Philhellenism in modernist literature is familiar—Robert Graves, T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, H.D, and James Joyce all have exemplary Greek influences and love for Classical texts. Yet, the influence of their contemporaries in Greece is less studied. I examine Lawrence Durrell’s works, locating him between Eliot’s Classicism (perhaps the hegemonic Modernism) and the Greek authors who responded to Eliot. Through his ties to Greek Modernists and Parisian Surrealists, Durrell contributed to the Anglo-American tradition in a mode that reflects the influence of what George Seferis, the Nobel Laureate for 1963, later called “the Greek style.” This places Durrell at a point of tension between competing movements.

Friedman’s recent contention in *Modernism/modernity* frames my critical assumptions: “As terms in an evolving scholarly discourse, modern, modernity, and modernism constitute a critical Tower of Babel, a cacophony of categories” and also that “modernism [is] in an exchange where the word means not just different things, but precisely opposite things.” Likewise, Kolocotroni asserts in *Modernism: An Anthology of Sources and Documents*, “Modernism is not a movement. It is a term that masks conflict and upheaval and any number of contradictory positions.” This recalls Bloom’s argument that what Nicholls calls “hegemonic Modernism” is a construction of Eliot’s canon-creating activities:

1 Friedman, “Definitional Excursions,” 497.
2 Ibid., 494.
Modernism in literature has not passed; rather, it has been exposed as never having been there. Gossip grows old and becomes myth; myth grows older, and becomes dogma. Wyndham Lewis, Eliot and Pound gossiped with one another; the New Criticism aged them into a myth of Modernism.4

Durrell avoided this gossip, perhaps to his disadvantage in academic rumour-mills, yet this Modernism existed within other ‘peripheral’ movements: the Modernisms Nicholls locates around the 1922 *anna mirabilis*, as promulgated in Eliot’s *The Criterion*. Durrell’s works reflect this plurality of competing artistic visions, such as his integration of Surrealist and Greek Modernist techniques in line with Seferis and Cavafy,5 his revisions of Joyce and Lawrence,6 and his resistance against Eliot’s influence. In this sense, Durrell illustrates the translation of the Modernisms of London and Paris to Athens in the 1930s.7 However, Durrell returned this ‘translation’ subtly altered—the apparition of the past-in-the-present transformed Eliot for Greek modernists.

To explore this, I use Durrell’s relationship with Eliot and his responses to the senior poet, who was a daunting “strong poet” and Durrell’s poetry editor at Fabers. Durrell identifies Eliot’s *The Criterion* as “the most important periodical of

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5 Kimon Friar, suggesting Durrell translate Kazantzakis’ *Last Temptations of Christ*, notes: “Katsimbalis has given me a copy [of your *Six Poems of Sekilianos and Seferis*] (and has also told me that your Greek is excellent!)” (Friar n.pag).
6 See Durrell’s notes for lectures on Joyce where he gives a three-part “Instant ‘Ulysses’ (add Littey water and stir)” that reflects his own Ancient, Medieval, and Modern divisions in *The Avignon Quintet*. Even under his “Anna Was, Livia Is, and Plurabelle’s To Be” distinctions, he makes a note to discuss “Joyce gave 13 lectures on Hamlet in 1912-13,” further tying Joyce to his own preoccupations with Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* (Durrell, CalTech Lecture n.pag). As early at 1936 he wrote to Alan Thomas: “it is a qualitative difference in which I blow the Lawrentian trumpet. I [know?] my own kind, I haven’t begun. Beside Lawrence, beside Miller, beside Blake. Yes, I am humble, I have hardly started. BUT I AM ON THE SAME TRAM” (*Spirit* 50).
7 For example, see Beaton, *George Seferis*, 31-64; Valaoritis, “Translating the Poets,” 51; Raizis “Lawrence Durrell and the Greek Poets: A Contribution to Cultural History,” 246-252; Kolokotroni and Taxidou, “Modernism and Hellenism,” 21; and Keeley, *Inventing Paradise*. Keeley examines both Durrell and Miller with respect to their re-articulation of Byronic approaches to philhellenism.
the day,” and Levensen emphasizes this:

If we look for a mark of modernism’s coming of age, the founding of the Criterion in 1922 may prove a better instance than The Waste Land, better even than Ulysses, because it exemplifies the institutionalization of the movement, the accession to cultural legitimacy.

