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A Spiral Staircase: Implications Of Time In The Novels Of Lawrence Durrell

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THE OXYGEN CONSUMPTION OF RELAXED AND
ACTIVE ARTERIAL SMOOTH MUSCLE

by

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of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the implications of Durrell's views on time as they have helped shape his major metaphoric construct for the novel. Durrell's vision of a universe where time is non-linear, non-progressive and ever-present took shape in his works of the early thirties, and gradually materialized into his metaphoric spiral staircase which involves a pattern of experience that is cyclic and potentially endless. Far from borrowing the material for his visionary universe from Einstein's Theory of Relativity -- as is commonly supposed by those who take The Key to Modern British Poetry 1952, as a point of departure for his views on time -- Durrell has formed his own private vision over the years. Ever since the thirties, when he exuberantly announced in a letter to Henry Miller that he was forming his own Heraldic Universe from which he had lopped-off clock-time, Durrell has been unfolding his world in his creative works, in his private correspondence, and on his radio and television programmes.

In the thirties, in Zero and Asylum in the Snow, in his Hamlet correspondence with Henry Miller, in The Pied Piper of Lovers and in Panic Spring, Durrell created a world in which

time had come to a stop. In The Black Book he discarded a linear plot for a new fictional mode made up of point events in reality which he presented in a spatial language portraying all time crowded into a moment of time.

When Durrell turned to a study of the Alexandrian Cabalists in the forties he did so with the intention of finding in their philosophy parallels for his own heraldic designs. In the same spirit, he probed Einstein on Relativity, Freud on the space-time aspects of dreams, Jung on mythical archetypes, and Groddeck on the It. At this point, he worked out a rationale for his intuitive world. In this sense, The Key to Modern British Poetry is not a record of Durrell's discoveries on time and the ego as twin poles for the novel, but a continuation of his search for a personal metaphysic. Six years later, he defined his metaphor for the novel as a spiral staircase implying a multi-dimensional reality that is forever changing.

This metaphor reached its fullest realization in The Alexandria Quartet. Here, each of the major themes -- love, time, the psyche, art -- undergoes mutations every time it is presented from the point of view of a different character. Hence, totality becomes the sum-total of all these point events in reality, and truth what most contradicts itself in time. This view of experience is wound up one way at one point, and unwound in the next; its axis is the city.

Thereafter Durrell's metaphoric design emerged as his distinctive trademark. He returned to it in Tunc-Nunquam where it relays a network of interdependencies in imagery, in the use of ideograms, symbols, spiralling themes, and multiple tenses. It divulges a reality that is essentially provisional and non-definitive. In this way, Durrell's metaphor became the axis of a Heraldic Universe which had always been his raison d'être in the novel.

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To my husband, my love and gratitude.

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INTRODUCTION

In this thesis, I will examine the implications of Durrell's views on time as they have helped shape his major metaphoric construct for the novel. Durrell's vision of a universe where time is non-linear, non-progressive and ever present, took shape in his works of the early thirties, and gradually materialized into his metaphoric "spiral staircase"¹ which involves a pattern of experience that is cyclic and potentially endless. Far from borrowing the material for his visionary universe from Einstein's Theory of Relativity -- as is commonly supposed by critics who take The Key to Modern Poetry, 1952, as a point of departure for his views on time -- Durrell has formed his own private vision over the years. Ever since the nineteen-thirties, when he exuberantly announced to Henry Miller his Heraldic Universe² from which he had lopped off clock-time Durrell has been unfolding the implications of his world in his creative works, in his private correspondence, and on his radio and television programmes.

¹"I am trying to make it [the novel] a spiral staircase." Lawrence Durrell and Henry Miller. A Private Correspondence, George Wickes, ed., (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1963), p. 345.

²"What I propose to do in all deadly solemnity, is to create my HERALDIC UNIVERSE quite alone." Fall, 1936. Ibid., p. 19.

In his early prose works -- Zero and Asylum in the Snow, 1936--in his Hamlet correspondence with Henry Miller, in the poetry of the same period, and in his novels The Pied Piper of Lovers, 1935, and Panic Spring, 1936, Durrell created a world in which the time clocks had come to a stop. In The Black Book, 1938, he avoided the linear plot to present what he called "the living limbo of experience"³ made up of "point events"⁴ in reality, which, he maintained, have replaced facts. This new fictional reality he arranged in a spatial language, non-Aristotelian in structure, "to render a sort of immediacy of impact -- the impact of all time crowded into one moment of time".⁵

Published in 1952, The Key to Modern Poetry can be seen as a later rationalization of Durrell's creative world. At this point he has found a metaphysic to tack on to the art. In Einstein's work on Relativity, Durrell found ideas to parallel and complement his own visionary world. Instead of lopping off time, he now found he could write about a new time envisioned by Einstein as a dimension of a space-time hybrid. Einstein had given time a new role to play: instead of being a dimension moving from here to there along a

³Lawrence Durrell, The Black Book, (New York: Giant Cardinal, 1959), p. 37.

⁴Lawrence Durrell, The Key to Modern Poetry, (London: Peter Nevill, 1952), p. 39.

⁵Ibid., p. 35.

marked series of stages it had become a thick opaque medium welded to space. Einstein suggested a marriage of time and space into a four-dimensional volume he called a "continuum". Durrell's understanding of this new time is of an "Isness", not a progressive movement from past to present to future, but "a sort of time which contains all time in every moment of time" (20). Or as he put it in a different context, this "Isness" is a "multiple state of birth-life-death" (36). Seen in this light, death can just as easily be situated in the present as the future, and somewhat inconsistently, time is "the measure of our death consciousness", meaning that the ticking of a poet's wrist-watch reminds him that it is imitating his heart beats, and that when they stop his life will be over (36).

If Durrell's equating of the "Isness" that is time with "the measure of our death consciousness" is a contradiction in terms -- since death is only part of the multiple state of being he describes -- this is because paradox is a feature of Relativity as Durrell understands it. The following assertion is a case in point: "Time is an always-present yet always recurring thing" (31). Obviously, time must pass if it is to recur. But to this objection Durrell counteracts with his conclusion:

You will begin to see that to think according to the terms of relativity one has to train the mind to do something rather extraordinary: to accept two contradictory ideas as simultaneously true. (31)

A further implication of the theory of Relativity which Durrell found of particular significance for the writer, is the change in our view of the subject-object relationship. Victorian science had claimed an absolute objectivity in its judgements upon the world. Subject and object were taken to be two distinct things, so that a description of any part of the universe was considered a judgement independent of the observer. Einstein suggested a marriage of subject and object, since an objective reality existing independently of an observer is difficult to verify. If, for example, different observers take pictures of an object at the same time and from the same point in space, these pictures will not be alike, unless the observers happened to be moving at the same speed. Consequently, although we are finding more ways for applying our scientific knowledge yet, paradoxically, our knowledge of what reality is has not increased.

This rapprochement between subject and object is further investigated by Durrell in the works of Freud, Jung, Rank, and Groddeck, in this order. Durrell believes that time and the ego are twin-hypotheses that must be studied together. For if time is no longer a question of almanacs and clocks but of the individual's awareness of it as an "Isness", then it becomes imperative to probe the nature of the psyche, or that which in the individual constitutes a self in the flux of experience. Durrell, therefore, exa-

mined such topics as Freud's analysis of space-time aspects of dreams, Jung's vitalist theory of the psyche, and Groddeck's pervasive life-force, the It.

After The Key to Modern Poetry, Durrell moved with a greater degree of assurance towards the creation of his metaphoric spiral staircase within his works. I do not assert here that he wrote his novels to illustrate a metaphysic, but that the metaphysic helped evolve the shape of an imaginative construct for a world he had already created. After 1952, in Sappho, in The Alexandria Quartet, and in Tunc-Nunquam, Durrell used spiralling patterns of images, themes, facets of individuals, of incidents and places, to create a kind of reality that is provisional, multi-dimensional and one that can be apprehended in its entirety, rather than progressively built up. Throughout this study, I hope to show that the metaphysic helped shape the metaphoric construct for an imagined reality that has always been Durrell's raison d'être in the novel.

CHAPTER I

A CRAFT IS A TONGUE

A craft is a tongue, a tongue is a key, a key is a lock¹.

I chose the word 'heraldic' for a double reason. First because in the relation of the work to the artist it seemed to me that it expressed the exact quality I wanted. Also because in heraldry I seem to find that quality of magic and spatial existence which I want to tack on to art.²

This is the Durrell of November, 1936. He is a young writer struggling to express a vision of life in a way he can call distinctly his own, and he is telling it with undisguised enthusiasm to his first literary mentor and friend, Henry Miller. In the quotation above, Durrell explains the raison d'être of a vision of a new art which is to embody what he has described earlier in a letter to Miller as the "Heraldic Universe". Art, says the young Durrell excitedly, is going to be prophecy, in the biblical sense of the word:

What I propose to do, with all deadly solemnity, is to create my HERALDIC UNIVERSE quite alone. The foundation is being quietly laid. I AM SLOWLY BUT VERY CAREFULLY AND WITHOUT CONSCIOUS THOUGHT DESTROYING TIME: I have discovered that the idea of duration is

¹Lawrence Durrell, Tunc, (London: Faber, 1968), p.31.

²George Wickes, Lawrence Durrell and Henry Miller: A Private Correspondence, (New York: Dutton, 1963), p.23.

false. We have invented it as a philosophical jack up to the idea of physical disintegration. THERE IS ONLY SPACE. A solid object has only three dimensions. Time, that old appendix, I've lopped off. So it needs a new attitude. An attitude without memory. A spatial existence in terms of the paper I'm writing on now at this moment.³

If Durrell's tone is high-pitched, it is because he is trying for the first time to define his own view of reality in terms of the art he is going to create. Yet, there is nothing distinctly new about his particular version of a timeless reality. Numerous writers before Durrell--Laurence Sterne, Joseph Conrad, Ford Maddox Ford, Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, and Marcel Proust--have recognized the arbitrariness of the time of clocks and calendars when contrasted to the individual's sense of the passage of minutes, and they have all tried, although in varied ways, to express in their novels a personal sense of time at odds with abstract, objective time.⁴

At this point, Durrell's views on the nature of time are not clear. In the previous quotation, he uses the word 'duration' without any sign of awareness of its dynamic role in the Bergsonian universe. Bergson's duration is a succession without distinction, a continuous state of becoming, not to be confused with the abstract time of mathematics, of

³ Ibid., p.19.

⁴ Compare Shakespeare's *Rosalind* on the subject of the individual's sense of time versus clock time: "Time travels in diverse paces with diverse persons. I'll tell you who Time ambles withal, who Time trots withal, who Time gallops withal, and who he stands still withal." As You Like It, 111, ii, pp. 326-329.

physics, or even that of clocks and calendars⁵. For Durrell, duration is vaguely identified with the time he is trying so hard to destroy: a time that is a steady progression towards death. He finds this staunchless, irreversible flow of days particularly threatening: the artist the creator, man as god is after all mortal. But if the man of vision can move into a timeless dimension in art and in life, he can in this way circumvent this meaningless flow. Art, then, becomes prophecy.

It can be argued, as Durrell himself does⁶, that a creative writer is entitled to his own version of reality without having to prove that he is also well-read in philosophy or in other writer's views on similar subjects. And Durrell's early heraldic universe is just such a case. If the details of his world are not particularly original, yet taken as a whole his statement is at least what it purports to be: a visionary world of a writer-to-be, not a reasoned-out philosophical system of thought. And what is of specific interest here, is the fact that this letter antedates The Key to Modern Poetry by sixteen years. The majority of Durrell's critics⁷ therefore who take The Key to Modern Poetry, 1952

⁵See further discussion of Bergson's theory of time on pp. 97-99 below.

