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Registering the Charge: Mood and Lawrence Durrell's *The Alexandria Quartet*

Rex Ferguson

Introduction

Why think about the mood of text? In what way can mood form a useful category in the analysis of literature? Where is the mood of text to be found? Answering these questions involves a certain insistence upon the exceptionality of literature: it means thinking about the relationship between mood and text as unique. This, in turn, requires seeing the questions posed as being part of a scholarly background which includes the range of recent work on literature and the emotions (and the history of emotions) and the now well-established field of scholarly work which has investigated the various embodied states that impinge upon and are reflected in text.¹ While this essay will do this, it is also crucial to recognize (as this volume of essays does) that mood's import is not discipline or genre-specific. As such, the mood of text is perhaps best thought of as specific rather than singularly unique. Recent special issues of *New Literary History* and *New Formations* have emphasised a cultural studies approach to 'mood-work' which finds mood in an array of aesthetic forms.² Importantly, this work is typically centred on the philosophical (specifically ontological) significance of mood and is couched in terms which place it in the context of the body of work which has, since the early 2000s, appeared under the umbrella-title of 'affect studies'. Thus, in Ben Highmore's estimation, 'in the ongoing attention that the humanities and the social sciences have been lavishing on emotion, sentiment, and affect, a space seems to be opening up for the study of mood'.³ I would go further than this and claim that attending to mood – especially the Heideggerian form of mood, or *Stimmung*, which underpins the work of Highmore, Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht and others – is the clearest way in which affect studies can shift emphasis and save itself from recent, valid, criticism.

The range of literary scholars who are doing 'mood-work' (even when they don't quite call it that) is significant but it is still in the process of establishing itself. What it currently lacks is enough material on specific texts and examples of what an examination of the moodiness of a text might look like. To this end, this essay will take Lawrence Durrell's *The Alexandria Quartet* and subject it to a mood-reading, explicating the philosophical significance of mood as it does so. Alexandria's mood is made manifest through an abundance of descriptive passages which activate complex lines of connection between the city's physical environment, social conditions and tangled history. Crucially, such passages are also tied to the equally complex narrative content of the series – in other words, the quartet's plot is, in part, constitutive of its mood. That plot can be seen as forming a fundamental plank in the genesis of mood is significant because it

reverses the dominant critical stance which tends to position the evocation of atmosphere and emotion as a feature of text that is primarily employed to produce meaning. Equally, it moves against affect studies fixation upon identifying affect in precisely those regions of text which are not driven by meaning. By contrast, this essay is concerned, ultimately, with the moodiness of plot.

Affect, Mood and Intentionality

What's wrong with affect studies? The first answer to this is nothing at all. As it has developed since the early 2000s, affect studies has offered an admirably rich means by which contemporary critical theory could move beyond the dominance of a linguistically-conceived version of post-structuralism.⁴ As it is most commonly articulated, affect studies is seen as coalescing around the writing of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Brian Massumi who, in taking foundational cues from Baruch Spinoza, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, and Silvan Tomkins, have insisted that sense-making is not restricted to cognition and that the body is immanently affected and affecting.⁵ This prospect has been taken up in order to account for the apparent irrationality of, amongst other things, political allegiance and gender construction while it has also given rise to studies focussed upon the peculiarity of aesthetic affect.⁶ What affect studies has also given rise to is one of the most interesting scholarly debates in recent years, this taking place through a series of critiques and rebuttals in the pages of *Critical Inquiry* in 2011-12. This began with Ruth Leys's now well-known essay 'The Turn to Affect: A Critique'. Leys takes aim, mainly, at the foundational work of Sedgwick and Massumi and in the conclusions they reach from contemporary research in psychology and neuroscience. For Leys:

both the new affect theorists and the neuroscientists from whom they variously borrow—and transcending differences of philosophical background, approach, and orientation—affect is a matter of autonomic responses that are held to occur below the threshold of consciousness and cognition and to be rooted in the body. What the new affect theorists and the neuroscientists share is a commitment to the idea that there is a gap between the subject's affects and its cognition or appraisal of the affective situation or object, such that cognition or thinking comes “too late” for reasons, beliefs, intentions, and meanings to play the role in action and behavior usually accorded to them. The result is that action and behavior are held to be determined by affective dispositions that are independent of consciousness and the mind's control.⁷

Leys concludes that, for affect-theorists, ‘affect is the name for what eludes form, cognition, and meaning’.⁸ Her objection to this position is not that it suggests there is a realm of behaviour and activity which takes place subliminally (who would argue against that, she claims) but, rather, the conclusion reached that such activity is completely divorced not just from cognition but, more crucially, from meaning and intention. Especially in the case of Massumi’s work, Leys thus sees affect theory as re-opening an ultimately regressive mind-body dualism. Since Leys’s essay was published, there have been several attempts to rebut her claims and arguments made to suggest that she has misinterpreted the affect theory she seeks to critique.⁹ It is beyond the scope of this essay to attend to the details of all the arguments made in this context – this task also being made redundant by the admirable clarity with which Leys herself has countered most of them.¹⁰ But there is one attempt at rebuttal which is particularly noteworthy, not because it is more successful in undermining Leys’s interpretation of affect studies, but rather because, in one brief moment, it points towards a possible way in which affect studies could be re-oriented. This comes from Charles Altieri, whose response was published in *Critical Inquiry* in 2012 and who writes that:

in opposition to Leys, I will argue that there are diverse and valuable forms of nonconceptual emotions and that these are present in moods and in esthetic experiences [...] Consider first the question of mood. What kind of intentionality can one attribute to moods, given the fact that they alter our sense of agency? Moods typically are imperialistic; moods do not compete, but only one dominates at any given time because they are without boundaries. Moods are total because they set affective atmospheres and color all that the atmosphere contains. And moods seem a strange combination of passive and active. There is a thinning of the powers of agency because agents become the participants in this shaping totality and come to feel that powers of action seem distant and not particularly relevant. Moods also seem particularly resistant to concepts, especially if one recognizes that there are two possible states of the agent here. One can simply be aware of the world as filtered through the mood. Or one can be aware of oneself as being shaped by the mood. Only the second is at all conceptual. And even then the concept that one is in a mood covers very little of what is going on for an intending agent. Even when one identifies the mood one need not take any practical orientation toward it.¹¹

Intention is certainly the nub of the problem, but in writing about its complexity and reach Altieri seems to argue more that Leys has not gone far enough in her critique than anything else. What is extremely significant about this passage, though, is that intention is nuanced by way of thinking about mood and that Altieri's version of mood is derived almost entirely from Heidegger. There are several important points here.

Firstly, as Altieri points out, one of the most noticeable things about moods are their constancy. Affects are often described in terms which emphasise a vitality which is necessarily transitory.¹² To use an analogy, affects could be compared to the dynamic activity of an electronic device while mood is the continuous hum of an electrical current which is always 'on'. As Heidegger writes: 'in a state-of-mind Dasein is always brought before itself, and has always found itself, not in the sense of coming across itself by perceiving itself, but in the sense of finding itself in the mood that it has'.¹³ I am always in a mood, no matter how banal or innocuous that might be – quiet contentment is as much of a mood as melancholy – and, in Heidegger's thought, a mood can only be removed by its replacement with another mood.

Altieri is also being Heideggerian when he talks about the liminal agency which moods entail. According to Heidegger, 'a mood assails us. It comes neither from 'outside' nor from 'inside,' but arises out of Being-in-the-world, as a way of such Being'.¹⁴ Moods are therefore important precisely because they are not within our ultimate control and yet are also not solely grounded in the external world.¹⁵ To describe them in this manner thus builds on the very project of phenomenology which, in its Husserlian origin, was inspired by the aim of collapsing scientific (objective) and psychological (subjective) philosophies in favour of the description of pure 'phenomena'. This tradition informs Altieri's definition of mood but is more openly referenced in Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht's brilliant discussion of the German word *Stimmung*, which refers to both 'mood' and 'climate'. Gumbrecht writes:

'Mood' stands for an inner feeling so private it cannot be precisely circumscribed. 'Climate,' on the other hand, refers to something objective that surrounds people and exercises a physical influence. Only in German does the word connect with *Stimme* and *stimmen*. The first means "voice" and the second "to tune an instrument"; by extension, *stimmen* also means "to be correct."¹⁶

In paying close attention to the musical reference contained in these meanings, Gumbrecht writes of the complexity of haptic experience – the fact that hearing does not take place through the ears alone but involves the skin's response to the lightly vibrating touch of sound waves.

Inspired by the form of phenomenological analysis, Highmore has argued that many sensory experiences are similarly 'synaesthetic'.¹⁷ While this is significant it is also important that, in Gumbrecht's account, music *touches* the body. He elaborates further on this by pointing out that 'another dimension of reality that happens to our bodies in a similar way and surrounds them is the weather'.¹⁸ Intimately physical, mood is literally an atmosphere that lightly touches and surrounds the body: the 'climate' which is inhabited. At the same time, and perhaps precisely because of the very lightness of that touch, it is also encountered as interior: my mood is fundamentally related to my sense of inner being.

To return to the issue of intentionality, this formulation of mood seems to raise a problem: namely, how intentional can an encounter with weather conditions be? Certainly, one does not intend the rain in a strictly determinate sense. There are two key points to make here. Firstly, *Stimmung* activates a sense of climate and atmosphere but is not a precise synonym for either. In fact, the overlap rather than mirroring of significance is what allows so many writers, including Durrell, to play in such complex ways with the evocation of mood through descriptions of the weather.¹⁹ Secondly, and more importantly, to think in such terms is to miss the point of intentionality as it was conceived by the phenomenological project following the insight of Franz Brentano. By this logic, whatever comes into consciousness *must* be encountered as an intentional relation: as Steven Connor puts it, 'there can be no pure consciousness, only consciousness *of*'.²⁰ Thus while I don't intend the rain, I intend my consciousness *of* the rain and, to push the point, what the state of being in the rain is.