In contrast, the Modernist canon is now being subsumed in the ‘peripheral’ movements surrounding Modernism, or the Modernisms within which Nicholls discusses and relocates traditional notions of modernism. This Anglo-American focus of scholarship, which takes “the institutionalization of the movement” for granted, is disrupted for Durrell via his Greek interactions.

Tellingly, Eliot rejected Durrell’s submission of “The Poet’s Horn,” writing “I don’t like to publish articles in the Criterion in which my own work is one of the subjects discussed.... I have certain opinions which you will no doubt discount.” While they were always friendly, later in life Durrell revised his list of ‘uncles’ (senior writers) in a public lecture, listing Henry Miller, George Katsimbalis, George Seferis, and with Theodore Stephanides replacing Eliot. Yet, Durrell’s British publisher, Faber, tied him to Eliot’s influence. Durrell praised The Criterion, and as a critic he states “in 1922 we stumble upon The Waste Land of T.S. Eliot, which altered the whole face of poetry, and Ulysses by James Joyce, whose technical innovations were to alter the face of prose.” It is, however, his afterthought that is crucial: “in neither case, however, for the better.”

Durrell does not mention Eliot’s further rejection of “Asylum in the Snow” for The Criterion, a work with Greek and Parisian influences, but in an unpublished

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8 Durrell, Key to Modern Poetry, 177.
9 Levensen, A Genealogy of Modernism, 213.
12 The pleasant recollections include Eliot’s comments on Durrell’s The Black Book: “it is the first piece of work by a new English writer to give me any hope for the future of prose fiction. If he has been influenced by any writers of my generation, the influences have been digested, and he has produced something different” (front flyleaf, first edition).
13 Durrell, Key to Modern Poetry, 177.
14 Ibid., 62.
15 Ibid., 62.
letter in 1939 he comments to Elizabeth Smart.\textsuperscript{16}  

don’t let the jackass of editors bother you. Sit always on the good round cushion of your own esteem; the moral for poets is: “The customer is always wrong”. Apart of [from] Seven and NEW in England no one will touch my verse; I have even argued with Eliot until he turned green, I even read bits at him, right in the eye. But in England they think me no good. Yet I can’t think them right, however much I try.\textsuperscript{17}

This sting illustrates the influence Eliot exerted, including firm directions for Durrell to be either a novelist or a poet, but not both, because it was incompatible with Eliot’s notion of “the laziness necessary for poetry,” a significant tension between Durrell and his editor.\textsuperscript{18}

Turning to Durrell’s Greek influences, critics, such as Perl, have noted the importance of nostalgia to Modernism, with its desire for a return, the homeward journey, and the \textit{agon} of such a passage. However, this is for a tradition and past that are not imminent and local. Keeley notes the same issues in Seferis, and Greek Modernism in general, but with a crucial distinction. He uses Seferis’ famous phrase “Wherever I travel Greece wounds me”:

\begin{quotation}
the poem was written at a time when the wounding was caused first of all by nostalgia, and even that was colored by the self-irony implicit in the poem’s title: “In the Manner of G.S.” By 1939 Seferis’s state of mind left little room for either nostalgia or irony.... A March 1939 entry [in his journal] defines the “Situation in Europe” by way of a passage from Homer’s description of the land of the Cyclopes (as translated here by Robert Fagles):

\begin{itemize}
  \item They have no meeting place for council, no laws either,
  \item no, up on the mountain peaks they live in arching caverns—
  \item each law to himself, ruling his wives and children,
  \item not a care in the world for any neighbor.
\end{itemize}