⁶"Now we have the timely recognition that each man is entitled to his own reality, interpret it as he wants. THE HERALDIC REALITY". In "Hamlet, Prince of China", Delta, (Paris: 2^e Annee, No. 3, Christmas, 1938), p. 39.

⁷See for example, John Unterecker, Lawrence Durrell, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964), pp. 21-22.

as a point of departure for their discussions on his views on time, are simply ignoring the real source of the Durrellian universe, which far from being philosophical, or scientific, or psychological or anything else, is a visionary world, envisaged metaphorically in terms of a new liaison between space and time. If all this talk about a heraldic universe sounds pretentious, it is because a young writer is trying to express the irrational in terms of the rational. He is trying to present his world in a form more recognizable to the reader. Thus far, the expression is metaphoric instead of systematic; thus far, Durrell is at home in his created world even if he is the first to admit that he is not yet certain of all of its aspects:

...what I am trying to isolate is the exact moment of creation in which the maker seems to exist heraldically. That is to say, time as a concept does not exist, but only as an attribute of matter, decay, growth, etc. In that sense then, it must be memoryless. I am afraid I cannot make this very clear even to myself until I examine all the terms and see what that means.⁸

That is not to say that in later years Durrell succeeds in synthesizing his random views into a unified imaginary universe in the manner of a Blake or a Yeats. Neither has he shown himself to be a mythographer by inclination as is Robert Graves, although there are those among Durrell's admirers -- like G. S. Fraser⁹ -- who like to see such a syn-

⁸ Wickes, p. 23.

⁹ G. S. Fraser, Lawrence Durrell, (London: Faber, 1968), p. 120.

thesis of mythology as a future direction of Durrell. If we consider his published work to date, we will note that his views on the heraldic universe have undergone numerous revisions, a factor which in itself is not a defect. But in his interviews in the fifties and sixties, Durrell's manner has changed, and like the later Aldous Huxley he assumes a certain distance from any or all of the positions he has held in his writings, a pose that is partly mischievous, partly cynical, and partly defensive. Perhaps he has had to assume this mask as a result of the excitement aroused in the field of literary criticism by the appearance of The Quartet. However, in spite of Durrell's later rationalizations and retractions, his early universe is an artist's vision, not a rational or logical view of the universe. Heraldry, as he sees it then, is a stage of being which extends beyond religion, or philosophy, and its goal is stasis. It calls to mind Aldous Huxley's Divine Ground of mysticism in that it is a state in which all discordants and contraries and flux in time are resolved -- the still hour when all storms are gone. I say here that it calls to mind Huxley, because Durrell's understanding of Eastern mysticism differs slightly from Aldous Huxley's. Whereas Huxley thinks that the mystical experience involves the will to achieve inner silence, Durrell considers that the Eastern mystical experience does not involve the will; in his own words: "where we say 'mysticism' they mean 'life' and where they say 'duality' we mean, in

our rather knowing way 'schizophrenia'."¹⁰ Hence, for him, heraldry, in literature, is not synonymous with the Eastern mystical experience, since heraldry is not a state of pure apprehension, but is one in which the artist uses his will to reach this goal. Paradoxically, then, the artist's dream is of a time when art will become unnecessary because this condition of calm can be attained in a state of pure apprehension¹¹.

In the nineteen thirties, while working on the initial stages of this vision, Durrell, influenced by Miller's excitement over a one-thousand page Hamlet correspondence with Fraenkel, turns to a study of Hamlet's anguish. In a 1936 letter to Miller, later adapted for publication as "The Prince and Hamlet: A Diagnosis", he says "HAMLET IS VERY HERALDIC, save the mark."¹² As Durrell sees it, the play embodies the inner struggle in terms of the outer one. Hamlet's battle, with which Durrell identifies, is to try to superimpose his own private reality on the common reality of men. In so doing, Hamlet becomes the victim of an inner struggle which is a tragic undercurrent of the play. As a result,

¹⁰ Lawrence Durrell, "Mysticism: The Yellow Peril", the New English Weekly, (January 25, 1940), XVI:14, 208-209.

¹¹ Durrell portrays the artist as "a man engaged bitterly waiting/For the day when art should become unnecessary." "Canon in Alexandria", (1945) published in The Poetry of Lawrence Durrell, New York: Dutton, 1956), p. 94.

¹² Wickes, p. 23

"There are two co-existing Hamlets. Or to be deadly accurate: there is the Prince, and there is Hamlet."¹³ Hamlet's true need is to come to terms with his "new chronology", and yet he is forced by his friends and by Ophelia to relinquish his internal struggle for the outer or social one.

Hamlet is the psyche forever trying to fight its way out of the armour of the Prince; through the chinks we catch a glimpse of this ephemera, in revolt against its social function, resentful, but dying-- all the time very quietly dying.¹⁴

When his "real" death comes, it is not administered by Laertes but by Hamlet himself. When the inner Hamlet dies, the eternal quietus is reached. What happens after that does not really matter since it is only the outer drama of events. Hamlet, then, dies by "implosion". "He is crushed inwards on to himself." Ophelia is the external tragedy, "SHE DOES NOT COUNT." With her in the external realm is Laertes and the whole machinery of court politics: "They are just different flavours of irony which leave nothing but bitterness in the mouth. Hamlet is dead. Long live the Prince!"¹⁵

The last throes of Hamlet's inner death occur at Ophelia's grave. "He is called upon to express his sorrow for her when in his inner chronology Ophelia is already dead and buried and rejected".¹⁶ Thereafter, only the Prince is left

¹³"The Prince and Hamlet: A Diagnosis", the New English Weekly, (January 14, 1937), p. 271.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 271.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 271.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 272.

to enact the outer tragedy, meaninglessly and mechanically. His physical death merely terminates his inner and more significant destruction. As Durrell states in his letters¹⁷, Hamlet's kind of death is really the "English death" he has tried to escape in Corfu, and it is also the subject of the book he is writing : The Black Book.¹⁸

At this point, Durrell gauges two worlds: the world from which he has to escape at any cost because it is to end in his inner death, and that other world of dream he has set out to create as the only hope for the creative man. And as is apparent throughout the correspondence with Miller, Durrell seems to feel that the older writer is a bridge for him between the two worlds. According to Durrell, Miller has never experienced this version of death; he inhabits the stratosphere a stage higher in the heraldic pattern than that of Shakespeare's Hamlet¹⁹. This is not to say that Durrell -- even at this early adulatory stage -- regards Miller as a better writer than Shakespeare; but that as a man Miller is able to realize himself more fully. Miller for the young Durrell is the Prince of China. But he is also the literary mentor and friend who is to caution Durrell against the game of literary

¹⁷ Wickes, p. 28.

¹⁸ For a discussion of The Black Book see Chapter Two of the thesis.

¹⁹ Durrell tells Miller: "You cannot write anything about Hamlet because the place it occupies in the heraldic pattern is below you. There is only going up, not down." Wickes, p. 60.

schizophrenia he has set up: that is, publishing simultaneously under two names, his own and that of Charles Norden, the author of Panic Spring: "Art for money's sake."²⁰

Durrell senses that the two roles are irreconcilable:

I have no hesitation about what to write anymore. I am discovering what I am. Only it's a bit painful because I started in another direction, and being forced to write what I'm going to will estrange me dreadfully. It's inevitable, but I shed a few pious tears now, at the beginning of the trip, so that I can be as dry as a cork and controlled when we put out to sea.²¹

Yet Durrell is never to relinquish this dual identity-game²², even when he gives up the pseudonym; and it is not difficult to see how his practice of writing for money casts uncertain shadows of non-commitment on his serious work.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 60.

²¹ Ibid., p. 39.

²² Durrell's dual identity-game remains his special trademark over the years. It can be explained in terms of the Jungian guilt-responsibility theme that I mention in chapter one, page 17. His traveller in Zero manifests a similar desire to evade responsibility for his role as artist. See page 21 below. Henry Miller warns Durrell that for the artist there can be no escape, since the artist is by vocation a traitor to the human race: p.22 below. I suspect that for Durrell, his use of two identities for writing is not schizophrenic, but simply a dual-role he has chosen to enact. See his distinction between schizophrenia and duality on page 10 below. And he maintains this dual, mock-serious role throughout his writing-career. For a discussion of this attitude, see pp. 128-29 below. I believe that it is this very attitude that mars his depiction of Alexandria in The Quartet: see pp. 200-4 below. Incidentally, Durrell has also published his paintings under another pseudonym; see Exhibition of Paintings by Oscar EPFS. Paris, 1964.

But this will be the subject of a later discussion on Durrell as British emissary in the Mediterranean²³. In the meantime, Durrell justifies his writing practices in this way:

My double Amicus Nordendis. He is a double, I need --not for money, or for any of the fake reasons I'm always giving-- but simply for a contact with the human world. I am alone really. That I'm a bit scared of going crazy.

and:

I CAN'T WRITE REAL BOOKS ALL THE TIME.²⁴

The period of greatest significance for a study of the germinal ideas in Durrell's work is the two years, 1936-1938, when Durrell's later pronouncements on art and the artist, the space-time universe, ego-id polarity²⁵ are all beginning to take shape. These are the formative years. It is at this time that he makes a study of Hamlet, tackles the problem of what he calls the English death²⁶, gauges the goals of the Surrealists in terms of their use of symbols for representing supra-rational realities. He is busy writing off his "adolescent hangover";²⁷ he develops an unquali-

²³See chapter five on Durrell's treatment of the Mediterranean in The Quartet.

²⁴Wickes, p. 104.

²⁵See pp. 6 and 9 above; and 26 below.

²⁶"Englishmen have always, in spite of the national anthem, been slaves. Only Chaucer, Skelton perhaps, and a few others, authentic barbarians, broke away or were born free". Wickes, p. 27.

²⁷Ibid., p. 49.

fied admiration for Miller, the man and his work,²⁸ only to realize that the next step is to demillerize his work, particularly The Black Book. It is a period of excitement and discovery. Miller, for example, is interested in the labyrinth at Knossus, and in 1936, he writes Durrell about his desire to visit it.²⁹ The labyrinth becomes later the focal symbol of Durrell's Cefalû, 1947. Miller talks about the importance of the symbol, the metaphor, the ideogram for the writer; Durrell also finds them necessary for relaying the experiences of his imaginative universe which can only be entered through an immersion into the demonic element.³⁰ He substitutes Tibet -- his own ideal locale -- for Miller's China.³¹ He finds that to transmute a timeless experience in writing, the best tense to use is the historic present. He dabbles in the "heraldic: my pet is in a very muddled state just at the moment."³² He is convinced that "ALL ART IN THE GERM IS CURATIVE."³³ He launches an unqualified attack on the critics:

²⁸This is an attitude that Durrell seems to modify after the appearance of Miller's Sexus. See: Ibid., p.51.

²⁹Ibid., p. 34.

³⁰Miller writes Durrell at the time: "I salute you AS YOU ENTER THE INFERNAL REGIONS." Ibid., p. 54.

³¹Ibid., p. 61.

³²Ibid., p. 65.

³³Ibid., pp.65-66.

