CONCLUSION

The Confluence

This thesis was an attempt to trace the trajectory of the changing notions of time as embodied in two typical examples of modernism and postmodernism. Prose fictional narratives are taken as coginitive tools for understanding the cultural constructions of the modern world. This enquiry has provided many interesting conclusions concerning the evolution of the novel form and its philosophical implications during the last century.

1. Humanising Time

Narrative structures facilitate modes of thinking that provide concrete basis for the perception of time; and these structures keep changing with the changing cosmology. This is the argument that provided the basis for this enquiry. We have seen how different forms of novelistic narratives represented different types of chronotopes in different ages of the development of literature. The classical fictional narratives embodied the earliest mythical notions of time – where time is not progressive because they do not register change. During the Renaissance, the birth and growth of new science and technology changed it, bringing in its wake the mechanical, linear notion characterised by the realist novels of the 18th century. The instinctive revolt against their mechanical and purely historical approach to time is marked from the very beginning, though the real revolt came with Modernism. This happened in the 20th century with the birth of new psychology, Bergsonianism and modern physics. The Modernist and Postmodernist narrative structures represent this phase. The structural innovations initiated by modernist experimentalism reach a
culmination with the postmodernist chronotopes. Such experiments in structure are not accidental happenings or passing literary fashions. They have deep cultural bearings. In its advanced stage the modern novel aims at a confluence of philosophy, mysticism and physics. This can also be seen as an attempt to “humanise time” as opposed to the mechanical tick - tock of the clock. As Frank Kermode explains: “The clock’s tick-tock I take to be a model of what we call a plot, an organisation which humanises time by giving it a form; and the interval between tock and tick represents purely successive, disorganised time of the sort we need to humanise” (45).

Kermode’s remark recalls Ricoeur and Aristotle. Time is narrated in fiction through plotting. Time in its natural state is chaotic, formless and incomprehensible. Plot imposes a structure on it and makes it tangible, giving beginnings, middles and ends. In other words, we catch “time by the tale”. If the plot structure of narratives has changed over time, it is to be seen as the artists’ attempt to humanise the changing notions of time.

2. From Realism to Postmodernism

Realist representation of time sprang from the mechanical certainties of the Enlightenment – with its objectivistic epistemology, mechanistic world view, positivism and logical empiricism. It provided the aesthetic premise for realist chronotopes. Generally there was a uniformity observable in the structure of such narratives such as beginning, middle and end, dominance of the monologic omniscient narrator and the use of space as providing a somewhat neutral “background” to the action. Modernism rejected this and confronted the loss of such absolutism, turning away from objectivistic epistemology and shifting to an
ontological base. This in turn evolved into a contextualist and relativist world view. Postmodernism celebrates this world view and sees the relation between the human person and the universe as a dialectical one. The fluidity and fragmentation of temporal structure in the postmodernist novels derive from this.

The structures of the modernist and postmodernist narratives appear to embody a sense of chaos through fragmentation and extreme spatialisation. But beneath this disorderliness we can also see the search for a new order and stability, though not of the rationalist kind. They seek it in the irrational. Faulkner sought it “through mystic ecstasies” (Sartre) in a Western context. Durrell sought this in Buddhism and Taoism which is Eastern.

The study of these two authors show how modern fiction expresses the crises of modern civilization. This work focussed mainly on the time concepts only. Time is focussed on because at no point before in human history have artists shown such acute consciousness of time, both as private experience and as a shared cultural experience at different levels.

3. Cultural and Aesthetic Implications

For practical reasons the focus on temporality has delimited this study. However, in summing up, we cannot ignore the cultural and aesthetic implications of the structures created by the novelists. This investigation of the narrative structures of Faulkner and Durrell has unearthed some important similarities as well as dissimilarities in the structural innovations in novelistic narration. In philosophical outlook they differ greatly. But placing them in the tradition of the modern novel in English, it is easy to see that they represent two phases of its evolution in terms of
concept and practice. Faulkner marks the heyday of modernism; Durrell signifies the passage from modernism to postmodernism. Both these display the power to assimilate the currents of contemporary thought into their works. Above all, they stand together as cultural historians of a civilization in radical transformation. The vision of time expressed by them is but one of the aspects of this. The similarities between the two are mostly in terms of their technical innovations. They can be briefly summed up thus:

1. Both reject traditional structures in fiction and attempt to create multiple chronotopes in their works.

2. Their works challenge the reader at the level of mimeis. In other words they demand spatialised structural understanding.

3. Both have adopted the narrative principles of other art forms – painting, cinema and music.

4. Sequential chronology is discarded by both novelists at the level of the sjuzet.

5. Both owe their legacy to Proust. The Proustian method opened up the possibilities of time narration that both Faulkner and Durrell adapted to their own purposes.