This is all very well but consciousness *of* is precisely what Sedgwick and Massumi (in Leys's account) thinks comes too late in matters of affect. In other words, affects unconsciously motivate behaviours which are then only cognized latterly by an intentional consciousness. This is when the peculiar intentionality of mood becomes so potent. For, moods are not like other objects in the world. Nor, even, are they something that we have in relation to a particular object in the world – I am not depressed about the kitchen table for example. Rather, as Heidegger sees it, mood is what allows for consciousness to happen just as it does (and for the kitchen table to *be* just as it is). As Jonathan Flatley puts it: 'in a real sense, when one is experiencing shame, a different world is being perceived than when one is joyful or fearful'.²¹ Altieri must surely be quite wrong, then, to say that we do not take any practical orientation in relation to our moods. Rather, we must by necessity experience the world in, through and as the particular mood that we have because, in Heidegger's terminology, they 'attune' us to the world in very specific ways. The further implication of this point is summarised succinctly by Charles Guignon, in a passage favoured by Highmore:

Our moods modulate and shape the totality of our Being-in-the-world, and they determine how things can count for us in our everyday concerns. Heidegger's point is that only when we have been "tuned in" to the world in a certain way can we be "turned on" to the things and people around us. Moods enable us to focus our attention and orient ourselves. Without this orientation, a human would be a bundle of raw capacities so diffuse and undifferentiated that it could never discover anything. What we do encounter in our attuned situatedness is not just worldhood, but rather a highly determinate cultural world.²²

One of the key concepts here is 'care'. Heidegger writes that "*existentially, a state-of-mind implies a disclosive submission to the world, out of which we can encounter something that matters to us*" (italics in original).²³ Moods orient us towards a 'highly determinate cultural world' which we are concerned with and which is encountered as meaningful. In a brief reply to one of her critics, Leys writes that 'intentionality carries with it the idea that thoughts and feelings are directed to conceptually and cognitively appraised and meaningful objects in the world'.²⁴ Affect theory might, at the very least, be hazy on this point but a phenomenologically-inspired version of mood-work has this kind of intentionality and more. This is because rather than springing from an entirely physiological basis which then contributes to a delayed meaning-making, moods are characterized by an extended version of intentionality which is geared towards our particular situatedness. In other words, mood is not *of* a particular object but is *of* that 'highly determinate cultural world' which Guignon writes of. Moods are thus an entanglement of physical touch, state-of-mind and cultural meaning.

Mood-Reading

Given this combination of character and significance, what would it be to read for a text's mood? Well, one of the first things to say is that mood's entanglement with meaning does not mean that mood-reading should be devoted to the task of explicating a particular interpretation which may not be apparent to the casual reader. Gumbrecht has spoken, by contrast, of moving towards a practice not of excavating meaning but of 'pointing' towards significance.²⁵ Highmore, likewise, has written of resisting the appeal to 'disentangle'. Rather, it is 'the sticky entanglements of substances and feelings, of matter and affect [which] are central to our contact with the world' and that 'what is required is a critically entangled contact with affective experience. This means

getting in among the murky connections between fabrics and feelings, between the glutinous and the guffaw'.²⁶

The sticky entanglements of 1930s and 40s Alexandria is precisely what *The Alexandria Quartet* describes. Yet, on the face of it, Durrell's text might seem specifically designed to promote a different kind of readerly disentanglement. The four separate novels – *Justine* (1957), *Balthazar* (1958), *Mountolive* (1958) and *Clea* (1960) – cover a period which can roughly be dated from the late 1930s to the late 1940s. *Justine* tells the story of an affair between Darley, the novel's narrator, and the eponymous Justine, who is married to a prominent Alexandrian banker, Nessim. The novel charts the passion of this affair and Darley's increasing concern that Nessim knows about it, with this fear culminating in his paranoid belief that Nessim will stage an 'accident' in which Darley is shot during the annual duck hunt on Mareotis Lake which he hosts. As it happens, the novel does indeed conclude with an accident during the duck hunt but it is another prominent character, Capodistria – who sexually abused Justine as a child – that is killed.

As the succeeding volumes of the quartet proceed they offer numerous corrections and supplements to Darley's (and the reader's) partial knowledge of events. The initial conceit of the second volume is that Darley's friend, Balthazar, having received Darley's manuscript of *Justine*, writes to him with a series of annotations. These are collectively referred to as the 'interlinear', with these notes providing a very different account of the period Darley has described – most notably by asserting that Justine never loved Darley but was, in fact, all the time in love with another character, the flamboyant writer Pursewarden. *Mountolive*, which focusses upon David Mountolive, the British Ambassador in Egypt, adds political intrigue to the mix with a narrative centred around Nessim's involvement in running guns to Palestine. What this ultimately leads to is Nessim instructing Justine to begin an affair with Darley in order to distract him from this activity – so, by this account and on Justine's side, the affair has been entirely instrumental, functional and passionless. This volume also contains the revelation that Capodistria was not the body found at Mareotis Lake and that his death was faked - with this, again, being motivated by Nessim's dealing in arms. *Clea* concludes the quartet by moving forward in time and charting the realization of Darley's love for the artist, Clea.

This mode of narrative is set out by Durrell in a brief Preface where he claims it is based on a rough analogy with the relativity proposition such that the first three novels are 'related in an intercalary fashion, being "siblings" of each other and not "sequels"'.²⁷ This is intended to be a challenge to the 'serial form of the conventional novel'.²⁸ It is also hinted at in *Balthazar* when a novel is planned that would act 'like some medieval palimpsest where different sorts of truth are thrown down one upon the other, the one obliterating or perhaps supplementing the other'.²⁹

Taken at face value, then, the quartet is an epistemological puzzle – a mysterious narrative in which the reader is motivated by the desire to move from partial to full knowledge. Yet what is most noticeable about the quartet is the way in which a full knowledge of events is never really attained, partly because a full disentanglement is impossible. On top of the basic outline summarised above, there are multiple other overlapping storylines including those in which Nessim fathers an illegitimate child with the prostitute Melissa (who is later cared for by Darley) and three important deaths in the shape of Nessim's fanatical brother Narouz (assassinated), the elderly cross-dressing policeman Scobie (beaten to death by sailors) and Pursewarden (suicide). These interconnected strands could be disentangled but what makes things more complicated is the way in which, despite Durrell's own words, the earlier 'truths' of the quartet are not 'obliterated' by the later ones: for example, it is impossible to believe, following a reading of *Justine*, that Justine was never actually in love with Darley. What I want to suggest is that this is because the mood of that earlier time, which is encountered as an immersion in an Alexandria of raw emotion, physical location and fleshly being, is so palpably felt. Thus from the very opening pages there are descriptions such as the following:

Notes for landscape-tones . . . Long sequences of tempera. Light filtered through the essence of lemons. An air full of brick-dust – sweet-smelling brick-dust and the odour of hot pavements slaked with water. Light damp clouds, earth-bound yet seldom bringing rain. Upon this squirt dust-red, dust-green, chalk-mauve and watered crimson-lake. In summer the sea-damp lightly varnished the air. Everything lay under a coat of gum.

And then in the autumn the dry, palpitant air, harsh with static electricity, inflaming the body through its light clothing. The flesh coming alive, trying the bars of its prison. A drunken whore walks in a dark street at night, shedding snatches of song like petals. Was it in this that Anthony heard the heart-numbing strains of the great music which persuaded him to surrender for ever to the city he loved.³⁰

What is so noticeable in this passage is its evocation of a condition in which the body is surrounded by an atmospheric intermingling of light, heat and scent. The air, squeezed by a ceiling of clouds above, is suffused with the tiny yet visible particles of 'brick-dust' and, later, 'sea-damp'. The description plays upon the kind of synaesthesia referred to by Gumbrecht and Highmore also as the light is filtered through what would more usually be thought of as a straightforwardly olfactory experience: smelling the essence of lemons. Everything – with the body of the human subject being as much a thing as anything else in this landscape – lies under a

'coat of gum' and this merging of subject and object, body and landscape, reaches a peak with the ambiguity aroused by the 'light clothing' in the second paragraph: is this the clothing worn in the 'dry, palpitant air' or that very air itself, suffused with the light hum of an electrical charge? The flesh 'comes alive' in this passage, 'trying the bars of its prison' but also succumbing to the environment in which it has been thrown.

Passages like this saturate the quartet, with the text continually 'disclosing' Alexandria through the mood of the city. Concomitantly, there is a constant 'attunement' taking place in which, to use the phrasing of Guignon, Darley's capacity to be 'turned on' to events, people and object around him is governed by the mood of Alexandria which has 'tuned him in'. In *Clea*, Darley returns to the city and claims to feel 'like the Adam of the medieval legends: the world-compounded body of a man whose flesh was soil, whose bones were stones, whose blood water, whose hair was grass, whose eyesight sunlight, whose breath was wind, and whose thoughts were clouds'.³¹ This is an Alexandria not solely of outer dimensions but carrying an intensely inner register. To use Toni Morrison's phrase, as Gumbrecht does, to inhabit Alexandria is to be 'touched as if from the inside'.³²

Such descriptive passages foreground an emphasis on *Stimmung*, but where else can the mood of the text be found? The majority of work that has been done on mood (and affect for that matter) has tended to focus on those aspects of text which seem least charged with the task of carrying meaning. Getting at what Hans-Georg Gadamer refers to as the 'volume' of the text has thus involved attending to its performative aspects: with performance in this sense carrying a range of meanings including the way in which a work might be physically spoken or sung, the use of visual images which may run counter to apparent meaning, the material forms in which a work of literature is housed and, most prominently, how the internal tones and rhythms of a text serve to 'perform' a singular presence.³³ In a recent special issue of *Textual Practice*, Alex Houen introduces a number of essays devoted to this latter approach, emphasising in his own introduction that language 'does not express feeling' so much as it 'does feeling' and that 'punctuation, vocabulary, and syntax each carry affect as part of their structure'.³⁴

At the same time as this work, which is articulated in a context of continental philosophy and critical theory, has been taking place, an approach to 'literature and the emotions' - couched in the terms of analytical philosophy and contemporary psychology - has worked much more on the way in which emotional response interacts with the meaningful content of text. Taken in one sense, this is hardly a new claim. Suzanne Keen thus introduces a recent special issue of *Poetics Today* on 'Narrative and the Emotions' by claiming that the literary scholar of seventy-five years ago would have little trouble in pairing these concepts.³⁵ In fact, she goes so far as to trace the

lineage back to Aristotelian *catharsis*. At its best, this work is subtle and suggestive.³⁶ But what animates much of the work that Keen introduces is a concentration upon the closure (and closing emotion) that plot provides: *catharsis* occurs, after all, through the pity and fear that attends the conclusion of a tragedy in which the hero's reversal is fully recognised. Keen rightly makes a critique of Jenefer Robinson's book *Deeper than Reason* partially on these grounds, arguing that Robinson's exclusive attention to realist fiction produces a skewed account in which closure is assured. I would go further than this by challenging Robinson's reading of specific moments of high emotion within realist fiction as, ultimately, levers whose main function is to generate the desire to rationally understand through a process of 'cognitive monitoring' (Robinson's term).³⁷ Keen and the contributors to the special issue of *Poetics Today* are not quite so bound by this instrumental view of emotional response but the claims made do still often refer to a single emotion (sympathy, altruism) which generates an effect of pedagogical benefit: narratives make us feel the moral of a story rather than just rationally cognize it.³⁸

In what remains of this essay I want to navigate something of a middle-ground between these approaches by picking up on a comment from Gumbrecht, who writes that aesthetic experience is formed from 'an oscillation (and sometimes an interference) between "presence effects" and "meaning effects"'.³⁹ Taking this in the context of a discussion about mood, there is never a strict cut off between the mood of the text and its meaningful content – so it is essentially limiting to look for mood only where meaning does not seem to adhere. At the other extreme, moods (and a more broadly conceived sense of the 'emotions') have too often been seen as conduits to aid in the construction of meaning. In order to bridge this gap it is useful to think about reversing the latter. In other words, rather than seeing mood as producing meaning we should attend to how meaning is embroiled in producing the mood of the text. And one of the ways this can be done is to think less about precisely *what* happens in the plot and more about *how* that plot happens.