LET US KILL THE LITERARY MEN ONCE AND FOR ALL AND
force THEM TO A PHILOSOPHICAL ADMISSION OF THE
mystery.³⁴

By January of 1937, he is able to announce self-consciously that now he is entering into his autistic self without responsibility³⁵ and the results are The Black Book³⁶, and the twin pieces "Zero" and "Asylum in the Snow" published in 1947 by the Circle Edition as Two Excursions into Reality. These two prose poems are the germinal source of The Black Book and indeed of so much of Durrell's later work dealing with his mythical universe. They may contain some writing that is incoherently autistic, but more than anything he subsequently wrote, they portray with clarity the mechanism Carl Jung calls the guilt-responsibility of the writer, a theme dear to Durrell, and one which he discussed in one of his letters to Miller. Put briefly, it refers to the artist's compulsion to want to evade his destiny if this is at all possible. When he cries, therefore: "I AM A MAN, THAT IS ENOUGH"³⁷, he is merely hiding the more terrible whisper: "I AM AN ARTIST and from there to the ultimate conclusion I AM GOD!!!"³⁸

³⁴ Ibid., p. 33.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 61.

³⁶ See Chapter Two of thesis.

³⁷ Wickes, p. 53.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 53.

In the destructive element, therefore, Durrell immerses himself, and the result is Zero bearing an inscription from Friedrich Nietzsche's letters after he became insane. Key phrases in the inscription run as follows: "... every name in history is myself ; ... I ponder with a certain amount of suspicion, whether all who enter in the kingdom of God also come from God;" and the conclusion is: "We artists are unteachable." In this zero hour, the artist is God: "Everything Illogical is God: And I am God!"³⁹ As creator, he has to speak for all the aimless who run ankle-deep in reality; and as incubus, he has to reveal the oppressive world of nightmare. In both capacities he launches into an enactment of the kind of journey the visionary must take before his real adventure is to begin. He must enter a Surrealist dream from which he is to emerge fortified with the knowledge of the reasons and conditions underlying the death of the imagination he sees around him. It is also the death of the inner man : "Did you know? Hamlet is dead;" "Weep for Lycidas, dead before his prime."⁴⁰ His exercise is an exorcism of this little death that can stand between him and meaningful creativity .

The prose poem as a whole is an Agon writ small; it is the germ of the later Black Book, an elaborate Agon which

³⁹"Zero", in Spirit of Place , ed. by Alan G. Thomas, (London: Faber, 1969), pp. 245-257.

⁴⁰Ibid., pp. 248-249.

Durrell meant as the first volume of a trilogy, to be followed by an Anagnorisis and a Pathos.⁴¹

A closer look at Zero reveals that this zero hour is also a state of suspension from abstract time. The protagonist of the piece is playing draughts with a friend Vasec, a man capable of a fierce kind of concentration on the game, to the point where he can exhaust himself -- passion, nerves, and intelligence. Not so his partner. The protagonist has that added and perpetual consciousness of the ghost in the cupboard; Hamlet's ghost. He is drawn into "the ever widening vortices to a level of concentration which is a magma" until he realizes that it is "The lotus-depths in which my mind is really at home" (250). Because he knows this, he feels that another aspect of his multiple role is to be a teacher: that is, to tell Vasec and his other friend, the Dancer, about Tibet, his dream-world, an icebound region of lakes and dragons, "The aura of mind brooding in the atmosphere of snow" (250).

Tibet is for Durrell of the same order of importance as is Jerusalem for Blake, or Mont Blanc for Shelley, or Byzantium for Yeats, or Kilimanjaro for Hemingway. They are all states -- some highly structured, others the emblems of primordial chaos -- in which creative expression reaches its ultimate potential, and man, in a manner of speaking, comes closest to god, perhaps closest to being god. In Durrell's

⁴¹Wickes, p. 83.

Tibet, the Hermit says he sees God, for he has also come to a knowledge of the nature of the death-in-life which is the condition of the initiated. He concludes that a life without a meaningful mythology, without creative imagination is a life-in-death; a condition of "...amusia, aphasia, aboulia, alexia, agraphia, and anopia."⁴²

This Tibet, then, is an aspect of the irrational or illogical forces in man: primordial chaos in which the man of imagination feels at home. Illogicality, as his protagonist says, is an attribute of the divine in man.

On the subject of the irrational in art, Durrell was to write a short prose-piece entitled "The Heraldic Universe", published in Personal Landscape in Cairo in 1942. Its subject is logic versus unreason. Logic, says Durrell, describes the world: it is a method, an instrument, and as such is secondary to the substance of experience itself. On the other hand, unreason is the realm where "the relations between ideas are sympathetic and mysterious -- affective rather than causal objective, substitutional. I call this the Heraldic Universe, because in Heraldry the object is used in an emotive and affective sense -- statically to body forth or utter: not as a

⁴²This line drew the following ecstatic remark from Henry Miller: "I am beginning to relearn the English language. Aboulia, masma, flocus! When you finally felt the Ark grounding on Mt. Ararat, what a consolation it must have been that all your marvellous words were rescued from the flood!" Ibid., p.79.

victim of description."⁴³ This state of unreason can only be relayed in the symbol or the ideogram: tools with which the writer can bore into the unknown and strike heraldic experience. And yet these tools are not perfect, since language can only render reality in an oblique manner. "'Art' then is only the smoked glass through which we can look at the dangerous sun"⁴⁴ or ultimate reality.

This is the prose piece of 1942. But already in 1937 Durrell has created the same experience imaginatively in Zero. Here the atmosphere is drenched in creative chaos, and the orderly mind is considered as one that most resembles a vegetable garden. The language too spills over into "intangible glyphs from the new book of the dead."⁴⁵ The symbols of this state are dragons and lakes and the snow in which the journey has just begun. "In whatever direction I move it is travel, the anatomy of a voyage."⁴⁶ And the design of his movement is circular, for he ends where he begins. The traveler meets an old man of Tibet, and in sudden anguish pleads with him to help him escape his destiny:

Let me go, I will be as other men are, talking of ordinary things in an ordinary way, I cannot stand this equilibrium between two worlds. The continents fall between my fingers like sand, and I cannot grasp them. Send me back into the painting. I am really a

⁴³"The Heraldic Universe," in Personal Landscape, I (Cairo: 1942), Part 4, pp. 7-8.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 8.

⁴⁵Spirit of Place, p. 253.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 254.

lady-bird after all. I must fly away home, my house is on fire, my children will burn. (258)

This, of course, is a repetition of the same Jungian motif mentioned earlier: the guilt-responsibility of the writer⁴⁷ showing through. But the old man brushes it aside with:

Be at peace. You are already there but have no compass, nothing magnetic. March on to Orion and be happy. You have nothing to lose because all is lost. Look. Here in the paper is written. You have already said it in the first page. The first sentence [Everything Illogical is God: and I am God]. Turn back. There is no way forward. Turn back. (258)

In other words, there can be no escape from responsibility. Henry Miller tells Durrell as much, and he quotes him a passage from his own work on D. H. Lawrence, which Miller feels is also descriptive of his young friend:

The poem is the dream made flesh, in a two-fold sense: as work of art, and as life itself which is a work of art. When man becomes fully conscious of his powers, his role, his destiny, he is an artist and he ceases to struggle with reality. He becomes a traitor to the human race. He creates a war because he is permanently out of step with the rest of humanity... He transmutes his real experience of life into spiritual equations. He scorns the ordinary alphabet which yields at most only a grammar of thought, and adopts the symbol, the metaphor, the ideograph. He writes Chinese. He creates an impossible world out of an incomprehensible language, a lie that enchants and enslaves men.⁴⁸

In the case of Zero, as indeed in the case of so many of Durrell's writings, a visionary world is created before

⁴⁷See p. 17 above.

⁴⁸Wickes, p.46 .

its rationale is set down in the form of descriptive prose, or discussed in interviews.

Zero is closely followed by its companion piece Asylum in the Snow, a Christmas carol written in Corfu in 1938. Durrell sends it to Miller who becomes so tremendously enthusiastic about it that he undertakes to publish it in different languages through his spiderweb of literary associations.

The singer in the carol is identified as Lawrence Durrell, and he has taken asylum in what he calls "my slaughterhouse, my ark, my monastery"⁴⁹. His retreat occurs in the snow. Snow is a spiritual condition of faith, hope, and hilarity, not the literal thing. Although snow is traditionally associated with death, here it is a state of death only for the uninitiated, a sign of hope for those who are. After all, the singer retreats into it to recreate his "real" world.⁵⁰ His shelter also serves as a lighthouse, but it differs from one in that it overlooks totally unique oceans, Asias, flora and fauna. Here, as in Zero, the theme is that of a journey; but this journey is particularly joyous

⁴⁹"It is getting towards Christmas. I have a confession to make. I am Lawrence Durrell, the writer who wrote until one day the world came into a terrible focus. I am a writer who never really wrote. Because the moment I became a real writer there was no partition of snow or minutes: and I had come here for a long holiday from myself." Asylum in the Snow, in Spirit of Place, p. 258-272.

⁵⁰Compare his use of snow in The Black Book, on p. 38 below.

for it leads to a new birth. "It is not the dead that concern us here but the living" (269).

Vasec and the Dancer appear in the carol; and yet, they do not really belong. They are at a stage of awareness that is half-way between those who really exist and those others in uniforms who never really understand. Those with the special gift of perception are joyous as the snow grows upwards from the earth; they can feel a quiet light filtering through them. There are five of them.

One of them is Fifi, "the eastern star", a virgin-mother-womb figure. She is the centre of the Nativity scene, which is delineated in a Milleresque, sexual quasi-mystical language. Fifi is the first of Durrell's earth-mothers: innocent, enveloping, surreal. She is warm snow, bovine virgin, holly and mistletoe. She is the "children saying prayers over empty stockings" (260). She is the prototype of Hilda in The Black Book.

Another of the initiates we have met before.⁵¹ He is the little one, Hamlet, "who knows quite well what he is doing. He is natural" (261). Hamlet lives with a wife who is not in touch with the spiritual dimension he inhabits. He tries several times to bridge the gap between them, but then one day he vanishes: into the world of tomorrow. His wife does not know where he is nor how to set about getting to him. She belongs

⁵¹See pp. 11-13 above.

to the life outside; he to the life inside. And Vasec is in between, watching the drama, feeling it but only understanding it in part. Vasec like the Dancer, is after all only part of the chorus, who apprehend the ritual, but do not take an active part in it. They are, in different terms, the disciples: those who watch and those who wait.

Pieter, on the other hand, is prepared to cross the Jordan River. He is one of those who are not puzzled by the mystical nature of the journey; and, therefore, when the snow piles up, he can keep a firm hold on his sense of laughter and joy. And yet the singer is not quite so sure of Pieter. He is not certain that Pieter is "one of us, or whether he too is included from courtesy. Not a disciple, because he believes he knows everything already. No one can teach him anything" (261).

The singer is the lyricist: the inevitable conjurer, the heraldic messenger "with many languages on the tip of my tongue, ready for emergency" (268). He is the prototype of a long string of Durrelian masks: Herbert Gregory, Lawrence Lucifer, L. G. Darley, and Ludwig Pursewarden. His message is: There are five of us left to create the world--would you say the real world? -- but they will not listen to us" (263). He is the magic man. And yet he knows that there are limitations to his magic, for there is an inevitable discrepancy between his gift for language-spinning and the heraldic experience itself.

When you are afraid of something, or want to hate it, you give it a name out of the alphabet. Then you can let it into the house and it will not hurt you.

It is covered in a name, and you do not see it properly, you only see the little black letters. (261)

Yet he has to set it down until such time as this experience can be attained by pure apprehension. At such time:

I [shall] sit all day with my hands pushed aside, useless It is what occurs in the inside spirits, where the great beings make their territory and the words cannot touch them. (266)

Only the initiates know that this territory is one of explosion and high tension, as is the cataclysmic eruption for example in Yeat's "Leda and the Swan", and that this is the only path to a renewed world.