6. Dialogism, polyphony and heteroglossia are used as modes of representing time experience.

7. Both incorporate metanarrative codes and merge them with the narrative.

8. Both employ fragmentation of style and use of multiple perspectives.
9. Both assume that the conquest of time and the comprehension of truth are possible only through the mythopoeic imagination, not through ratiocination.

10. Geography is used by both to explore the particulars of experience but the narrative process transforms the factual and the empirical into the universal, by converting them into the mythical and the metaphorical.

Both these writers attempt to abolish the boundary line between memory and imagination which is another way of subverting the epistemology of realism. Memory signifies the time-boundedness of human experience. But when the distinction between imagination and memory are dissolved, reality is released from history and time. Faulkner depicts such a moment towards the end of Absalom Absalom! where Shreve and Quentin attempt to finalise their narrative reconstruction of the Sutpen murder.

In Chapter 8, Quentin and Shreve reach the limit of their knowledge of the Sutpen murder mystery: nevertheless they go on beyond reconstruction into pure speculation. The signs of narrative act fall away, and with them all questions of authority and reliability. The text passes from mimesis of the various characters’ narration to unmediated diegesis, from characters “telling” to the author directly “showing” us what happened between Sutpen, Henry, and Bon. The murder-mystery is “solved”, however not through epistemological processes of weighing evidence and making deductions, but through the imaginative projection of what could – and, the text - insists, must-have happened. (McHale 10)
Durrell’s Darley also starts like Quentin and Shreve, looking back on the past and attempting to make sense of it through epistemological processes of recapitulating and arranging events in memory attributing causal connections to events. But Darley’s retelling of the Alexandria experience in *Justine* is revealed as only part memory and part imagination in *Balthazar*, when the Interlinear appears to cast a different light on the same events. Several instances can be quoted from the same book. Finally in *Clea* Darley speaks about entering the kingdom of imagination which is the true domain of narration. In both cases the narrator protagonists finally come to the awareness that empirical and absolute truths are unknowable. Poetic imagination is the only recourse to truth, not reason since “the poetic or transcendental knowledge somehow cancels out purely relative knowledge. . . . beyond that of the fact-finding sort” (*A Q* 791).

**4. a. Faulkner’s Time Vision**

Faulkner’s vision of time is closer to the Protestant Christian philosophy. It might be even argued as “apocalyptic”. His “deviation from the master narrative of Protestant Christianity . . . . which is a dominant, homogeneous, religious frame work in American society and which . . . . sanctions the idea of the linear progress of time that is buttressed by the biblical story of the beginning and the ending” qualifies him as a “rebel” and a practitioner of “the so-called heretical cosmology” (Tanaka 76). However, Faulkner attempts to “to step out of the Protestant vision of the linear progress of time” (81), though he does not quite succeed in it. This is because history haunts him; as we can see in the way he dates the events in his works. So is eternity, as demonstrated through the vision of Dilsey in *The Sound and the Fury* or of Hightower in *Light in August*. Faulkner’s novels generally depict a tragic and
decaying world, metaphoric of the decline of a civilization itself. Faulkner dispelled the accusations of pessimism when he asserted his faith in man when he said in his Nobel acceptance speech: “I decline to accept the end of man . . . I believe that man will not merely endure: man will prevail” (4).

Notwithstanding his assertion, Faulkner’s works present a vast metaphor of the decline of the old world of comforting certainties. His South is not merely a geographical and cultural entity to be studied in isolation; it is by extension, a symbol of a world in the throes of historical and cultural decline. Faulkner presents his characters struggling to come to terms with history both at the personal and the public domain. The characters in his novels attempt to escape from the haunting spectres of the past. For them time is never redemptive; it is destructive and entropic. In both The Sound and the Fury and Absalom Absalom! Quentin engages in the task of escaping time. So are characters such as Joe Christmas, Reverend Hightower and the rest (Light in August). Jean Paul Sartre finds Faulkner’s response characteristic of his age though he does not accept Faulkner’s metaphysics. He notes: “We are living in a time of impossible revolutions, and Faulkner uses his extraordinary art to describe our suffocation and a world dying of old age. I like his art, but I do not believe in his metaphysics” (“On The Sound and the Fury”). Though he set his novels in the American South, the sense of decline is, in the larger context of the Western civilzation, a Spenglerian one.

Faulkner’s characters escape from the temporal world only through mystic ecstasies or death. Quentin kills himself. Hightower has an epiphanic moment which foreshadows his death. Dilsey who survives the Compsons, has mystic ecstasy at
Easter. Such moments are moments of forgetfulness or moments of Kairos through which Faulkner’s protagonists escape from time and memory.

Yet another factor to take note of is the concern with telling or constructing of the story itself. In turning towards the subjective experience of its characters, these novels often foreground the act of telling itself. For this purpose he uses multiple narrators whose separate voices present a polyphony of time narration. In Faulkner, the attempt to tell the story is part of the anguish of the characters, especially that of Quentin in *Absalom Absalom!* Though he is not a conscious artist, he is basically a teller of stories. In Durrell, the basic motif of the ‘Künstlerroman’ provides ample scope for self-reflexivity and he makes abundant use of this in *The Alexandria Quartet* as well as *The Avignon Quintet*. In both these works, the protagonists are writers or novelists of one kind or the other.

