CHAPTER 4

The Word Continuum: The Palimpsest of Time in Lawrence Durrell’s

The Alexandria Quartet

“Yes, we live in dislocated chronology, and there is as yet no concept that will make sense of this modern dislocated experience of temporality.” (Kristeva 4).

4.1. The Modernist Consciousness

In the late 1920s Wyndham Lewis made this observation: “There is so far no outstanding exponent in literature or art of einstenian (sic) physics, for necessarily there is a certain interval, as things are, between the idea and the representation. But such a figure will no doubt occur … applying this philosophy to life” (89). Durrell was to fulfil this prophecy. In adopting the stance that his novel is based on the Einsteinian continuum, Durrell attempts to demonstrate the possibility of mediation between science and literary narratives.

Durrell for his part was acutely aware of the currents that shaped the modernist consciousness as he has so brilliantly explained in his A Key to Modern British Poetry (1952). In this book he displays a deep knowledge of the modernists and the evolution of the modernist art. He spoke of “a semantic disturbance”, a gradually increasing curve of subjectivity” (22) that through the previous hundred years had shaped the modernist era. It meant the end of the notion of the mechanical universe and the human person as ego, and time as history (22 – 23). His theory of the novel is formulated in his statement about new physics.

The one thing that which differentiated the new physics – the physics of today, that is – from the old (Einstein’s from Newton’s) is the idea of the nature of space and time and their relationship. Under the new theory
space was conceived of as being $n$-dimensional, with time as the fourth of its dimensions... time is one of the great clues to the modern outlook.

(23)

It is from such premises that his novelistic innovations took shape and carried it beyond the boundaries of modernism.

4.2. Durrell and Modernism

The Structural innovation that Durrell introduced in *The Alexandria Quartet* puts him in the line of the modernists – Eliot, Joyce and Proust. Many critics have pointed out the strong affinities his *Quartet* has with *The Wasteland*, Proust’s *Remembrance of things Past* and Joyce’s *Ulysses*, apart from influences from visual arts and music. Absorbing these influences he went beyond them and charted a new territory of his own by melding the new scientific ideas and philosophy into a narrative of epic dimensions.

Durrell, like Joyce, Proust and Eliot uses a city as the dominant image. His Alexandria finds its counterparts in Joyce’s Dublin, Proust’s Paris and Eliot’s London as the spatial dimension providing the textual analogy for the structure. Just as “Joyce literally wanted the reader to become a Dubliner” (Frank 21), so Durrell would make his readers become Alexandrians. Joyce presented “Dublin as a huge, surrounding organism that the Dubliner possesses as a birthright” (Frank 21). Durrell’s presentation of Alexandria is no different.

Critics have pointed out that *The Alexandria Quartet* is indeed Durrell’s counterpart of *The Wasteland*. “It may almost be said that *The Waste Land* has been imported bag and baggage into *The Quartet*. It may even be reasonably suggested that the novel constitutes an extension of the poem, an answer to it different from Eliot’s
own answer in his later work” (Hutchens 57). The affinities between The Wasteland and The Alexandria Quartet are not accidental. Apart from some of the thematic aspects, the spatialisation of the narrative is the main concern for us at this point.

The modernists created spatialised narrative structures in order to make Bergsonian experiential time manifest. Their practices inspired the greater experimentalism of the mid and late 20th century novelists. Julia Kristeva notes that “for Proust, time is to be psychic time, and consequently the factor which determines our bodily life” (4). She argues that (for the postmodernist) “time in fact persists as the only surviving imaginative value which can be used by the novel to appeal to the whole community of readers” (4-5).

**4.2.1. Affinities with Modernist Art**

The elements of musicalisation, the ready analogy with the methods of modernist paintings, the method of juxtaposition, parody, mythical parallelisms and the abundance of literary and historical cross references that we find in The Quartet are all derived from the modernists. The form that Durrell has adopted draws analogy with cubist art, cinema and music.

**4.2.2. Musical Analogy**

The musical structure is readily suggested in the title. A ‘quartet’ is a four part classical performance -a contrapuntal composition involving four major voices. This reference in its title points to the four sections of the novel as forming a musical pattern conducive to the free association of memory and its fluidity of movement through time both historical and mnemonic – in which Darley the chief orchestrator is able to incorporate a variety of voices, illuminating the meaning of each sequence. The four novel “siblings” constitute a quartet-four large movements in a complete performance;
each separate segment within each novel further grouped into separate sections of varying lengths and tempos and organized under the common theme of “modern love”. They are to be understood as a supreme achievement in the orchestration of multiple voices or “polyglossia” in the Bakhtinian sense. The fugue reference in the beginning of the novel (20) implies the general texture and form of the work. The fugue was a highly developed form in baroque music in which the standard performance consisted of four contrapuntal voices. In the novel we can see the first voice – of Darley – followed by the contrapuntal second voice – that of Balthazar – in the second book which alters the perspective of Darley. With Mountolive the third voice enters with further variations on the subject and finally all the voices and themes are brought together in the final part, Clea.

4.2.3. Analogy with Visual Arts

The causal structure already discarded by the modernists now assumes more spatial characteristics and emerges in new patterns, drawing comparisons with visual art forms. One critic speaks of the novel as having cinematic qualities:

Such is the case with Lawrence Durrell’s *Alexandria Quartet*: four volumes – Justine, Balthazar, Mountolive and Clea – which constitute a four-part novel. Both the subject and the form of that work have a precise basis in Einstein’s theory of relativity. In choosing his subject for the Quartet, Durrell made a conscious aesthetic choice -- one which resulted in a form that, due in large part to its use of space and time, has significant connections with the cinema. (Anderson 3)
Painting has been on the forefront of the modernist experiments that influenced 20th century novel. Theodore Steinberg speaks of Durrell’s cubist connection which resulted from the reconceiving of space in the Einsteinian context.

... Durrell is one of those writers who has ever consciously tried to incorporate recent scientific discoveries in his work. The Quartet may indeed share a number of characteristics with cubist painting, but it is doubtful that the cubists understood as much about Einsteinian time and space as Durrell did. The cubists may embody that scientific revolution, but again, what makes Durrell’s work epic is that he both embodies and consciously explores the implications of that revolution, of that critical moment in human history. (65)

The effect that the novel’s structure creates is comparable to the kinetic art of Alexander Calder who created the so called ‘Calder mobiles’- sculptures that replaced the symmetric patterns of conventional sculptures by more dynamic asymmetric forms. These provided a visual equivalent to the harmonious but unpredictable activity of nature. Made by hand to give them a natural effect, Calder sculptures combined and recombined the shape, size, color, space, and movement in shifting, balanced relationships.

4.3. Durrell and Postmodernism

The tendencies that flowered out in postmodernist novels are already anticipated in modernism. In his Modernist Fiction, Randall Stevenson cites Joyce’s Finnegans Wake as “a postmodernist paradigm, a prophecy of the self-reflexive foregrounding of language and fiction-making that has become one central, distinguishing characteristic
of postmodernism” (197). It is not surprising that Stevenson cites Durrell to head the list of postmodernists “who have expanded the self-consciousness of modernist art, writing stories about story telling, or intruding into the fiction to comment on their own practice and proceedings or to discuss other problems in relating language, fiction and reality” (197). The form that these writers created was described as metafiction, the “natural extension of the modern novel, which in its most experimental form seeks to explore the nature of consciousness” (Vipond 56). According to Earl G. Ingersoll, Durrell transcends the modernist boundaries on three points mainly: the application of the principle of indeterminacy, use of two dimensionality of characterization (“depthlessness”) and self reflexivity which “appropriates the mise en abyme effect” (334 – 335).

As has been pointed out, Durrell is a transitional figure because “although Durrell may have begun as a modernist, he was already . . . crossing its boundaries into the postmodern as early as The Alexandria Quartet, and well after his “fellow Irishmen” had done their own border crossing” (Ingersoll 334). This is corroborated by Vipond who notes that “the Quartet, in the true modernist form reflects the modernist tradition while undermining it…. Durrell’s novel is at the cross roads of modernism and postmodernism” (55).

One important feature that characterized the movement towards postmodernism was the conscious attempt by artists to incorporate the discoveries of science- those of Planck, Einstein and Heisenberg - into their works. Theodore Steinberg notes that the postmodern has to do with “works that in some way demonstrate either an awareness of, or at least the effects of these discoveries about time and space . . . . Rather, it has to do with the ways artists and thinkers approach the concept of reality” (65). Durrell
pioneered this effort by being the first novelist to consciously attempt to work out the Einsteinian model of the universe in his novel. In simple terms, the Einsteinian model means that time is conceived as an extension of space, or, time and space together form a continuum; for which Durrell believed that it was possible to create a narrative model. “Durrell’s appropriation of Einstein’s relativity theory as a metaphor for perception in an attempt to refine a metaphysics of consciousness connects him with modernism, but the relativity proposition, in fact destabilizes the old unities as it manifests the relativity of points of view and absence of absolute truth” (Vipond 57).

Durrell differs from the high modernists in his attempt to transcend the Bergsonian durée exemplified by Proust and his followers and drawing upon Einsteinian relativity to create a new fictional chronotope. His attitude is reflected in the words of his fictional novelist Pursewarden: “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 the time-consciousness. But being unwilling to mobilize the meaning of time he was driven to fall back on memory, the ancestor of hope!” (AQ 764).

Even when we maintain that the Einsteinian idea had a profound impact on the narratives of the modernist period, the possibility of using it as a structural device was never considered. Bergson’s time philosophy was a philosophical response to the Einsteinian science, which Proust used in his work. He presented his durée through the shifting memory of a single individual and consequently narrated À la recherche from a singular homodiegetic first person point of view. In the case of Durrell the story is altogether different. He employs a polyglossic narrative where multiple points of view come together and provide different perspectives on the same reality, which in each case appears different or contradictory, exemplifying the idea that “truth is what most
contradicts itself in time” (A_Q 216, 277). Sharon Spencer observes how Durrell’s novel “presents a most unambiguous illustration of how a finite spatial concept may be used by a novelist to contain complementary and sometimes contradictory versions of an ostensibly stable reality” (15).

4.4. Durrell’s Concept of Structure

Even from the days of apprenticeship, Durrell had a clear idea of what kind of narrative structure he wanted to create and how it would represent the new model of the universe that he termed the ‘Heraldic Universe’. His first noticed work The Black Book (1938) anticipates the Quartet in terms of thematic and structural concerns. In a letter to Henry Miller in 1936, Durrell wrote:

Art nowadays is going to be real art, as before the flood. IT IS GOING TO BE PROPHECY, in the biblical sense. What I propose to do, with all deadly solemnity, is to create my HERALDIC UNIVERSE quite alone. The foundation is being quietly laid. I AM SLOWLY BUT VERY CAREFULLY AND WITHOUT ANY CONSCIOUS THOUGHT DESTROYING TIME. (18)

In the same letter he rejects the Bergsonian durée, anticipating the future course of his work:

I have discovered that the idea of duration is false. We have invented it as a philosophic jack-up to the idea of physical disintegration. THERE IS ONLY SPACE. A solid object has only three dimensions. Time, that old appendix, I’ve lopped off. So it needs a new attitude. An attitude without memory. A spatial existence in terms of the paper I’m writing on now at this moment. (19)
The thematic and structural concerns expressed in The Black Book are fully developed in The Quartet.

Proust invoked involuntary memory basing on the idea of association. It is true that Proust’s monumental work did inspire Durrell. But in Durrell’s work the nature of memory that becomes the source of writing is different. The Alexandria Quartet is his first successful attempt at “destroying time”. The author describes this group of four novels not as sequels but as “siblings”. Elsewhere he used the phrases like “four decker novel”, an “allegory”, “an investigation of modern love” “a prose poem about Alexandria”, “a word continuum”, and “relativity poem”, each of which highlights a certain aspect of this modern epic. It also fits descriptions such as a “mosaic”, a “baroque novel” and a “palimpsest”. But the comment that caught the widest interest was of course, his linking of the novel with the “relativity proposition”. In the prefatory note to the American edition of Balthazar, the author explains the basic rationale of its structure:

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 to be deployed spatially … and are not linked in a serial form. They interlap, interweave, in a purely spatial relation. Time is stayed. The fourth part alone will represent time and be a true sequel. (9)
But we should not misread the author’s reference to the first three novels as “spatial” because “he does not refer to a neutral, pictorial space. The words he uses are “interlap” and “interweave,” words which convey the textural or qualitative as opposed to the visual or pictorial” (Kruppa 413).

In stressing the Einsteinian cosmology as its structural analogue, Durrell has made a clear distinction between his technique and purpose compared to that of his predecessors. His purpose clearly is not to embody the Bergsonian experiential time set off against the clock time. The structural concept is elaborated by the author’s fictional counterpart Pursewarden’s dream of writing the ‘n’ dimensional novel described as “a marriage of past and present with the flying multiplicity of the future racing towards one” (A Q 198). This statement embodies the concept of simultaneity which Pursewarden wants to create in his work. The notion of simultaneity was revolutionized with the arrival of the Einsteinian theory. Einsteinian time is one in which every moment is infinity since it contains all time. Hence “at every moment in time the possibilities are endless in their multiplicity: out of this attitude toward reality arises “the intercalation of fact and fancy” . . . that is The Alexandria Quartet” (Beja 217-18).

Albert Einstein demonstrated in his theory that, when two observers are in relative motion, they will necessarily arrange events in a somewhat different time sequence. As a result, events that are simultaneous in one observer’s time frame will not be simultaneous in some other observer’s time frame. In the theory of relativity, the intuitive notion of time as an independent entity is replaced by the concept that space and time are intertwined and inseparable aspects of a four-dimensional universe, which is given the name “space-time” or the “space-time continuum”.
Arguably, the novelist is not throwing the Bergsonian durée out. Instead “what Durrell has done has been to superimpose Einstein on Bergson and Proust – to restore the Einsteinian space-time continuum without invalidating the Bergsonian concepts of duration and evolution” (Richardson 112). The Bergsonian durée is where he actually begins, but it forms only part of the whole scheme making The Quartet more inclusive in its temporality.

This point is evident in many places in the novel as in Darley’s reference to his love for Clea, which is anticipated in his earlier relationships with Melissa and Justine: “the seeds of future events are carried within ourselves, they are implicit in us and unfold according to the laws of their own nature” (A Q 828). He is able to understand this truth only in recapitulation at a temporal and spatial remove from the actual events: “it is not hard, writing at this remove from time, to realize that it has all already happened, had been ordained in such a way and in no other. This was, so to speak, only its ‘coming to pass’- its stage of manifestation” (828). In other words, the insight that he tries to convey is time as a continuum with space, as a perpetual present that is beyond clock time, “between the ticks of the clock” (659), effecting what Pursewarden calls a “temps delivre” allowing Darley to escape from “that ailment of the human psyche” (658). The escape from the ailment results from his growing awareness of the “unreality “of time. In the above comment he emphasizes the phrase “already happened” in the sense that the events that happen had been “preordained”. “The scenario had already been devised somewhere, the actors chosen, the timing rehearsed down to the last detail in the mind of that invisible author . . . . the city itself: the Alexandria of the human estate” (828).
Ken Richardson notes that “in order to feel the reality of the space-time continuum, we must feel that past and future coexist with the present in the same way that (say) the city coexists with the island” (112). He finds this idea embodied in the way Durrell uses the narrative tense – “recounting of past events in the present tense” and “the treatment of the future” apart from evocations of character and place which slow down the narrative momentum (113-114).

Durrell controls the temporal movement of the story by interspersing the narrative of love and political intrigue with scenes and descriptive pieces and slow paced meanderings of characters, particularly Darley through the city. The purpose is to emphasise the ‘spatiality of time’. There are sufficient indications to this effect in the way he drops hints to the reader. “This subordination of the narrative momentum (forwards and backwards) to a predominantly spatial matrix of places and people is achieved by an initial emphasis on these, the reader being allowed to experience the time dimension only when the spatial ones are firmly established” (116). Durrell’s structural method is thus integral to the semantics of the work. It has deep philosophical implications. He differs from the modernists by replacing durée with a more science-oriented sense of temporality.