In the meantime, the singer must record it as he sees it from his lighthouse:

When I speak, the words torment doctors, because there is no vocabulary, no glossary in the tongue I am using. It is a magnificent experiment, but I am lonely. (271)

This loneliness is magnified at the end of his song, when all the others disappear, dissolve as though they had become part of a vision. Only he remains to wonder whether in fact he has seen them or whether they are merely emanations of himself. And then he seems to separate into two: the ego or protagonist of the carol, and the id which departs with the others.

While Durrell is engaged in this highly imaginative exercise, he also publishes a popular romance in 1937. A

brief look at Panic Spring⁵², published under the pseudonym of Charles Norden, will show by contrast the kind of work Durrell is doing on the side to maintain, as he puts it, his contact with the world of man. He, thereupon, turns from the Miller rampaging prose style of the Hamlet letters, of Zero and of Asylum in the Snow, to this orderly almost static piece à la Huxley. Panic Spring is a descriptive romance depending in large measure upon discussion between the characters who

⁵²Panic Spring is not Durrell's first novel. His first is Pied Piper of Lovers, 1935, which is now become a rare item. I was fortunate to get a copy, courtesy of Cassell's London. Pied Piper of Lovers is a cathartic exercise by the young Durrell, in which he recalls early incidents from his childhood days in India, and other less happy days in school in London, before he rejects the middle-class life that his father had cut out for him, and turns to a self-styled life of wanderer-writer. This novel, like his later poem "Cities, Plains, and People" (see pp. 67 ff.) is a frankly autobiographical piece. What the young Walsh finds in London is a penniless existence, a group of aimless would-be writers and artists, and endless loneliness. But he gradually achieves maturity in his understanding of people. He also meets by accident in a restaurant, his childhood sweetheart, Ruth, now suffering from a serious heart condition. She is apparently to die in the same poignant manner as do her later counterparts Gracie and Melissa. The novel has some good patches of writing bearing the Durrell stamp of verbal dynamism. But it suffers from sections of adolescent incoherence, sentimentality, and drawn-out descriptions. So far in his work, Durrell has not envisaged his heraldic universe, and his dissatisfaction with clock time as a measure for human activity is still undefined. Walsh, for example, writes his one-time school pal: "I think sculpture is the medium in which to express. Space against Time curves and stresses, structures and dimensions. How in hell can I express the volume of things by daubing ink on paper? In the future I'll send you deformed lumps of clay, each representing a letter. So abstract and so satisfying". Pied Piper of Lovers, (London: Cassell, 1935), p. 369. So far, Durrell is dissatisfied with the concept of linear time in the novel, but he has not resorted to an alternative for it.

love to luxuriate in smart talk while lying indolently in the sun. But this is the popular mode of the novels written in the twenties and thirties, and Durrell presumably uses the formula for the purpose of a quick sale. At any rate, he never pretends it is anything but a cheap romance. In The Writers At Work series of 1963, he admits that it is dreadful, because it is an "anthology ... five pages of Huxley, three of Aldington, two pages of Robert Graves, and so on -- in fact all the writers I admire. But they didn't influence me. I pinched the effects, I was learning the game."⁵³

Panic Spring suggests a popular Huxley formula for the novel. A group of discordant, shifty characters is fortuitously thrown together in some outlandish place, and while they exchange opinions on love, art, politics and sex, the author has a chance to make short, elegant character sketches of each of them. This is what happens in this novel.

A young school-teacher, Christian Marlowe, is delayed at the Hôtel Superbo in Brindisi waiting for a chance to proceed to Greece where the revolution is in full sway. With him are a group of English tourists: middle-aged ladies on a pleasure cruise, devout missionaries presumably dedicated to the service of mankind, Anglo-Indian planters motivated by less altruistic goals, and of course the avowed drifters evading social boredom. Marlowe has just fled London: "London, thou

⁵³Writers at Work . Second Series. Introduction by Van Wyck Brooks, (New York: Viking, 1963), p. 274.

art of townes, A Per Se",⁵⁴ in order to confront his own "special daemon" (14). In a letter home to his colleague, Latimer, Marlowe explains his dilemma:

For some time past I felt the atmosphere tightening. It was harder to breathe. There was a weight pressing my brain. Then snap, and I exploded. I'm still numb from the shock. Where am I going? I don't know. Why? I can't clearly say. For how long? At the moment I feel for ever. (21)

Lawrence Lucifer of The Black Book is to undergo a similar rejection of his past.⁵⁵

At Brindisi, Marlowe finds himself in a transitional state between the life of "not-being" -- in which teaching and death are compatible forms⁵⁶ -- and a new life, the nature of which is not yet clear to him. This new life starts unexpectedly when he is offered a midnight-trip to the island, Mavrodaphne, by a mysterious Greek boatman, Christ (for Christos Kasapikos), with the Pan-like feet. Marlowe, then, goes to Mavrodaphne in a death-like journey; and the island itself becomes for him a place in limbo where he can solve his own private riddle.

On the island, he finds a group of fellow exiles. There is Gordon, the one most sympathetically treated by the author; he is content to discard the past totally, and settle into the non-directed present wholeheartedly. He explains to

⁵⁴Panic Spring. By Charles Norden. (New York: Covici, 1937).

⁵⁵See pp. 48 and 49 below.

⁵⁶Panic Spring, p. 17.

Marlowe that what he finds most appealing is the "splendid unreason that characterizes the island" (58). Walsh is the would-be poet; Francis, the only woman in the group, is a self-taught painter, who attracts both Marlowe and Walsh. There is the humorous Fonvasin, a make-shift doctor, and two mindless monks: "The two skeletons in Christ" (196).

At the center of the picture is the Greek owner of the island, Rumanades. Although he has started as a humble trader in currants, he is now Greece's foremost financier. Mavrodaphne is his wedding present to the Spanish girl he had bought and married. But Manuela refuses to be added to his possessions, and she walks out on him. "You bought me like a mare and like a mare I have broken stable" is the note he finds on her disappearance (100). Now his lonely life is only occasionally relieved by the visitors to the island.

The group slowly becomes involved in the life of the island, with its superstitions, its folk-tales, and its rituals. The annual ritual of fireworks involves a church-procession in honour of a patron saint, and Rumanades has tacked on to it the fireworks as a tourist attraction. Another ritual takes place at the Jump at the centre of the island overlooking the swirling waters between the two crags below. A ritual was formerly used to attest to the guilt or innocence of the accused. The story goes that a Greek lover Theseus had taken the leap off the Jump to win the hand of his beloved from her reluctant father, and that he emerged

triumphantly from the waters only to die of a chill on his wedding night. The villagers believe Rumanades to be the author of the story. This re-enacted Theseus theme forms the focal interest of the novel, for the panic spring into the unknown is still part of the island's tradition, and it tests man's ability to emerge from the trial victorious or be irrevocably defeated. The test is symbolic of the psychological pilgrimage of the spiritual exiles. Each one of them has taken a trip into a timeless dimension -- in the sense that the passage of days is unnoticed -- which is also a place in limbo, since the locale does not necessitate meaningful social participation. Each is living the past-present-future all in one.

Marlowe is tirelessly going through a religious exercise: he, in fact, hopes to amalgamate his life and thought into "The Portentous Pattern" of Quietism: that is, grace through contemplation, and wisdom through passiveness (100). A welcome humorous note, in contrast with all this soul-searching, occurs in "The Mummy" episode narrated by the incorrigible Doctor Fonvasin, who tells an incredible tale about how he once practised mummification. The two monks provide yet another quixotic tale. Both incidents form the gothic ambience traditional in a romance, which in this case explodes with the unexpected death of Rumanades in the storm: a kind of willful suicide. But the villagers believe that the storm is the gods' specific sign foreshadowing death on the island.

Death introduces reality for a short span on the island. Francis and Walsh reassess their individual futures and decide that it is time to return to England. One of the monks dies. Fonvasin is quite contented to live an imaginary past, but now he has to leave the island with the rest of the visitors. Gordon quietly packs and leaves for Italy, another self-imposed place of exile. Marlowe, in a sudden furious spurt of energy, wraps the whole experience up into a pattern of Quietism. As in the later Cefalû, the novel ends on a note of discovery of an inner reality which strengthens some and proves to be the end of others.

Panic Spring is obviously a put-up job. It is nothing but a series of character sketches, with occasional ventures into ritual and re-enacted myth, and sprinkled with drinking-parties and superficial banter. It is tenuously held together, if at all, by the central symbol of the Jump, and its implication for the various characters in the story. The novel is to some extent a study in timelessness, and how this condition affects each of those involved in a search for a reality, or, in some cases, an identity. This is the effect it has on Marlowe:

If time had ceased to exist, then there could be no measure put against his playing; indeed, to complete the circle of paradox, there was no future when the present was so full: of the fruits ripening, of the peasants singing rich and melodious with plenty, of the children being born, men dying. No, there was no future, as there was no past. (297)

At this stage, Durrell's quest for an imaginative life out of

time is still influenced by the mysticism of the later Aldous Huxley: timelessness does not at this point entail a complex theory of a space-time hybrid. It is merely a wishful state in which chronological time is evaded, and place does not matter since it is irrelevant. Timelessness, far from being a new way of seeing life and experience within it, is a form of escape from social responsibility, and the mind is free to wander without conforming to a socially predetermined pattern of existence. A waiting-game: "the limbo idea" (301). A poem of the same period embodies this idea:

All you who know desire in these seas
 Have souls or equipment for loneliness
 Lean now like fruitage. The Hesperides
 Open. This is the limbo, the doldrum,
 Seal down the eye of your cyclops,
 Silence Time's drum.⁵⁷

Jordan regards this condition as a state of "Heroic reality",⁵⁸ because it is sufficient unto itself. Marlowe, as is to be expected, sees in it the embodiment of a philosophy of life based upon a "policy of inaction" (309). But he is disconcerted to find that "Time, when they least expected it, had decided to set a very definite turn to their activities" (311). Death, Rumanades's death, is the other side of time as staunchless flow. When the initial panic following the death of Rumanades is ended, life on the island resumes its ritualistic flavour. The mourners come from all over

⁵⁷"Summer in Corfu." In A Private Country, (London: Faber, 1943), p. 13.

⁵⁸Panic Spring, p. 303.

Greece, and they sit around in the arbours sipping wine and waiting for the mimetic dance to begin:

The women, red, blue, saffron, yellow, mustard, cinnamon, magenta, walked about under a forest of candles as thick as a man's arm, each going up to the right-hand nook by the altar to kiss the case in which the rib of the patron saint was locked, before moving across the line of frescoes to gaze upon the dead face of Rumanades, and leave their offering of fruit, flowers, or vegetables with the remaining Leucothean monk. (363)

A pattern of life-in-death is the way things are on the island. The villagers only know the here and now.⁵⁹ And yet this is not entirely true of the visitors. Walsh, for example, realizes that this state of suspension is not totally real. He admits ruefully that he is one of the "last romantics between two worlds. Our emotions aren't our own any longer. We're shirkers."⁶⁰ He, therefore, retraces his steps to the only reality left him, back home.

Meanwhile, the body of the Odysseus-like Rumanades is borne on the boat "in the keen air of morning to Ithaca" (372). His quest ended, all other quests are forced to come to an end, or, at least to begin a new cycle of experience.

In a 1959 interview with Kenneth Young, Durrell brushes aside his work prior to The Black Book as "hardly worth the investigation".⁶¹ His reluctance to discuss this

⁵⁹ Compare Durrell's later treatment of the same theme on p.51 below.