Seferis’ comment: “Exactly: the era of the Cyclopes.”\textsuperscript{19}
\end{quotation}

This sets out the distinction Durrell later makes in “Spirit of Place” and that several critics who examine this circle have noted. While nostalgia played a significant

\textsuperscript{16} Durrell is also known for introducing Smart to his friend George Barker, and hence he played a role in what may be the most famous literary affair of the Twentieth Century.
\textsuperscript{17} Durrell, Letter to Elizabeth Smart, n.pag.
\textsuperscript{18} MacNiven, \textit{Lawrence Durrell: A Biography}, 312.
\textsuperscript{19} Keeley, \textit{Inventing Paradise}, 6.
role in Modernism, the kind of sentiment surrounding epigrammatic ties to a tradition or Eliot’s classicism and canon differs for the Greek Modernists. The nostos and its algos or agon is not the same in a continuous living language, mythology, literary tradition, and landscape. As Seferis argues in his essay comparing Cavafy with Eliot, there are two distinct nostalgias. The local inhabitant feels the weight of a past that allusively lives on in the present; it inhabits the same streets, cities, and informs current struggles. As in Homer, nostalgia is for a lived home. The foreign nostalgia requires a homeward journey to “some other land, some other sea.”

In his Banquet Speech for the Nobel Prize, Seferis humorously points to this affinity between past and present: “On a observé, l’an dernier, autour de cette table, l’énorme différence qui existe entre les découvertes de la science d’aujourd’hui et la littérature; qu’entre un drame grec et un drame moderne, il n’y a pas grande différence.” His “no great difference” between past and present is striking—it illustrates the elision of past and present he sees in his homeland.

A modern example of Seferis’ “no great difference” appears in the Athenian Metro. In Syntagma Square stands the modern Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, and under the square in the stairways to the Metro, lies an excavated grave of an unknown soldier behind glass, visible to thousands of commuters daily. The new Metro has, throughout its excavation, retained ancient materials in the glass walls, visible to commuters. The ancient lies beneath the modern monument in the newest large-scale engineering project in the ancient/modern city. Much like Seferis’ contention that “il n’y a pas grande difference” between ancient and modern Greek drama, we find the immediacy of allusions to the ancient past in a location where the past and present overlap and the presence of the past continually asserts itself.

Illustrating Durrell’s affinity for Seferis’ views, the subtitle for the first Greek translation of Durrell’s Justine matches Seferis’ most famous poem, which itself explores the relationship between myth, history, and present experiences: Ioustine: Mythistorema in comparison to Seferis’ Mythistorema. The confluence is lost on no Greek reader—Durrell’s novel is subtitled with a word invented by the Greek national poet to title his most famous poem, coincidentally published the same year Durrell first arrived in Greece. Klironomos elucidates this notion of ‘myth-history’:

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21 I am deeply indebted to Beatrice Skordili for pointing this out to me and for our discussions of this site. Her keen insights inform much of this paper.
the reader… can pursue a number of interpretive paths that are contingent upon similarities and differences between antiquity and modernity…. Yet, because these concepts of *anamnesis* and *mneme* are not fully integrated… the attainment of total understanding is often found to be as fleeting as the process of remembering itself.\(^\text{22}\)

This relationship between intertextuality, Eliot’s sense of tradition, historical consciousness, and nationalist approaches to literature and locale informs my approach to Durrell’s representations of Greece. The crux of the matter is that Myth and History are not a tradition so much as a current presence.

For Seferis, the first Greek translator of Eliot’s “*The Waste Land,*” seeing the ancient past in the present as a part of everyday life taints Modernism. As Beaton argues: “Through his impact on Durrell, Henry Miller, and other British and American writers, Seferis brought about a revolution in the way later generations have viewed his country: no longer a museum-piece of the past but as a place of vibrant, dionysiac energy.”\(^\text{23}\) Seferis’ influence was wide, being a major nationalist poet, brother in law to the president, and a high-ranking public official.\(^\text{24}\) This strong relationship between past and present, an ostensibly consistent feature of Greek Modernism, is prominent in Seferis’ works. In his readings of Cavafy this distinction—in comparison to Eliot—is precisely what Seferis sets out as “The Greek Style.” This is a particularly important distinction since Cavafy also predates Eliot, indicating that while there are many affinities between the Greek Modernists and Eliot’s particular modes of Modernism, this is not mimicry.