Faulkner never let go of the reference to clock and calendar time. The Bergsonian paradigm dominates his narrative structure. However, he seldom loses sight of the watch and the clock. Faulkner gives direct and indirect indications of public time while staying focussed on the experiential time. The personal and the historical experience of time are both depicted as running parallel, often providing a contrastive vision. The great practical advantage of this method is that the reader can reconstruct history from the novels.

Even when his narration uses the multiple voices, Faulkner keeps each voice separated and focussed within the consciousness of individual characters, unlike Durrell who ‘intercalates’ voices. Faulkner is modernist in the sense that his conception of character is phenomenological; that is to say, it stresses the process of “becoming” over the state of “being”. At the same time he does not entirely let go of
the realist principle by retaining the biographical perspective even as he stresses their subjectivity. This juxtaposition of the subjective and objective runs parallel to the juxtaposition of the chronological and experiential levels of time. Like in the realist convention, “we (still) have a sense of personal identity subsisting through duration and yet being changed by the flow of experience” (Watt 26). But its presentation becomes subjective, diverse, contradictory, ambiguous and multiple. Faulkner’s characters still retain their link to historical time through their geneologies – such as that of the Compsons, the Sutpens and the McCaslins.

Time in Faulkner’s fiction is structured around themes – the past and the present knotted together around certain crucial events in the life of the characters. A unified focaliser is always there to structure them. The past and the present mingle and flow, producing a sense of the durée. Faulkner’s style poses difficulties with his syntax and symbolism in his attempt to dramatize the human consciousness. Associative memory of the mentally retarded Benjy and the desperation of Quentin are presented by taking liberties with the familiar norms of syntax.

4.b. Durrell’s Continuum Idea – The Search for a New Philosophy

Considering the techniques used to represent the time experience of modern man, the moot question is whether the modern and the postmodern really differ very much. It appears that there is only a difference of degree rather than a radical contradiction or opposition between the two. In this sense, postmodernism can be best described as an outgrowth of the modernist tendencies. Durrell stands as a bridge between the modern and the postmodern in this sense. He does not entirely give up
the sense of structure as conceived by the modernists; at the same time he does attempt to transcend it with evidently commendable results.

Whereas Faulkner and his contemporaries were greatly influenced by the Bergsonian philosophy of time, which sought to articulate the durée experience, Durrell sought to replace it with the idea of the space-time continuum as the basic structural principle.

The influence of cubist paintings is noted in both cases, though in Faulkner it is not a consistent method. This has to do with Einsteinian relativity. Perhaps it is cubism that first assimilated the Einsteinian relativity into artistic perception, a step further in the progress towards abstraction. In the Einsteinian relativity, the Newtonian absolute and independent space and time are reduced to isolated “space-time events”. Cubist paintings represented this by fragmentation of represented objects and bringing the fragments together in the same frame creating simultaneous perception.

In actual practice as we see in The Alexandria Quartet, durée is one of the layers of the “palimpsest of time” that the novelist tries to present in the work. Durrell considers all modes of time perception. The inclusive nature of this concept of time is put in the mouth of Balthazar:

Every sort of time trickling through the hour-glass, “time- immemorial” and “for the time being” and “time out of mind”; the time of the poet, the philosopher, the pregnant woman, the calendar…. Even “time is money” comes into the picture; and then, if you think that money is excrement for the Freudian, you understand that time must be also!(A Q 707)
Quentin’s thoughts in *The Sound and the Fury* are recalled in the above passage: “Father said that constant speculation regarding the position of mechanical hands on an arbitrary dial which is a symptom of mind-function. Excrement Father said like sweating. And I saying All right. Wonder. Go on and wonder” (SF 59-60).

Durrell’s exploration of time began with *The Black Book*, developed through *The Quartet*, and culminated in *The Avignon Quintet*, a work “in its conception and execution . . . . is without question the most ambitious of Durrell’s fiction” (Vander Closter 166). He saw these three works as “three stages of fulfilment of a pursuit . . . . The Black Book is the agon, the struggle. The Quartet corresponds to pathos, or experience . . . . The Quintet represents the anagnorisis, fulfilment and accomplishment” (Montremy 1). In the end, what Durrell has attempted to do is to open up the possibility of a confluence between East and West, and between logic and intuition. In this sense *The Quartet* looks forward to *The Quintet*. The four novels of *The Quartet* and the five novels of *The Quintet* “makes a complete whole . . . . The four gradually interpenetrates the five” (1). The anticipation can be traced in Clea’s letter to Darley that closes the work expressing her desire to go to France. She knows “with absolute certainty” that she must go there because “. . . artists like sick cats knew by instinct exactly which herb they needed to effect cure: and that the bitter-sweet herb of their self discovery only grew in one place, France . . . ” (872-873).