⁶⁰ Panic Spring. p. 368

⁶¹ Kenneth Young, "A Dialogue with Durrell", Encounter, XIII, (December, 1959), 67.

particular piece of juvenility is understandable, and yet Panic Spring is of interest to the student of Durrell's later work. In it, Durrell, perhaps inadvertently, shows interest in sidetracking chronology to explore a new dimension which so far is a place in limbo. When he gets to The Black Book, Durrell treats the same subject in a much more coherent form, and in 1945 he writes a letter to Henry Miller⁶² explaining further developments along the same line of thought. His rejection of the English mode of life is seen in his novel as a fascination with the motif of the journey: again a theme to reappear in the later novels. And finally, but just as importantly, the novel is drenched in the spirit of place, a theme of abiding interest to the author. He explores it in his travel books: Prospero's Cell, 1945, in Reflections on a Marine Venus, 1953, and once again in his recent publication, The Spirit of Place, 1969.

In Panic Spring, Mavrodaphne is dedicated to the sea and sun, but also to the spirit of Pan. The mysterious boatman Christo has Pan like feet. The title suggests that the incidents of the novel take place during a panic spring that leads into summer; and the setting is a pastoral idyll. Durrell is never to abandon this interest in the theme which he makes the central meaning of the poem "Deus Loci", 1945. He regards this poem of sufficient importance to make it the last

⁶²Wickes, p. 202-203.

in more than one anthology of his poetry.

Panic Spring does not fit into the mainstream of Durrell's creative writing. Like the earlier The Pied Piper of Lovers, and the later Cefalû, it is of complementary interest to the main creative output starting with the heraldic short pieces of the thirties to The Black Book, to The Alexandria Quartet and Tunc-Nunquam. It rounds up this early experimental period of Durrell, a period in which his ideas and his technique take shape. As early as the thirties, Durrell is interested in the nature of time and in its implications for the visionary. And he is trying his ideas out in a groping, unfinished style. Thereafter, he discovers his own voice, or his own way of saying things, and he erases the remaining marks of his literary models: Henry Miller, Aldous Huxley, D. H. Lawrence, and T. S. Eliot.

The turning point is The Black Book.

CHAPTER II
BOY IN AN ARK

With me I carry this little toy ark, with its little toy animals We are lit up in the signs of the new chaos.¹

The question has been decided. Art must no longer exist to depict man, but to invoke God. It is on the face of this chaos that I brood.²

In Corfu, in 1936, Durrell sets out on a spiritual journey which materializes on paper as The Black Book: his first real novel, in the sense that The Pied Piper of Lovers and Panic Spring are not. The Black Book is the culmination of an imaginative struggle in which Durrell has been engaged since his earlier heraldic writings examined in the last chapter. Lawrence Lucifer, the protagonist of this book, undertakes a compulsive journey into his past in which he relives his life in a cheap London hotel, the Regina: "a baroque incubus" (14). He reveals the nature of the kind of death that has become a modus vivendi of a group of debauchees. He sees himself as a little boy in an ark brooding on the face of imaginative chaos, and with him are his toy animals, the characters at the hotel. He carefully sets

¹Lawrence Durrell, The Black Book, (New York: Giant Cardinal, 1959), p. 222.

²Ibid., p. 222.

them out into a pattern to enact the charade of death which he has "almost shared" (210). This little ritual is his way of exorcising the little death, before he can begin to celebrate life as a man and creative writer.

The metaphoric apparatus Lucifer uses is already familiar to us from the previous works of Lawrence Durrell. For instance, one of the main themes of his novel is that of infinite regression, a kind of back-to-the-womb allegory which is portrayed in Lawrence Lucifer's obsessive dream of himself as Jonah and Hilda as the whale. This is a theme we have already come across in both Zero and Asylum in the Snow. Again the season is the same: winter. In The Black Book the snow is incessant. Both winter and the snow are appropriate images for the state of spiritual atrophy that is the subject of this elegy on the individual and collective funerals enacted at the Regina. But snow is also the backdrop for Lucifer's heraldic visions; for him, as for initiates in his visionary world, it carries the hope of rebirth. This treatment of snow is similar to that of Asylum although in the latter the positive qualities are more focal to the prose piece than they are here³. In the novel, there is portrayed the struggle between inner and outer realities: the Hamlet-Ophelia conundrum we have met in Asylum as the conflict between the "little one" and his wife. Here it takes the form of the pathetic Herbert-Grace dilemma. And there is also the per-

³See p. 23 above.

vading obsession with the death of time as chronology.

In The Black Book, the time of clocks has come to a standstill; the cobweb of decay is hanging motionless in space. There is only the "living limbo" of experience (37). Lawrence Lucifer muses: "The museum clock is scourged by raindrops: it dies, like a pale face on the stalk of a tower and reminds me of the death of time" (37). This stifling sense of existing in space alone is symbolized in the map of South London that Lobo is forever drawing, but which he is never to finish. And as Lucifer sets his thoughts down on paper, he knows that for him time has ceased to matter:

I live only in the imagination which is timeless.
Therefore the location of this world which I am
trying to hammer out for you on the blunt typewriter,
over the Ionian, is the location of space merely.
I can only fix it with any certainty on the map. (38)

The only language to approximate, not entirely depict, this lonely journey is the language of ideograms expressed in the gnomonic aorist. The aorist is particularly appropriate here, since it is an indefinite tense. In Greek, it is a past tense expressing an action without indicating whether this action is completed, continued, or repeated. In this sense, it approximates most closely what Lucifer refers to as "a new spatial language" which he hopes will do partial justice to loneliness⁴. The world that Lawrence describes here is different from that to be depicted later by his parallel, L.G.

⁴Ibid., p. 155. "There is no language, not even the new spatial language which can do justice to loneliness."

Darley in The Quartet . Lucifer's world is supposedly "timeless", not a space-time continuum with intercalated realities. He is so involved in his own death mime, that other people's ancillary realities do not figure much in the picture. The exception is the interlinear of Herbert Gregory. But then Gregory's diary plays the part of the id to Lucifer's ego-game, and helps him make a substantially different decision at the end from that of Gregory. The latter realizes that the pursuit of his own heraldic reality is an exercise he cannot maintain for any period of time, so he kills himself, or at least this is what he says he will do when he disappears. Lawrence Lucifer says at the end of his account that he will go on to a creative career innately different from the life of emotional sterility he has hitherto been leading.

Lawrence Lucifer, like Lawrence Durrell, is writing his *Agon* from an island on the Ionian. When he makes certain pronouncements on the nature or goals of creative writing, particularly the writing he is engaged in at the moment, it is reasonable to assume that he is also speaking for his author. One such remark in the novel is particularly relevant:

The truth is that I am writing my first book. It is difficult, because everything must be included: a kind of spiritual itinerary, which will establish the novel once and for all as a mode which is already past its senium. I tell myself continually that this must be something without beginning, something which will never end, but conclude only when it has reached its own genesis again: very well, a piece of literary perpetual motion, balanced on a hair, maintaining its precarious equilibrium between life and heraldry. (47)

In fact, The Black Book is delicately balanced between life and heraldry: the death-charade at the Regina Hotel and the surrealistic, snow-infused hallucinations of Lawrence Lucifer; between the metaphor of the little boy in an ark on a black rock and that of Jonah's trip in the whale (222). Lucifer continuously turns from his macabre existence to take an imaginative journey in a car racing down snow-bound roads to the "you" of the novel, perhaps Durrell's wife whom he addresses at the end of his Agon (218), or a symbolic mother-womb-whale fantasy, or an enveloping life-force he will reach eventually after his journey is terminated, or a combination of all of these. He occasionally identifies her with Hilda, as in this passage:

For the purposes of simplification, let me be known as a Jonah. With Hilda as the Whale, there are the implications in the Bible story which have been altogether ignored until now. (153)

He plays two imaginative roles: the little boy in the ark, and Jonah in the whale; but he soon realizes that when his quest for identity is over he will emerge from the confining imaginative cocoon he has woven around himself.

His regressive sexual obsession is the other side of the coin of sexual atrophy around him. All the characters at the Hotel are unconscious types of sterility. They are the masks of death. Their world is a world of inaction, of dissociation, of noninvolvement. For Lucifer, then, sexual fantasy becomes an act of imaginative recreation. Sex in the Regina Hotel -- and there is no evidence anywhere of any other

human emotion -- is merely a narcissistic stumbling into a greater and more bewildering darkness; a look at self in the mirror; an obsessive gazing into the image in the water. And Lucifer thinks that if this doom is to be avoided, there must be an alternative which he envisages as the recreative, timeless experience epitomized in his heraldic visions of the new nativity in the snow.

On a winter's morning in Corfu, Lawrence Lucifer begins his first book. He finds an appropriate correspondence between the present winter numbness and the past wintry death he is invoking, a death "whose meaning is symbolic, mythical, but real also in its symptom" (2). In the present winter of his discontent, his mimes are still with him: Tarquin, Clare, Peres, Chamberlain, Gregory, Grace, Peters, Hilda, all shadowy grotesque figures to enact his macabre pantomimic dance. This is not to say that the past is only part of memory: it is very much part of the present; in fact, this winter morning is the winter morning of his elegiac existence at the Regina. The snow that blew then is still blowing now.

As always the weather I am continually referring back to is spiritual. Winter is more than an almanac: it is dug in invisibly under the fingernails, in the teeth-- into everything that is deciduous, calcine. Winter, as the figures produced by the shadow of the retinal blood vessels on an empty wall. I tell you it is part of the spiritual adventure, like our meeting in the snow, and the great arterials stretching away to god like a psalm; and you, gathered in the snow, a soft cave of flesh. That is why I am marking down these items in the log of that universal death, the English death, which I have escaped. It is lonely work. (83)

Gradually, he arranges his figures on the chess-board. Tarquin, the homosexual, emerges as the clearest representation of death: he is irrevocably drowned in the miasma of self. The single object of his adoration is the gigolo Clare, a lazy, evasive person: a combination of Vasec and the Dancer of Asylum in the Snow. A diary is the only reminder of the previous occupant of Lucifer's room: the Death Gregory of the green fable. Through his diary, we are introduced to some of the other characters still living at the Hotel: there is the Spaniard Lobo, a fantastic whose giant obsession is to prove his ability to triumph over the female. Next door to him is poor Miss Venable, the shadowy female who is struggling with insomnia, detective novels, ovaltine and tea-cups. The Chamberlains, who at first appear to be the most balanced of the motley crew, emerge as a failed D. H. Lawrence couple: all for wholeness and sexual fulfilment, but in fact the most efficient self-deceivers of the group.

Gregory's diary is an interrupted Hamlet-like soliloquy. He writes it from a silence so heavy that he has the sensation of wading through it. Like Lucifer, Gregory is haunted by the geometrical insanity of day followed by night followed by day. Like him he writes in the gnomic aorist, particularly when he conjures up the image of Grace, a consumptive nineteen year-old whom he has brought off the streets for a promise of a cup of coffee. She is, for him, the female wonder-worker, at least at first; but gradually

she becomes the rouged death-mask, the vulgar cockney who plays at grand dâme with the supposedly romantic Clare. And yet, Gregory finds her irreplaceable: for he can be himself with her without the threat of being understood.

The gnomic aorist successfully relays her poignancy:

Gracie was my fate: IS dead. A sort of mirage, this word I cannot grasp. A tinsel moon on a garish back-cloth. A circle of blackness which blots out all new horizons. A rent on the clean daylight of her yellow, peaky, little face. O. K. But if one were to start a quibble about temporal realities would the present tense justify itself? Is she behind me sitting in the chair, coughing over the latest Film Paper? I do not turn round, because I know at once that she is. In bed, worn out, languorous, aching with pleasure between the starched sheets? Yes. But only when I am on that borderline of the realities when every abstraction has solidity, weight, volume. I can lift desire in my fingers like the small bud of the breast. I can see it, feel it. It enters my experience like a calamity. (55)

But all the while he makes her pay cruelly for his own shortcomings. Grace, like Ophelia, dies without gaining any insight into the real nature of the man behind the mask.