The main driver of plot in *The Alexandria Quartet* is the city itself. On the opening page of *Justine*, Darley writes of 'the city which used us as its flora - precipitated in us conflicts which were hers and which we mistook for our own', latterly reflecting that 'we are the children of our landscape; it dictates behaviour'.⁴⁰ Justine also talks of their affair as 'part of an experiment arranged by something else, the city perhaps' while Darley refers to the way in which the *cafard* (melancholia) of the city would, at times, seize Justine.⁴¹ Tellingly, the city's agency is often described in a manner which plays upon the light but immersive touch of *Stimmung*. Alexandria is thus described as 'breathing' on several occasions, while Justine comments that 'we are all in the grip of the emotional field which we throw down about one another'.⁴² At a contiguous point in

the narrative ‘the gravitational field of the city’ is imagined as pulling people into it.⁴³ The behaviour which the city thus generates is primarily driven by a sensuality which characters seem powerless to control. So, Darley’s affair with Justine is against his better judgement, his sense of morality and his loyalty to Nessim. In *Mountolive*, the British diplomat, David Mountolive, is similarly unable to resist an impolitic attraction to Leila Hosnani. In fact, this particular volume is explicitly themed around Mountolive’s desire, and failure, to ‘act’ autonomously in a political sense. Hamstrung by various political considerations and clearly affected by the onset of war, Mountolive also simply *feels* powerless in much the same way as Darley writes that ‘at times she [Justine] spoke of going away: at times I did the same. But neither of us could move. We were forced to await the outcome with a fatality and exhaustion that was truly fearful to experience’.⁴⁴ A whole host of other characters, including Pursewarden, Mountolive, Scobie, Pombal and Narouz, are similarly unable to resist what are ultimately self-destructive desires.

Reducing the mood of *The Alexandria Quartet* to a couple of basic descriptors is certainly not the intended outcome of this mood-reading. Having said that, what could be said with a fair degree of conviction is that there is a pervasive eroticism in the text which is connected both to the powerlessness referred to above and to the varieties of sensual experience which the city provides (the atmospheric ‘coating’ mentioned earlier). Lust, tension and anxiety are ‘in the air’ just as heat and dust are subsumed within the body. But the entanglement goes further than this, as the ‘highly determinate cultural world’ of Alexandria – its ancient and modern history – is also imbricated in the text’s mood: just as it acts as an agent in the plot, so too the city seems to have a memory in this sense. Darley writes explicitly with this in relation to Nessim:

At this time he had already begun to experience that great cycle of historical dreams which now replaced the dreams of his childhood in his mind, and into which the City now threw itself – as if at last it had found a responsive subject through which to express the collective desires, the collective wishes, which informed its culture. He would wake to see the towers and minarets printed on the exhausted, dust-powdered sky, and see as if *en montage* on them the giant footprints of the historical memory which lies behind the recollections of individual personality, its mentor and guide: indeed its inventor, since man is only an extension of the spirit of place.⁴⁵

Nessim is merely the ‘responsive subject’ of the city, created by memory and culture but also by ‘towers’, ‘minarets’ and ‘dust-powdered sky’. As the narrative develops, Darley, too, recognizes and courts ‘a desire to be claimed by the city, enrolled among its trivial or tragic memories’.⁴⁶ It is

noticeable, then, that the first longer passage quoted in this essay ends with a reference to the city's most famous love affair, as Darley wonders: 'Was it in this that Anthony heard the heart-numbing strains of the great music which persuaded him to surrender for ever to the city he loved'?'⁴⁷ What is combined here is a very specific referent of *Stimmung* – the haptic 'surrounding' of music which touches on the inside ('heart-numbing') – and a cultural precedent in the 'surrender' which Darley will make to Justine and Alexandria. The same entanglement can be seen when Justine is compared to that 'race of terrific queens which left behind them the ammoniac smell of their incestuous loves to hover like a cloud over the Alexandrian subconscious'.⁴⁸ In forming citizens as its 'flora' the city is aided by a history fertilised through a rich diversity of cultural influences. Darley thus writes of knowing Justine 'for a true child of Alexandria; which is neither Greek, Syrian nor Egyptian, but a hybrid: a joint'.⁴⁹ This melting pot of histories and cultures is intrinsically linked to the plot in that Nessim's justifies his actions on the basis that he is protecting the Egyptian Copts (of whom he is a member) from the rise of radical Islam by building an alliance with Palestinian Jews. But it is also connected to an anti-British thematic, most notably voiced by Pursewarden, which takes aim at the sterile homogeneity of colonialism and its attempt to flatten histories and beliefs. In some ways paradoxically, Durrell's text thus both attacks the evils of cultural and religious tension at the same time as it admonishes the failure to immerse oneself in such friction.⁵⁰