After *The Quartet*, Durrell’s writing began to get closer and closer to Eastern mysticism, finally reaching a confluence between Eastern and Western thought in *The Avignon Quintet*. Cecil Wajsbrot observes:

*The Alexandria Quartet* takes into account Western psychology, dualism, and ambivalence, and accordingly the opposition of space
and time. To say it another way, Freud and Einstein preside over the fates of Justine, Balthazar, Melissa, and Clea. In *The Avignon Quintet* Durrell turns to Eastern philosophy, the five skandas which are the psychological categories of Tibetan thought.

The Quintet as a whole becomes a paradigm for an integrated vision of reality founded on the above confluence. Durrell was greatly attracted to Buddhism and Taoist philosophy which stress the unreality and flux of time – a theme that he carried further into *The Avignon Quintet*. He told his interviewer that *The Quintet* “evokes a sort of Einsteinian prayer-wheel: variability or indeterminacy par excellence” (Montremy 2).

Durrell was aware of the essential difference in the approach to reality between the East and the West. Western philosophy was based on reason and analysis, a method that traces its lineage back to Socrates and Plato. But the Eastern approach is intuitive. This is not to say that it is unscientific. It is simply that the ancient philosophers of the East knew and recognised the limitations of rational thinking and the relative nature of reality. This mistrust of the analytic empirical method is very clearly manifested in the Taoist thought. Human intellect is not capable of comprehending the ultimate reality – the Tao or the concept of the yin and the yang. The Heraclitean idea of flux and cyclicity is close to the Taoist notion. It is simply that his views did not gain currency in the later centuries.

Durrell saw the confluence of the Einsteinian physics and the Freudian/Groddeckian psychology as ending up in Hindu metaphysics (Plimpton 279). In an interview with Julian Mitchell and Gene Andrewski, he declared confidently:
Eastern and Western metaphysics are coming to a point of confluence in the most interesting way. It seems unlikely in a way, but nevertheless the two major architects of this breakthrough have been Einstein and Freud. Einstein torpedoed the old Victorian material universe – Freud torpedoed the idea of the stable ego so that personality began to diffuse. Thus in the concept of space-time continuum you’ve got an absolutely new concept of what reality might be, do you see? (Plimpton 278–279)

He justified his stand against the criticism that the Einsteinian continuum cannot be represented in a literary work: “I call it a continuum, though in fact it can’t be quite accurate in the sense that Mercator’s projection represents a sphere; it’s a continuum but it isn’t one, if you see what I mean. So that really this is only a kind of demonstration of possible continuum” (279).

Durrell explained the concept of character as “non personality” in his works as part of this vision. He said: “In other words, the non personality attitude to the human being is a purely Eastern one: it is a confluence that is now approaching in psychology” (279). Durrell’s stance finds support in Fritjof Capra who notes that concepts which seemed totally unrelated in the non relativist physics are now seen to be but different aspects of one and the same concept. Throughout Eastern mysticism there seems to be a strong intuition for the “space-time” character of reality. The fact that space and time are inseparably linked, which is so characteristic of relativist physics, is stressed again and again. His intuitive notion of space and time has,
perhaps, found its most far-reaching elaboration in Buddhism. (The Tao of Physics 158)

When Durrell spoke of the Einsteinian model, it was not Einstein’s physics alone that he had in mind. He had assimilated Heisenberg, Planck and Neils Bohr. Bohr working on Planck’s Quantum mechanical theory, proposed the idea of Complementarity in 1927. According to this concept the wave and the particle are not contradictories. They together formed a complete picture of one reality. Physical phenomena could be completely described only in this way. Complementarity meant that independent, objective or autonomous objects do not exist. They are constantly in a state of interaction and also in interactive relationship with the instruments used for measuring their interactions. The observer and the field of observation affected each other. Their interaction itself was a determinant factor in the characteristics of each. Durrell uses these ideas in his works by the complex manipulation of multiple narrators.

His narrative structure puts the narrators (observers) as characters and vice versa. Their interactions constantly change and affect one another. Their merger into each other becomes the metonymic rationale of the world of quantum mechanics and relativity.