Gregory's diary intercalates with, and supplements, the real and imaginary voyages of Lucifer. Lucifer's life shifts from the infinite boredom of his role as the silent, suffering companion to Tarquin, to his own nightly journeys in the snow with Hilda. Tarquin's tragedy is that he can feel nothing, and Hilda's that she can feel too much. Whereas Tarquin is the walking image of death, Hilda is the "virgin prostitute of the fable."⁵ When Lucifer cannot face his

⁵p. 52. Tarquin's parallel in Durrell's poetry of the period is Unkebunke at whose tomb the poet writes this

room with its dead books, stale sheets of poems, littered drawers, and haunting silence, he goes to Tarquin's room for a spell of mutual condolence and misery. Tarquin is the unsuccessful writer, and yet he self-indulgently engages in recording his interminable history. His ideas on creativity are mere reflections of his own dissipated image; and, therefore, for him the artist is a sick man, and art a disease. When Lucifer finds this channel of escape too arid, he resorts to Hilda. She is ignorant and blundering, but her big heart thaws at the least thing. And he has come to rely on her as an invalid. She is his anodyne.

Like the fool in the tarot, the crazy joker of the pack, I wander through the events of the way. The imbecile hangs on the mercy of time like a lily on the river. I have no being, strictly, except when I enter that musty room, frosted softly at night, where Hilda the giant cauliflower of my dreams, moves about her tasks. Between the artist I, and Hilda the prostitute, there is an immediate correspondence. We recognize and respect each other, as pariahs do. We love each other, but we do not understand each other. Nevertheless we have made a truce. (78)

And all the while, time for him is the awareness of constantly running downhill into the snow towards Christmas, the

soliloquy:

Deliver us from evil.
 Deliver us from the trauma of death's pupil,
 From the forked tongue of the devil,
 Deliver us from the vicar's bubonic purple,
 From the canine hysteria, the lethal smile,
 O deliver us from the botanical sleep,
 The canonical sugar, the rabbinical pose,
 Deliver us from death's terrific pinnacle,
 Biological silence, a clinical sleep.

From A Private Country, (London: Faber, 1943), p. 44.

season of rebirth⁶.

Book Two deals with a different group of spiritual cripples. The environment is Honneywoods, a school where Lucifer teaches and a reminder of the one that has previously stifled Marlowe. Here the staleness of the social system is more elaborately ridiculed in the characters: in Marney, the gigantically egoistic Jewish hunchback; in Eustace, the blond immaculately-dressed and supposedly sunny-tempered type; in the prudish teacher of English; in Madame About, the French teacher "celebrating an eternal spring, though the leaves are falling" (98), and in Peters, forever discussing his own genius: "one must be a man of the world... like Eliot, don't you think?" (101). At the centre of the picture is the negro student, Miss Smith; she stands for a flora and fauna completely foreign to Honneywoods. Lucifer sees her as belonging to a world of pure image: she sits at the centre of a laughing universe. Her laughter is "pure Zanzibar, tiger tiger burning bright, monkeys, pagodas" (103). And when she reads Skelton, her voice evokes for him a world of pure sensation:

Dimly, I feel the slow corrupt delirium of rebirth.
Am fed. Dazzling, in the flesh of this last moment's
reason. I question myself eagerly. Is this amusia,
alexia, abulia? It is life.⁷

⁶"All day my own movements struggle towards the darkness. Immense massive manoeuvres against time... I am alive only in the soft glitter of snow." p. 142.

⁷P. 107. Compare footnote 42 on p. 20 above.

The characters that Lucifer invokes are presented in the gnomic aorist, the only tense that can approximate to the feeling he has of all time existing in every moment of time. Seasonal change, particularly apparent in Book Two, is reminiscent of that in The Waste Land: both do not merely denote the cyclical passage of time, but are also symbolic spiritual states of man.

The incidents related in Book Two do not follow a chronological pattern; neither do they follow logically from those of the first Book. This is a consciously controlled device of presentation as Lucifer informs us:

I am in such a hurry to finish the job that I blurt out the end before the beginning. It is going through me at such a pace that I cannot distinguish the various flavours of the incident, in their chronological order. (I am a liar. It is artifice which dictates this form to me). (59)

Included in this artifice is the hypothesis that for the writer there is no forgetfulness, and no memory: there is only the periodicity of the time of writing.⁸

Book Two is sometimes heavy-handed, especially when Lucifer, or Durrell, tries to explain the thematic progression of his writing. In one such instance, Durrell speaks in his own identity addressing Alan G. Thomas -- a personal friend and a dedicated collector of his work -- in a pompous valediction in which Alan is the reminder for Durrell of all that

⁸"On the mantelpiece is a clock. The hands stand to quarter-past six, and it is striking twelve. By these tokens I know that it is exactly ten past ten." p. 98

England stands for:

the masques, the viols, the swans, the mists, the doom,
the fogs: you were offering me medieval death in which
I would live forever, stifled in the pollen of bre-
varies, noctuaries, bestiaries: split silk and tumbrils,
aesthetic horses and ruined Abbeys. (115)

This is the part of England Durrell wants to kill in order to
revive again, and "if I succeed, and I will succeed, then I
shall become, in a sense, the first Englishman," and he signs
it: "Affectionately Yours, Hamlet's godchild." (116)

The shrillness can be written off as an adolescent
hang-up. However, Miller's reaction to it is to seriously
proclaim Durrell as the first Englishman⁹ and to praise him
highly for his visionary and linguistic skills. T. S. Eliot
at first refuses to publish the excerpt from the novel¹⁰ --
that Miller gets published as "Ego" in Seven in the summer
of 1938 -- but he capitulates when he sees the novel as a
whole, and declares it: "the first piece of work by a new
English writer to give me hope for the future of prose
fiction."¹¹ He may have recognized in Durrell's No Man's
Land echoes of his own arid Waste Land. At any rate, it
is not purely coincidental that both lands suggest states
of being in which the healing mythologies are so etherized

⁹George Wickes, Lawrence Durrell and Henry Miller:
A Private Correspondence, (New York: Dutton, 1963), p. 72.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 137.

¹¹See the cover of the Pocket-Book: Cardinal Edition
of The Black Book.

that they float away before they can provide man with the curative effect. Furthermore, as Lucifer puts it: "It is not only a question of going back to the myth. The myth will come back to us."¹²

And how is the new myth to return?

This is a question that Lucifer can only answer tentatively. Myth, he feels, can be recreated by means of a regenerative process to be attained through an annihilation of the old self. He believes that heraldry involves a two-fold development: first, the discovery of the nature of one's own inner landscape, and second, through the transcendence of this knowledge into apocalyptic vision¹³. This is the discovery of The Black Book. At this point in the development of the young Durrell, the discovery occurs through sexual experiences:

Heraldic? Time shut off...Gently your body rises out and hangs above the lacquered river: an image not sponged out, or carried downstream among the Ophelias. They say we love only our own reflection in the faces of others, like cattle drinking from their own faces in the river. The heraldic Narcissus in your face has learned something at last. The true meaning of charity is knowledge. (143)

This kind of preoccupation with the nature of the inner self leads Durrell later to a study of, and a life-long admiration for, the works of George Groddeck. In the meantime, Lucifer

¹²Ibid., p. 131.

¹³The second theme is explored further in The Dark Labyrinth, (London: Faber, 1947), and The Alexandria Quartet, (London: Faber, 1957-62).

has an intuitive insight into the mechanism of the psyche, at least his own.

A few of the other characters make various discoveries, but these are of a different order of reality. Tarquin, for instance. He finally realizes that he is a homosexual. But he gains no particular insight into the nature of the death that is his way of life. Chamberlain is told that his wife has been unfaithful to him. For a while, it seems as though he is finally going to tear off the mask he has been wearing as his own identity; but instead, he retreats into a suburban haven with wife, child-to-be, and all the dullness of a middle-class routine. His withdrawal from reality is in direct contrast to the protagonist's commitment to a life of imaginative creativity. The second Book ends with a description of one of Lucifer's persistent visions of himself in the snow as Jonah in the whale, a feeling he characterizes as:

The dead full weight of being, of IS! This must be the end. I am waiting forever in space. It is time that kills one. Space is more durable than logic can suggest. (156)

Book Three is a giant Dance of Death. First occurs the death of the "inner" Gregory, which he charts in his diary. Although he is aware of the level of existence equivalent to Miller's China, or to Durrell's Tibet, he finds he cannot sustain it on his own. He is choked with self-hatred: a form of self-inflicted revenge for his inability to love Grace even on her death-bed. When she dies, he is thrown back upon his colossal egoism:

Love me, I whispered, love me and take me from myself. I do not want the gift of freedom--it has become a prison. At night the sea beats like a hammer against my temples. The lights of the cars wheeled across my bedroom walls. I had become an inhabitant of a private pandemonium. (156)

What is left him now is his green diary, green for "cancerous, nitric" (176), "the real green gangrene" (187). He is Lycidas dying before his prime; and his world is dying because he is dying of brain haemorrhage. His soliloquy -- to be or not to be -- has gone on too long, and he is now determined to end it in the negative. He signs his diary off with this decision; his diary which, he says, is "the record and testament of a death within life: a life in death" (191).

Gregory, having reached the first level of the heraldic life, is unable to go on to the second one. Lawrence Lucifer realizes this, and decides to choose differently. His grand finale is like that of the singer in Asylum in the Snow: he reflects upon each of the individuals taking part in the performance. He defines Chamberlain's disease as that of the dog collar; he has respect for Gregory, but realizes that he does not have the stamina to go further; Hilda has lost both ovaries to cancer; Tarquin molds away into a senility of his own. In fact, Lucifer's world too is disintegrating:

I have seen more than ever the modern disease
looming in the world outside this sea, rock, water;
the terrible disintegration of action under the
hideous pressure of the ideal; the disease of a
world every day more accurately portrayed by Hamlet. (209)

What he sees about him is the death of the vital centres; he

sees anonymity; faces of puppets; a million miles of boredom. Like his predecessor of Asylum in the Snow, he finds out that in the theatre he has just presented:

...it is all or nothing. Oneself is the hero, the clown, the chorus; there are no extras, and no doubles to accept the dangers. But more terrible still, in the incessant whine of the chorale, the words, words, words spraying from the stiff mouth of the masks, one becomes at last aware of the identity of the audience. It is my own face in its incessant reduplications which blazes back at me from the stone amphitheatre. (196)

And how will it all end for him?

The answer lies in a physical, and possibly a metaphoric journey, which will lead him to the "you" of the novel: an affirmative life-force (213). For Gregory's entreaty: "Pity me, I was born dead" (164), he substitutes his own modified: "Pity me, I was born old" (219). Now he is prepared to emerge as the writer of the new mythology.

What we have here is a process of transformation, a kind of metamorphosis. Lucifer has died out completely in order to emerge onto a new plane of reality: the Dionysian theme of death and rebirth. This theme reappears often in Durrell's subsequent works: in The Dark Labryinth¹⁴, in The Quartet, 1958-1962¹⁵, and it takes up a considerable portion of The Key to Modern Poetry, 1952. In 1960, Durrell, still preoccupied with the theme of human adjustment to the reality of death, writes an article entitled: "I wish one

¹⁴See p. 71 below.