4.5. Spatialisation in the Novel: its Implications

Durrell’s idea of the “word continuum” is a literary-philosophical derivative of the Einsteinian “space-time continuum”. It involves the plot structure as well as characterization. The form of the novel is controlled by the idea of space more than that of time. This spatialised form serves as the rationale of the Einsteinian structure Durrell is trying to exemplify. His subordination of the linear form to the spatial is in fact an extension of the modernist preoccupation rather than a rejection of it. For this he makes
use of Alexandria as a vast metaphor, creating a poetry of place, evoking the historic city through the characters who are embodiments of the deus loci (spirit of place) rather than characters in the realist sense. He achieves these effects through evocative images and foregrounding the spatial aspects of the city. Instead of being a mere background, Alexandria is a “palimpsest” (AQ 338) holding within it layers of its history, legend, mythology, memory and imagination.

The reality of Alexandria, the central character of the novel is seen as “the slow accretions of time itself on place. Just as life on the individual face lays down, washed by successive wash, the wrinkles of experiences in which laughter and tears are utterly indistinguishable. Wormcasts of experience on the sands of life . . .” (AQ 338). The remark highlights the novelist’s attempt to link time and space. Elsewhere the city is the “capital of memory” (657). It is a memory of the historical and mythical past evoked throughout the Quartet; thereby making us conscious of the layers of memory that imputes “character” to the place. The narrated time extends far back into the world of myth and legend – signified by the references to Alexander and the mythologies of ancient Egypt, its ethnic, religious and linguistic mix and traditions.

In other words, Durrell’s chronotope in The Quartet is deeply rooted in the sheer physical presence of the city, which means that ‘space’ characterised as ‘place’ – which is the city of Alexandria – dominates the narrative in every way. Characters and their actions are bounded or controlled by the deus loci. Durrell devotes more passages to ‘locate’ the actions of his characters in the city and as a function of the city rather than independently. Temporal movement is arrested in the process.

The historical period of action is the inter-war years and World War II. But no particular event of the world war is directly presented, whereas Alexandria and its
surroundings are evoked in all their richness, glory and squalor. Such an approach is justified because “history and landscape – reality itself – must be interpreted to be felt, to be understood. And for Durrell relativity is the key; there seem, at least, to be a thousand truths” (Pinchin 184).

4.5.1. Plot and Character

A reconception of plot and character was necessitated by the new approach. As Richard Pine observes: “Durrell abolished from his novels the conventional sense of time as understood and pursued by western narrative, and thus his characters lacking this dimension move not so much along a set of actions as around an idea. They form patterns rather than events” (Introduction 7). The notion of characters as mere functions of the city abolished the realist idea of character – the idea of discrete human personality, or the “round character” of realism.

For him, plot and character are not “finished products”, rather eternally engaged in the process of “becoming”. This is a concept that Durrell’s novel shares with certain postmodernist novels like Cities of the Interior, about which Sharon Spencer notes that “the structure . . . . coincides with the fluid concept of personality which is reflected in the novel’s characters and events. In this dynamic idea of being, the focus is always on the process of becoming, on the Bergsonian notion of personality as constant change” (19). But Ken Richardson makes a slightly different point of view, stressing that the characters of the Quartet – for all that is said in the text about their insubstantial nature – represent clearly defined nuclei in space – time (albeit subject to duration and growth) from which the narrative lines emanate. Even when these narrative lines follow the time-axis, the spatial deployment of the character- nuclei is sufficient to emphasise that
what we are tracing is a line in space-time; more frequently, however, the narrator’s method is to trace the spatial lines that connect them with other characters. (116)

This remark does not cancel out Spencer’s argument. Instead it is complemented in the sense that even when Durrell is able to abolish the old notion of concrete personality, he is able to retain the identity of his characters in a different way by merging them into the space-time structure and not allowing them to stand away from the plot. The individual identity of the character is recognized in terms of the plot itself.

Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan observes that the realist notion of character dissolved in the context of modernism and postmodernism. “Various features which had been considered the hallmarks of character, modeled on a traditional view of man, were denied to both by many modern novelists” (29). This traditional view was subverted by the developing theories of Freud and Groeddeck who put forward a more fluid conception of the human personality. If the self is a constant flux or it is a “group acting together”, the concept of character changes or disappears, and the old “stable ego” disintegrates (30). Durrell showed that the naturalist-realist idea of the “stable ego” or “the concept of the individual as a discrete entity is erroneous” (Read 389). Ludwig Pursewarden the novelist from whom Darley the protagonist draws inspiration, puts this idea before us in the novel.

We live … lives based upon selected fictions. Our view of reality is conditioned by our position in space and time – not by our personalities as we like to think. Thus every interpretation of reality is based upon a unique position. Two paces east or west and the whole picture is changed
And as for human characters, whether real or invented, there are no such animals.

Each psyche is really an ant-hill of opposing predispositions. Personality as something with fixed attributes is an illusion . . . (A Q 210).

The point is that in the new concept of fiction there can only be relative views of characters and this is ever changing, depending on the time space locus of the narrator as well as the character narrated. There are only “interpretations” not incontrovertible truths as such.

Durrell introduces the idea of the instability of character early in the novel through the image of mirrors, where Justine poses in front of the mirrors and comments on the possibility of “multi-dimensional effect in character” (28). “The reasons for the characters’ behaviour are unstable because ‘character’ itself is slippery, a concept invented by other novelists but rejected by Durrell; and the foregrounding of this is in a way the motor that drives The Quartet” (Alexander 77).

Durell conceives characters as “particles” within the space-time continuum, mutually affecting one another and affected by their observer(s). The Quartet frequently brings before the reader the idea that behind the phenomenal world of space and time perceived by our common sense notions, there is another, timeless and eternal world, where there is an essential oneness. Thus the four sibling novels attain to the status of an ideogram for space-time continuum and at each stage the novel signifies an ascend into “the heraldic universe”. The reader is constantly confronted by a sense of discontinuity, fluidity, plurality, contingency and indeterminacy as he progresses through the four books. The memory of Alexandria – of which the characters, including Darley the chief narrator are particles –, is a collective one. Alexandria is the space
continuum. Durrell in the “Consequential Data” section appended to Balthazar presents his intention:

Some short hand notes of Keats’s the photographer, recording the Obiter Dicta of Pursewarden in fragmentary fashion: ‘I know my prose is touched with plum pudding, but then all the prose belonging to the poetic continuum is; it is intended to give a stereoscopic effect to character. And events aren’t in serial form but collect here and there like quanta, like real life’. (385)

Durrell’s approach to reality is not mimetic in the traditional sense. “Apart from any *causal* relations between characters and reality, to do with their genesis or their effects, perhaps the most significant relation is something like the traditional *mimesis*” (Lamarque, “Philosophy and Fiction” 70). But Durrell and the postmodernists approach characterization “semiotically”, so to speak. “Whereas in mimetic theories (i.e. theories which consider literature as, in some sense, an imitation of reality) characters are equated with people, in semiotic theories they dissolve in textuality” (Rimmon-Kenan 33). This happens in *The Alexandria Quartet*. The textuality of the characters is emphasized in various ways. One is by juxtaposing the present characters with the past – legend, myth or history – by bringing allusions in given contexts. Durrell’s characters’ names are not always denotative but connotative evoking allusive meanings. Moreover characters are sometimes ‘merged’ into one another in ingenious ways, blurring their ‘individual personalities,’ creating an effect like cubist portraits. For example, Justine is allied to Robert De Sade’s Justine and Shakespeare’s Cleopatra, and the Arsinoe. “Justine becomes a part of the historical past. And the distinction between time past and time present becomes blurred. Rather than a person set in time, Justine is
an “exemplar” of place: she is a manifestation of the “Alexandrian subconscious”, as indigenous to Africa as the very lions “her true siblings” (Godshalk 362). This of course is true of all characters, in varying degrees. Balthazar is compared to the mythical Tiresias and the Pan god, Melissa to Artemis, Narouz to the fisher king and so on.

Self-reflexivity is another major feature. The very first novel is about Darley attempting to create a novel out of his experience of Alexandria. It also mentions three other novelists – the historical De Sade, fictional Arnauti and Pursewarden - from whom Darley takes the cue; particularly Arnauti with his Moeurs, based on Justine, a work which Justine is depicted as reading. At one point towards the end of Justine, Darley recalls his friends about whom he had been writing: “The slow unreality of time begins to grip them, blurring out the outline- so that sometimes I wonder whether these pages record actions of real human beings” (A Q 194). Balthazar reads Darley’s first draft in which he himself is a character, and gives him the “Interlinear” raising the question to Darley’s face once again: “After all your concern – was it with us as real people or as “characters”?”(231). Further, in the third novel Darley becomes a character.

As the tale progresses, we are afforded multiple views of characters who reveal one or other aspect of themselves glimpsed at particular points in time like reflections in multiple mirrors. This creates a “palimpsest” effect of characterization. Discrete fragments separated in time, paradoxically create a sense of continuum, in space that is. Or at least that is how the author would have the reader envision it. Darley first makes use of Justine’s diaries, his own experiences and Arnauti’s novel Moeurs to characterize Justine in Justine but is forced to revise his construction in Balthazar. This
exemplifies the statement: “Truth is what most contradicts itself in time” (A Q 216, 277). Contradictory images and multiple representations of the same reality are possible, because truth is relative and conditioned by the subject’s position in time and space. “In the end….everything will be found true of everybody” (210). Sitting before the multiple mirrors Justine exclaims: “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?”(A Q 28).

The realist notion of verisimilitude is subverted also by providing contradictory motives for the actions of the characters. Two important instances are Justine’s marriage to Nessim and Pursewarden’s suicide. In each of the four books these are explained differently, each time convincingly! Deliberate caricature and melodrama as seen in Scobie’s and Pombal’s misadventures and Scobie’s apotheosis provide yet another instance. Durrell also inserts sequences of magic realism – the story of the homunculi reported by Da Capo (808-812).

Joseph L. Kruppa offers some insight into Durrell’s character conception in light of Marshall McLuhan’s idea of the “Gutenberg Galaxy”. To him the novel’s idea of continuum is also an attempt to break out of the restrictive nature of the written and printed word which objectifies the narrative making it an enclosed form of experience. “Newtonian space was an enclosed space in which objects could be placed at determinate points, but the consciousness was temporally oriented, and ever mutating and dissolving faculty” (404). According to Kruppa, “What he (Durrell) criticizes repeatedly is the post-Gutenberg habit of compartmentalizing subject and object; what
he tries to achieve in the *Quartet* is that primitive linkage of subject and object which McLuhan says is the natural result of the electronic age” (406-407).

The word continuum idea dissolves the subject-object/content-form dualities, which is the equivalent of the space-time duality. Further, it invalidates the notion of discrete individuals and stresses relationships -characters becoming particles in the relationships which keep changing. The city becomes a metaphor of a collective consciousness. “All of the characters in the *Quartet* exist only in relationships, and these relationships are finally the property of the city, Alexandria, which is a figuration of their place in space-time” (416).

**4.6. Durrell’s Vision of the Heraldic Universe**

As already suggested, this concept is crucial to the understanding of the temporal structure of the whole novel. Durrell is attempting to translate the Einsteinian universe into artistic terms, through the abolition of time, implied by the myth of the heraldic universe. This is a derivative of the Neo-Platonism of Plotinus, the ancient philosopher of Alexandria.

Christopher Burns notes that the basic logic of *The Quartet* is guided by the mystical philosophy of Plotinus. He describes the novel as a “four part etching” which Durrell has somehow related to the four stage ascent to the heraldic universe (378). “In the manner of Dante and James Joyce, it is an abstract odyssey in terms of concrete experience” (379).

Durrell formulated the principles of the heraldic universe in his letters to Henry Miller. In one of these he stated that this concept expressed the exact quality of the relation of the work to the artist. Heraldry represented “that quality of magic and spatial existence which I want to tack on to art”. He further explains that “what I am trying to
isolate is the exact moment of creation, in which the maker seems to exist heraldically, that is to say, time as a concept does not exist, but only as an attribute of matter-decay growth, etc. In that sense then, it must be memory-less” (qtd. 375).

It is a process of three stages which begins with one’s entry into “a field or laboratory of the consciousness” “based in repose”. He conceives this ascent not in a numerical order. But “because “contemptible’ numbers are the only way to label them, you can say 1ˢᵗ state, 2ⁿᵈ state, 3ʳᵈ state, like an etching…. You cannot define these forms except by ideogram: this is “non-assertive” form” (qtd. 376-77). Burns observes that “the ascent to the heraldic universe is more than a casual one. … the four stage ascent provides a carefully executed design for the Quartet, and .. .. the content of the work is inseparably linked to the four stage architecture” (379). And “this design dictated the widely discussed time-space constructs and is its raison d’etre” (379).

Burns notes that Durrell “seemed unclear about the character of the “states” through which one must pass” (378). Plotinus’s concept enumerated four faculties of the mind- sense, imagination, creativity and knowledge (of God). Justine, Balthazar and Clea represent the first three stages – sensation, imagination, and reason and objectification respectively. “Clea marks the threshold, surveys the ascent, and – in the last paragraph- describes Darley stepping over into the knowledge of self, knowledge of God, and a new creative energy” (379).

The first stage is sensuous experience without introspection or understanding represented in Justine where “he (Darley the artist) has surveyed four characters and the four stages of ascension in which they live. The Alexandria he sees is the sensual and immediate Alexandria of Justine” (382).
The second stage (of imagination) “is achieved by the mind” in which a preliminary order is discovered in the “integers of experience”. So Balthazar the second deck begins to cover the same space from a different point in time. This is clearly indicated in the opening itself with the repetition of “landscape tones” (AQ18) repeated in the opening invoking the city (209) and going on to focus on the theme of love vis a vis Justine-Clea relationship.

Justine-Nessim marriage is seen in terms of ‘business’ then on to part 2 with focus on Pursewarden, Scobie and Balthazar’s hermetic world of the cabala and on to the world of suspicions, jealousy, political intrigue, carnival and murder. Balthazar’s Interlinear forces Darley to return to the same spatiotemporal reality. He “is able to achieve the second stage – the intellectual or imaginative examination of experiences and a preliminary attempt to find a relationship within them” (Burns 383). This section ends with Clea’s letter which foreshadows his return in the beginning of Clea. But that comes only after Mountolive.

In Justine we see not love, but the perversions of love, the aberrations which Balthazar shares in his own way. “And the city we see is not the immediate Alexandria but the timeless city which lurks forever on the periphery, seen only in the mystical carnivals and in Balthazar’s cabal” (383). Burns also notes how Balthazar explains the time space construct in terms of the palimpsest where different sorts of truth are thrown down upon one another . . . (383)

The third stage is signalled by the narrative voice and chronologically ordered Mountolive. At this stage the individual attempts “to see all things – even himself – in an ordered system, this order may be chronological, spatial or both. The key is the objectification of self and the imposition of a rational order. (378). In Mountolive the
objective and rational order prevails. “Reason seems to have stepped in and quelled the beautiful chaos of Justine and Balthazar” (385).

Mountolive-Leila love affair and its final outcome contrasts with the Nessim-Justine affair and “the swift rejections of love without beauty, sex without love, and a peculiar kind of fidelity serve to underscore Mountolive’s dispassionate predicament and to make more salient his contrast to Nessim” (385).

The fourth is the stage of knowledge which is the vision which Durrell calls “the heraldic universe, lies just over the threshold. The final step may be impelled by a great love, or by a new vision of one’s self, or by what Plotinus called the sudden “cosmic consciousness” (378). Darley’s return to the city signifies the final stage. “Darley’s abstract movement toward the heraldic universe becomes his very real return to the city” (386).

Darley moves towards the heraldic vision through a series of realizations. One such moment is when he reads Pursewarden’s private letters, when a moment of illumination brings out the link between the central themes of love, time and the spatialised conception of art embodied as the heraldic universe.

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’. 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. (AQ 792)

This approach accommodates the other themes and explains them – the four faces of modern love, the theme of the city and clarifies the idea of allegory.

By now his romantic passion for Justine is gone; only disgust remains. He goes to Clea feeling that he “should be released from the bondage of . . . appetites, of the flesh” (AQ 703). This release is also a release from the bondage of time when the illusory divisions between time segments are abolished in his imagination and gets a spatial orientation represented by the city Alexandria of his experience. Travelling with Clea in the city Darley suddenly realizes: “…that the past and the present had joined again without any divisions in it, and that . . . . memories and impressions had ordered themselves into one complete pattern whose metaphor was always the shining city of the disinherted – a city now trying softly to spread the sticky prismatic wings of a new – born dragon fly” (723).

The dramatic underwater rescue of Clea from death marks another moment of self realization. Some time after this, Darley begins to write the line “Once upon a time” (AQ 877), those words signifying his maturity, having mastered time after having explored its various aspects in “the laboratory of consciousness”. A significant part of this realization is the illusory nature of causality signified in the remark that “if two or more explanations of a single action are as good as each other then what does action mean but an illusion …” (791). He has harmonized with the totality of the universe and is finally able to begin narrating it.

