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TEMPORAL AND SPATIAL UNITY IN THE NOVEL-
SEQUENCES

OF DOROTHY RICHARDSON AND LAWRENCE DURRELL

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NOVEL-SEQUENCES OF
DOROTHY RICHARDSON AND LAWRENCE DURRELL

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Preface

As I was browsing in Twentieth-century fiction studies in an attempt to find a topic for my PH.D. project, a peculiar phenomenon caught my attention. I noticed the considerable number of novels composed of more than one volume. I set out to study what I, then, called the "novel-sequence" or "roman-flueve" phenomenon. I started by exploring the ancestry of this form in the history of English fiction. The first example can be traced as far back as the Seventeenth Century. John Bunyan (1628-88) published the two parts of The Pilgrim's Progress in 1678 and 1684 respectively. As J.W. Mackail suggests, these may be regarded as an English prose Illiad and Odyssey. Part One is an epic; Part Two is a romance. One is a dream-story; the other is a continuation of the dream.

I found other multi-volume-novel writers much later in the Nineteenth Century. Disraeli (1804-81), in his "Young England" trilogy Coningsby (1844), Sybil (1845), and Tancred (1847), offers his proposed solution to the "Condition-of-England" problem: a return to some imagined medievalism; a new Toryism. Anthony Trollope (1815-82) found his real genius in The

Warden (1855), and developed it in its successors: Barchester Towers (1857), Dr. Thorne (1858), Framely Parsonage (1861), The Small House at Allington (1864), and The Last Chronicles of Barset (1867). In these, as George Sampson explains, we get a perfect picture of England in provincial areas, with the middle or upper-middle classes as its main figures. Thomas Hughes (1822-96) is now remembered solely for Tom Brown's School Days (1857) and its more purposive and less spontaneous successor Tom Brown at Oxford (1861). Anthony Hope (1863-33) produced The Prisoner of Zenda (1894) and its sequel Rupert of Hentzau (1898).

From fiction published in the early Twentieth Century, I found John Galsworthy's The Forsyte Saga (1906-21), and Arnold Bennett's ponderous trilogy Clayhanger (1910), Hilda Lessways (1911), and These Twain (1916). While Galsworthy portrayed the upper-middle classes, Bennett showed the life of the "Five Towns," the "Potteries" of Stradfordshire and those who went out of them. Ford Madox Ford also wrote novels of more than one volume. His Tietjens war series Parade's End comprises Some Do Not (1924), No More Parades (1925), A Man Could Stand Up (1926), and Last Post (1928). The series is an elaborate study of personal relations worked out with deliberate and adult

artistry.

The distinctive and common feature to all the previous illustrations is that although they have a special interest in place, they concentrate more on the chronology of incidents, whether through presenting more than one generation of characters or following a set of characters in what is a more or less biographical narrative.

As I went further into Twentieth Century, I examined two more writers whose approach was different. Dorothy Richardson (1873-1967) and Lawrence Durrell (1912-1991) both objected to any sequential perception of their respective works. Intending The Alexandria Quartet to be a symphony which could allow him to interweave his themes and play one note against another, Durrell disapproves of sequence-publication admitting that the publication of the novels in sequence instead of simultaneously defeated the purpose of the work. He jokingly justifies this by his need for money. Comparably, Dorothy Richardson insisted on referring to the many novels constituting Pilgrimage as novel-chapters. She regarded Pilgrimage as one novel composed of many chapters ignoring the fact that the first twelve volumes (not including the posthumous thirteenth volume March Moonlight) were published over

a period of twenty three years.

Although ignored afterwards, Richardson is one of the earliest novelists who received immediate recognition for experimenting with form which, for her, occupied paramount space. Her thirteen-volume novel, Pilgrimage (1915-67), combines a special interest in both time and space elements. As for temporal unity, the novel traces the day-to-day existence of the heroine, Miriam Henderson. Richardson believed that if a novel was made alive enough by capturing the flow of reality, then its immediacy should be more exciting than any contrived plot. Subverting plot, Richardson pushes a spatial apprehension of her work without the usual correlative of time.

Commenting on Lawrence Durrell's The Alexandria Quartet, Frederick Karl writes that the sense of place dominates; Alexandria defines the actions of the characters. Durrell, who sees characters almost as functions of landscape, points out that a time sequence is working along with place in the novels. Yet, time is stayed: the four novels comprising The Quartet are not connected sequentially. Rather, they are presented as siblings, that is, they overlap and interweave in a spatial relationship, with only the fourth novel Clea (1960) representing time clock and acting as a true

sequel to the first three. In music terminology, Durrell's aim is to achieve a fugue-like simultaneity, so that at each moment of the novel, all of Alexandria is in movement, ever changing and developing. As in a huge symphony, the first three novels are polyphonically developed themes while the fourth novel acts as a lengthy recapitulation.

The present dissertation is a study of two particular elements of what I now call multi-volume novels (rather than novel-sequences): time and space. It centers around two principal components. The first is that 20th century literature, as Joseph Frank points out, has moved in the direction of spatial form. Writers, such as Eliot, Proust, and Joyce, ideally intend the reader to apprehend their work spatially in a moment of time, rather than as a sequence. I have found this observation to be equally true of two otherwise considerably different modern writers: Lawrence Durrell and Dorothy Richardson. Their experimentation with form has led to the spatialization of the most linear form in literature, fiction.

I have set out to trace the influences which helped shape the work of those two writers. A close examination of the individual characteristics of Richardson's Pilgrimage and Durrell's The Alexandria

Quartet has led to the second principal point of the dissertation, which is the cyclic nature in the development of English fiction--the fact that certain currents and dominant features have a tendency to repeat themselves periodically in fiction, so that what seems innovative is actually a re-enactment.

Dissatisfaction with predominant literary and critical techniques is the fundamental feature of a cycle that includes such writers as Lyly, Nashe, Sterne, Carlyle, Swinburne, Morris, Dickens and, subsequently, Fowles and Swift, and to which we can add Richardson and Durrell. Generally, the dominant structure which those writers rejected was characterized by the following: plot linearity that implies a story's purposeful forward movement; a single authoritative storyteller; well motivated characters interacting in recognizable social patterns; the crucial conflict deterring the protagonist from the ultimate goal; and the movement to closure. Variations naturally existed, but these characteristics have been peculiar to the dominant currents in the history of fiction.

Both Durrell and Richardson have absorbed and reflected trends and techniques which characterize the recurrent cycle I have referred to, and which has found