¹⁵See p. 220 below.

could be more like the birds: to sing unfalteringly at peace,"¹⁶ where he attributes all human unrest and anxiety to the fear of the mystery of death. Because of this fear, man has insulated himself from life, so that he cannot begin to enjoy life unless he can learn to situate death in the present, thus ridding himself of his subconscious, paralyzing fears. In other words, the only solution for man lies in an imaginative catharsis, that is an imaginative experience of death. If man can imagine that the worst has taken place let us say in an atomic holocaust, then he is bound to emerge from the experience strengthened and surprised to find out how good life is.

This imaginative immersion into the destructive element is the subject of The Black Book, and it is not difficult to see in it an autobiographical relevance. Durrell has always had a deep attachment for this novel, ever since in December, 1936, when he tells Henry Miller: "I'm in love with it,"¹⁷ up to the sixties, when in a more subdued tone he tells his interviewer that it is significant "only in the sense that it is important for my evolution ... my inside evolution."¹⁸ Although he discovers here how to tell

¹⁶Réalités, (November, 1960), No. 120, pp. 56,59,78.

¹⁷Wickes, p. 35.

¹⁸Writers at Work, Second Series, (New York: Viking Press, 1963), p. 269.

it the way it is, yet the novel still betrays traces of his literary models, including D. H. Lawrence, Aldous Huxley, Henry Miller, and T. S. Eliot. Lawrence's unremitting search for the whole man and for sexual fulfilment is gently satirized in the Chamberlains; T. S. Eliot's Waste Land is rendered anew in No Man's Land, and Eliot's style echoes in a passage like the following describing Tarquin "pinned to a slab of rufus cork, etherized like a butterfly."¹⁹ There is also the self-conscious linguistic virtuosity of Huxley, as well as this writer's trick of emotional aloofness played by Herbert Gregory²⁰. And more obviously, there is the Milleresque quasi-mystical passages dealing with sex, and so loudly applauded by the older writer²¹. It takes Durrell another novel, Cefalû, and a few more years of writing, before he is able to do without these borrowings.

In the meantime, The Black Book has left him completely wrung out. In fact he writes Miller that he plans to take a monastic summer: no more books, no more writers, no more anything except being. Once again, Durrell is evading his destiny: "A GOOD STEADY JOB WITH A LITTLE HOUSE LOTS OF CHILDREN A LAWN MOWER A BANK ACCOUNT A LITTLE CAR AND THE RESPECT OF THE MAN NEXT DOOR."²²

¹⁹The Black Book, p. 4.

²⁰Ibid., p. 30.

²¹Wickes, p. 79.

²²Ibid., p. 82.

The novel has uncovered for him new roles to play:

I tried to say what I was, but of course with my talent for covering myself in confetti made out a hell of an epic. I wanted to write myself miserable and wormy and frightened as I was. NUMB really. That terrible English provincial numbness, the English death infecting my poor little colonial soul and so on. Instead you say monster. I wish it were true. But I have yet to find which is the theatre, which the mask. Time. I tell myself, give it time.²³

On the personal level²⁴, therefore, the novel has helped free Durrell from the fears he has harboured in his subconscious about death. It has also stated clearly the themes and the mode of expression he is to employ in his future "real" works. But at this point, he confesses to Miller that the Heraldic Universe is for him a cyclic, periodic experience:

... like a bout of drinking. I am not a permanent inhabitant-- only on Wednesdays by invitation. I enter and I leave--and presto, the ordinary individual is born, the Jekyll.²⁵

And Durrell insists that he needs to maintain this dual literary life. This schizophrenic consciousness is expressed with uncanny clarity in a poem of the same period "Je Est Un Autre" where the poet is followed everywhere by his double: "I hear him laughing in the other room."²⁶ Miller warns Durrell that although he may want Charles Norden -- a charac-

²³Ibid., p. 91.

²⁴"Believe me, the root of the struggle which on paper looks like the struggle to write is really the struggle to live." Ibid., p. 99.

²⁵Ibid., pp. 105-106.

²⁶A Private Country, (London: Faber, 1943), p. 50.

ter who derives from one of the more unsavoury characters in Tropic of Cancer -- to be the scapegoat, what in fact may happen is the opposite. So he advises Lawrence Durrell to kill Charles Norden. From this point on, the pseudonym is dropped, but writing for money remains an avowed practice of Durrell.

On the creative level, Durrell chooses his equipment and refines his tools. He finds out how to create real characters who will yet exist on a heraldic level of awareness. He discovers that the gnomic aorist -- "first person historical singular"²⁷ -- is the most suitable tense for relaying the present "Isness" of the "living limbo" of experience, and for portraying all time as existing in the present which also involves an acute awareness of the reality of death: the other side of the coin of life. Plot, as a steady movement of events arranged in chronological sequence, becomes an irrelevance in a universe punctuated by human consciousness of significant events, rather than by the ticking of the clock; and space, or the feeling of existing suspended in space, becomes symbolic of the highest realm of vision of which man is capable.

To reflect this mode of consciousness, design in the novel is circular, in the sense that the work reaches its conclusion at its own genesis, in a hypothetically never-

²⁷As Miller defines it in Wickes, p. 221.

ending process²⁸. This endless motion is suggested in the continuous iteration of the seasons, which in turn are ideograms, or states of consciousness. A parallel method is used in the presentation of character. Characterization, though still sometimes descriptive, is more often a continuous telegraphic message whose code is the ideogram. Lobo's map is a case in point. Although it provides a continuous identification with Lobo's circuitous way of setting about things, it also stands in Lucifer's mind for the spatial existence he is trying to depict; and ultimately even its very existence as an object is questionable. Another example is Gregory's green diary which suggests the emotional gangrene of its writer, and the way of life at the Regina Hotel. But at the same time it serves as a parallel identity to Lucifer since it complements his own version. Its colour is suggestive rather than literal, and in this way is used by Durrell in a manner parallel to all the other designs in the heraldic pattern: the snow, seasonal change, rain, the motif of the journey, plains, rivers, the sea. Durrell's ideograms may suggest ideas or feelings, or both; quite often they do not represent the literal meaning of the word but states of consciousness.

Some of his favourite symbols also emerge at this point. The mirror, the other self or potential selves, is one; another is the mask which is used in the earlier works as a

²⁸Compare quotation on page 40 above.

cover up for a Hamlet-like struggle of the character, but is later on developed into a symbol of an individual's deliberate enactment of a different role, as at a masquerade ball or a carnival. Tuberculosis is another: the last escape of such defenceless types as Grace, and the later Virginia Dale and Melissa; and more importantly, there is the spirit of place, an ever-recurring interest of Durrell's place, as an agent influencing people but also as a reflection of their collective inner landscape: that is a centrifugal and a centripetal force. All these symbols will become even more significant in his later novels.

In The Black Book, Durrell has also started using another device that he will be polishing later on; this is the technique of introducing more than one narrator to cover the same group of people. So far, however, Gregory's account of the inhabitants of the Regina does not differ substantially from that of Lucifer. In fact, the two versions complement each other and fuse in the reader's mind to form a running commentary on the characters. The implication here, is that another writer, who is presumably also interested in charting the heraldic design, can give further amplifications to the scene after, or simultaneously with, Lawrence Lucifer's²⁹.

²⁹"The writing, then, is the projection of my battle with the dragon who disputed my entry into the heraldic baronies." The Black Book, p. 197.

And there is also the question of myth, the new myth to be created for this desolate spatial typography. There is underlying this novel an aggressive reenactment of Celtic and Biblical myth in a way that reassesses their traditionally accepted values. Such instances are Durrell's elaborate use of nativity as a sexual-mystical theme, with Hilda as the new Mary, his comparable treatment of Jonah and the whale, of the ark and the animals, and to a lesser extent his choice of Tarquin's name -- one of the knights of the Round Table -- and his choice of green for the colour of Gregory's diary, a colour associated with the Celtic underworld. This deliberate assault on a tradition³⁰ to which, in the final analysis, Durrell belongs has angered F. R. Leavis, a stern opponent of relativism in literature and criticism, who believes that it is both desirable and possible to trace a great tradition of English literature through a few writers who have respected certain time-honoured principles which he regards as important. Seen from this clearly defined Puritanical perspective, it is not difficult to find much that is lacking in the works of Lawrence Durrell and Henry Miller, both of whom are dismissed by Leavis with a scathing remark³¹ in The Great Tradition. And yet, Leavis does not know

³⁰ See for example "A Ballad of the Good Lord Nelson", A Private Country, p. 53.

³¹ F. R. Leavis. The Great Tradition, (Harmondsworth: Chatto and Windus, 1948), p. 36: "In these writers - at any rate in the last two Miller and Durrell - the spirit of what we are offered affects me as being essentially a desire, in Laurentian phrase, to 'do dirt' on life."

what to do with Sterne's relativism in Tristram Shandy, or, for that matter, with the works of Fielding, Flaubert, or as he puts it "the bad tradition of the eighteenth-century romance". (14)

However, Leavis does raise a controversial issue: what, if any, is the moral responsibility of the artist? According to which standards is it to be assessed? Leavis sees this responsibility as a religious one, as the appended quotation to his book from D. H. Lawrence implies: "One has to be so terribly religious to be an artist." The irony of the situation resides in the fact that both Miller and Durrell, those black sheep of the fold, regard themselves, with equal earnestness, to be religious writers³². In a flattering portrait of Henry Miller in "The Happy Rock", 1945, Durrell tackles the subject of obscenity in literature. Miller, he says, "goes out so completely into life that he tends to deform it with excessive love. He can teach us to see the miraculous in the obscene."³³ And further: "If 'Know Thyself' is a moral injunction, then I think Henry Miller is a moralist" (5). What is at issue here is the question of the writer's intention, or perhaps, that of his point of view. Durrell, for one, is an avowed opponent of the overt didactic view of art. What he says of Miller in the following

³²"As if we weren't religious writers," Wickes, p.258.

³³The Happy Rock , (Berkeley: Packard Press, 1945), p.

passage can be said of him:

...several of your younger admirers have a distorted view of you in one sense. They don't realize the central nature of your search, and that the books are a sort of spiritual by-product of the search. In other words they don't get the rationale behind what they call your 'deliberate obscenity'--without realizing the meaning of its 'deliberateness'.³⁴

Whether the above is in fact descriptive of Miller's intentions, or whether it is merely Durrell's hope for the Miller line, is debatable, as Durrell is to realize after the publication of Sexus³⁵ but it still reflects Durrell's own artistic goals. If anything, he seems to be reaching back towards a kind of pre-Christian spirituality in The Black Book period, and he tries to formulate his ideas with greater clarity during his stay in wartime Alexandria.

This time it is in terms of the Cabal. The beliefs of the Alexandrian Cabalists seem to him to illuminate his own morphology of experience. The Cabalists, he tells us, are pre-Christian adepts, in the sense that they try to express man's awareness of the ideal in terms of pure symbol, which cannot be categorized or formulated in the rational sense. For example, the circle and the square are "contemptible" representations of two thought-forms. They cannot be explained, but an initiate can develop an extrasensory awareness of the symbol and accommodate it to his experience.

³⁴ Wickes, p. 333.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 266.

This is how Durrell works out his own morphology:

It is as if everything to date had taken place on the minus side of the equation -- with the intention of producing One-ness.

THE MINUS SIDE

THE PLUS SIDE
PURE FORMS

THE ONE

1 2 3 4

All human searching for perfection as strain or disease, all concepts from Tao to Descartes, from Plato to Whitehead aim at one thing: the establishment of a non-continual STATE of stasis: a point of cooperation with time. In order to nourish conceptual apparatus, moralities, forms, you imply a deficit in the self. Alors all this work or STRIVING - even Yoga - aims at finding rest or relaxation in time. It aims at the ONE.