Durrell’s protagonist is made to realise that to understand the mystery of relativism one had “to intercalate realities” which “is the only way to be faithful to Time, for at every moment in Time the possibilities are endless in their multiplicity” (A.Q. 370). Darley finally achieves this vision – his kairos moment in a revelatory experience described at the end. He possesses this awareness through the act of imagination, not through ratiocination.
Darley’s progression may be described as a progression from the static absolutist view to a dynamic relativist one. As an artist he embodies the cultural dilemma of the West which derives from its classical Greek foundations. Durrell, Darley’s real life counterpart, chooses to discard the non-relativistic view of the classical Western cosmology. Einsteinian cosmology brings him to the door to ancient Eastern thought. This affinity for Eastern thought is a widespread tendency of the contemporary Western world. Fritjof Capra explains the reason behind this:

Greek natural philosophy was on the whole, essentially static and largely based on geometrical consideration. It was, one could say, extremely ‘nonrelativistic’, and its strong influence on Western thought may well be one of the reasons why we have such great conceptual difficulties with relativistic models in modern physics. The Eastern philosophies, on the other hand, are ‘space-time’ philosophies and thus their intuition often comes very close to the views of nature implied by our modern relativistic theories. (The Tao of Physics 15)

In other words, science was finding its way back to Eastern theology and mysticism. This in a way reflects the deep seated yearnings of a fragmented and dying world, a yearning for oneness founded on some cosmic principle. Capra notes: “As we study the relativistic models and theories of modern physics, we shall see that all of them are impressive illustrations of the two basic elements of the Eastern worldview- the basic oneness of the universe and its intrinsically dynamic character” (159).

This turning Eastwards becomes pronounced in the post-Quartet stage of Durrell’s writing career. The philosophical and structural concepts that Durrell
developed in *The Alexandria Quartet* continued to develop through the five-decker novel *The Avignon Quintet*. Though commercially less successful and critically ignored at the time, it is a work that deserves to be studied carefully. This novel also uses the same historical period (World War II), though with the scenes spread out in Avignon, France and Egypt. Its structural peculiarities were not easily understood or appreciated by even those who applauded *The Quartet*.

Durrell explained that his intention was “to do a telescopic form, -what the French call gigogne . . . you open one and it opens another and you open a third and so on and so forth. . . . (He) didn’t want to do it in continuum form this time, (but) wanted to do it straight like a telescope not fleuve . . .” (Carley 46), explaining further that the novel “should become on the one hand more flou, that is to say more dispersed apparently and much tighter in its inner organization and lie anchored on Avignon and a very small group of people” (Carley 46). The main story consists of a group of people gravitating towards the ancient city of Avignon during the peak of World War II in search of a Templar treasure hidden in an Avignon cave. The resolution of their political, theological and sexual differences culminates in the production of the quincunx, the illumination symbolising the ultimate reconciliation of matter with spirit.

The treasure hunt provides the central symbolic motif. Durrell uses the device of multiple narrators who narrate one another and merge into each other. Blanford the novelist (like Darley /Durrell) character explains its rationale thus:

My style may be described as one of jump-cutting as with cinema film. The basic illustration is of course the admission that reincarnation is a fact. The old stable outlines of the dear old linear novel have been
sidestepped in favour of soft focus palimpsest which enables the actors to turn into each other, to melt into each other’s inner lifespace if they wish. Everything and everyone comes closer and closer together, moving towards the one. *(The Quintet* 1265)

Durrell thus achieves the abolition of discrete identity of personality through the merging of characters, making them reflect each other and reversing temporal progression by bringing dead characters back to life in the narration and using the devices of mise-en-abyme.

Like Darley in *The Quartet*, Blanford the protagonist achieves the philosophical and artistic vision which provides him the status as ‘Logos’, enabling him to “write” the *Quintet* which is already written! In *Monsieur*, he creates a “fictive” representation of the “real” events which comprise the remaining volumes. Thus the structure of the novels echoes their content; from the matrix of the first narrative come the four differentiated versions of the succeeding novels, which lead, when read together, to the apprehension of “reality prime” *(The Quintet* 1367). Just as the characters discover the quincunx which designates the location of the Templar treasure, so does the reader discover the quincunx which is the novel’s form. Instead of the structural analogy from music and cubist paintings used in the former work, Durrell uses a geometric one with mystical associations; that of the quintet. A quintet is a five – point geometric arrangement in which each point in space reflects the other points.
5. Reading of Spatial Narratives

One of the problems that frequently come up in the discussions of modernist and postmodernist narratives is the reader’s approach to works like those of Faulkner and Durrell, the so called “writerly” texts. The modernist and postmodernist narratives demand what Joseph Frank described as “spatial comprehension”. The reading process is always linear, but the work has to be comprehended spatially as Frank explains in his *The Idea of Spatial Form*. His remarks about Joyce’s *Ulysses* is true of Faulkner and Durrell too: “(They) cannot be read-. . . can only be reread. A knowledge of the whole is essential to an understanding of any part” (21). Frank also said that “a unified spatial apprehension” of such works “would ultimately be possible” (21). It stresses the significance of “simultaneous perception”. Durrell also demands this in his works, perhaps in a more radical manner. He indicated how he wished *The Alexandria Quartet* to be comprehended: “Of course, ideally, all four volumes should be read simultaneously, . . . ., but as we lack four-dimensional spectacles the reader will have to do it imaginatively, adding the part of time to the other three, and holding the whole lot in solution in his skull” (Plimpton 279). The same holds good in the case of *The Avignon Quintet* also. His notion corroborates the idea of Frank about the reading of the spatialised narratives. Perception of a written text is based on the medium of memory which is not linear, sequential and unidirectional. Although every linguistic narrative is sequential at the level of mimesis (the *sjuzet*), the reading of the spatialised forms compel the reader to make connections between widely separated parts of the narrative, not just successive ones. This is done in terms of the fabula. The narrative can move back and forth – anticipate its own end through forms of prolepsis and employ different analeptical returns to its
earlier moments – in terms of the fabula. The reading process naturally relies on reflective, simultaneous and reciprocal relationships. In other words, the reading process is itself spatial though the physical process involved is arguably temporal. Textual spatiality thus holds a mirror to the reader. Durrell’s original vision appears to have been timeless and spaceless. It challenges the reader to share in this view by developing a new perceptual process. It means the reader of modernist texts has to let go of the linear mindset and allow the text to ‘grow on’ him, letting it engage the mind directly entering the text from any direction more or less like reading a computer hypertext.