Through the writer protagonist Darley’s vision Durrell proposes that the aporias of time can be resolved only through the act of imagination and not through
rationalization. This knowledge is mythical, poetic and transcendental. This knowledge comes to Darley while he reads the private letters of Pursewarden, the great master novelist whom he had misunderstood. Darley arrives at the realisation that “the poetic or transcendental knowledge somehow cancels out purely relative knowledge. . . .” and that in his attempt at fact finding, he had been “completely missing the mythopoeic reference which underlies fact” (A Q 791).

Thus Durrell has transcended the realist absolutism and the Newtonian - Lockian view of reality that it embodied, and takes a step further from the Bergsonian thought by the “abolition of time”.

4.7. Plot Structure

The author provides several hints as to the structure of the work, within the narrative itself. The reader has to follow these hints in order to comprehend the structural devices used. The book contains several self-reflexive references pointing to its narrative structure. Balthazar’s analogy of a palimpsest is a crucial one. Speaking of Darley’s attempt he says that “the story told so to speak, in layers....a series of novels with “sliding panels. . . .” or else, perhaps, like some medieval palimpsest where different sorts of truth are thrown down one upon the other, the one obliterating or perhaps supplementing the other (A Q 338). Darley’s tale becomes a palimpsest in which other characters, namely Balthazar, insert their own knowledge and experiences, erasing, striking-through, blotting out the original extra-temporal quality. “Far off events, transformed by memory, acquire a burnished brilliance because they are seen in isolation, divorced from the details of before and after, the fibres and wrappings of time” (187). Aware that this original is a flawed version of what really happened,
Darley is forced to incorporate Balthazar’s input into his narrative, resulting in a palimpsest structure emblematic of the overall meaning of the narrative, highlighting behind the temporal and spatial dissemination of the stories, a pattern of recurrent displacement, erasure and dispersion. The memory of Alexandria is a collective one in which multiple temporalities are laid one over the other. The characters, including Darley the chief narrator are particles constantly interacting. Durrell uses multiple narrators to create narrations within narrations - creating the effect of multiple voices and multiple points of view. Darley’s problem of organizing reality itself is a central issue because in the act of organizing reality, one is apt to cut out a large chunk of reality, providing only a partial view. The narrative form also creates a sense of stasis by never allowing the plot to move forward in linear fashion. This complements Pursewarden’s dream 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. (AQ 198)

Time appears spread out and mingled with the spatial, turning The Quartet into a paradigm for the space-time continuum. The significance of the Einsteinian notion is explained in Pursewarden’s words as reported by Balthazar:

The relativity proposition was directly responsible for abstract painting, atonal music, and formless (or at any rate cyclic forms in) literature. Once it was grasped they were understood, too. . . . In the Space Time
marriage we have the greatest Boy meets Girl story of the age. To our
great grandchildren this will be as poetical a union as the ancient Greek
marriage of Cupid and Psyche seems to us. (A Q 306)

4.8. Durrell’s Use of Narrative Voices

A crucial factor that makes possible the complex structure of the novel is the
employment of multiple narrators. Durrell uses both intradiegetic and extradiegetic
narrators, direct report and also FID which facilitate a highly fluid form of narration
rendered through multiple narrators. Multiple points of view narrations are orchestrated
through letters, diary extracts, quotes from novels, embedded stories and so on. In the
Einsteinian universe reality keeps changing according to the position of the observer
and the observer also forms part of the field. So the multiple tellings signify the
structure; in the words of Balthazar the “palimpsest” (of voices). One reality (one view)
is thrown over the other, each with its own autonomy.

Almost all the characters in The Alexandria Quartet tell stories. Darley, Arnauti
Balthazar, Pursewarden, Justine, Nessim provide the major narrative voices in the four
books apart from the omniscient extradiegetic voice in Mountolive. The authorial voice
is also presented in the ‘Workpoints’ and ‘Consequential data’ added at the end of the
individual novels. (Arguably, the narrator in Mountolive itself is Darley according to
some critics). Each voice is capable of offsetting the other and thus what we have is a
polyphonic narrative with so many ‘unreliable narrators’. This justifies the notion of the
sliding panels and the palimpsest.

Darley the homodiegetic narrator of Justine becomes aware of his own
unreliability when some of the basic premises of his story are displaced by Balthazar in
Balthazar. But the “authoritative” and “final” truth about Alexandria – the true protagonist of the story – does not emerge. Durrell leaves it open-ended. Darley’s narrative is overlaid by the new version of the truth concerning some of the basic motifs. Balthazar’s reliability itself is brought to question when his ideas are contradicted by Darley’s actual experience. In fact at the end of the fourth volume there are still unanswered questions. The difference between Darley the narrator and other such homodiegetic first person narrators is that Darley is troublingly aware of his ‘unreliability’. This awareness takes him to a new perception of truth and a new vision of his own artistic vocation “a cultivation of the style of the heart” (383).

From the very beginning Durrell uses a variation of the point of view method of the modernists. This method was part of the structural experimentations of Conrad, James, Woolf and Joyce. The reliance on the narrator’s memory conditions the structure, especially in the first two books. The various episodes are strung together in “the iron chains of memory” unfettered by clock time. It attains an emotional structure because Darley’s reworking of the past is coloured by his romantic affection focused on Justine. It is thus different from the episodised structure of the picaresque novels (Cervantes, Fielding) because in those novels the external narrator narrates and the characters are realized in terms of their psychological motivations and the setting of the action remains more or less neutral.

This method has its bearings on the way Durrell has attempted to formulate a new consciousness of time in the four-decker novel. Just as the modernist experimentations of the stream of consciousness novels were facilitated by the first person character-bound narratives-with often the artist as the hero narrator – so the postmodernist self-reflexivity was facilitated by the narrator as novelist who could
consciously contemplate the problem of reality. Playing with temporality and constituting time in radical ways was not the least of these concerns with reality. The polyphonic arrangement of the novel is an experiment that establishes the idea of truth as a function of many voices and of many points of view. Thus the novel displays the awareness of multiplicity and multidimensionality, inherent in the relativity principle.

Durrell was skeptical of the idea of stream of consciousness method which made use of involuntary memory as its chief tool for evoking time. He thought of the modernist notion as misconception. One of the characters in The Avignon Quintet explains:

….The stream of consciousness is composed of all too painfully conscious bits with the links suppressed; free association does the hop skip and jump along these points, behaving like quanta . . . . Anyway stream of consciousness is a misnomer, suggesting something flowing between the banks. Milky Way would be more accurate. Consciousness is a smear. (The Quintet 231)
Figure 6.
The Narrative Structure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Justine</th>
<th>Balthazar</th>
<th>Mountolive</th>
<th>Clea</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Darley</td>
<td>Darley Balthazar</td>
<td>Omniscient unidentified</td>
<td>Darley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arnauti</td>
<td>Arnauti</td>
<td>Mountolive</td>
<td>Pursewarden, Clea, others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justine</td>
<td>Pursewarden, others</td>
<td>Leila, others</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pursewarden, others</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.9. Analysis of the Temporal Structure

The four novels connect to each other by mutual references, repetitions, reinterpretations and overlapping of events. To understand the highly complex narrative temporality of the work, the timeline of the fabula can be a standard reference point. It is to be noted in passing that Durrell seldom mentions particular historical dates directly, though there is a clearly recognizable contemporary historical background suggested. Time itself is evoked as palimpsest – mythical, legendary, historical and experiential. The author does not provide many clues to locate the events on specific dates or in a regular sequence. Even when events like the Spanish Civil War or World War II are mentioned, no specific historical event or political references are provided as a link to the story told. Though an exact dating of each event in the fabula may not be possible, an approximate chronological sequence of the major episodes is listed in the table below.
Table 19.
Timeline of Important Events.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Approx date</th>
<th>Mentioned in</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Mountolive’s first arrival in Egypt.</td>
<td>1919 – 20</td>
<td>Mountolive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The fish hunt. Leila’s love for Mountolive.</td>
<td>1920 – 21</td>
<td>Mountolive, Balthazar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Mountolive returns to Europe.</td>
<td>1920 – 21</td>
<td>Mountolive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Justine- Clea affair –the unfinished portrait.</td>
<td>1930 – 33(?)</td>
<td>Balthazar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Mountolive’s life as a diplomat in Europe and Soviet union.</td>
<td>1921 – 1933</td>
<td>Mountolive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>The alleged Coptic conspiracy Nessim Justine marriage.</td>
<td>1932 – 33</td>
<td>Justine, Mountolive, Balthazar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Appointment to Egypt -meeting Pursewarden in London.</td>
<td>1933</td>
<td>Mountolive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Darley in Alexandria.</td>
<td>1933 – 34</td>
<td>Justine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Darley’s affair with Melissa- Cohen’s death.</td>
<td>1933 – 34</td>
<td>Mountolive, Justine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Darley’s affair with Justine.</td>
<td>1933 – 34</td>
<td>Mountolive, Justine, Balthazar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Mountolive’s return to Egypt.</td>
<td>1934</td>
<td>Mountolive, Balthazar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Pursewarden’s suicide.</td>
<td>1934 – 36</td>
<td>Justine, Balthazar, Mountolive, Clea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Mountolive’s last meeting with Leila. Leila pleads for her children</td>
<td>1936 – 37 (eve of shoot)</td>
<td>Mountolive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Cervoni’s ball. Murder of Toto.</td>
<td>1936 – 37</td>
<td>Balthazar, Mountolive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Melissa’s affair with Nessim.</td>
<td>1936 – 37</td>
<td>Justine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Duckshoot. The alleged death of Da Capo, Justine’s escape. Melissa sent for treatment.</td>
<td>1936 – 37</td>
<td>Justine, Balthazar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Darley goes to Upper Egypt.</td>
<td>1936 – 37</td>
<td>Justine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Death of Melissa Darley’s retreat to the Cyclades.</td>
<td>1938 – 39</td>
<td>Justine, Balthazar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Event</td>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Author</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Balthazar visits Darley on the island.</td>
<td>1938–39</td>
<td>Balthazar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Darley attempts to incorporate Balthazar’s interlinear</td>
<td>1938–39</td>
<td>Balthazar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Darley leaves the island for Alexandria.</td>
<td>1942–43</td>
<td>Balthazar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Darley back in Alexandria, he meets the old friends. The child adopted by the Hosnanis.</td>
<td>1942–43</td>
<td>Clea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>The underwater accident.</td>
<td>1942–43</td>
<td>Clea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Leila’s death.</td>
<td>1943–44</td>
<td>Clea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Mountolive marries Liza. Darley goes to Cyclades again. He begins to write.</td>
<td>1943–44</td>
<td>Clea</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 4.10. The Macro Structure of the Novel

The Alexandra Quartet is composed of four separate novels that at the level of the fabula overlap chronologically and spatially. Each of the novels can stand on its own as discrete and autonomous. They were published as separate books over a period of three years and can be read separately. When taken together they reveal a deep-seated unity among themselves. But this interrelationship also reveals the paradoxical truth that even when they form a continuum, they are retellings of the same story which, in the process of retelling, reveals indeterminacy and relativity of truth.

The four novels overlap spatially and temporally. Each novel refers to the others at many points. The deliberately jumbled and blurred out chronology of the narrative discounts the idea of sequels. Durrell conceived them not as sequels but as ‘siblings’, to be read in sequence but apprehended as a whole spatially. Alexandria provides the basic spatial dimension of the narrative. Darley recalls every experience against particular landmarks of the city. Thus space is used as a mnemotechnical device.
Within the textual space which is linear by its very nature, he achieves spatialisation of the narrative by freely moving back and forth in time and moving between different perspectives and metadiegetic passages. Characters merge into one another and so do episodes. Each of the four novels is divided into smaller sections thematically organized and then structured into macro units. And finally the four together produce the mega structure of The Quartet. Cohesion of the text is achieved through the controlling consciousness of Darley.

The now-story deals with Darley, the budding novelist’s attempt to narrate the life of a handful of characters based in Alexandria in the years between the two world wars, his return to the city in the middle of the war and his attainment of the “heraldic vision”. Durrell is not satisfied with presenting Alexandria as a mere setting but intercalates the spatial dimension of the city with the memories that it evokes at different levels creating a palimpsest of legends and the mythology, for without these levels of memory experience cannot be understood.

The fabula time of The Alexandria Quartet is approximately followed in the linear manner in Mountolive, the third novel. It covers the whole period of historical time, before the fourth novel Clea. The fictional (sjuzet) time of The Quartet breaks out of this historical frame work to move back and forth through the consciousness of the various characters and especially through Darley, the chief narrator, the intradiegetic author and focalizer of the whole experience of Alexandria. The narration comes to us in quanta of time. It weaves history and myth, the private and public worlds of different characters and creates what is described as a palimpsest of time experience.
The first three novels of the Quartet cover the same fabula time but from different points of view, offering different interpretations of an overlapping complex of events which are set in Alexandria of the 1930s and 40s.

Justine is narrated from the point of view of Darley the writer consciously trying to recapture the events in his life in Alexandria in a series of analepses. Darley’s recapitulation of his life in Alexandria is rendered as fiction through which he attempts to make sense of the past. It is coloured by his emotion and imagination, providing a very involved, very subjective, romantic point of view. His presentation of the characters is a projection of his own feelings about them. He creates in the very beginning of the novel a pattern of narrative that appears like a collage, interweaving description, character portraiture and particular incidents to be taken up and reworked later on, without a chronological sequence. As Ken Richardson observes, “the spatio-temporal rhythm of these first two parts of Justine is also reinforced by the overall rhythm of the novel as a whole” (117). In other words, the larger structure of the four novels together is reflected in the opening sequences of Justine.

The second, Balthazar problematizes Darley’s one sided view of things, going over many of the crucial episodes in Darley’s Justine manuscript and overlaps or erases many of them, imputing motivations in the characters contrary to what the writer had imagined and recasting them through his “Interlinear”. Here the general view point and the spatio-temporal rhythm remain more or less the same. The only difference is that Darley is forced to incorporate Balthazar’s more objective view point. Balthazar retraces the territory already covered in the previous work, providing new, alternate and often contradictory viewpoints concerning some of the crucial events and characters.
Darley has already depicted. Darley still uses the same sources he has used in the previous work, but Balthazar’s ‘Interlinear’ dominates his narrative. Thus the second book becomes “double-voiced”. The Interlinear forces him to re-examine the characters and events within a social and political context rather than in a self-reflexive, private perspective. This is the beginning of Darley’s crisis as a lover and also as a narrator.

The third book Mountolive is narrated in the conventional third person omniscient point of view, but with Mountolive as the chief focaliser, providing an objective perspective, following the conventional temporality with one lengthy analepsis only. The fabula reaches back to a period earlier than that of the previous two narratives and presents retrospective details pertaining mostly to Mountolive, the British diplomat and his career that spans nearly two decades. The historical aspects of time come to the fore. It provides insight into the political world of Egypt and Britain’s inter war years. The fabula time of Mountolive covers the whole chronological span of the first two novels and brings it up-to-date with the events already developed in the previous two. Though the central focus is Mountolive - Leila love story running parallel to the other love stories, it weaves together the other plots too and is linked to the spirit of the city. Change of narrative voice indicates different emphases to the events overlaying the previous impressions of the city and its lives. Darley, the dominant narrator of the previous books becomes a minor character in the narrative. The characters described from the subjective point of view of Darley are reinterpreted this time imputing political motives in place of the romantic ones. This pertains to the nature of the relationship between the Hosnanis and Mountolive, Nessim and Justine. The narrative achieves greater speed too.
Thus the first three narratives, centered on the same time sequence, form one unit – the three sides of space. This is to be taken as a spatialised presentation of temporal experience. They hold up a certain segment of experience for analysis from three differing but overlapping points of view. Two different observers in the first two books make each other characters in their stories. Darley makes Balthazar one of his characters and Balthazar in turn puts Darley also into the tapestry of Alexandria experience. In each of these cases we have overlapping realities, contrapuntal views of the same reality from within the text; for both these are intradiegetic narrators. In both cases memory is the organizing narrative principle.

This time there is a movement in time forward to a conclusion. But the ending is different from the conventional novels of closure. There are many loose ends, so to speak, with regard to the story that Darley and others have been trying to tell. But then the continuum is there and hence there can be no closure. The motif of the artist coming into his own is perhaps the main thing.