Eliot’s importance to Greek Modernism is almost exclusively mitigated by Seferis’ interpretation of Eliot in his translations, all of which are poetic translations and hence should be considered interpretations. Anastasiadou summarizes the situation in “Subverting Eliot’s Modernism,” in which she places poetic responses to Eliot in the context of the cultural and historical contingencies

\(^\text{22}\) Klironomos, “Ancient *(Ανάµνησις*, National *Μνήµη* in the Poetry of Giorgos Seferis,” 217; italics original.
\(^\text{23}\) Beaton, *George Seferis*, xi.
\(^\text{24}\) Seferis’ importance is widely acknowledged. Beaton summarizes, “In Greece itself, no other writer has exercised such a dominant influence since the Second World War…. Seferis’ poetry stands in a clear historical line between the great voices of the past (Solomos, Kalvos, Palamas, Sikelianos, Cavafy himself) and almost all the major figures since” (Beaton, *George Seferis* xi). This is reiterated by many scholars, and Valaoritis notably writes: “Until then [1939], in Greece, we had been more familiar with T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, from Seferis’ translations” (48).
of mid-century Greece:

The person who paved the way for Eliot’s renown in Greece was Seferis…. [T]he majority of the postwar poets acknowledge the role of Seferis’s 1936 translation of The Waste Land in their initiation into Eliot’s work…. [H]e basically introduced Eliot’s work to them and… their relationship with the Anglo-American poet was largely determined and defined by their relationship with Seferis’s work.²⁵

Seferis’ timeline for involvements in Anglo-American Modernism also loosely originates from his December 1931 discovery of Eliot’s works, which follows years of contact with the French Modernists during his time in Paris.²⁶ In 1933 he first translated The Waste Land²⁷ (published three years later²⁸), and in 1950 he re-translated it and wrote a formal introduction.²⁹ Given the potential for Eliot’s influence on Seferis, it is worth noting (whether ironic or not) Durrell’s anecdote: “As a young consul in London, Seferis announced to a friend in Athens: ‘There is a chap here who must have read my poems, at any rate he is influenced by them. He is called T.S. Eliot’.”³⁰ Whether apocryphal or not, Seferis carefully ties Eliot to his previous interest in Cavafy and the French Modernists. This overlap continues, and as Raizis notes, “Cavafy’s achievement as a modern poet was first made known to the anglophone [sic] world by... E. M. Forster. He had some of Cavafy’s representative poems published [in Valassoupoulo’s translation] in The Criterion of T.S. Eliot (1924).”³¹ In this way, Seferis had both personal and literary-historical grounds for placing primacy on Cavafy’s “Greek Style.”

At this point, I will put my argument on hold to illustrate the distinctions under discussion by turning to Eliot’s The Waste Land. For instance, with regard to allusions and Eliot’s notion of tradition, we as readers may be able to quickly find the allusions in the opening lines of “The Waste Land”: “April is the cruellest month, breeding / Lilacs out of the dead land,” and this cruel time tellingly “mix[es] / Memory and desire, stirring / Dull roots with spring rain.”³² Among

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²⁶ Beaton, George Seferis 107.
²⁷ Ibid., 122.
²⁸ Ibid., 150.
²⁹ Ibid., 284.
³¹ Raizis, “Lawrence Durrell and the Greek Poets,” 244.
other things, the dead land is the Waste Land, which draws in the Fisher King and the French Grail Romances. Walt Whitman’s blooming lilacs from the dooryard make their presence known, and we are immediately transported to the early development of the English literary tradition by Chaucer’s opening to “The Canterbury Tales”:

Whan that aprill with his shoures soote  
The droghte of march hath perced to the roote,  
And bathed every veyne in swich licour  
Of which vertu engendred is the flour;\(^{33}\)

Durrell flaunts this allusion in his 1948 poem “Anniversary,” which is dedicated “For T.S. Eliot,”\(^{34}\) and it is the role of allusion that differs in Durrell’s Greek-influenced poetics.