Susan Vander Closter notes that

> the multivolume novel form as conceived by Durrell demands that the reader eventually see its parts simultaneously as if the volumes were panels set in three dimensional rather than linear arrangements, a structure that is dramatically plastic and related to the perceptual tricks of the modernists in cubism or, in another medium, like jazz, with its reliance on variations and the fluidity of thematic expression. (166)

Works like those of Faulkner and Durrell create a kind of new mythology, or metaphors for modern culture. They leave in the mind lasting after-images that linger. They stand out from the common run of fiction by defining states of mind rather than strain to tell a story. Their business is not to weave illusions around the reader. Instead they have an epistemological end – to liberate the mind.

This of course is a point that has been contested by many. One crucial question is, to what extent they reveal a specific mode of temporality; Bergsonian or Einsteinian? Formalist and structuralist methods help understand the structures of
novels by making distinctions and categorizations. The basic premise of analysis is the duality assumed between chronicity (linearity) and achronicity (spatialisation or transgressions of linear configuration). But it sidesteps many crucial issues such as the disparities, conflicts and interrelations that exist between different notions of time within one text, between temporality and narrativity, between experience and formulation.

6. The Change from Objectivity to Subjectivity

As already noted by Milan Kundera, the modern novel was heralded by the rise of humanism, which evolved into the age of the Enlightenment. Tracing the history of the modern novel, Ian Watt noted how the novel attempted to be “objective” in its approach to life, in keeping with the notions of philosophical realism. Verisimilitude or “truth of experience” was aimed at through the use of the empirical method and the referential use of language. The novel pretended to be history following the narrative methods of historiography. But modernism marked the shift towards subjectivity and self reflexivity and a movement towards more abstract forms of narrative sacrificing character and plot. Postmodernism carried this to the next stage with the creation of metanovels which explore the very form and the processes involved in creating it. According to Sharon Spencer,

the incorporation of passages devoted to the exploration of the creative process constitutes the novel’s interiorized comment on its own being. It is as though the novelist, frustrated in his attempts ever to envision himself with total objectivity, from a perspective outside himself, has discovered that the novel may achieve what the novelist may not: the novel may comprehend itself in a sense that is impossible for the human being. (140)
The cultural setting of this development is what may be described as the loss of faith in the so called “grand narratives”, as well as “the shortening of temporal horizon in the late twentieth century, and public awareness . . . . of the co-existence of radically different time scales from the nanoseconds of the computer to the billions of years in which contemporary cosmology calculates the age of the earth and the universe”(Heise 6 – 7).

7. Dehumanization of the Human

It would appear ironic to note that in the attempt to humanise time, the modern novel has dehumanised the human. The pursuit of abstract forms results in such a condition that critics have declared “the death of character”. The writer’s attempt to create more and more abstract forms has perhaps led to the death of character – that is to say characters whom we can identify as our ‘next door neighbours” and who can be studied as “round” or “flat”. “In addition to the death of God, the death of humanism, the death of tragedy, our century also has heard declarations concerning the death of character” (Rimmon-Kenan 29).

From our analysis, it is possible to conclude that the clear link between modernism and postmodernism would be the “marked tendency toward dehumanization in fiction” which is “related to the drive towards abstraction” as in the other arts. (Spencer, Introduction xvii). Characters lose their particular identities and begin to serve “as perspectives, as points of reference from which the subject of the book is perceived” (2). In Faulkner and his contemporaries the tendencies towards abstraction are perceptible though not fully achieved. In Durrell it is clearly discernible.
Thus Durrell and Faulkner are experimenters in their status as “literary spatialists” for whom “character has become but one of many components that, conceived and handled by the novelist as though they were building materials, contribute to the erection of a spatial structure” (6).