The fourth book Clea completes The Quartet, taking off from where the other three left off and once again resuming the first person narrative of Darley. There is a noticeable change in terms of the temporal and spatial perspectives. The narrative covers the shortest fabula time – about less than three years. There is a sense of forward movement in time when Darley returns to the city after a few years of absence living and recapitulating on the Greek island. Darley returns to Alexandria, “the capital of memory” in the middle of the World War to rediscover it, “in the elusive temporal fashion of a ghost”(667), “to re-experience it once more and this time forever” (660). He comes to realize the illusory nature of time and the multiplicity and provisional
nature of truth. He realizes: “If I have spoken of time it was because the writer I was becoming was learning at last to inhabit those deserted spaces which time misses – beginning to live between the ticks of the clock, so to speak. The continuous present, which is the real history of that collective anecdote, the human mind” (659).

The events that he experiences in the city lead him to artistic maturation in the process. The general structure of the work also follows the pattern already made familiar to us in the first two books, except that the stress on memory is now nearly completely gone. Certain gaps in the previous stories are filled out with hitherto unknown information, through a few completing analepses. The climactic action is Darley’s underwater escapade with Clea. After this he goes away again, presumably never to return to the city. The indications at the end suggest that it is not an ‘ending’ but a new beginning for the protagonist when he attains the heraldic vision and begins to write.

Darley’s growing awareness of the nature of reality is orchestrated in the four stages represented by the four novels. As an admirer of Pursewarden, Darley after reading his diary “Conversations with Brother Ass” grows into the vision of the dead novelist who gave priority to imagination over reality.

In Clea, he makes this remark after having failed to capture reality as he wanted in his book: “I began to see that the real ‘fiction’ lay neither in Arnauti’s pages nor Pursewarden’s – nor even my own. It was life itself that was a fiction- we were all saying it in our own different ways, each understanding it according to his nature and gift” (792).
The scheme of the four novels is now clear: “The four novels all serve to illustrate this, variously expressed, thesis, *Justine, Balthazar*, and *Mountolive* covering the same period of time, *Clea* advancing the action forward” (Alexander 77).

The tetralogy proceeds to its end by a process of constant displacement of meaning. “The first three novels return to the same sequence of events, each providing, through the commentary of individual characters, meanings for those events which in some sense displace each other; and that sequential displacement, from a different perspective in time, continues into *Clea*” (77). The first three novels move over the same historical period, serving as a metaphor for three dimensional reality. In the last installment the perspectives provided by the former three are made to dissolve in the dimension of time. Together, they provide the time-space continuum. One way of providing this insight is through the reinterpretation of characters’ motivations for action.

. . . *Clea* displaces some of the interpretations of the earlier novels, in particular through the journals of Pursewarden, to which Clea has access. .. his passionate love for his sister Liza now in Egypt… suggest a convincing motive for his suicide – that he wanted to ‘free’ his sister and enable her to marry. The journals also provide further possible ways of ‘seeing’ Justine, by claiming that she knew that her daughter was dead – had actually seen the body – but preferred to maintain the fiction of not knowing, of still searching. (81)

Durrell leaves the narrative open ended structurally and thematically; that is to say, without the “sense of an ending”. Alexander sees this in the central theme of love.

The sense of incompleteness (and of infinite possibility) is present in a theme which is explored throughout the *Quartet*, but gathers momentum in *Clea* :
metamorphosis, albeit Durrell’s expression of the concept, a central one in postmodernist writing, is nothing like as radical as may be found in later magical realist writing. Objects of desire become their opposite when the lover abandons the task of imaginatively reinventing the beloved; desire is then replaced by disgust. (81)

After the concluding passages of Justine, Balthazar and Clea the author has added the ‘Workpoints’ (197 – 202, 389) and “Consequential Data” (385 – 387), which are also to be treated as part of the whole structure, not merely by cross references but also metaphorically signifying the structural innovation that Durrell is putting forth. They suggest the possibilities for further ‘siblings’ that could be attached.

Taking the four novels together,

it may be said, . . . that the Quartet as a whole exhibits a substantially identical over-riding spatio-temporal rhythm. Each of the siblings to Justine both expands and fills in the spatial matrix (Mountolive, in so doing, also extends (sic) the time-coordinates); the workpoints at the end of Justine and Balthazar giving clear evidence of this as one of the Quartet basic procedures (the other being continual evaluation of matter already presented) (Richardson 117).

4.11. Structural Survey of the Four Novels

A general summary of the novels is provided below with a focus on the structural arrangement of the narrative.
4.11.a. Justine

Justine is divided into five Parts – including the ‘Workpoints’ – subdivided into forty-eight sections. It consists of a gradual unfolding of the memories of Alexandria in its various aspects, exemplified in the various characters particularly the titular figure Justine. Darley attempts to come to terms with the memories of the city bringing together a tapestry of impressions, a topographical space overlaid with layers of history, legend, myth, ethnic and religious diversity which blend with the narrator’s personal experiences. His purpose is “to understand it all” (A Q 17), as he declares, “in order completely to rebuild this city (Alexandria) in my brain – melancholy provinces … full of the “black ruins” of his life (18). The work presents the impression of a mosaic of events, reconstructed from chaotic experience framed in retrospect. It is narrated “not in the order in which they took place – for that is history – but in the order in which they first became significant for me” (97). This remark explains the structure of the first part of The Quartet which is in fact a series of analepses, dealing with the things that happened to Darley during his stay in the historic city.

Darley has with him a few relics of the city – the child of Melissa and Nessim and the wedding ring that the dead Cohen wanted to give Melissa and the diaries of Justine, Nessim and Arnauti which he uses in places to narrate the tale.

The spatial and temporal removal from the site of painful experiences helps him record the events of the past. The island retreat signifies the artist’s isolation; the vantage point in space and time from which he can order experience and make some sense of the reality that lies beneath the appearances. His temporal removal from the mechanical time of the city makes him aware only of the ocean’s rhythms. For him, “in the great quietness of these winter evenings there is one clock: the sea. Its dim
momentum in the mind is the fugue upon which this writing is made” (19 – 20). The sea as we recognize, is a vast symbol of timelessness, as well as Darley’s isolation. For Darley, time takes on the form of memory infused with his love for the *femme fatale*, Justine.

Darley who knows the characters directly tries to turn his memories of them into fiction, identifying them with the truth about Alexandria. As he says: “the city which used us as its flora – precipitated in us the conflicts which were hers and which we mistook for our own . . .” (17). In other words, Darley’s recollections are an attempt to recapture Alexandria in the mould of a spatialised narrative by selecting events according to their emotional significance. Darley the artist is trying to arrive at his maturity. He is engaged in the process of creation of narration:

… but in this the first great fragmentation of my maturity I feel the confines of my art and my living deepened immeasurably by the memory of them (other characters). In thought I achieve them anew; as if only here - … only here can I enrich them as they deserve. So that the taste of this writing should have taken something from its living subjects – their breath, skin voices – weaving them into the supple tissues of human memory”(20).

The narrated events deal with Darley’s life in Alexandria preceding his departure to the island. The initial focus is on his troubled romantic relationships. The descriptive passages are of two kinds: portraits of individuals as well as the landmarks of the city. Memory and imagination mix. The narrative presents different segments of time without reference to chronological sequence. The interspersing of character portraits with the main narrative along with landscape description and the movement from present to past and past to present enhance its impressionistic nature and exposes
the tentativeness of the story. It begins with Darley briefly introducing the present – his life on the Aegean island – and shifts to the narrative past referring to Melissa’s death. It ends with the dramatic events attending the winter ducks hoot on the historic lake Mareotis.

Sections 1 – 7 evoke places mainly with hints of the theme and brief character sketches. The island and the city are contrasted; the island signifying the narrative present and the city the past. Important events recalled are Melissa’s death, Justine’s desertion of Nessim and Nessim’s madness, preceding Justine’s desertion. Sections 8 – 18 develop the themes of love and jealousy initiated in the opening passages, looping back into an earlier period. The impressions of Justine are drawn in more detail in the context of her relationships with the lover Darley, her husband Nessim and also Capodistria who is supposedly her tormentor since childhood. Several views of Justine are given. The section also traces Darley’s life with Melissa and the jealousy of Cohen the furrier who had kept her as a mistress.

Sections 19 and 20 introduce new portraits with Mnemjian the “Memory man, the archives of the city”(36) of Alexandria and Balthazar the leader of the Caballi, along with invoking the legendary past of the city allied to Alexander and Plotinus the philosopher and Queen Berenice, linked to Melissa.

21 and 22 focus on the developing intimacy between Darley and Justine and Nessim’s jealousy which Darley fears.

23 – 24 reveal incidents relating to his affair with Melissa – Darley’s first sight of Melissa and his encounter with her in Pombal’s flat.

25 – 29 take another backward glance to explore the mystery of Justine’s past guessed from the diaries and Darley identifying the city with her. Darley also learns from
Pombal’s report about his consul’s passion for Justine. He recalls Arnauti’s (Justine’s first husband) novel *Mœurs* in which the heroine Claudia a young Jewess is a fictional version of Justine. Apart from this Arnauti’s diary *Posthumous Life* also provides information about her. It concludes with Justine’s first sexual encounter with Darley in his flat and Darley records the drastic change in his life by quoting the dying words of the old conqueror Amr.

Part II is divided into ten sections. It begins detailing the growth of Darley’s associations with Justine and Balthazar through the cabala and concludes with a detailed return to Nessim’s madness already mentioned in the beginning.

Section 1 begins with the portrait of Balthazar the “key to the city” and Darley’s association with his cabal.

2. Darley recalls the watch-key episode when Balthazar talked to him about Justine and her past life with the writer Arnauti and his novel about her. He also hears of the lost child of Justine for the first time. Darley’s feelings of misery and guilt in his relationship to Melissa are also presented.

3. Details of the cabal meetings and the Balthazar-Justine friendship recounted along with the philosophical discussions under Balthazar.

4. Begins with a description of the night of his final parting with Melissa and concludes with the reference to the island where he is at the time of writing.

5. Darley recalls in detail the visit to the dying Cohen which antedates the previously mentioned event.

6. Darley is in the present and recalls Arnauti. He speaks of his reason for coming to the island as an attempt to “escape from history”. He also recalls the last meeting with
Pursewarden in the hotel where he lived. It details Darley’s last impression of the enigmatic novelist who committed suicide that night and left £500 to him.

7. Another evocation of the city with Pursewarden recalling the burning library, recalling the legendary event of Caesar’s or Amr’s conquest.

8. It begins with the scene of Nessim painting Justine’s picture leading on to the comical portrait of the British pederast Scobie, the sailor turned bimbashi.

9. Darley recounts his first meeting with the artist Clea in Balthazar’s clinic, his developing friendship with her and several occasions of discussions with her. Darley also remembers that it was Clea who took care of the dying Melissa.

10. This lengthy section focuses on the theme of love. Darley recalls Justine’s theories about herself and the question that she asked Arnauti – “love consists wholly of paradoxes” (111). Darley’s encounters recall those of Arnauti, Justine’s first husband and novelist. Several separate occasions are recalled here, including the extraordinary scene on the beach. It also includes quotes from Arnauti about love making.

Descriptions of Justine’s bedroom and her remarks are reconstructed from Arnauti’s book along with Darley’s observations. Pursewarden’s friendship with Justine is hinted at when Darley visits her house in the company of Pursewarden, who later reproduced the conversation between Darley and Justine in a cruel short story. Justine is presented as speaking about her meeting with Nessim and the attempt to escape love by loving a Swede. They walk along the night streets listening to Pursewarden’s digression on the novel he is going to write – about God. A visit to Balthazar where they hear Cavafy’s poem recited on gramophone and a walk together at night with Justine is followed by the narration of the Sveva-Pombal affair. Justine
recalled through Arnauti again. Justine speaks of the alarming change in Nessim. She is afraid.

Part III consists of 4 sections working out the climactic events. Section I opens with Darley being warned of Nessim’s growing jealousy. Melissa is in Palestine at this time. Darley feels that he and Justine are under Nessim’s secret surveillance. He gets the hints about this from Selim, Nessim’s secretary. Darley is hired by Scobie to report secretly to the British on the activities of cabala, suspected of seditious intentions. Nessim struggles with his madness. He takes refuge in his Summer Palace in the desert and Darley also stays there assisting in the building of a chapel with the blind monk Panayotis. This is some time immediately after Pursewarden’s death. Darley receives letters from Melissa. One day he discovers Nessim’s telescope which he suspects was being used to spy on him and Justine on the beach.

2. In Autumn, they return to the city and Darley begins to work under Scobie, reporting on the Cabbala. Darley visits Pombal’s room during part of a raid by the secret police which upsets the French diplomat. Darley is reminded of his life with Melissa. Justine reports the strange shooting episode on the seashore involving herself and Nessim. In another episode, Nessim questions Justine about her friendship to Balthazar and produces Balthazar’s lost watch-key found in the stud-box, embarrassing her.

3. Nessim experiences “that great cycle of historical dreams” (143) and attacks of hatred for Justine. In Darley’s reminiscence, Nessim’s diary is recalled along with the activities of the cabala. It describes the big parties thrown by Nessim as part of the political strategy of the Copts. In another sequence, one summer night Darley wanders through the streets and spies on a coupling in a brothel. Darley’s diary also reports his
search for Justine’s perfume in a shop signifying his deep fetish for the woman. In yet another episode, Pombal reads from Arnauti’s *Moeurs*.

4. This section begins with a detailed narration of Nessim suffering from hallucinatory experiences, possibly on account of the tension that he faces on the political and personal fronts. Justine feels threatened and warns Darley not to go for the forthcoming great duck shoot. Darley suspects that at this point Melissa herself reported Justine’s unfaithfulness to Nessim. Selim’s visit to Melissa’s house is recalled. Darley reconstructs Melissa’s affair with Nessim in detail. Darley reevaluates his relationships and thinks of sexual jealousy and ends the section with the invitation to the duck shoot.

5. The final sections build up to the duck shoot climax. It is a set scene brilliantly realized. It begins with the assembly of the hunting party at Nessim’s house and ends with the reported death of Capodistria and Justine’s disappearance – two events that appear to be mysteriously linked. Darley returns feeling like the survivor of an earthquake (177). To him, the city appears all changed. He recalls a scene from *Moeurs* where Arnauti is exasperated by Justine while he reads to her the book he is writing about her.

Part IV consists of four sections providing a sort of coda to the novel, recapitulating the themes initiated in the opening and concluding them. It is marked by the disappearance of the characters from the scene of the action, with Justine in Palestine, Nessim “to slack off for two years” in Kenya, Clea away to Syria, Da Capo to Italy, Darley to Upper Egypt, Pombal to Rome, and Melissa dying some time after giving birth to Nessim’s love-child. Darley maintains his link with Alexandria through Clea’s letters which he describes as “a lifeline attaching (him) to an existence in which the greater part of (himself) was no longer engaged” (186). While in Upper Egypt he is
phoned by Clea reporting on Melissa’s condition. Darley reaches Alexandria, only to see her dead, in the same hospital bed where Cohen had died. He meets Nessim who is drastically changed, having “become like all Alexandria” (191). The second section is a long letter from Clea containing some crucial information. She reports of her meeting with Justine in a kibbutz in Palestine. The death of Capodistria was rumoured to be planned by Nessim, an act which she mistakenly interprets as his attempt to free Justine from her “succubus” (193). She reports that Justine had simply put Darley out of her mind (193). She also recalls Pursewarden and his last novel.

Part 3 is very short, with Darley back again in the present, on his island speaking about the “slow unreality of time” (194) that enfolds his memories and make the past begin to look unreal.

The novel concludes with a section titled ‘Workpoints’ which appears to stand as an addendum to the story but giving some significant clues to the structure of the work itself. The first passage “notes for landscape tones” (197) looks forward to the opening of Balthazar (209). The passage mentioning Pursewarden’s concept of the novel (198) is of significance. Some references – such as the mythical associations of Melissa (Melissa Artemis) and Justine (Berenice) and the two poems of C. P. Cavafy recalling the Antony and Cleopatra story point to the Justine-Darley and Mountolive-Clea relationships – which are developed further in the later novels.

4.11.b. Balthazar

Balthazar contains a total of 14 Sections in four parts. It is the most complex section of the novel in that Darley’s narration is joined in by Balthazar with his ‘Interlinear’ which cancels out and substitutes many of Darley’s presumptions regarding Justine, Pursewarden and Nessim particularly. Several events in Balthazar
refer back to *Justine* covering the same time segments, in the form of repeating analepses, providing the effect of overlap. It stresses the illusory nature of experience and problematizes the question of truth. The protagonist-narrator attains a new level of realization by “the sacred mystery that Balthazar initiates Darley into (which) is called “intercalated realities.” Darley learns to live with the absence of discrete, absolute facts …” (Lewis 35).