There is one very important *caveat* to the preceding discussion, which is that it is questionable how accurate Durrell's rendering of Alexandria is. Ray Morrison has suggested that the quartet owes more to an immersion in Taoist philosophy than the particularities of Alexandrian life, while John Rodenbeck has been more condemnatory of Durrell, describing his writing as parading 'what appears to be a cynical indifference – perhaps even hostility – to the physical and historical underpinnings of what purports to be his subject'.⁵¹ This remarkable statement is undermined by the fact that Rodenbeck sees the poetry of C. P. Cavafy as evoking a more authentic Alexandria at the same time as claiming that, without it, 'the Quartet would be in fact inconceivable'.⁵² The internal contradiction of this stance aside, it does raise an interesting question about the authentic recapturing of mood. It is significant, for instance, that Darley finds the mood of Alexandria in a writing which is indebted to other writers, including Cavafy, and which takes place once he has left the city and is living on a Greek island. On the second page of *Justine*, Darley writes that 'I had to come here in order completely to rebuild this city in my brain - melancholy provinces which the old man saw as full of the "black ruins" of his life'.⁵³ From the beginning of the quartet, then, the possibility of a recollection which 'rebuilds' an authentic original is aided, but surely also undermined, by the recourse that must be made to the literary:

the 'old man' referred to being Cavafy. References to the poet abound, often at extremely significant moments in the text. Thus, when Darley writes at length about Nessim and Justine's relationship he imagines Nessim thinking with Cavafy:

Was all the discordance of their lives a measure of the anxiety which they had inherited from the city or the age? 'Oh my God' he almost said. 'Why don't we leave this city, Justine, and seek an atmosphere less impregnated with the sense of deracination and failure? The words of the old poet came into his mind, pressed down like the pedal of a piano, to boil and reverberate around the frail hope which the thought had raised from its dark sleep.'⁵⁴

This passage is connected to an endnote which directs the reader to Cavafy's poem, 'The City', translated by Durrell and in which the 'black ruins' of the earlier reference appear. Cavafy's poem voices a desire to leave a city that imprisons the body and intrudes upon one's state of mind, its speaker referring to feeling 'Confined among these dreary purlieus/Of the common mind' and of wandering the 'same mental suburbs'.⁵⁵ Similarly, Nessim's animus towards the city (which is aimed partly at its status as a colonial outpost which isolates it from the rest of Egypt) is vocalised through a sense of an atmosphere impregnated with emotion and which is a product of the city and the age. And the words of the poet reverberate like both a musical chord and the steam of boiling liquid – in other words, in the guise of the 'tone' and lightly atmospheric touch of *Stimmung*. Nessim recalls this poem as he himself thinks of leaving Alexandria – or is it that he thinks of leaving in the terms he does partly because Cavafy's poetry lives in the heat and dust of his city?

When it comes to mood, it is perhaps best to consider notions of original and representation as one further entanglement, the disentanglement of which should be resisted. As Darley comments, the city is 'half-imagined (yet wholly real)'.⁵⁶ While this statement refers to the task of remembering an Alexandria that is now in his past, it also suggests that the experience of the city is partially an aesthetic encounter. Taken in this sense, mood and *Stimmung* can productively be connected to notions of aura. Indeed, this is precisely what Gernot Böhme has done in postulating a theory of aesthetics based on the idea of a 'production of atmospheres'. Böhme takes Walter Benjamin's aura as one of his starting points, noting that Benjamin refers to the aura as a 'strange tissue of space and time [...] which flows forth spatially, almost something like a breath or a haze – precisely an atmosphere. Benjamin says that one "breathes" the aura. This breathing means that it is absorbed bodily, that it enters the bodily economy of tension and

expansion, that one allows this atmosphere to permeate the self.⁵⁷ In *Mountolive*, the writer Pursewarden makes a strikingly similar point, commenting that in the reception of art, 'artist and public simply register, like a seismograph, an electromagnetic charge'.⁵⁸ The aura of an artwork is autonomous – it does not produce its 'atmosphere' through the authentic reference to a prior reality but is marked only by, as Jean-Luc Nancy puts it, 'the coming into presence of some *presence*' – and it is encountered in a way that is strikingly similar to the attunement of *Stimmung* discussed in this essay.⁵⁹ It would therefore make sense to claim that it is precisely the internal mood of text which does most to produce its aura.

Conclusion

That the quartet's plot is constitutive of mood is, ultimately, a matter of its confluence with both the text's explicit evocation of *Stimmung* and its emplacement in a historically-informed and 'highly determinate cultural world'. Of his own writing Darley comments that 'the solace of such work as I do with brain and heart lies in this – that only there, in the silences of the painter or the writer can reality be reordered, reworked and made to show its significant side. Our common actions in reality are simply the sackcloth covering which hides the cloth-of-gold – the meaning of the pattern'.⁶⁰ To return to the terms of affect theory and its critique, Darley thus sees his task as one of cognizing meaning in retrospect and as an afterthought to instinctive immersion in the world. Yet, as the narrative progresses it is precisely this form of meaning which eludes his grasp. On the opening page of *Clea* he thus writes:

I had set out once to store, to codify, to annotate the past before it was utterly lost – that at least was a task I had set myself. I had failed in it (perhaps it was hopeless?) for no sooner had I embalmed one aspect of it in words than the intrusion of new knowledge disrupted the frame of reference, everything flew asunder, only to reassemble again in unforeseen, unpredictable patterns...⁶¹