This “abolition” or downsizing of the human personality would seem to be a historical irony, considering the fact that the modern novel founded itself on the principle of humanism and individualist philosophy. This tendency manifests itself as the fragmentation and defamiliarization of “character” in the novel. In practical terms this led to the “cultural elitism” of so much of the novels of the specified period. Spencer observes that the misunderstanding and prejudice against the modern (ist) and postmodern (ist) novel is mainly concerned with the issue of “fictional character” (Introduction xv)”. She explains why:

Character is to the novel what the melody is to music and what the identifiable representational subject is to painting and sculpture. It provides the element of the familiar and the recognizable. Its presence is a signal, a code, a sign that reassures the reader that he knows what the work is “about”. The diminished and diminishing role of character for its own sake, along with the changing methods of depicting character, arouses in the unprepared reader insecurity and anxiety and, eventually, anger. (xvi)

The novelists of our time have come a long way from realists’ character centred narratives to the postmodernists’ structure centred ones. The changed philosophical outlook is reflected in Spencer’s remark: “In contrast to virtually all Western art since the Renaissance, in contemporary times man himself occupies a
relatively small place in most serious compositions, regardless of their stylistic mode of expression” (xvi).

There are different explanations to this phenomenon. The traditional argument is that “the dehumanization of the novel is a sign of spiritual deterioration” (xvi). From the postmodernist point of view it is “a long overdue rejection of complacent, egotistic anthropomorphism, a movement toward a more universal cosmic conception of existence” (Introduction xvi – xvii). Durrell’s presentation of characters as the functions of a spatial reality or parts of a great continuum amounts to this.

Virginia Woolf’s prophetic utterance about the change of human character seems to be fully realised. This is linked to the new notion of time and space. However,

Whether it is the demise of identifiable characters that causes time to fracture, or the fragmentation of time that sets an end to character, is not easy to decide; what is clear however, is that the time of the individual mind no longer functions as an alternative to social time. Neither is social time any longer perceived as a threat to psychological durée, memory and the flow of consciousness; on the contrary, it is subject to the same divisions and fragmentations that affect the worlds and identities of individual characters. The weakening of individual as well as social and historical time as parameters for organizing narrative is the most crucial problem the postmodern novel articulates in its multiple formal experiments as well as many of its thematic concerns. (Heise 7)
8. The Methodology of Analysis: a Critique

“It has often been suggested that one of the characteristics of modern narratives is the subversive treatment of the various categories of time” (58), notes Rimmon-Kenan. But such subversion “does not invalidate the categories” used by the structural analysts. She notes further that “subversion can only be conceived of against the background of (or even within) a network of possibilities . . . . Moreover, while the treatment of time may undergo various changes, time itself is indispensible to both story and text. To eliminate it (if this were possible) would be to eliminate all narrative fiction” (58).

Andrew Gibson points out some drawbacks of the structuralist analysis of fictional temporality. He observes that “western thought in general and contemporary culture in particular have been responsible for a powerful over-emphasis on and overvaluation of chronos (“closed conception of time”) as opposed to aion (“open conception of time”)” (Gibson 180)

He goes on to say that

narratology has not risked even a speculative venture into differing ways of thinking time. It has remained indifferent to the kinds of questions or speculative challenge implicit … in the various aspects of modern and postmodern writing and contemporary theory . . . . The narratological conception of time is always of time as chronos. … events belong only to the world of fabula. They take place only within certain determinate boundaries. They are not discursive. They are represented or recounted. They are thinkable only as having occurred. In addition they are describable only in relation to ‘actors’, by whom
they are ‘caused or experienced’….the describability of time on all levels of the narrative text is axiomatic… for classic narratology as a whole. Without chronos, the very foundations of established narratology are at risk, and with them a psychology, a logic, a theory of the stable subject, and a metaphysics. (181)

He further argues that

the narratologist’s assumption of the describability of time also takes place within the common narratological search ‘for the universal model for fabula’. The premise is that a homology or structural correspondence exists ‘between the fabulas of real narratives and “real” fabulas, between what people do and what actors do in fabulas that have been invented. (181)

The structural model itself is limited by the fact that “it describes a structure – the relations between phenomena – rather than the phenomena themselves”, thereby becoming “disjunctive”, “and invariably involves a geometry or spatialisation of time” (181). Hence “an account of narrative temporality will always be contaminated with spatial metaphor” (182).

Moreover, “narratology turns aside from time as difference, from time as a multiplicity in which the elements ceaselessly vary and alter in relation to others; a time to be thought in terms of fission, for instance, or differences in speed” (184).

Structuralist narratology is only one among the numerous theoretical methods developed by modern theorists. According to Rebecca Stern, as theoretical approaches have come to accommodate structuralism, psychoanalysis, phenomenology, feminist theory, deconstruction, new
historicism, cultural studies, queer theory, and an array of other significant approaches, narratologists have aligned textual and temporal relationships into a nearly-kaleidoscopic set of curves and angles, new grammars of order. (236)

The most serious complaint against Structuralism is that it is ahistorical and that it is reductive. Terry Eagleton raises these issues, noting that one of the primary drawbacks to the structuralist approach is that it is “hair-raisingly unhistorical” (109). He explains further that “the laws of the mind it claimed to isolate – parallelisms, oppositions, inversions and the rest – moved at a level of generality quite remote from the concrete differences of human history. From this Olympian height, all minds looked pretty much alike” (109). This of course is reductionism. With the rising influence of the new historicists, the critical war cry against structuralist narratology is, “Always historicize!” which is “the one absolute and …transhistorical imperative of all dialectical thought” (Jameson, Preface 9).