If *Justine* is a composition of memory, whose structure is conditioned by Darley’s subjectivity alone, *Balthazar* brings in another dominant voice that overturns Darley’s point of view and overlays the first book “obliterating” and “supplementing” it. With the arrival of Balthazar’s ‘Interlinear’, “Darley steps out of the tightly subjective, not to say solipsistic, world described in *Justine* into the intersubjective field that *Balthazar* constitutes” (Raper 74). It is here that “Durrell’s break with the literature of memory, and therefore with modernism” (69) is made possible. This is made possible with the structural innovation in which the same temporal segment of the fabula is recovered by a different voice adding to and subtracting from the first.

Part I of *Balthazar* is divided into seven sections of varying lengths. It opens with a passage referring back to the beginning of *Justine*.

Section 1 begins in the narrative present, with Darley invoking the city and the surrounding desert under the changing seasons. Section 2 continues the theme and reflects on the fact that his picture of Alexandria was “provisional” (210). In section 3 he recalls Pursewarden’s remarks about the relations between life and fiction. In 4, he describes Balthazar’s letter mocking his attempt to narrate. It concludes with an image from Pursewarden’s sight of the mirage-city from the sea, an image suggests the idea of illusion. In Section 5, Balthazar visits Darley in the Cyclades and deposits his
‘Interlinear’ which forces him to reconsider his interpretations in the manuscript. Sections 6 and 7 are very brief. But the concluding lines indicate two important points – that Darley comes to realize the contradictory nature of truth from Balthazar, and understands the need for imagination from the dead Pursewarden. He must now find the truth about Alexandria within himself (216 – 17).

Part II begins with the photograph of Darley and friends in Mnemjian’s barber shop recalling Da Capo, Toto, Scobie, Pursewarden, Capodistria and Pombal and concludes with the details of the activities of Scobie who is a modern Tiresias in an ironic sense. This refers back to section 19 of Justine (35 – 36).

Part III focuses on Mountolive talking to Nessim at the yacht club. Balthazar’s information that he has been used as a decoy in her love intrigue perplexes Darley. It also summarises Justine’s relations with Arnauti her first husband, Clea and Nessim. Clea’s portrait of Justine has special significance. Details about Nessim’s proposal for marriage to Justine are given along with the story of the lost child. Against the background of another set scene of celebration at Nebi Daniel, Darley reproduces their plans for marriage and Nessim informing Da Capo about it.

Part IV begins with Nessim’s visit to Karm Abu Girg, seeking his mother Leila’s permission for the marriage. In another analepsis, Leila’s life is narrated from the past to the present. She lives a recluse life after the small pox affliction. Narouz’s love for Clea is brought to focus. Nessim tells Narouz about his marriage and the lost child of Justine. Narouz announces the forthcoming secret meeting of the Copt families at the ‘mulid’ of St Damiana which Pursewarden will also attend. Narouz takes up the task of reporting to Leila about Nessim and Justine marriage. Leila is skeptical about the Jewess.
Part V is in two sections. Section 1 opens with Darley musing over the problem of organizing the new material along with the others to make a meaningful narrative out of it. He quotes Balthazar’s report of his visit to the presentation of Justine to the skeptical Leila during the ‘mulid’. It also recounts Nessim’s jealousy about Darley-Justine liaison which prompts his secret attempts at spying on Justine. In Balthazar’s view, Nessim-Justine relationship recalls Arnauti’s idea of Justine as “a case”. In another dramatic disclosure Balthazar reveals the truth about Da Capo’s death. It had been a stage managed affair by Nessim to help Da Capo escape debts by cheating an insurance company. This reference now connects with Clea’s report (193) and, before that Darley’s report at the end of Justine (175 – 77).

Section 2 presents a conversation between Pombal and Darley long time before Melissa’s death. Pombal comments on Darley’s relationship to Justine and Melissa. It concludes with Melissa’s arrival at the flat. Part 3 once again returns to the narrative present on the island.

Part II.

VII.1. This section focuses on Purswarden and his role in the Justine love story recounted entirely by Balthazar. He recounts Purswarden’s criticism of Darley’s novels and his reference to Darley as “Lineaments of Gratified Desire”. The narration goes further backwards to Keats’ interview with Purswarden on his third arrival in Alexandria for lectures at Atelier. It then jumps forward to Pombal terribly affected by Purswarden’s death, and then moves backwards in time to Justine taking Purswarden to Cairo for a lecture. Their relationship is recalled, with Purswarden using her to try out his new novelistic experiment. He is presented as making disparaging remarks
about Arnauti’s *Moeurs* and insulting towards Justine. Several episodes are recalled, highlighting the relationship between the two.

Darley is already enrolled in the secret service. Balthazar explains the nine point proposition of the cabal one evening at the Café Al Aktar. Justine and Pursewarden quarrel.

It ends with Nessim and Justine drifting apart, following Justine’s coming to learn through an overheard telephone conversation that her child was dead, confirming her suspicions. The question of the child was not mentioned by Arnauti or Darley. A rift opens up between husband and wife. Nessim keeps the knowledge of the child’s death which his brother Narouz had forced out of the Magzub. Balthazar concludes with the remark that it is at this point that Justine encountered Darley and took him for a lover. He was only a pawn in the game played by Justine.

2. Darley reflects on Balthazar’s interpretation and comes to his own conclusions. He is made to go back again to his Cavafy lecture after which Justine accosted him, which was the beginning of his affair with Justine (21, 32), hurting Melissa. Darley borrowed money from Justine to send her to Palestine for treatment (here he also inserts a portrait of doctor Amaril and his romantic dandyism). He also recalls with a sense of guilt, Pursewarden’s money given to him by Clea who took care of Melissa in her last illness. Melissa had asked Clea to love Darley after her death. Darley recalls their days together visiting Scobie on Sundays. A detailed account of the comical Scobie and his idiosyncrasies are narrated with allusions to the mythical Tiresias. Within this is introduced the story of Toby Mannering and concluded with a reference to the grotesque death of Scobie. The section returns again to Balthazar’s report on the final
stages of the Justine-Pursewarden affair and his suicide. He recounts in some detail his arrival at the hotel room to see the dead Pursewarden in the company of Justine.

VII introduces another part of the Interlinear, where Balthazar goes back to Narouz’s decision to act. This is an event that chronologically comes before Justine’s suspicion of the death of her child (which is already narrated). Narouz, in one of his infrequent visits to the city sees the Magzub during the feast of Misra, follows him through the streets and confronts him secretly. In a vision the man reports to him that Justine’s child was drowned while playing on the river bank near Arnauti and Justine’s house. On his return Narouz visits a prostitute and also sees Scobie being chased by an angry crowd for opposing circumcision. The last sequence presents Darley’s vision of Justine and Nessim after the phone call, “staring at each other with clasped hands, so near together, so far apart” (328), and connecting back to the earlier reference where Justine is pictured as overhearing the telephone conversation reporting on the death of the child (296).

VIII is again from Balthazar’s narration recounting his accidental involvement in the death of Scobie, who was battered to death on the waterfront. He helped to cover up the scandal and conduct Scobie’s funeral. Clea takes the old man’s parrot which carries the memory of Scobie forward, imitating his voice.

IX opens with Darley recalling the hypochondriac Pombal attended by Keats, the day before the carnival, Pombal reports on his misadventure with Sveva. He plans to attend the carnival in Scobie’s fantastic dress wearing the “fatal hat” which led to Toto Brunel’s murder the next evening. The section shifts to the interlinear with Balthazar recalling the stolen watch-key episode and Justine’s involvement in it. She had stolen it
from him in the hope of using it to open Nessim’s safe, which she thought must have held the secret about the lost child.

X. Darley realizes that he had made the city according to “the image of (his) own jealous personal property, and it was true yet only within the limitations of a truth only partially perceived” (338 – 39). Balthazar’s version makes him recall some moments which could give him the suspicion that he was a decoy in the Pursewarden-Justine affair. Balthazar recounts Justine’s attempts to thwart Nessim’s spying on her and the dramatic car accident caused by her foolishness. The scene then shifts to the Carnival where the murder of Toto Brunel at Cervoni’s ball is recounted. This is also the result of the misfired attempt to kill Justine. The episode is detailed along with the Cervoni’s Carnival ball. Narouz comes to town and Justine absconds for some time after offering her wedding ring to Toto. Pursewarden tells a vampire story to the guests. Darley meets Da Capo disguised as Mephistopheles in the Cervoni library. Toto’s body is discovered.

Next day Balthazar calls to tell the whole story. Justine deputes Darley to get her ring from the police.

XI presents Darley’s visit to Nimrod’s office where they are scrutinizing the epidiascope pictures of the ball and checking the list of Cervoni guests without any clues as to the murderer.

XII. Darley visits Justine to deliver the ring. Justine is cautioned about Nessim. Darley has doubts about Justine’s intentions. Melissa is pregnant by Nessim. Justine and Darley take a walk to Taposiris. The coming duck shoot is looked upon with apprehension.

XIII shifts focus to Clea and her father during the New Year’s Eve dance and another sequence of events. Clea and Darley talk about the Toto murder. Her report points in
the direction of Narouz as the murderer. Darley has a brief glimpse of Nessim and Justine dancing together at the far end of the hall.

XIV. In early summer Darley gets a letter from Clea who is in Syria. She claims to have changed. She refers to Balthazar’s interlinear and its implications. Pursewarden and his unfinished trilogy are recalled. Clea quotes a letter that Pursewarden wrote to her. It refers to Darley as “Old Lineaments”. It discusses the problems of art.

4.11.c. Mountolive

In Mountolive the narrative voice shifts to the third person omniscient view point providing an outsider view. It explores the pre-World War II political world of colonial Egypt. It offers what seems to be the most historical, empirical and disinterested account of events. It is actually the speculative part of the story, focalized mainly through Mountolive, and incorporating other voices also in the form of letters and notes – like those of Leila and Pursewarden. The fabula of Mountolive covers the whole historical period of action except that of Clea and in doing so helps the reader connect the strands of the action into a chronological coherence. Calendar (historical) time pervades the narration in the manner of realist novels.

Mountolive has a pivotal role in the structure of The Quartet.

While the shift from Justine to Balthazar is designed to expose the subjectivity of all interpretation – Darley had given himself a more central role in the emotional drama than was allotted to him by any of the other participants – Mountolive supplies a new frame of reference within which interpretations might be made and meanings found (Alexander 79).

Ian Mac Niven describes Mountolive as “the clou, the nail holding together the entire structure of the Quartet” (466). The realist mode is justified by the subject matter.
“Implicit in the realist structuring of *Mountolive*, which sets it apart from the others, is the notion that different areas of experience require to be inscribed in fiction according to different principles” (Alexander 79).

In sixteen seamlessly continuous sections, it covers the life of the British diplomat Mountolive from his early youth to the days following his second posting in Egypt. The final event is murder and burial of Narouz Hosnani, who falls a victim to political intrigue. The evolution of Mountolive is traced in three stages: the first romantic phase when he falls in love with Leila and his second phase when he matures as a diplomat, still maintaining the relationships through letters and finally the return to Egypt, getting caught in the pre-war political intrigues and the disillusionment. There is an implied contrast between Mountolive-Leila and Darley-Justine affairs. Just as Justine represents Alexandria for Darley, Leila represents ‘Egypt’ for Mountolive. Both face disillusionment. If Darley was the observer of the field of Alexandria in the first two books, in this he is part of the field observed by the covert extradiegetic narrator – a minor character only.

The narrative can be divided into three thematic sections as follows:

1. Mountolive’s transfer to Alexandria
2. Mountolive’s life in the Embassy contrasted with Balthazar’s in the cabal.
3. The thick of the battle between Nessim and Mountolive with Memlik Pasha’s intervention and the assassination of Narouz, ending *Mountolive*.

The rest of Mountolive’s life is charted in *Clea* during the War when he falls in love with Liza and marries her and goes away from Egypt.

In the fabula the last important events that complete the first three novels are the duck shoot episode and the dramatic events immediately following it. However,
Mountolive ends with Narouz’s death and funeral. Chronologically, this last episode precedes the duck shoot.

**Phase I** (Chapter 1). Mountolive’s first visit to Egypt as secretary of the legation to learn Arabic. He falls in love with Leila Hosnani. Through Leila he discovers a new Egypt. There are also hints of Hosnani’s jealousy towards his wife and her lover. Leila tells Mountolive of keeping up their contact in the future when he is away. Then he bids goodbye. Colonial politics of Egypt of the post World War I is referred to.

**Phase II** (Chapters 2 – 5). Mountolive’s life as a diplomat mostly in Eastern Europe, Latin America and Russia is summarized. The romance fades even as he and Leila correspond. Through Leila he befriends Pursewarden and Liza Pursewarden through her brother. Later he comes to know that Pursewarden is posted to Egypt next year. In London he also meets Liza and takes her out in the absence of Pursewarden. He is not able to make sense of Leila’s remark about the possible help Nessim might get from Pursewarden. Mountolive is promoted and leaves Russia, while Europe is under threat of imminent war. He meets Nessim in Berlin, which gives rise to the suspicion that Nessim is involved with arms business. Mountolive arrives in London. He recalls Pursewarden’s acid remarks about England and its people. He visits his mother at home and receives papers to go to Egypt. Mountolive receives a long letter from Pursewarden appraising him of the political situation and about the diplomatic and personal issues in the Embassy. The letter is a summary of the happenings that are covered in *Justine* and *Balthazar* from Pursewarden’s point of view. It presents the chief characters involved in the love intrigues, the cabbala and Coptic nationalism. Darley is specially mentioned with amused irony and sympathy. It concludes with Pursewarden’s request for a
transfer. Mountolive replies asking Pursewarden to wait a year and decides to transfer his rival Maskelyne and promote Pursewarden to the rank of his chief political adviser.

Phase III (Chapters 6 – 14). Mountolive arrives as Ambassador in Egypt and is soon enmeshed in the intrigues at the embassy, handling Maskelyne’s rivalry with Pursewarden and the reports of a Coptic conspiracy involving Nessim. Pursewarden has turned over a “new leaf”.

The Ambassador develops an excellent personal relationship with the Hosnani couple though Leila’s silence remains an enigma. He receives a letter from her which explains that his appearance in Egypt upset her apple cart. She is waiting for the tide to turn, waiting for courage to face him in her new station. During the carnival party at the Cervoni’s, Justine arranges a secret meeting between them but Leila’s nerves fail her and she only leaves a note in lipstick. It is at this ball that Mountolive gets new friends Amaril, Pierre Balbz and the Cervoni family. Clea begins his portrait to be sent to his mother as a Christmas present. In one of Clea’s stories we learn about the romance of Amaril and the mysterious Semira. The romantic Amaril wants to marry Semira after replacing her deformed nose with a new one, but she eludes him.

Pursewarden’s suicide and its aftermath are traced in two chapters. It begins with Pursewarden’s little quarrel with Pombal in Pombal’s room and his report about his victory over Maskelyne and his desire to celebrate it that night. It also refers to his autobiography Beating about the Bush. Pursewarden’s activities and his thoughts immediately before the suicide are traced with no hint of what is coming. That night he is shocked to learn from Melissa about the Hosnani plot and Darley being used by them. This is the decisive moment.
Mountolive is shocked to receive the news of Pursewarden’s suicide in a detailed report from Telford. He is unable to face the moral implications of the discovery. The confused Mountolive reads Errol’s report which tells him of Pursewarden’s meeting with Balthazar at Café Al Akhtar, his meeting Melissa and his remark that she was a desirable person to marry. There is also a reference to his new novel *All about Love*. In his will he had made his sister the literary executor and bequeathed five hundred pounds to Darley and Melissa. Mountolive’s loss of trust in Nessim and Leila makes him suspect Leila’s hand in all this. He gives orders to keep the Hosnani involvement from the report because it might put the Egyptians into the business. But he wants conclusive proof before and asks to keep everything confidential. Pursewarden had unwittingly separated him from Leila. Though he meets Nessim at a meeting he feels a chasm that now yawned between them and makes no mention of Pursewarden’s death. His acute ear ache gave him an excuse for not attending Pursewarden’s cremation.

