

Introduction: Lawrence Durrell, Text, Hypertext, Intertext

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Lawrence Durrell occupies an oddly diverse series of liminal positions in the canon of twentieth-century literature. A British author, he was born in India in 1912 to parents who had never been on the British Isles, and as a consequence, he did not have British citizenship (Ezard n.pag), though he did reside in Britain for over a decade and held a variety of positions in the Foreign Office during and following World War II. Known as a novelist, he considered himself a poet, and found work as a screenwriter, as a jazz pianist, and other such positions. In a similar pattern, his oeuvre exists ‘in-between’ a variety of schools and movements: he is neither as direct an author as Henry Miller nor as controlled as T. S. Eliot, both of whom were major correspondents and influences; his works are known as both surrealist and realist; as a modernist, his texts consistently anticipate effects and sensibilities associated with the postmodern, as might be expected of writings between 1931 and 1990. As an artist who voiced radical skepticism about the relationship between texts, plot-oriented development as a causally-linked succession, and stable notions of identity, he nonetheless archived his notebooks scrupulously, retained draft versions of works, and showed extensive interest in the role of biography in artistic production.

Durrell’s literary texts themselves reflect these internally contrasting positions that are attached to, yet between, two distinct regions, and it is for this reason that this collection is subtitled “Text, Hypertext, Intertext.” As a body of fictional, dramatic, biographical, and poetic works written primarily in English, but also with whole works in French and Greek, the intertextual relationships among the texts overlap in a seemingly endless array, such that Freud interacts with the Marquis de Sade, Gnosticism becomes familiar with a Slovenian suicide club of the 1960s, and Thomas Hardy speaks to Philhellenic tourists. Hence, the primary text mediates between these Others while provoking the reader to acknowledge readerly anticipation and agency. In an extreme manner, the reader is even thrust into a position of relying on his or her own resources, “which is where every reader ultimately belongs” (Durrell 307).

In this collection, a number of new perspectives on Durrell’s works appear. Beatrice Skordili acutely points to the role of presence in absence in *The Alexandria Quartet*, where bisexuality and the pursuit of happiness both exist under erasure in the paired Freudian and Sadean epigrams. In a related manner, Stephen Osadetz and I consider the elisions prompted by this presence in absence with regard to source materials found in Durrell’s notebooks for *Monsieur; or the Prince of Darkness* and

marginalia in his personal library. Likewise, Matthew Bolton adeptly takes up Durrell's challenge to the reader to become actively engaged in the creation of the text from its various hypertexts, and he returns attention to the readerly element in Durrell's works. Stefan Herbrechter also brings Taoist and deconstructionist thought to bear, two topics that are insufficiently studied in critical approaches to Durrell's works and that have not been previously paired for this purpose. Finally, Lyn Goldman has also greatly enhanced this collection by allowing the author to speak for himself on his own indeterminate status in 1986: between writing and retirement; life and death; East and West; and sage and charlatan, as well as with regard to the epitexts and peritexts to his own writings.

This serves to remind the audience, as critical readers, of the persistent role that one text's relationship to another plays throughout Durrell's oeuvre. Such relationships are typically established by allusion and citation, but also more extremely at the level of plot through the search for 'truth' that Durrell's characters and narrators enact among the textual fragments incorporated into the works (diaries, letters, other books, newspapers), which themselves frequently derive from Durrell's own notebook-sketches of other works. This is perhaps most notable with "THE GREEN NOTEBOOK (Sutcliffe Papers)" in *Monsieur* (250-274), which the plot reveals as Sutcliffe's posthumously uncovered sketches for a novel; however, this fragmentary text is copied almost verbatim Durrell's own notebook work for *Monsieur*, which is in a green notebook. Significantly, and as Bolton points out in his article here on *The Alexandria Quartet*, this structure invites the reader to participate in Durrell's process of constructing the novel from these notebook fragments. Moreover, as a contribution to (and an actual constituent of) other novels—ranging from Cortazar's *Hopscotch*, Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*, and Vassanji's *Book of Secrets*—Durrell provides the prompting link, by proxy, to his own epitexts of Orwell's *1984*, Sade's *Justine*, the Tao Te Ching, his own novels that exist in a hypertextual relationship to each other, and many more in a seemingly endless succession of internet-like links between texts.

Finally, I would like to extend my thanks to the authors assembled here and to *Agora's* board of Associate Editors, as well as to Lyn Goldman for permission to publish her interview, the Bibliothèque Lawrence Durrell at the Université Paris X in Nanterre, the International Lawrence Durrell Society, and the Durrell School of Corfu.

Works Cited

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