For Durrell, Chaucer’s root-piercing April showers explain the essence of Eliot’s “Poetry, science of intimacies”:

In you his early roots drove through  
The barbarian compost of our English  
To sound new veins and marbled all his verses  
Through and through like old black ledgers  
Hedging in pain by form, and giving  
Quotations from the daily treaty poets make\(^{35}\)

Durrell’s revision of Eliot and Chaucer together points to the integration of tradition into the present in Eliot’s allusion, which is itself based on Chaucer’s allusion to Virgil, hence shoring up fragments. By alluding to both the source and the new work that Eliot creates in his allusion, Durrell makes his reader aware of the role of allusion.

Durrell, however, cannot resist suggesting his own notion of the ‘unknown’ in the second stanza. After pursuing Eliot’s opening allusion in The Waste Land, Durrell comments:

… yet these

\(^{33}\) Chaucer, The Riverside Chaucer, 23.  
\(^{34}\) Durrell, Collected Poems 187.  
\(^{35}\) Ibid., 187.
Alluding and delimiting can only mystify
The singer and his mystery more, they do not chain.\(^{36}\)

In this clause, the adjectival verbs “alluding” and “delimiting” are without a noun: alluding and delimiting ‘poems’ can only mystify? Alternatively a verb is missing from the previous clause. Nothing is doing or being the alluding and delimiting. The subject is absent. Eliot is removed from the scene in the same way he suggests that the objective correlative\(^ {37}\) displaces strong personal feeling, and as Cowley has noted, Eliot’s objective correlative is also caught in an ambiguity over adjectives: “is it to be read as an adjective followed by a noun or a noun followed by an adjective.”\(^ {38}\) Moreover, the allusions “do not chain”—they do not link “Time present and time past.”\(^ {39}\) So, what is allusive remains a gap. Through this gap (not through allusion) the poet’s promethean gift is unchained.

Durrell’s gap in the poem also shows the reader the importance of allusion to Eliot, although Eliot notes: “I gave the reference in my notes in order to make the reader who recognized the allusion, know that I meant him to recognize it, and know that he would have missed the point if he did not recognize it.”\(^ {40}\) This quintessentially Eliotic unification of “Time present and time past” is, however, radically challenged when these allusions encounter time past within time present: not a poetic heir but a poetic peer. There is a distinction, with regard to tradition and the canon, between Eliot’s allusions to previous poetic traditions and his integration of popular song materials, though both function as allusions—one reinstates a canon and one challenges it, and we certainly do not encounter Homeric jazz rags in Eliot (he stays with the deus loci Shakespeare).

In Durrell, ties to Greek landscape further our sense of the Greek coextensive literary traditions through allusion, in contrasts to Eliot. Durrell’s *Alexandria Quartet* uses the Greek history of Alexandria, with constant references to historical sites and with modern characters repeating (alluding to) past events, much as the reader finds in Cavafy. This is, however, not only Seferis’ ‘Greek Style’—it also reflects the Freudian elements of the novel and Freud’s own descriptions of another ‘eternal city’ as a metaphor for the psyche:

\(^{37}\) Eliot, “Hamlet,” 100.
\(^{39}\) Eliot, *Four Quartets*, 3.
\(^{40}\) Eliot, *To Criticize the Critic*, 128.
nothing that has come into existence will have passed away and all earlier phases of
development exist alongside the latter ones. This would mean that in Rome the
palaces of the Caesars and the Septizonium of Septimus Severus would still be
rising to their old height… not only in its latest shape, as the Romans of the Empire
saw, but also in its earliest…. And the observer would perhaps only have to change
the direction of his glance or his position in order to call up the one view or the
other.\textsuperscript{41}