To explain the current situation the narrator takes a flashback to the courtship period of Justine and Nessim. It begins with a meeting between Clea and Nessim. Clea indicates that Justine’s intention to marry him is simply to use Nessim’s fortune to search for her lost daughter. The two lovers had met before to talk about marriage like a business deal. Nessim reveals to her his secret political enterprise for the Copts in Egypt, which would put him and his family at risk if made known. Since he saw Palestine as the only nation that can determine the future of everything in the Middle East, he is trying to forge an alliance with them. Justine agrees to his proposal. It is not romantic love that forges their bond.
Soon the conspirators get to work in the city. Nessim launches Justine in Alexandrian society through extravagant banquets with occasional holidays in Justine’s summer palace with Amaril, Clea and Balthazar. A few months more to go before everything is finalized, a night conversation between Justine and Nessim is interrupted by Darley’s phone call. Justine has made arrangements to send Melissa away to Jerusalem for treatment. Nessim’s telling Leila about the plot on the morning of the carnival meeting had made Leila refuse to meet Mountolive. She had refused to go away to Kenya as asked. They ponder over the problem with Pursewarden, and the problem of Da Capo who is very much compromised. Da Capo must disappear. He wants to claim his insurance anyway. Nessim also is faced with the possibility of doing away with the fanatical Narouz. The events described are dated a few days before Pursewarden’s unexpected suicide which upsets everything. The narrative now moves forward once more with the discovery of the Hosnani plot. Nessim, warned about Narouz’s jehadi intentions, confronts him at home and is humiliated. Nessim even thinks of getting rid of his brother. Justine proposes a holiday in the desert. Balthazar and Mountolive discuss the motivation behind the suicide. It ends with an inset story Balthazar’s trick on Randidi which ends in tragedy.

While in Cairo, Mountolive receives reports implicating the Hosnanis and finds that he is unable to communicate with Leila. The assassination of Nessim is suggested. Mountolive is forced to have an official audience with the senior minister Nur who promises to take action.

Nessim’ bribes the notoriously corrupt Memlik Pasha, to prevent any action against him. Mountolive finds himself in a quandary. Memlik Pasha plans action
against Nessim. Mountolive gets an invitation for the annual duck shoot. He also gets a letter from Leila imploring him to do something to help them out.

**Phase IV** (Chapters 15 – 16). Mountolive feels a sense of futility and helplessness. Memlik receives advice from his barber about eliminating Narouz. Mountolive receives a letter from Leila for a meeting. On the eve of the duck shoot Mountolive meets her. The meeting shocks him into an awareness of the drastic change that has taken place over time. Leila is a total stranger now. Mountolive is “suddenly face to face with the meaning of love and time” (621). Leila requests protection for her sons. In disguise he wanders the Arab quarters and is led into the house of child prostitutes. He receives information that Memlik is targeting Narouz. Mountolive gets a dog for companion. The last chapter details the death of Narouz by mysterious assassins. Nessim and Balthazar fail to save him. The novel closes with the ritual funeral and mourning.

**4.11.d. Clea**

In this last installment of *The Quartet*, Darley returns to Alexandria to re-experience the city, completing the structural design of the work. The spatial shift from the island to the city is accompanied by the shift from the world of the past to the present. Marguerite Alexander explains the complex structural relationships among the novels noting that

If *Mountolive* were the final novel of the sequence, it would not only stabilize specific meanings, but mark a devaluing of the imaginative life, including desire and the writer’s insistence on mysteries which are imaginatively penetrated, in favour of life lived in the world and the intelligence officer’s decoding skills. But *Clea*, besides pushing the action forward in time, represents a return to the values of the first two
novels. Clea herself is an artist and in this novel she becomes Darley’s lover, while Darley himself, now back in Alexandria resumes the role of the first-person narrator. Clea reintroduces the idea that, while desire is stable, personality, through which desire must express itself, is not.

(Alexander 80 – 81)

There is no clear indication given to determine the time lapse between the end of Mountolive and Clea. The reference to the World War helps us mark the time as 1943 – 44. Darley’s voice resumes the narration. It presents a movement forwards in time in contrast to the other three novels thus becoming a true sequel to the rest. Darley matures as an artist as well as a lover. He, like Proust’s Marcel at the end of À la recherche..., obtains his vision and begins to write.

I. The lengthy first section opens with Darley’s reflection on time and his attempt “to rework reality” (658), only to realize that “it is reality which works and reworks us on its slow wheel” (657). A significant point in his awareness is reached when he realizes that he “had now come face to face with the nature of time, that ailment of the human psyche” (658). The reflection leads on to a desire to “return to it (Alexandria) once more in order to be able to leave it forever” (659). Darley writes:

If I have spoken of time it was because the writer I was becoming was learning at last to inhabit those deserted places which time misses—beginning to live between the ticks of the clock, which is the real history of that collective anecdote, the human mind; when the past is dead and the future represented only by desire and fear, what of that adventive moment which can’t be measured, can’t be dismissed. For most of us the
so-called Present is snatched away like some sumptuous repast, conjured up by fairies- before one can touch a mouthful. (659)

Chapter I. Darley receives a letter from Nessim, is visited by Mnemjian, bids farewell to the island and returns with Nessim’s child to witness the great change that time has wrought in the city and its inhabitants. Alexandria remains the same yet different. The Hosnanis have declined. The city is facing war. Darley makes note of the historical developments indicated by the war. It concludes with the journey to Karm Abu Girg for his last meeting with the sick Justine.

I.II. Description of the Egyptian countryside en route Karm Abu Girg.

I.III. Nessim has rescued Justine from Palestine after the failed political plot and both of them are now under government surveillance and restriction, living at Karm. Darley meets Justine, suffering from the effects of stroke and the household has an air of unease and bitterness. While Nessim is away for the night, Justine speaks of the strange nature of her love and deception played on Darley. He realizes that his construction of Justine was faulty, now that his love has turned into disgust over time. Both of them are now prisoners of memory. The sick Leila lives in seclusion. Justine also explains the nature of her relationship to Pursewarden who had reconciled her to the “business of rape” dismissing the ideas in Arnauti’s Moeurs. She recalls her first visit to Darley, on the same day that Pursewarden had thrown her out of his hotel. She had Darley as a substitute for Pursewarden as lover. In another dimension she was doing it for Nessim.

I.IV. Back in the city, Darley meets an alcoholic Balthazar. The cabal had been dismissed and Balthazar had suffered debasement because of his passion for a Greek sailor. Darley confesses that his writing has stopped because he feels that he is “on the wrong track”. Balthazar encourages him to begin again. But Darley feels that he is not
able to fit in his characters, once having returned to the place. Balthazar reveals his role in Da Capo’s feigned death. Darley begins to work in the British legation as a censor, possibly by the good offices of Liza Pursewarden. He reconnects with Clea who becomes his true lover in place of Justine and Melissa. The dead Scobie has been elevated to the status of a local saint with his old bathtub for a holy relic. Semira Amaril story has a happy ending.

II. Darley begins to confront the nature of time in familiarity and alienation, stability and change, past and present. Under the shadow of the war, Darley’s relationship with Clea deepens. Pursewarden is once again recalled through his novel Liza had given to Clea. It contains wounding things about all of them. Clea remarks that Pursewarden “exemplified something” (735) and also recalls her old affair with the dead man which cured her of her creative block once. In another recall she narrates her affair with an unnamed lover in Syria leading to pregnancy and abortion. The wounding experience nourished her as an artist. Balthazar is rehabilitated after Mountolive’s banquet and is hopefully able to build his practice again. Liza Pursewarden arrives in Alexandria to collect her brother’s personal effects and material for a biography. Liza meets Mountolive as her prophesied lover. Liza also visits Clea to ask about her relationship to Pursewarden. She had hugged the death mask Clea had shown to Balthazar how to make. Liza has not met Justine so far, possibly because of the break between Nessim and Mountolive, who has forbidden it. Nessim’s effects have been taken by his friends during his days of disgrace. The telescope taken by Balbz is set up in the verandah of the summer legation. One day Clea is able to watch Mountolive and Liza at the beach. She could lip read Liza’s words. They were arguing about their marriage. Liza attempts to run into the sea and David takes after her and then they embrace. It is later
dubbed as an accident. Clea promises a portrait of Liza but delays it. Darley faces the problem of his failure to gain complete knowledge. Pursewarden’s “Conversations with Brother Ass” in the “commonplace book” is mentioned as dealing with this. His theory of art is quoted. The birth of the artist gives hope in a world that always hangs in the balance. All men are artists. She warns him not to be wounded by the remarks about him in the book. Pursewarden had disagreed with the cabal on the point of religion and art. According to him religion was art bastardized out of all recognition. At Darley’s request Clea launches into a long narrative mimicking Scobie’s story of Toby the sailor and his misadventures. It finishes off with Scobie reading Clea’s fortune retelling her of the Syrian episode. She wishes Darley to leave her alone.

III .The flow of the story is further interrupted by an insert from Pursewarden’s notebooks with the chapter title “My Conversations with Brother Ass”. Darley reads this theorization on the English literary tradition up to Eliot and the new form of the novel too as different from that of Proust. He also makes note of Pursewarden’s comments on the concreteness of space and the abstract nature of time as embodied in “Proust’s great poem . . . . his work is the great academy of time-consciousness” But he finds that Proust had failed Because “unwilling to mobilize the meaning of time he was driven to fall back on memory, the ancestor of hope!” (764).The comment signifies Pursewarden’s desire to transcend the limitations imposed on the novel form by mere memory to the new form of the ‘n’ dimensional novel. He also reports about Justine’s knowledge of her child’s death and of their strange visit to the child brothel where Justine’s narration of the love story of Azziz and Yuna takes place. The “Conversations” ends with some pointers to Darley about life and art: “Brother Ass, the so-called act of living is really the act of the imagination. The world – which we always
visualize as ‘the outside’ world – yields only to self– exploration!” (772) and it is necessary “to surrender our own rationalized morality” to achieve the “poetic jump” into the heraldic reality. “Whoever makes this enigmatic jump into the heraldic reality of the poetic life discovers that truth has its own built-in morality!” this in fact looks forward to Darley’s realization of the heraldic universe which finally enables him to write and live.

IV. Darley reflects on the reading of Pursewarden’s book and finds the observations made therein accurate. He is witness to the intrigues among the colonial officers while working in the war office. Pombal has a romance with a soldier’s wife and anticipates a “happy ending”, a tragically ironic remark.

V. Darley meets Liza Pursewarden. She is now in love with Mountolive. She authorizes him to write a biography of Pursewarden giving him her brother’s writings to rival the one Pursewarden’s wife has asked Keats to write. He also comes to see their child’s photo whose death had something to do with Pursewarden’s suicide because of guilt. He is able to get a view of Pursewarden from his innermost self. It makes him recall the “shabby passages” he had developed on Pursewarden in Justine. He realizes that he had been rather blind about Pursewarden, being caught up in the relative facts that hid the poetic truth. He is also led to realize the illusory nature of the factual world. Darley comes to a resolution of the problems of his love and his writing now. He comes to understand the nature of the ‘heraldic universe’ – the continuum of the past, present and the future – and also that of the city and the three writers Arnauti, Pursewarden and himself.

Darley meets the transformed Keats just back from the war field. This meeting reveals many more facts about Pursewarden. It makes Darley understand the double
edged nature of truth and the problem of language that a writer has to wrestle with. Keats reveals to him the contradictory side of the dead novelist from a ‘reading of the letters to the wife’. Darley realizes that Pursewarden’s work and not his life was important, providing one of the many meanings of a ‘word with four faces’.

VI. Darley meets Liza at her residence. Pursewarden’s childhood in Ireland is recounted. The story of the child born of incest and the guilt accompanying it explains Pursewarden’s choice of Egypt as well as his suicide, recalling the myths of Isis and Osiris, Ptolemy and Arisinoë. Liza burns his letters, recalling how their poetic life had lost its magic with the appearance of guilt.

VII. Towards the end of the War, Darley, Balthazar and Clea visit Da Capo’s grave and read his letter which tells the strange story of his adventures in Italy where an Austrian baron breeds the homunculi. They discuss non-empirical knowledge in light of Paracelsus. Balthazar embarrasses Clea when he recalls Scobie’s prophecy about Narouz and herself. Later they witness the accidental death of Pombal’s Fosca. After the funeral, Pombal is about to leave Alexandria on a new assignment. He takes Liza to the room in Mount Vulture where Pursewarden had died. It is now a brothel for soldiers. Clea recalls Melissa and her feelings towards Darley and Cohen who in spite of his brutishness, was admired by Melissa.

VIII. During the last summer in Alexandria, Clea discovers Narouz’s island, supposedly the legendary Timonium of Antony and Cleopatra. Maskelyne dies in a desert sortie. Both Darley and Clea find themselves in a laid back life and Clea wants to leave. The dramatic rescue of Clea from near death is a turning point in their relationship. It brings about a change in their lives.
IX. Soon Darley returns to his Greek island again under a government assignment after the *mulid* of Scobie. Leila is reported dead.

X. Darley finds his old island itself changed. He is “thinking much about the past and about (himself and his friends) all moving in it, the ‘selective fictions’ which life shuffles out like a pack of cards… withdrawing and restoring” (872 – 873). He receives a letter from Clea written with her artificial hand fixed by Amaril. The artificial hand has made her a better artist, and she is moving to France. Mountolive now married to Liza, is posted to Paris. Pombal has developed a new passion for French women and asks for “reinforcements” (Darley invited). Amaril and Semira are going to have a child with the nose she invented. Balthazar is off to Smyrna and Venice. Justine has taken Memlik into society. She and Nessim are planning to go to Switzerland next year with new international plans. One day Darley comes into the “kingdom” of imagination and begins to write.

### 4.12. Temporal Devices Used in the Novel

As already pointed out, Durrell’s structural innovations can be seen as a conscious attempt to capture the philosophical essence of the Einsteinian universe. In a broader sense, it encompasses the world view of the twentieth century science which is guided by not only the Einsteinian relativity but also the quantum theory of Planck and the uncertainty principle of Heisenberg. The palimpsest idea holds the key to his temporal structuring. This effect is created by the overlaying of multiple levels of time experience through the narrative. The intercalatory approach to narrative voices, characters and temporal ordering is part of this grand scheme. Durrell uses every resource available in story telling to create a narrative which can be explored at
different levels. The detailed analysis of the temporal structure is what is attempted here.

Darley describes himself as “a poet of the historic consciousness” (A Q 95), and being aware that “the contemporary psyche has exploded like a soap-bubble under the investigations of mystagogues” (95), tries to escape to the island. To him “surrounded by history on all sides, this empty island alone is free from every reference” (95). It is from this starting point that he progresses in three stages to finally arrive at a vision “on a blue day, quite unpremeditated, quite unannounced, and with such ease . . . (877). The last lines of the novel read “Vision is exorcism” (881). Darley exorcises himself from the historic consciousness and achieves the mythical and the transcendental vision. It turns out to be the relativity view of the cosmos scientifically integrated. The artist envisions this intuitively. Science argues it out. What Durrell has attempted to do is to create a novelistic form which would be a translation in human terms, of the relativity principle.

It has been said that these first three novels explore spatial dimensions and the theory of relativity while Clea explores a temporal dimension by jumping ahead into a different time period from its predecessors. There are several references to real and imaginary writers whose works form part of Darley’s narration. These are the devices Durrell uses to question the authority of history and memory and the authority of the text in general. Thus the text would act as a metaphor for a new cosmology where the knowability of absolute truth is called to question. This stands in opposition to the realist-modernist epistemology.

The nature of the relationship between subject and object is crucial in the relativity proposition. The observer (subject) is part of the field he observes: Darley the
narrator in the first two novels is the observer/subject and the relativity idea pertaining to him is completed when he becomes part of the story (the observed field) through Mountolive where the extratextual narrator sets him up as one of the characters, the object.

4.12.a. Analepses

Durrell uses analepses in every one of the novels but with varying degrees of importance. It is in the first two that memory is the dominant mode. Both may in this sense be called memory books which make use of analepses evoking memory in three forms – historical, mystical and personal all linked to the city.

4.12.b. Mythical memory

Carol Pierce looks at The Alexandria Quartet as “a highly complex work, rich in allusions to the past – to history, legend and myth. Durrell... reveals the many ages of the city (of kings, of God, of man) still existing as a symbolic reality within the “historic present”. . . as ‘a sort of palimpsest” – allusion beneath allusion, legend under legend, each revealing a possible level of meaning or effect. All this enriches and deepens the texture of the work, giving a sense of world enough and time – “Time Immemorial” as Durrell puts it” (Pierce 485).

