the post-colonial national settlement that has been built around the edifice of Arab nationalism: is Egypt really an "Arab" country? Indeed, how meaningful is the notion of an "Arab nation" which extends from the Atlantic to the Persian Gulf (Iraqi and Syrian troops chanted the same Ba'athist anthem praising the "one, united and indivisible Arab nation" as they were sent off to fight each other during the 1990-1 Gulf War)? In the historical time-frame covered by

the tetralogy, Egypt (like many other nation-states that gained independence from a dominating foreign power in the twentieth-century) was transformed from a multi-ethnic to a virtually mono-ethnic entity; the *Wafd's* eponymous newspaper was only allowed to resume publication in 1990, the suppression of Copts continues, and the remnants of Mediterranean and Pharaohnic nationalism are still regarded as dangerous heresies by the ruling party. In recalling the cultural and political debates and conflicts that took place in Egypt as British colonialism died, the Quartet reminds Egyptians of potential post-colonial futures that became subsumed under Nasserite pan-Arabism.

The Alexandria Quartet is an important work for many reasons. Much has been written about the importance of the tetralogy to literary modernism, including its status as a late-modernist text or as a “missing link to post-modernism”. Scholarly criticism of the Quartet has also focused on the tetralogy's uses of myth, its bewildering intertextuality, its complex structure, the games it plays with philosophic, mystical, metaphysical and scientific ideas, or its experiments with time, duration and memory. That the Alexandria Quartet has generated such wide-ranging academic interest should confirm the tetralogy's significance in the field of twentieth-century literary modernism; aspects of such research have been incorporated into this study. However, the prime purpose of this dissertation has been to emphasise the importance of the Alexandria Quartet as a work of high literature which stands astride the colonial/post-colonial nexus and to uncover the historical strands embedded within the tetralogy. The Quartet is an example of late-colonial writing in that it stands at the terminal end of a tradition of Empire writing which includes writers such as E.W.Lane, Richard Burton, Rudyard Kipling and E.M. Forster. On the other hand, the tetralogy is a kind of post-colonial writing in that it charts the process of decolonisation and provides an epitaph for Empire written from the point

of view of one of Empire's wayward sons. The Quartet offers an imaginative treatment of the three-cornered struggle for Egypt's post-colonial future and sensitively and insightfully studies the intercultural struggles that were on-going in Egypt for the control of the future. Moreover, the tetralogy anticipates with a surprising prescience contemporary debates over the relationship of "hybridity" to both Imperial and post-colonial national identities. Further research into the Alexandria Quartet's relevance to hybridity theory may well be fruitful. For understandable reasons, a large proportion of the criticism of colonial and post-colonial writing produced in the United Kingdom concerns texts that deal with India. However, the study of the British literary imagination in the Middle East during the twilight of Empire would add an important new strand to colonial and post-colonial studies; furthermore, since Egypt's strategic importance to Britain was as a "passage to India", the study of the English literature of the British occupation of Egypt would help place Indian Empire writing in the context of the wider British Empire.

A pressing case can be made for scholarly research which attempts a comparative and contrastive analysis between the Quartet and contemporaneous Arabic literature: Naguib Mahfouz's Cairo Trilogy, another multi-decker novel of the nineteen-fifties which is concerned with memory and duration is an obvious candidate here. Such a comparative and contrastive project could then be extended so as to cover other literary encounters between the West and the "Orient". Prominent here would be a study wherein the *Maghrebin* writers of post-War North Africa would be compared and contrasted with the American "Beat" writers who were active in North Africa during the nineteen-forties and 'fifties. Likewise, the Arabic *Mahjar* (exilic) writers, mainly Levantine Christian refugees, who were working in the United States in the mid-twentieth century could be compared and contrasted with their American and Middle Eastern contemporaries. Thus,

it is hoped that from the germ of this dissertation would arise a trilogy of major academic works which deal with the encounter between the Western and the Middle Eastern literary imaginations. Additionally, further research could be conducted into Egyptian and Arab criticism of the Alexandria Quartet and a comparative and contrastive analysis between this criticism and that of Western scholars could be undertaken. Likewise, the tetralogy's Arabic translation would be an interesting focus for research into the linguistic and cultural issues involved in literary translation from English into Arabic.