This would seem an accurate reflection of the nature of tradition and allusion being
set up by Durrell following his interactions with Seferis, who introduced him to
Cavafy’s works. Durrell seems to echo this approach in an often-cited passage in
\textit{The Alexandria Quartet}: “Our view of reality is conditioned by our position in
space and time…. Every interpretation of reality is based upon a unique position.
Two paces east or west and the whole picture is changed. Something of this
order…..”\textsuperscript{42}

Such fusions of the modern and ancient, moreover, are what Seferis offers in
his explorations of antiquity as already existing in lived space—the Athenian
Acropolis is not fully ancient when you live beneath it and hold it as a nationalist
symbol for a modern country, a symbol holding together the city states it formerly
distinguished. This distinction colours the sense of tradition in Seferis’ works.
After dislodging Cavafy’s historical allusions from a sense of tradition (in his
comparison to Eliot), Seferis binds them to the lived space of the Alexandrian poet,
Cavafy, where the ancient and modern literally overlap in the landscape: “the
Greek tradition…. is not… an affair of isolated promontories, some great names,
some illuminated texts.”\textsuperscript{43} For Cavafy, the ancient and modern overlap in
Alexander the Great’s city, and Cleopatra’s Anthony is as apt a reference as a
modern adulterer walking the same streets, hearing the siren call of the city. Using
Cavafy to demonstrate his revision of Eliot, Seferis lists the ancient and modern as
coextensive, arguing the ‘Greek style’ is

\begin{quote}
like what others of us see and feel… Greek folk songs, Aeschylus, Palamas,
Solomos, Sikelianos, Calvos, Cavafy, the Parthenon, Homer, all living in a moment
of time…. With this point of view Cavafy will not seem to us alien; rather we shall
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{41} Freud, \textit{Civilization and its Discontents}, 18
\textsuperscript{42} Durrell, \textit{The Alexandria Quartet}, 210.
\textsuperscript{43} Seferis, “Cavafy and Eliot,” 161.
find him... becoming more and more closely united, more and more integrated with our living tradition.\footnote{Ibid., 161.}

Moreover, Seferis’ own view on tradition predates his awareness of Eliot, and it appears in 1920, contemporary with Eliot’s “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” although Seferis’ poetic and literary interests were dedicated to Greek and French.

Accessing Greek Modernism, Durrell’s \textit{The Alexandria Quartet} (1957-1960) negotiates an alternative path to his British and American milieu, and it takes up a project very similar to Seferis’. Against \textit{The Waste Land}, the “Unreal city”\footnote{Eliot, “The Waste Land,” 31, & 38-9.} is a repeated trope in Durrell’s quintessentially \textit{city} novel. In \textit{The Alexandria Quartet}, Alexander the Great’s city is the topos. However, Durrell’s text does not pay \textit{homage} to Eliot’s series of Unreal cities. Cavafy is the “old poet of the city”\footnote{Durrell, \textit{Alexandria Quartet}, 18.} and his poem provides the centre around which the novel moves. This means Durrell’s Alexandria turns away from the Anglo-American modernist perspective just as it focuses on Greek history. Durrell also positions his novel \textit{contra} Liddell’s \textit{The Unreal City} (a novel set in pre-war Alexandria) and its ties to Eliot.

Nonetheless, Durrell’s book is not without its allusions to Eliot and was published by Faber. Postcolonial critics attend to the \textit{Quartet}’s epigram: “The characters in this story, the first of a group, are all inventions together with the personality of the narrator, and bear no resemblance to living persons. Only the city is real.”\footnote{Ibid., 14.} This locates Alexandria, which is clearly not an accurate representation, in a troubled position as “real” yet not an accurate reflection of colonial space.\footnote{Also see John U. Peters’ “Realizing the Unreal: Durrell’s Alexandria Prefaces” (87-93).} Manzalaoui argues this “real” implies accuracy,\footnote{Manzalaoui, “Curate’s Egg,” 248-260. Manzalaoui is misspelled “Manazlouii” in some editions.} which the \textit{Quartet} does not have. Hence, Durrell naively diminishes Egypt to a series of Orientalist fantasies, and critics have detailed his inaccuracies. I differ. Instead of colonial fantasy, the troubling word “real” marks Durrell’s response to Eliot’s “Unreal city”—the “reality” of Durrell’s city is not at issue, and is frequently denied by Durrell in interviews, so it is the contradiction of Eliot’s influence that stands out. This sense of “real” is emphasized repeatedly, and acknowledging it
allows us to see both genuine Orientalism and ironic mockery of colonial expectations.