However the structuralist methodology cannot be dismissed outright. The method of analysis of temporality we have adapted from them is ideally suited for the present purpose; if not for anything else, for the reason that this approach has a shared ideological denominator with the works under consideration. The writers we have studied are representative figures of an age that rejected the Enlightenment realism and the notion of commonsense in the interpretation of reality, apart from the overemphasis on the historical man. Structuralism arose at the same time. “The fact that structuralism offends common sense has always been a point in its favour. Common sense holds that things generally have only one meaning and that this meaning is usually obvious inscribed on the faces of the objects we encounter”
(Eagleton 108). Bergson and Einstein upset the notions of common sense and thus became liberating influences on the narrative methods of the modernists and postmodernists. Structuralism is able to evaluate the significance of a literary work from the newness of its structure as a distinguishing characteristic instead of attempting to look at it from the point of view of verisimilitude in terms of characterization and causal structure of the plot, or the point of view. In other words, the “architectonic” novels of these writers demand such a method of critical evaluation.

Yet another drawback of the structuralist method according to Rimmon-Kenan is its decentering of character. “Whereas the study of the story’s events and the links among them has been developed considerably in contemporary poetics, that of character has not” (29). This of course is not surprising, considering the fact that the writers of the modern age no longer see man as the centre of things.

In addition to the decentering of man . . . . methodological considerations also lead to such subordination. Like any scientifically oriented discipline, formalist and structuralist poetics recognizes the methodological necessity of reduction, especially in preliminary phases of an inquiry. Since action seems more easily amenable to the construction of ‘narrative grammars’ (often based on verb-centred grammars of natural languages), it is convenient to reduce character to action – at least in the first stage. (Rimmon-Kenan 34)

Notwithstanding such observations, the historical value of such a venture cannot be overlooked; for both William Faulkner and Lawrence Durrell stand in two related and successive stages of the growth of prose fiction, responding to the
philosophical concerns of their respective worlds which overlap, and can be seen as two consecutive stages of a literary evolution. The structuralist response is also founded on the same world view, which expresses a certain disillusionment with history. It is not difficult to find a basis for such a response in the historical experience of twentieth century man. As Sharon Spencer notes:

Briefly, during historical periods when man feels uneasy, oppressed, overwhelmed and terrified by both his natural and his human environment, artists tend to abandon realism for a style that seeks exaggeration, distortion, and ultimately, abstraction; images of the world that are simplified, stripped of details, purified, reduced to essences, provide a comforting sense of the basic stability of life.

(Introduction xvii)

The cultural and philosophic value of the formal experiments that the two novelists attempted can be understood in the light of the above remark. Faulkner operated within the world view of modernism. Durrell outgrew it.

Though the geographical and cultural settings differ between the two novelists, their basic concerns appear to be the same. Faulkner provides a basically tragic view of history, but in Durrell there is an attempt to formulate an alternate reality, a more integrated philosophy of life contingent on the new science and ancient philosophy. In Durrell, though history seems to remain part of the background of the action, there is a rejection of the historical man, implied by letting the heraldic universe enfold the protagonist. He moves away from Christian thought and the humanism of the West to seek salvation in Gnosticism, and Eastern mystical philosophies. Evidently, man cannot live in a philosophical and metaphysical vacuum.
Durrell substitutes a new narrative in place of the one that is lost. Whether such a philosophy would finally prove efficacious is a moot point.

Durrell and the postmodernist novelists can be seen in the broader context of the emerging global culture which foregrounds simultaneity as its spatio-temporal perception. As MacLuhan had predicted, technology has abolished the old notions of time and space, if not the Einsteinian science. Helga Nowotni observes:

It was as if the technological, artistic and scientific achievements of this epoch converged to break down the well-rehearsed spatial and temporal structures of social perception and transform them into a broad experimental field in which new ways of seeing, different spatial forms and, not least, new more democratic, social and political relations were to be tested and rehearsed. (19)

If the structure of fictional narratives has changed over time, it is to be seen as the artists’ attempt to humanise the changing notions of time. A comparison of the methods of Faulkner and Durrell would lead us to the conclusion that the postmodernist narrative strategies are derived from those of the modernists. The modernist methods were being carried to their natural culmination, so to speak. Despite noticeable differences in philosophical outlook, their aesthetic methods share certain common grounds. Literary narrative, particularly the novel, is constantly engaged in reconstructing our understanding of time, marching “by intention with the cosmology of the age”.