Every character is allied to some mythical situation or character. In this there is no one-to-one relationship, for one character can resemble or merge into the other(s). Innumerable allusions to mythology provide a mythical level of structure to the whole work. The Tiresias myth is linked to Scobie, Balthazar and some other minor characters. In Clea, Liza recalls the story of “Osiris and Isis, with Ptolemy and Arisinoe – the race of the sun and the moon” (803) connecting her relationship to her dead brother Pursewarden to the myths of Egypt.
William Leigh Godshalk points out how Durrell’s choice of the name Melissa, from Franz Hartmann’s book on Paracelsus, is significant to the writer’s project (364). For Darley Melissa is symbolically re-embodied as Clea in the final pages of Clea. “Melissa from the past becomes Clea in the future” (364).

Of course, the centre piece of the novel is Justine whose role as femme fatale is the hub around which things turn. At the very beginning itself Darley’s mythical and historical memory are brought to bear upon Justine, who is the greatest exemplar of the spirit of Alexandria as he sees it. “She could not help but remind me of that race of terrific queens which left behind them the ammoniac smell of their incestuous loves to hover like a cloud over the Alexandrian subconscious. The giant man-eating cats like Arsinoe were her true siblings” (A Q 23). Godshalk observes how “Justine becomes part of the historical past. And the distinction between time past and time present becomes blurred” (362).

Taken together, Melissa, Justine and Clea are facets of the same experience glimpsed at different stages of the narration of love experience which is ultimately the memory of the timeless city of Alexandria.

4.12. c. Historical Memory

Historical memory is evoked from the very beginning; sometimes directly like the reference to Alexander and Cleopatra. An oblique reference to the city like “the great winepress of love” (18) refers at once to the love theme and also evokes Taposiris, the place where the first wine press existed. Similarly historic aspect of the city is established in the very beginning with the reference “Five races, five languages, a dozen creeds…” (17). Historical figures and sites are recalled in many other sections
too. An example: Alexandria’s “spiritual centre was the forgotten site of the Soma where once the confused young soldier’s (Alexander’s) body lay in its borrowed Godhead . . .” (38 – 39). C. P. Cavafy and his poetry represent a more recent aspect of Alexandria’s historic memory. Antony and Cleopatra are evoked in many situations.

4.12. d. The Personal Memory

This of course is attributed to the attempts by Darley along with others who recount experiences and interpret them. Darley’s narration in Justine and Balthazar’s reinterpretation of the same in Balthazar are immediately visible. But within this there are others such as Arnauti, whose memories are recalled through his novel on Justine.

Durrell’s notes and workpoints given at the end of each novel are also to be treated as part of the structure. Through them he suggests the possibilities that are still open to the writer to add more realities or layers of truths to what is already given. The possibilities are endless.

A static quality is achieved by the first three novels narrated in the past tense and reworking the same themes set in the same time-space. In the last part (Clea) the first person narrator returns and re-enters the changed time space of war time Alexandria, recording experiences noting the changes that have taken place in the characters and the social milieu as a whole.

The first three novels repeat the motif of death – In Justine the feigned death of Da Capo and the real death of Melissa, in Balthazar, that of Toto Brunel, in Mountolive the murder of Narouz. In the last chapter the climactic event is a near death experience for Clea who is but reborn, through a heroic effort on the part of Darley, who himself undergoes a spiritual rebirth.
Reading Pursewarden’s private letters, Darley grows into a new awareness “that poetic or transcendental knowledge somehow cancels out purely relative knowledge” (A.Q. 791). There is also the realization that “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?” (791). Time has to be comprehended in all its multiple connotations. This refers back to what Balthazar had noted earlier: “To intercalate realities,’ . . . ‘is the only way to be faithful to Time, for at every moment in Time the possibilities are endless in their multiplicity” (370).

4.12.e. Iterative Frequency

Iterative method is most used in Justine. This is the first book where the city and its inhabitants are firmly established. There is a series of character portraits where this comes in handy, to suggest the way of life and habits of the characters before narrating particular incidents. Darley for example, introduces his life in the city referring to his wretched existence in the sleazy flat saying, “at the time when I met Justine I was almost a happy man” (21) and goes on to describe his routine life and his life with Melissa. In the section after the next he introduces his glimpse of Justine walking below his balcony in the evening. Then in the next section the narrator provides more details thus: “I have had many such glimpses of Justine at different times, and of course I know her well by sight long before we met. I see her sitting alone by the sea, reading a newspaper and eating an apple; or in the vestibule of the Cecil Hotel, among the dusty palms, dressed in a sheath of silver drops, …” (23).

Similarly, before introducing the first contact with Melissa, he prefices it with the statement about the conditions in which he had lived before that, saying: “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*” (24). Several such examples can be pointed out. Such passages serve to indicate long periods of time that elapses between important events. It occurs in other sections of the novel too. An example of Darley’s life with Clea after his return to the city enjoying a period of rest and love is presented in chapter IV. In statements such as “sometimes at evening, I might come upon her sitting absently…” (778) a whole period of life is summarized.

4.12.f. Repetitive Frequency

Durrell uses the method of repetitive analepsis not from one single point of view, but distributes it among the different narrative voices. Since the narrative present deals with the island interlude in *Justine* and *Balthazar*, the analepses are all external to the now-story. They refer to the narrative present of *Mountolive*. The events that Darley and Balthazar recall are in fragmented form and are distributed among the different parts of the four novels effecting the necessary spatialisation of the “n dimensional” novel. Many of these coincide with the events in *Mountolive*. The Nessim-Justine marriage and the Coptic conspiracy, Pursewarden’s suicide and the murder of Toto Brunel can be pointed out as memorable examples of this. Durrell’s notion of indeterminacy and relativity leading to the rejection of causality emerges mostly through these analepses. By repeating the same events from different perspectives and time loci the determinate character of the truth of experience is made problematic.

The repeating analepses pertaining to certain important events in the story should also be seen as “completing analepses, or “returns,” which “comprise the retrospective sections that fill in, after the event, an earlier gap in the narrative (Genette
51). Genette speaks of such analepses as filling in “earlier gaps” or “ellipses pure and simple, that is, breaks in the temporal continuity” (51).

But Durrell’s method is not completive in this sense because a certain version of the event narrated by one voice leaves certain aspects unsaid because of ignorance, partial knowledge or deliberate omission. The gap in the narrative is a “paralipsis” which is “of a less strictly temporal kind, created not by the elision of a diachronic section but by the omission of one of the constituent elements of a situation in a period that the narrative does generally cover” (51–52). This is made possible in The Quartet through the manipulation of the “unreliable narrators”. Darley is only the first of such characters. Repetitive frequency involving partial knowledge or ignorance can be cited in relation to some of the following incidents.

1. Justine’s relationship to Darley.
2. The watch-key episode.
3. Nessim’s madness.
4. The motivations behind the Nessim-Justine marriage.
5. Justine’s relationship to Da Capo.
6. The suicide of Pursewarden.

Events pertaining to each of the above are built up through the repeating analepses in various sections of the narrative, covering all the four novels. In Justine, Darley’s narration puts them in his perspective; in the grip of his own “emotional field” and he engages in repeated recalls of the various scenes involving his relationship to Justine, Melissa and others. His interpretation is proved erroneous by Balthazar’s version, which again comes to us in a series of repeating analepses pertaining to Justine, Nessim and the rest. Darley provides several references to his friendship with
Justine before narrating the episode in which they first become friends. This takes place after his lecture on Cavafy, eating Italian olives in a shop. Justine is already Nessim’s wife. This meeting leads to his friendship with Nessim also (32 – 33). But in the first reference to this meeting Pursewarden is not mentioned. The same episode is referred to later by Balthazar who offers a closer view of the couple and their relationship. This analepsis repeats the episode providing Darley with the information that Justine had come to him immediately after Pursewarden had thrown her out. Darley becomes aware of another hidden aspect of his relationship. It was not he that Justine loved, but Pursewarden. He was being used as a decoy to protect Pursewarden from Nessim’s jealousy (216). Darley has reasons to believe that Nessim had been spying on him and secretly planned to murder them both. The murder of Toto Brunel confirms this. But Balthazar’s ‘Interlinear’ promptly denies it. He retraces the same events that Darley mentions and gives a different perspective. This repeating analepsis is thus used to demonstrate the contradictory nature of truth.

The watch-key episode (80) is the first time that Darley talks to Balthazar. Balthazar is desperate about retrieving the gold watch-key. Though they talk of Justine there is no indication here that she had stolen the watch-key. This is made clear at a later stage in the narrative where Justine speaks to Nessim in their bedroom. The narrative returns to the same fabula time but this time another significant side is revealed which fills up the gap regarding the lost watch-key. This takes place in Nessim’s house. Nessim appears mystified and shamed when he discovers Balthazar’s watch-key in his stud-box. The episode raises the issue of Nessim’s suspicions about Justine’s friendship with Balthazar. But it concludes with the narrator’s remark that “it was clear to them that he (Nessim) had stolen it” (143). The watch-key turns up again
in Balthazar’s version, where after a few days of Darley’s first meeting with him and Balthazar ordering a new watch-key, Justine returns it to him at the clinic (337). She tells him the story that it was she who had stolen it from him in order to try it on her wall-safe which she wanted to open secretly. The key had looked similar to the original. But when he wanted to know why, she tells him that she had “hoped to discover something about the child” (337) which Nessim was hiding from her.

Her loss of confidence in Nessim is linked to another event in which she had overheard a telephone conversation in which the phrase “she must never know” occurs (296). Nessim lies to her about the content of the conversation, to her disillusionment. She had married Nessim on the promise of helping to find her child.

The marriage of Justine and Nessim is again seen in different perspectives when the events leading to it are narrated by Balthazar and also the narrator of Mountolive.

Pursewarden’s death is interpreted from time to time in different ways depending on who is narrating and when. These are conditioned by the nature of the individual narrators’ relationship to the enigmatic novelist. Darley’s last meeting with Pursewarden is detailed in Part II section 6 of Justine (96 – 100) and in Part III where Justine and Darley talk about him immediately after his death (137). Balthazar makes the first reference to the event, when he speaks of it as “an extraordinary and inexplicable freak” (305). He provides Darley with more details regarding this. This is a closer description of the events by an eyewitness, immediately after the suicide. The details regarding Nessim’s behaviour (311 – 313) points to the political intrigues involving them both. The final version is yet to come (in Clea).

In Mountolive chapter VIII Pursewarden’s activities on the eve of his suicide are described in detail (517 – 536). The first reference to his love for his sister appears
here (532). Though Darley meets Pursewarden he excuses himself and leaves. This report contradicts the earlier statement by Darley in Justine where they have detailed discussions on many things including literature and the trade of the novelist (97 – 99). Darley’s version agrees with Telford’s report in chapter IX (538-539) which provides details about Pursewarden procuring cyanide. Additionally, it says that Pursewarden seemed to be about to go on a holiday (538). Mountolive reads the suicide note in which Pursewarden says:

But I simply am not equal to facing the simpler moral implications raised by this discovery [of Nessim’s conspiracy]. I know what has to be done about it. But the man happens to be my friend. Therefore… a quietus. (This will solve other deeper problems too.) Ach! what a boring world we have created around us. The slime of plot and counter-plot. I have just recognized that it is not my world at all. (540)

Pursewarden declares himself “wanting in a sense of duty” (540). This makes Mountolive exclaim: “Utter folly! Nobody kills himself on an official reason!” (541). The theory that develops here is in agreement with the earlier report by Oliver Maskelyne concerning the political conspiracy. Later Balthazar gives a philosophical view on the whole thing saying: “I take it to have been an expression of contempt for the world, contempt for the conduct of the world” (581).

The final version comes from Liza Pursewarden when she meets Darley in Clea (783 – 790). In another external analepsis reaching far back into her Irish childhood, Liza narrates the story of the strange relationship between Ludwig and herself and its outcome. She tells him that Pursewarden’s suicide resulted from his fear that Liza’s
relationship with Mountolive would be “endangered or crushed” (787). In the suicide note written to her, Pursewarden offers an entirely different reason from the one he had given to Mountolive.

The fear that, so long as I was still alive, still somewhere existing in the world, you would find it impossible truly to escape from the chains in which I have so cruelly held you all these years. At this fear my blood has turned chill – for I know that truthfully something much more definite is required of me if you are ever to renounce me and start living. I must really abandon you, really remove myself from the scene in a manner which would permit no further equivocation in our vacillating hearts. Yes, I had anticipated the joy, but not that it would bring with it such a clear representation of certain death. This was a huge novelty! Yet it is the completest I can offer you as a wedding present! And if you look beyond the immediate pain you will see how perfect the logic of love seems to one who is ready to die for it. (787)

This makes us refer back to the earlier suicide note for Mountolive as well as the mentions of Liza in Melissa’s prediction. We also come to understand the “deeper problems” mentioned in the earlier note. With the presentation of each new data by each narrator, the view of truth changes. For each one, his/her version is the truth ratifying Pursewarden’s words: “we live by selected fictions’” and also: “Everything will be found true of everybody…” (305). Darley, after his meeting with Liza realizes that he “had been digging about in the graveyard of relative fact piling up data, more
information, and completely missing the mythopoeic reference which underlies fact” (791).

4.12.g. Prolepses

Prolepses appear as foreshadowing hints, images and prophecies, examples of which can be found in various places.

There are a number of instances in the narrative where forward references to later events are made. Three or four examples would suffice to show how Durrell uses this as a temporal device.

The central issue in Justine is Darley’s liaison with Justine which fills him with apprehension. After their intimate encounter, Justine responds to Darley’s question “what on earth are we going to make of all this?” (75), she responds by walking over to the dressing table and “with a single blow like that of a leopard’s paw (sweeps) it clean” and says: (That) “is what I am doing to Nessim and you to Melissa” (75). Darley realizes the implications of this statement at the end of the duck shoot when both Nessim and himself are shattered by the news of Justine’s sudden disappearance. He recapitulates “In my mind’s eye I can see Nessim racing up the great staircase to her room to find . . . . the dressing table swept clean as if by a blow from a leopard’s paw” (177 – 78).

Yet another instance concerns the faked death of Capodistria. The reference to the false teeth hints at the question of the identity of the dead man (278). The mystery is resolved later only; but the reason was hinted at by Balthazar. The mystery is explained to Darley first by Mnemjian and later by Balthazar in Clea (663).

Another one is Justine’s visit to the brothel. This is first described by Darley in the first part where there is a dramatic rescue of Justine from the house of the child
prostitutes. But in Clea Darley comes to realize that Justine knew that the child was dead, a fact that he learns from Pursewarden’s letter (769).

Pursewarden’s death and the causes leading to it remain a mystery to all. When he meets Liza Pursewarden, Darley is told that the reason was that Pursewarden wanted to get out of the way of love between Liza and Mountolive. This is the final explanation that we get. And this in a sense is anticipated in Mountolive where the three meet in London and Mountolive’s relationship with Liza begins. In another sequence, the letter written by Clea refers to her love affair with a mysterious young man in Syria. The fact that Amaril was the lover is told to Darley in the last part (855).

Darley’s growth as an artist is fostered by Pursewarden and Clea. The heraldic reality which Darley must possess is hinted at in Clea, both by Pursewarden and Clea (773, 792), anticipating Darley’s vision at the end (877). All these serve to reinforce Darley’s feeling that “the seeds of future events are carried within ourselves, they are implicit in us and unfold according to the laws of their own nature”.

After their first love making Darley recalls Clea’s telling him long time before that “the love you feel for Melissa, the same love, is trying to work out through Justine. “ and he wonders: “Would I, by extension, find this to be true also of Clea?” (A Q 728). It is after this that Clea repeats the old question that Justine had asked him when they made love first: “I am always so bad the first time, why is it?” (728).

A comical example of foreshadowing appears in Mountolive. In his loneliness the Ambassador muses: “I shall soon have to change my life radically… or it will become completely empty… shall have to get myself a dog… to keep company” (585). He does get it later when the women in the embassy present him with a dog: only it is
an “unwanted gift. He was to be *garde-malade*, a male nurse to a short legged lap dog” (635).

Prophecies are also used. One instance of this is Scobie’s prophecy about Narouz and Clea: “You will be in a dark place, imprisoned, unable to resist him. Yes, there is one near at hand who might aid you if he could” (815), is fulfilled in *Clea*. Clea’s violent illness after the visit to Da Capo’s tomb is her premonition of the mishap she is soon to face on Narouz’s island. Darley’s heroic rescue fulfils the prophecy.