“Real” rather than “unreal” is also visible in the conclusion of Justine with Cavafy’s poem “The City,” which provides a narrative pattern for the Quartet as a whole works. Durrell begins the next volume of the Quartet with a similar injunction: “The city, half-imagined (yet wholly real), begins and ends in us” and only two pages later follows with the comment “An hour later, the real city appeared, swelling from a smudge to the size of its mirage,” in which “real” is emphasized with his own italics.

In place of Eliot’s Unreal city, Durrell places Cavafy, and the novel repeatedly alludes to Cavafy’s “The City.” The narrative structure derives from the poem itself. Cavafy begins (in Durrell’s translation):

You tell yourself: I’ll be gone
To some other land to some other sea,
To a city far lovelier than this
Could ever have been or hoped to be—

The narrator of the novel, and the ostensive translator (the narrator), has undertaken precisely this task by leaving Alexandria, but he finds the same consequences as the poem:

There’s no new land my friend, no
New sea; for the city will follow you,
In the same streets you’ll wander endlessly,
The same mental suburbs slip from youth to age,
In the same house go white at last—
The city is a cage.

This is echoed when the Coptic Nessims asks his wife: “Why don’t we leave this city, Justine, and seek an atmosphere less impregnated with the sense of deracination and failure?” This allusion to the poem is compounded by the

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50 Durrell, Alexandria Quartet, 209; emphasis added.
51 Ibid., 211.
52 Ibid., 201.
53 Ibid., 201; emphasis mine.
54 Ibid., 147.
narrator’s attempts to escape the city:

With the posting of this letter of acceptance [of a teaching job in Upper Egypt] a new period will be initiated, for it marks my separation from the city in which so much has happened to me, so much of momentous importance: so much that has aged me.... The same streets and squares will burn in my imagination as the Pharos burns in history. Particular rooms in which I have made love, particular café tables where the pressure of fingers upon a wrist held me spellbound, feeling through the hot pavements the rhythms of Alexandria.\textsuperscript{55}

All of this returns the reader to the poem’s declaration:

The city is a cage.
No other places, always this
Your earthly landfall, and no ship exists
To take you from yourself.\textsuperscript{56}

While Cavafy’s city is tied to the historic figures who walked its ancient streets, this blurring of past and present is not tied to a tradition as it is for Eliot. This was Seferis’ contention in his comparison of Eliot to Cavafy, which emphatically carries over into Durrell’s work. Just as in Freud’s Rome, Durrell’s locale allow an overlap that is akin to that which Seferis traces in Cavafy: not a canon of order and sequence, with mutual influence and transformation of the personal to the literary, but instead a past that is contemporary with the present, where forebears’ footsteps echo on the same streets and walkways. Durrell works against Eliot’s influence by using Cavafy.