In addition to the Egyptian-English comparative dimension, this research has also uncovered further directions for research in English writing *per se*. Building on research undertaken for this work, an interesting study could be undertaken focusing on the copious body of travel and Empire writing on Egypt produced between the years 1875 and 1952 such as Mabel Calliard's autobiographical A Lifetime in Egypt 1876 - 1935, the Reverend Alexander Body's From the Egyptian Ramleh: Sketches of Delta Life and Scenes from Lower Egypt and the writings of "Bimbashi" Joseph MacPherson, a lifetime resident of Alexandria during the British occupation who worked as the city's chief of police on whom Durrell based the Quartet's Joshua Scobie; such a study would end with D.J Enright's Academic Year, written on the eve of the Egyptian revolution.

As a non-combatant, Durrell wisely avoided writing away-from-the-front 'war poetry', the sole exception to this decision is "Near El Alamein" (Durrell Poems 142), one of "Two Poems in Basic English". An effective, if very conventional meditation on the "pity" of war explored by the poets of the Great War, "El Alamein" is a marked contrast to the rest of Durrell's Egyptian poetry and reads as if it were written by a journalist visiting the scene of a recent battle. Nevertheless, "El Alamein" provides a link to the poets of the Desert War. An interesting study could be written on the relationship

between the tetralogy's Johnny Keats and Keith Douglas; moreover, further research could compare and contrast Durrell's treatment of war-time Egypt with that of the Desert War poets. Especially deserving of further study is Hamish Henderson's unjustly neglected Elegies for the Dead in Cyrenaica. In these elegies Henderson, a Gaelic-speaking Cambridge-educated Marxist and Scottish Nationalist who survived the Desert War, draws upon the literatures of all the combatants of the Desert War, English, German, Italian and Scottish. Moreover, Henderson eschewed the flies-and-beggars approach to Egypt found in the poetry of both Douglas and Durrell, and draws upon Arabic history, legends and literature to add poignancy to his description of the Desert battlefields. Henderson's Eighth Elegy, "Karnak" which incorporates ancient Egyptian theology and mentions the heroic "shepherd kings" of Arabian fable, the conquests of Mohammed and 'Amr, the poem ends "*Welcome O Hussein / When you enter Karbala*" (45), comparing the death of the European soldiers at Cyrenaica with the martyrdom of the prophet Mohammad's grandson at Karbala (Arabic "place of sorrow"), the event which divided the Muslim world between Sunni and Shia, rather as the Second World War rent Europe apart. In his preface to his elegies, Henderson mentions the remarks of a captured German officer, which anticipate the camaraderie between Allied and Axis soldiers confronted by the desert depicted in Lee Thompson's film Ice Cold in Alex (1960): "Africa changes everything. In reality we are allies, and the desert is our common enemy..." (50).

In contrast to Henderson's awareness of Arab and Egyptian culture, a number of Egyptian writers cite the scant regard for Islamic *moeures* and the riotous behaviour of Imperial antipodean troops in Egypt during the Great War as the last straw that broke the backbone of Egyptian patience at the British occupation. For example, near the beginning

of the Cairo Trilogy, Mahfouz has a key protagonist, Ahmad Abd al-Jawad, "...cursing the Australian troops who had spread through the city like locusts, destroying the land...He could not stand to expose himself to soldiers who openly plundered people of their possessions and took pleasure in abusing and insulting them with out restraint" (Palace Walk 11 – 13). Yet many of these soldiers went on to make the ultimate sacrifice for God, King and the British Empire at Gallipoli (Peter Weir's 1981 film Gallipoli is clarion call for Australian republicanism) and a study of poetry and other writing produced by these men both in Egypt and Turkey would usefully supplement existing knowledge of Middle Eastern Empire writing of the Great War, the period immediately before the action of the tetralogy begins.

Further avenues for research that have developed from this study include a deeper investigation of the influence of the Egyptian Per-M-Hou and the Tibetan Bardo Thödol on the Quartet and a further study of Kabbalistic themes in the tetralogy. The study of Kabbalistic themes in the Quartet could also be developed in a comparative and contrastive direction by comparison with the work of a modernist contemporary of Durrell's, the Argentinian writer Jorge Luis Borges (1899 - 1987); Borges' writing also incorporates elements derived from the Kabbalah, Gnosticism and neo-Platonism, and from the contemporary and historical Middle East. Finally, a book deserves to be written on Durrell's further development of the Quartet's Gnostic, Kabbalistic, neo-Platonic and Sufic themes in the Avignon Quintet.

This work ends with an appeal to those scholars and teachers working the fields of modernist, colonial and postcolonial literature to award to Lawrence Durrell's Alexandria Quartet the scholarly and critical attention that it so richly deserves.

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