As much as this passage articulates a failure to know, it is also one in which Alexandria's *Stimmung* can be felt. The patterns of meaning reassemble as the shifting sands of the desert sweep over the city, merging with the lapping waters of the shore and the Mareotis lake. And while these patterns never adhere enough to become an object of stable meaning, the interaction with each successive iteration *is* formed as an intentional relation to a cultural world characterized by a melting pot of histories and by friction and tension. In trying to remember discussions from his past, Darley comments that 'I can only remember the pattern and weight of

these conversations, not their substance' but also notes that 'these are the moments which possess the writer [...] and which live on perpetually'.⁶² Pattern, weight, mood, *Stimmung*, aura: Darley recalls what is also most memorable about Durrell's text – not the ultimate conclusions that might come out of its epistemological journey but the ontological being which that journey has in part produced. In other words, the confusing twists and turns of the plot are constitutive of an Alexandria which is a rich muddle of histories, cultures and ethnicities and which is felt as a range of light touches which surround the body. Darley may be right to say that he has failed in something, or even in many things: but in registering the charge of Alexandria's *Stimmung*, the reader cannot feel that transmitting its mood has been one of them.

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- 2 Charles Altieri, 'Affect, Intentionality, and Cognition: A Response to Ruth Leys', *Critical Inquiry*, 38 (2012).
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- 5 Lisa Blackman, *Immaterial Bodies: Affect, Embodiment, Mediation* (London: Sage, 2012).
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- 10 Steven Connor, *The Book of Skin* (London: Reaktion Books, 2004).
- 11 ———, 'Cp: Or, a Few Don't by a Cultural Phenomenologist', *Parallax*, 5 (1999), 17-31.
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- 13 Lawrence Durrell, *The Alexandria Quartet* (London: Faber and Faber, 1968).
- 14 ———, *The Alexandrian Quartet* (London: Faber and Faber, 1968).
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- 16 Rita Felski, and Susan Fraiman, 'Introduction: Special Issue "in the Mood"', *New Literary History*, 43 (2012), v-xii.

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- 18 ———, 'How a Revolutionary Counter-Mood Is Made', *In the Mood, Special Issue of New Literary History*, 43 (2012), v-xii.
- 19 Adam Frank, and Elizabeth A. Wilson, 'Like-Minded', *Critical Inquiry*, 38 (2012).
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- 21 Melissa Gregg, and Gregory Seigworth, 'An Inventory of Shimmers', in *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. by Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seigworth (London & Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2010).
- 22 Charles Guignon, 'Moods in Heidegger's *Being and Time*', in *What Is an Emotion?: Classic Readings in Philosophical Psychology*, ed. by Cheshire Calhoun and Robert C. Solomon (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. 230-43.
- 23 Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *Atmosphere, Mood, Stimmung: On a Hidden Potential of Literature*. trans. Erik Butler (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012).
- 24 ———, *Production of Presence: What Meaning Cannot Convey* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004).
- 25 Mary-Catherine Harrison, 'How Narrative Relationships Overcome Empathic Bias: Elizabeth Gaskell's Empathy across Social Difference', *Poetics Today*, 32 (2011), 255-88.
- 26 Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*. trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978).
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- 49 Patricia Waugh, 'Precarious Voices: Moderns, Moods, and Moving Epochs', in *Moving Modernisms: Motion, Technology, and Modernity*, ed. by David Bradshaw, Laura Marcus and Rebecca Roach (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 191-213.

¹ On the emotions see Thomas Dixon, *From Passions to Emotions: The Creation of a Secular Psychological Category*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). Charles Altieri, *The Particulars of Rapture: An Aesthetics of the Affects*, (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 2003). Jenefer Robinson, *Deeper Than Reason: Emotions and Its Role in Literature, Music, and Art*, (Oxford: Clarendon, 2005). Berys Gaut, *Art, Emotion, and Ethics*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). Kirsty Martin, *Modernism and the Rhythms of Sympathy: Vernon Lee, Virginia Woolf, D. H. Lawrence*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). See also Suzanne Keen, 'Introduction: Special Issue on Narrative and Emotions', *Poetics Today*, 32 (2011). On the body see Elaine Scarry, *Literature and the Body: Essays on Populations and Persons*, (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990). Steven Connor, *The Book of Skin*, (London: Reaktion Books, 2004). Susan Stewart, *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002). Neither of these lists are exhaustive.

² Rita Felski and Susan Fraiman, 'Introduction: Special Issue "in the Mood"', *New Literary History*, 43 (2012). Ben Highmore and Jenny Bourne Taylor, 'Introduction: Special Issue "Introducing Mood Work"', *New Formations*, 82 (2014).

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⁷ Ruth Leys, 'The Turn to Affect: A Critique', *Critical Inquiry*, 37 (2011), 443.

⁸ *Ibid.* p. 450.

⁹ In the pages of *Critical Inquiry* alone, these include William E. Connolly, 'The Complexity of Intention', *Critical Inquiry*, 37 (2011). Adam Frank and Elizabeth A. Wilson, 'Like-Minded', *Critical Inquiry*, 38 (2012). Charles Altieri, 'Affect, Intentionality, and Cognition: A Response to Ruth Leys', *Critical Inquiry*, 38 (2012). See also Jonathan Flatley, 'How a Revolutionary Counter-Mood Is Made', *In the Mood, Special Issue of New Literary History*, 43 (2012).