We note that Melissa and Clea practice fortune telling. Melissa predicts Pursewarden’s death (531) to take place soon, and as it appears, it is her inadvertent remark that precipitates it by revealing the Hosnani plot to him (535).

Ken Richardson notes that in *The Quartet*

most references to the future are in the form of speculation . . . and this awareness of a future that is waiting in the wings both contrasts with and reinforces the ability, possessed by Scobie, to see the future as a present reality . . .. Intermediate between these are, on the one hand Clea’s preoccupation with horoscopes; and on the other, her intuition of things to come. The latter finds expression in the letters to Darley, … this recurring apprehension of time – future – given the extra weight by its being assigned to a character who, because she has played a comparatively small part in Darley’s past, is more easily thought of as belonging to his future – further strengthens one’s sense that too is contained in the time present. (114)

If the future and the past are not separable, then the ordinary notion of time is at best an illusion. “The continuous present” is “the real history of the human mind”
(659). But the stream of consciousness principle did not truly suggest the idea of the endless continuity because it “is composed of all too painfully conscious bits with the links suppressed” It “is a misnomer, suggesting something flowing between the banks” Durrell thinks of consciousness as “a smear” as he says in The Quintet.

4.12.g. Circularity of Time

Repetition of events and images is one method that Durrell uses to great effect to highlight the notion of circularity, at different levels. Several examples can be pointed out to demonstrate the idea of cyclic repetitiveness as an integral part of the temporal experience in the novel. One effect of this narrative device is the merging of characters into one another which displaces their discrete nature. Temporal experience becomes collective. For example, Darley’s lover Melissa merges into Justine and later into Clea. They are linked to a mythical level of experience by being exemplars of the city itself.

Immediately after the first sexual encounter with Justine, Darley writes: “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 was changed.”(77). This is repeated exactly hundred pages later in a lengthy statement when Darley receives the news of Justine’s dramatic disappearance after the duck shoot on the Mareotis. There is a slight change in the phrasing and the tense changes to the present, adding images of Alexandria landmarks along with a quote from Arnauti’s Moeurs on Justine:

It is as if the whole city had crashed about my ears: I walk slowly to the flat, aimlessly as survivors must walk about the streets of their native city after an earthquake, surprised to find how much that had been familiar has changed,
Roue Piroua, Rue de France, the Terbana Mosque (cupboard smelling of apples), Rue Sidi Abou El Abbas (water-ices and coffee)…. (178)

The particular episodes are located in different sequences though involving the same protagonists. But the use of the same imagery with incremental additions implies temporal change as well as sameness, progression in time but continuum as well, making a subjective return to the same point of vision.

This sense of cyclic repetition happens in another way also suggesting the dissolution of the discrete human personality and the continuum of perception – in this case that of character. Darley’s involvement with the three women – Melissa, Justine and Clea.

The first love making between Justine and Darley is followed by Justine’s remark:

“I am always so bad the first time, why is it?

Nerves perhaps. So Am I

You are a little afraid of me” (75).

This same remark is repeated by Clea in the same situation several years later, where Darley makes love to Clea while bombs are exploding over Alexandria. He recalls the past two loves – Justine and Melissa immediately before this.

“I am always so bad the first time, why is it?”

So am I

Are you afraid of me?” (728).

Melissa, Darley’s first mistress who recalls the mythical Melissa Artemis, the nymph and patron of suffering womanhood, is Darley’s first love in Alexandria. The memory of Alexandria begins with Melissa (17) and she is also Darley’s only hope for
the future. “In some curious way the future if there is one has always been vested in her” (184). The first such image is that of Darley “lying beside a sleeping woman in a cheap room near the mosque, in that early spring dawn, with its dense dew, sketched upon the silence which engulfs a whole city before the birds awaken it”, listening to “the sweet voice of the blind muezzin from the mosque reciting the Ebed … ‘I praise the perfection of God…” (27). After his reunion with Clea, the image is repeated:

She was standing at the drawn curtains to watch the dawn break . . . . In the spring sunrise, with its dense dew, sketched upon the silence which engulfs a whole city before the birds awaken it, I caught the sweet voice of the blind muezzin from the mosque reciting Ebed – a voice hanging like a hair in the palm-cooled upper airs of Alexandria. “I praise the perfection of God …” (729)

After the pain and misery of previous affairs, Darley enters into a mature relationship with Clea as the “reimbodied and reincarnated” Melissa (Godshalk 364). This is suggested through the repetition from Justine of the image of Melissa in the coffee shop. At the beginning of Justine, Darley recollects Melissa “sitting in the corner of a coffee shop, alone, with her hands supporting her chin” (AQ 54). The image appears again in Clea with Clea in “the exact station and place” where “she (Melissa) had been sitting, gazing at a coffee cup with a wry reflective air of amusement, with her hands supporting her chin” (711). Darley is overcome by a sense of déjà vu when he accidentally finds her in the Café and even fancies her as the dead Melissa. The meaning of this repetition is explained in Clea’s remark to Darley about his affair with Justine. She declares to him that “the love that you now feel for Justine is not a different love for a different object but the same love you feel for Melissa trying to
work itself out through the medium of Justine” (108). Darley repeats this at the end (792).

It is not only in the case of love that such repetitions occur. There are two scenes of death where a situation gets repeated – that of Cohen and of Narouz. Both these men are victims of rejection by their lovers at the point of their death when they wish to see their women. Melissa refuses to visit Cohen when informed of the situation, saying: “He is nothing to me, never was, never will be” (88). The same phrase is repeated by Clea (643) when Nessim desperately phones Clea informing her of the dying Narouz’s wish to see her. All these show how Durrell modifies and repeats images and ideas from an earlier passage, thus giving a circular movement to his style. This movement, which ties in with the general pattern of the first two novels of the *Quartet*, suggests that time rather than moving linearly forward, turns back upon itself. Time in this way takes on a new density and becomes another dimension of the narrative. (Godshalk 368)

The leitmotif of “Jamais de la vie” reinforces this circularity of experience in a realistic way. “Jamais de la vie” appears in two ways – one as a popular song and the other as a perfume, repeated in the context of the evolution of the key love affairs in the novel. Its repetition has multiple significance. Each time it is repeated one way or the other, it recalls the other occasions before and the reader juxtaposes them in the mind.

It first appears in connection with Justine when Darley met her at El Bab. It is described as the perfume that she wore. (*AQ* 26 – 27). The dying Cohen sings “Jamais de la vie” to Darley where it is described as “ a popular song which had once been the
rage of Alexandria . . . and to which Melissa still danced in the Cabaret” (94), making Darley recall C. P. Cavafy’s poem about the dying Mark Antony.

Towards the end of Justine, Darley’s fetish for Justine leads him to the perfume shop to search for her favourite perfume and has difficulty finding it. When he mentions her name the salesgirl fetches it for him and he discovers that it was “not among the most expensive or exotic of perfumes” (155) and ironically finds that he cannot recognize it. It also makes him recall the bottle found in the dead Cohen’s waistcoat.

In Mountolive, when Pursewarden last dances with Melissa in the hotel, he sings the same tune (526). In chapter X of the same, the image appears immediately after the scene of conspiracy and love between Justine and Nessim. This time it is the perfume worn by Justine (558).

The motif appears again while Mountolive is going to meet his old love Leila. He hears the song from the radio (615) and sings it “despite his distaste” (616) while driving. The final meeting of the former lovers turns disastrous. Mountolive “was suddenly face to face with the meaning of love and time. They had lost forever the power to fecundate each other’s minds!” (621). This is followed by his grotesque adventure in the child brothel. As the flabbergasted ambassador drives home, he hears the song coming over the car radio and shuts it off “with an oath” (632).

For the last time we see Darley unconsciously singing it while he and the child are entering the Alexandria harbour. Darley remarks that “to her (the child) it must have seemed appropriate music for a triumphal entry into the city of childhood” himself “amazed at how ancient the tune sounded” (A Q 671).
The appearance of this motif links different characters and different episodes together suggesting the idea of cyclic time which encloses all experience.

4.12.h. Narrative Speed

The narrative speed is controlled by scene, summary, pause and ellipsis. Mieke Bal points out that “the scene is, by definition, in the majority” (105) in most novels. “Although traditionally an even alternation between summary and scene used to be the aim, in order neither to overtire the readers with too rapid a tempo nor to bore them with one that was too slow, in the course of time a development has made itself felt towards rejection of that stereotypical pattern”(105). Durrell orchestrates these narrative devices to control the rhythm and speed of the narrative. Of these, special attention needs to be given to Durrell’s use of pause and scene. Durrell presents his scenes with special purpose of evoking the spirit of place and also to merge it with the movement of time signified by human action.

There are two types of scenes – 1.Pure descriptions of landscapes – the island, the desert and the city and 2.Those presenting certain regular events – feasts, rituals, hunting and such other human activities. These are set into the narrative at various places.

As an example in the very first part of Justine Darley evokes a series of memories of people and places. Alexandria dominates the narrative. In Justine, Part I sections 2, 3, 10, 26 and the concluding passages he describes the city vividly, first hinting at the theme of love. The opening section of Balthazar repeats this (209). When such descriptions are made, the mythical and historical references are woven in to enrich the narrative with deeper levels of significance. This is particularly true of the city with its historic memory of more than two thousand three hundred years
(Alexandria the gateway to Egypt was founded in 332 B.C.). The action of the novel seldom progresses without reference to the spatial reality of the city.

The lengthiest description of the Egyptian landscape occurs in Clea, inserted during Darley’s last visit to Justine: “Ancient lands, in all their prehistoric intactness: lake –solitudes hardly brushed by the hurrying feet of the centuries…. ” (686). This passage of pure description fills up the time between Darley’s departure from the city and his arrival at Karm Abu Girg.

Quite often the descriptive passages merge into scenes of action and vice versa. Two examples:

In section 5 of Balthazar, Balthazar’s surprise visit is prefaced with the descriptions of the island and sea in the spring. It begins with “The two winters we have spent . . . .

Now in the spring come the long calms, the tideless, scentless days of premonitions. . . .” (211 – 212). The passage then goes on to describe the regular life on the island and then the arrival of Balthazar. In Justine the point at which Hamid reports Justine’s disappearance, Darley walks to his flat feeling like the survivor of an earthquake, “surprised to find how much that had been familiar had changed, Rue Piroua, Rue de France, the Terbana mosque . . . . Rue Sidi, Abou El Abbas . . . .” (178), simply listing the landmarks of the city and some historical details about it.

Durrell’s descriptive powers are at their best in the colourful scenes of Egyptian life scattered throughout The Quartet. Examples of these can be pointed out in the case of the duck shoot (168 – 178), The Sitna Mariam (315 – 326), the fish hunt (397 – 403), the carnival and the Cervoni ball (341 – 362), and the mulid of “El Scob” (858 – 868). These scenes create a sense of slowing down of the narrative speed but they are fully
integrated into the scheme of the narration by providing the setting for some important
events in the plot. Two of these – the duck shoot and the carnival – are even settings for
melodramatic events such as the feigned death of Capodistria and the inexplicable
disappearance of Justine in the first case and the murder of Toto Brunel and the failed
secret rendezvous of Leila and Mountolive in the second.

Pauses in the narrative are created through descriptions like the ones already
mentioned or through inset stories (told by characters) and diaries, letters or such other
documents written or read by some. These are metadiegetic and achronic in the sense
that they reach to another level of the narrative without being part of the time scheme of
the fabula. The story of Negroponte told by Pusewarden during the Cervoni ball (348 –
350) the tragic story of Randidi told by Balthazar (581 – 582), Clea’s story of Toby
Manning told in imitation of Scobie (745 – 748) and Capodistria’s homunculus story
told in a letter (808 – 812) serve as examples of inset stories. Clea’s letter to Darley is
the penultimate section of Justine (191 – 193). The chapter III of Clea titled
‘Conversations with Brother Ass’ (749 – 773) interrupts the forward movement of the
narration, making a pause. It is a crucial piece of metadiegesis presented as “Extracts
from Pusewarden’s Notebook”. It is read by Darley who gets a deeper insight into
Pusewarden’s life and art and serves as a landmark in Darley’s inner growth.

4.12.i. The Use of Tense

Durrell narrates certain events (frequently in Justine) in the past tense and
infrequently –in descriptive passages – uses present tense evoking the immediacy of the
city Darley has left behind. For example, here is Darley’s recap of his bidding goodbye
to Melissa: “Alexandria Main station: midnight. Deathly heavy dew . . . . a final lurch
and the train pours away down a tunnel, as if turned to liquid.
I walk about Moharrem-Bey that night, watching the moon cloud over . . .” (87).

In place descriptions also the same method is adopted: “Money falling into the tin bowls of beggars. Fragments of every language – Armenian, Greek, Amharic, Moroccan Arabic . . . These are the poor quarters of the white city . . .” (56 – 57).

This again is juxtaposed with descriptions of his life on the island suggesting two spatial realities – the island and Alexandria – coexisting in the novel. This is analogous to the two temporal realities of the past (memory) and the present existing together in the narrative structure. “but the interleaving of Darley’s past-tense memories with his descriptions of his present life on the island (particularly important in the first seven sections) inevitably reinforces the effect of these present tense passages in which he sees the past as present reality” (Richardson 114).

The “presentness” of the past is suggested also in another way, by constant revival of the memories of the past into the narrative present through relics (Melissa’s child and the rings that Darley takes to the Cyclades), letters (of Pursewarden and Da Capo) diaries (of Justine, Arnauti, Nessim), novels written by the characters (Moeurs of Arnauti, God is a Humourist and others of Pursewarden), the apotheosis of Scobie as El Scob and the “rebirth” of Da Capo and so on.

The mysterious and contradictory nature of reality is what ultimately drives Darley to an acceptance of reality in terms of multiplicity and contradiction. This is what he learns from his spiritual mentors Pursewarden and Balthazar; that it is only through the act of imagination that one can live and write and escape from the tyranny of “that ailment of the human psyche”, time. Darley realizes that the heraldic vision had been one “which had been so long in forming inside (him) . . .” So he is driven back to
the age old formula with which the storytellers of the past began their narrations. “Once upon a time . . . (877). Language is conditioned by time and this is the best way one can tell a story.

4.13. Workpoints and Consequential Data – a Note

In the “Author’s Note” to the first edition of Clea Durrell calls it a “word continuum” and explains the inclusion of the ‘Workpoints’ as suggesting a number of possible ways of continuing to deploy these characters and situations in further installments – but this is only to suggest that even if the series were extended indefinitely the result would never become a roman fleuve (an expansion of the matter in serial form) but would remain strictly part of the present word continuum. If the axis has been well and truly laid down in the present quartet it should be possible to radiate in any direction without losing the strictness and congruity of the continuum. But to all intents and purposes the present set of four volumes may be judged as a completed whole. (7)

This suggests that a unified rational approach to meaning, leading to a “closed” ending was being subverted under the new cosmology Durrell was trying to project. “As part of the word continuum, Justine, Balthazar, and Mountolive seem to be completed by Clea. But a continuum is arbitrary and may be radically adjusted by the introduction of another observer. The Quartet, as word-continuum is that strange paradox, a finished work of art that can never be finished” (Kruppa 413).

Commenting on Durrell’s description of ‘the central topic of the book’ as ‘an investigation of modern love’, Theodore L. Steinberg writes: “It is an investigation of modern love, an investigation that makes progress but remains unfinished at the end of
Clea…. Darley must learn what love means in order to become a writer and a human being… the process, the investigation, the metaphysical inquiry is vital” (64). The basic theme that holds together the four novels is this theme, the artist’s coming into his self realization through the experience of love in its various forms; a postmodern Künstlerroman.

“Perhaps above all else The Alexandria Quartet is a celebration of the endlessly dynamic power of the imagination, whatever reservations one may have about the level of Durrell’s achievement” (Alexander 82).

For him the whole novel is an ‘investigation’ and not an answer. If there is an answer at all, it lies in the awareness of the non availability of absolute and neatly packed answers to the questions concerning reality and truth. One has to come to terms with multiplicity of perception. Thus the novel seeks to explore the nature of consciousness and not absolute answers. Stories can be told in many ways, the same story told from many angles would look different, depending on the position in time and space taken by the perceiver(s) and the teller(s) of stories. The ultimate knowledge possible is knowledge of oneself, through the power of imagination. Imagination offers endless possibilities to the creative mind. And Durrell’s imagination brings out the endless ways in which time can be conceived and narrated.