“The City” illustrates a more subtle distinction as well, and Durrell notably uses his own translation.\textsuperscript{57} The land of decay that comprises the city—translated as “wasteland” in most versions (μαρασμό in the original)—is re-created by Durrell as “How long, how long must I be here / Confined among the dreary purlieus of

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 182.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 201.
\textsuperscript{57} As a translator, Durrell is largely forgotten, although his 1946 \textit{Six Poems From the Greek of Sekilianos and Seferis} stands among the early translations of Seferis and precedes his later collaboration on \textit{The King of Asine and Other Poems} with Bernard Spencer and Nanos Valaoritis. Gerontopoulos has pointed to problems in Durrell’s translation of the kathourevousa \textit{Pope Joan} by Royidis, but by all accounts his demotic was excellent (Friar n.pag).
the common mind? Wherever now I look / Black ruins of my life rise into view.”\textsuperscript{58}

This places the decaying land of the city in a different context. Much like the problematic word “real” for postcolonial critics, the waste land of Alexandria takes on a new meaning, which Durrell would have applied even if the location had remained Athens, as per his first sketches for the novel—Durrell shifts focus to Cavafy contra Eliot, aligning himself with Greek Modernism.

The poem and Durrell’s translation differ significantly, as Durrell even mentioned in his public readings of the text.\textsuperscript{59} Durrell’s creative translation of the poem is reinforced by Raizis\textsuperscript{60} and in Valaoritis’ reminiscences of working with Durrell on translations of Seferis.\textsuperscript{61}

Seferis’ discussion of Cavafy’s “Those Who Fought for the Achaean League” illustrates elements of Cavafy’s works that further influenced Durrell: the elision of history, tradition, and contemporary experience that remains outside canon formation, being instead rooted deeply in nationalism and lived space. He quotes:

Valiant are those who fought and fell in glory;
Fearless of those who were everywhere victorious.
If Diaios and Critolaus were at fault, you are blameless.
When the Greeks want to boast,
“Our nation turns out such men as these,” they will say
of you. So marvelous will be your praise—

Written in Alexandria by an Achaean;
In the seventh year of Ptolemy Lathyrus.\textsuperscript{62}

Seferis admits to being puzzled over “the point of this tail-piece which merely

\textsuperscript{58} Durrell, \textit{Alexandria Quartet}, 201.
\textsuperscript{59} For a closer examination, see Hirst, “‘The old poet of the city’: Cavafy in Darley’s Alexandria,” 69-94.
\textsuperscript{60} Raizis, “Lawrence Durrell and the Greek Poets,” 241-254.
\textsuperscript{61} Valaoritis, “Remembering the Poets,” 46-56.
\textsuperscript{62} Seferis, “Cavafy and Eliot,” 126. Seferis immediately notes what appears to be an affinity with Eliot’s notion of Classicism: “[These lines] made me reflect upon the remarkable unity of the Greek Anthology, which, as has been observed, contains poems written over a period of about a thousand years and yet forms a whole, the newer poems merely adding something of their own to the procession of the older ones. And so, I thought, after a chasm of so many years, here comes Cavafy to add his stone to the great building” (126).
seemed to get in the way” until

suddenly and for the first time, I appreciated that the poem was written in 1922, on the eve of the catastrophe in Asia Minor [the massacre at Smyrna]; and almost without thinking I reread these lines as:

Written in Alexandria by an Achaean,
The year that our race was destroyed.63

This places Cavafy, Greek but living in the now-Arab city of Alexandria, in a far different position from “com[ing] to add his stone to the great building”64 of the literary canon in which he ostensibly struggles in the agon of the Blooomian ephebe. This is an intensely politicized sense of ethnicity and nationalism caught in a poem of exile—the affinity between past and present occurs in the same space and under related circumstance but separated by millennia. Overlapping space in the historic city, where history rewrites itself like a palimpsest, is precisely the notion Durrell draws from Cavafy.

As with Friedman’s contention that the meanings of Modernism are unstable, and in line with Kolokotroni’s contention “Modernism is not a movement. It is a term that masks conflict and upheaval and any number of contradictory positions,”65 the primary exemplars of Modernism in Greece demonstrate a significant difference from Eliot on the key issue of allusion. Durrell mirrors this break. With the immediacy of the past’s presence in the present, Durrell resists the Anglo-American traditions his works initially arose from. Greek Modernism is in a key position, being both a development from Western European Modernisms and an origin for these traditions, necessitating their revision.

Primary Sources


63 Ibid., 127.
64 Ibid., 126.

**Secondary Sources**