¹⁰ Ruth Leys, 'Affect and Intention: A Reply to William E. Connolly', *Critical Inquiry*, 37 (2011). Ruth Leys, 'Facts and Moods: A Reply to My Critics', *Critical Inquiry*, 38 (2012).

¹¹ Altieri, pp. 879-80.

¹² Gregg and Seigworth, p. 1.

¹³ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978), p. 174.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* p. 176.

¹⁵ Stephen Mulhall, *Heidegger and Being and Time*, (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 76.

¹⁶ Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *Atmosphere, Mood, Stimmung: On a Hidden Potential of Literature*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), pp. 3-4.

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- ¹⁷ Highmore's example of this is eating, where 'the cacophony of crunching might actually be part of the "flavor" of potato chips'. Ben Highmore, 'Bitter after Taste: Affect, Food and Social Aesthetics', in *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. by Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seigworth (London & Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2010), (p. 121).
- ¹⁸ Gumbrecht, p. 4.
- ¹⁹ Gumbrecht's example of this is Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice* which is, of course, also deeply concerned with music. Ibid. p. 75. .
- ²⁰ Steven Connor, 'Cp: Or, a Few Don't by a Cultural Phenomenologist', *Parallax*, 5 (1999), 18.
- ²¹ Jonathan Flatley, *Affective Mapping: Melancholia and the Politics of Modernism*, (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 2008), p. 16.
- ²² Charles Guignon, 'Moods in Heidegger's *Being and Time*', in *What Is an Emotion?: Classic Readings in Philosophical Psychology*, ed. by Cheshire Calhoun and Robert C. Solomon (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. 230-43 (p. 237).
- ²³ Heidegger, p. 177.
- ²⁴ Leys, p. 802.
- ²⁵ Keynote lecture at 'Mood – Aesthetic, Psychological and Philosophical Perspectives' conference, University of Warwick, 6-7 May 2016. Mood-reading thus has the potential to be a further mode of the 'surface reading' proposed by Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus. Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus, 'Surface Reading: An Introduction', *Representations*, 108 (2009).
- ²⁶ Highmore, p. 120.
- ²⁷ Lawrence Durrell, *The Alexandria Quartet*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1968), p. 9.
- ²⁸ Ibid.
- ²⁹ Ibid. p. 338.
- ³⁰ Ibid. p. 18.
- ³¹ Ibid. p. 700.
- ³² Gumbrecht, p. 20.
- ³³ On Gadamer see Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *Production of Presence: What Meaning Cannot Convey*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), p. 64. For various forms of performance see William Eggington, 'Performance and Presence, Analysis of a Modern Aporia', *Journal of Literary Theory*, 1 (2007), 6. Piette. Abel. Scott McCracken, 'The Mood of Defeat', *New Formations*, 82 (2014). Patricia Waugh, 'Precarious Voices: Moderns, Moods, and Moving Epochs', in *Moving Modernisms: Motion, Technology, and Modernity*, ed. by David Bradshaw, Laura Marcus, and Rebecca Roach (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 191-213.
- ³⁴ Alex Hounen – Introduction: Affecting Words. Special Issue of Textual Practice, Affects, Text, and Performativity 25.2 (2011), p215-232. P. 217 for actual quote.
- ³⁵ Keen, p. 4.
- ³⁶ In the special issue of *Poetics Today* see especially Miranda Burgess, 'On Being Moved: Sympathy, Mobility, and Narrative Form', *Poetics Today*, 32 (2011).
- ³⁷ Robinson.
- ³⁸ For example see Blakey Vermeule, 'A Comeuppance Theory of Narrative and Emotions', *Poetics Today*, 32 (2011). Mary-Catherine Harrison, 'How Narrative Relationships Overcome Empathic Bias: Elizabeth Gaskell's Empathy across Social Difference', *Poetics Today*, 32 (2011).
- ³⁹ Gumbrecht, p. 2.
- ⁴⁰ Durrell, p. 17 & 39.
- ⁴¹ Ibid. p. 28 & 49.
- ⁴² Ibid. p. 698.
- ⁴³ Ibid. p. 729.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid. p. 122.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid. p. 143.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid. p. 155.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid. p. 18.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid. p. 23.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid. p. 698.
- ⁵⁰ This reading of Durrell could be compared to Sianne Ngai's identification of feelings which are 'diagnostically concerned with states of *inaction*' – albeit Ngai uses a slightly different terminology and places genuine social experience at the core of her interpretations. Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), p. 22.

⁵¹ Ray Morrison, 'The City and Its Ontology in Lawrence Durrell's *Alexandria Quartet*', *Mosaic: A Journal of the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature*, 46 (2013). John Rodenbeck, 'Alexandria in Cavafy, Durrell, and Tsirkas', *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, 21 (2001), 156.

⁵² Rodenbeck, p. 149.

⁵³ Durrell, p. 18.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* p. 147.

⁵⁵ C. P. Cavafy, 'The City', in Lawrence Durrell, *The Alexandrian Quartet*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1968), p. 201.

⁵⁶ Durrell, p. 209.

⁵⁷ Gernot Böhme, 'Atmosphere as the Fundamental Concept of a New Aesthetics', *Thesis Eleven*, 36 (1993), 117.

⁵⁸ Durrell, p. 482.

⁵⁹ Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Birth to Presence*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), p. 389.

⁶⁰ Durrell, p. 20.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* p. 657.

⁶² *Ibid.* p. 26 & 27.