You enter a field or laboratory of the consciousness which is not dangerous because it is based in repose. It does not strain you because having passed through the impurities of the ONENESS OF EVERYTHING, you are included in Time. NOW FORMS EMERGE. Because "contemptible" numbers are the only way to label them, you can say 1st State, 2nd State, 3rd State, like an etching. This is what I have called THE HERALDIC UNIVERSE. You cannot define these forms except by ideogram: this is "non-assertive" form.

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER
THAT IN THE FIELD OF
PURE REPOSE?

THE HERALDIC UNIVERSE

Needless to say I have not yet passed through the ONE from the minus side. If I had I wouldn't be able to conceptualise it all this way or label it THE HERALDIC UNIVERSE as I do. But it is like a giant game of chess with the heavens; it is another version of THE REAL.³⁶

If art is subordinate to the state of pure apprehen-

³⁶Ibid., p. 202-3.

sion, which is the heraldic universe, this is because it is an ordered conscious process, and it uses the will to reach a visionary experience. Art can only make raids across the border from the minus to the plus. Art is verbalization: the ideal is silence. All of which is a more sophisticated version of the argument of the short excerpt "The Heraldic Universe" of 1942 discussed in Chapter I.³⁷ But this time, Durrell has found pure symbols for expressing the superiority of the many, the square, over the one, the circle. Still later, Durrell's interests take him into investigations on the nature of time in the fields of psychology and the physical sciences.

In the meantime this revised version of a universe, in which both time and space are included and in which the inner silence is ultimate being, is reflected in the poetry of the forties. Poetry is Durrell's major and most significant literary output of this decade. The stage is Alexandria of the war-time period. The products are A Private Country, 1943 (poems written between 1936 and 1942), the poems of New Directions in Prose and Poetry, 1940, those of Personal Landscape, 1945, and Cities, Plains and People, 1946. One poem published in New Directions is focal: "Poem in Space and Time", also included in On Seeming to Presume, 1948, as "The Prayer-Wheel". This poem published five years before Durrell's letter

³⁷ See above, pp. 20 - 21 .

on the Alexandrian Cabal, contains all its matter. It is a condensed pattern of pure symbols, to be sensed and not explained. For example, death here is "skull and feather" which lie between "The armature of universes,/Neither less, neither more". Space is the "sea's migrations", is the "ministry of fishes", and it "Lives by perpetual patience."³⁸ There is also the "slow holy circle", which is the level of experience on the minus side of the chart. But the speaker is trying to cross over to the great silence:

From the Zero plus or minus
 Children of the great appearance,
 By the discipline of dying,
 By your cities and your rivers,
 Spinning in their egg-bound trances,
 Learn by timeless incoherence.

Here also are some of the heraldic emblems: the man-child bound in his egg-trance, tries to apprehend reality, in terms of cities and rivers, and finally attains it in the only form in which it is attainable, the state of unreason. He also knows that apprehension is superior to verbalization:

What is known is never written,
 By an equal distribution
 He and She are IT for gender,
 Sparks of carbon on the circle,
 Meeting in the porch of sex.

Speech can never stain the blue,
 Nor the lover's occult kisses
 Hold the curves of paradise.

³⁸New Directions in Prose and Poetry, (New York: Kraus, 1967), pp. 342-344.

Durrell's poetry is sometimes enigmatic because he is paradoxically trying to cross into the realm of the ineffable. But if he takes his poetry seriously, he can view himself with a bemused detachment as is apparent from this reference to himself:

And now that the pie is opened,
Feathered the head of the owlet,
What shall the monster sing?³⁹

or from his following modest assessment of his own poetry:

My skill is in words only:
To tell you, writing this letter home,
That we, whose blood was sweetened once
By Byron or his elders in the magic,
Entered this circle safely, found,
No messenger for us except the smile.⁴⁰

The smile, an emblem of the inner silence, is superior to the holy circle of art.

In "Fangbrand: A Biography," Durrell depicts the solitary as an eccentric on an island: "The luminous island of self"--a searcher and a pathfinder. The main characteristic of this island is the "roar of silence", and he discovers that:

Truth's metaphor is the needle,
The magnetic north of purpose
Striving against the true north
Of self: Fangbrand found out,
The final dualism in very self,
An old man holding an asphodel.⁴¹

³⁹"Self", Ibid., p. 346.

⁴⁰"At Corinth", Ibid., pp. 346-347.

⁴¹A Private Country, (London: Faber), 1943, pp. 7-11.

But "time's chemicals mock the hunter/For crumbs of doctrine" and Fangbrand dies, having grasped little else than the silence, "a smile, an animal truth."

Yet what Fangbrand expresses regarding the final dualism of self is also a quality of Jesus as Durrell sees him in "A Small Scripture". This theme I discussed earlier in connection with The Black Book⁴² and will be discussing further in Durrell's study of Groddeck's ironic Jesus⁴³. In "A Small Scripture", Jesus is:

Darling and bully with the bloody taws
Both walked in this tall queen by the green lake
Both married when the aching nail sank home.
Weep for the lion, kneel to the lamb. (20)

There is a deliberate connection here between these varied images: between Fangbrand the solitary on the luminous island of self, the double Jesus to be wept for and worshipped, the king of the islands in "Exile in Athens" who is king over the clock, for he knows how to share boundaries with the bird, or a bed with a star, or to be a subject of sails⁴⁴. There is also the mask of "Journal in Paris" who keeps repeating "Truth is what is/Truth is what is Truth?"⁴⁵

⁴²See above, p. 40.

⁴³See below, p. 103.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 26.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 29.

or the pastoral lovers "Daphnis and Chloe" who are carved in "the clear geography of time."⁴⁶ There is a connection between all these and Uncebunke, that sad object of Durrell's satire, asleep in the image of death. He fears suffocation by marble and implores to be delivered from "Time's clock-work womb."⁴⁷ The connection amounts to a building up of various facets of one personality.

All these facets coalesce in the frankly autobiographical poem:⁴⁸ Cities, Plains and People, 1946, one of Durrell's best poems of the period. It contains an outline of his life from his idleness in the Himalayas, to his return to "Pudding Island o'er the Victorian foam", and his realization that London can only be a promise-giving kingdom, to his subsequent life-in-exile in Paris, Corfu, Athens, and Alexandria. The poet is:

Prospero upon his island
Cast in a romantic form,
When his love was fully grown
He laid his magic down.

Truth within the tribal wells,
Innocent inviting creature
Does not rise to human spells
But by paradox

Teaches all who seek for her
That no saint or seer unlocks

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 30.

⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 33-41.

⁴⁸ This poem has the same contents of the autobiographical letter of January, 1937, in Wickes, pp. 59-62.

The wells of truth unless he first
Conquer for her his thirst.⁴⁹

But he is also a persuader haunted by a wild pack of selves. In an "Author's Note" to one of the anthologies in which his poems are reprinted, Durrell makes a connection between his various poetic characters and himself:

Canon is an imaginary Greek philosopher who visited me twice in my dreams, and with whom I occasionally identify myself; he is one of my masks. Melissa is another; I want my total poetic work to add up as a kind of tapestry of people, some real, some imaginary. Canon is real.⁵⁰

In the final section of the poem, the poet reaches out to the affirmative sun, Durrell's metaphor for the heraldic universe. His ego and id "Lie so profoundly hid/In space-time void." The poem as a whole shows the unending compensations that the genus epileptoid finds in his art:

For Prospero remains the evergreen
Cell by the margin of the sea and land,
Who many cities, plains and people saw
Yet by his open door
In sunlight fell asleep
One summer with the apple in his hand.⁵¹

Cities, Plains and People is followed by Cefalû, a novel, reprinted later as The Dark Labyrinth. Durrell wrote it in 1945, but published it two years later. Coming as it

⁴⁹Cities, Plains, and People, (London: Faber, 1946), pp. 57-72.

⁵⁰John A. Weigel, Lawrence Durrell, (New York: Dutton, 1966), p. 153.

⁵¹Cities, Plains and People, p. 72.

does at a point in Durrell's career at which he seems to have arrived at an exciting formula for the novel, it is a strange reversion to the situation novel, complete with introduction, portraits, complication and dénouement. Both the gradual development of incident and character, as well as the reasoned and logical style are a deliberate harkening back to the methods employed in Panic Spring. Both novels are in a sense anachronistic: they could have been written by a Thomas Love Peacock. This is how Durrell's apologia for it is expressed in one of his letters to Henry Miller:

..The Dark Labyrinth...is a queer cosmological tale about seven modern European tourists who get lost in the labyrinth in Crete where the minotaur has begun to make a comeback. It is really an extended morality, but written artlessly in the style of a detective story. Guilt, Superstition, The Good Life, all appear as ordinary people; a soldier on leave, a medium, an elderly couple (Truman), a young unfledged pair, a missionary. I have deliberately chosen that most exasperating of forms, the situation novel, in which to write it. I wonder what you'd think of it. I knocked it off in order to hold my depression at bay. I've been low, very low.⁵²

Even though Durrell is at this point engrossed in his study of the Cabal and its implications for the artist on the nature of time and space, he turns to the writing of his morality. It begins with a formal presentation of the main theme. A journey is taken by a group of European tourists to the widely-publicized and newly-discovered labyrinth of Cefalû, possibly the pre-Minoan one, in the island of Crete.

⁵² Wickes, p. 201.

They travel on board the Europa to their destination, or their destiny as it turns out to be, for the labyrinth caves in unexpectedly on its victims. Having defined the background, Durrell moves in with his paint brush to make portraits of the various members of the group. Baird, a soldier on leave, is Guilt, haunted by the image of Böcklin, a German soldier-spy he has had to kill in the war; Fearmax, Superstition, is a mouthpiece for Durrell, and a medium who is continuously thinking about such subjects as psychic awareness, the nature of the astral self, and the philosophy of the Alexandrian Cabalists. The Trumans are an elderly couple respected by all. They portray the Good Life. Champion is the artist-in-permanent-revolt, another mouthpiece for the author. And then there is a gargoyle of prejudice, Miss Dombey, the missionary who can see little good in others. Contrasted to her is Virginia Dale, a stenographer recovering from tuberculoses, the "victim of unconscious intention."⁵³

Death comes to all these in a cave-in during their return journey in the labyrinth. Faced with the ultimate test of everyman, their individual reactions form the core of the morality. Baird, the perpetual shirker of reality, comes out of the labyrinth at the entrance, to pursue the ghost of his victim further; Graecen, the poet, also escapes but his days are numbered anyway. Miss Dombey is astounded

⁵³The Dark Labyrinth, p. 101.

to find out at the last moment that she has never believed anyway; somehow this business of the Second Coming has become entangled with the immense Imago of her dead father. Fearmax drowned in the miasma of a psychic mind figures out the meaning of reality:

...what were they doing here? Or was the whole place merely a mad exteriorization of his inner confusion; his feet walking slowly down metaphoric corridors of his own subconscious -- in which only the roar of the sleeping monster gave him a clue of his primal guilt... The work of Rank on the symbolic significance of labyrinths, and their connection with divination by entrails. Olaf's observations upon the corridors of the Great Pyramid; was it possible that the place he was traversing had been hollowed by the hands of men to suit some occult purpose? (24)

He dies of suffocation in the labyrinth. The Trumans, on the other hand, successfully travel within, and eventually through, the labyrinth and as they do so they discover most of its features: a cave, a miniature lake, several nexus of corridors, and finally an amphitheatre where they come face to face with the Thing, in their case a cow that leads them out onto the Roof of the World . This is the Durrellian equivalent of the Garden of Eden.

The dénouement is provided in the form of a discussion between the Trumans and the sole inhabitant of this new world: Ruth Adams. There is no way out of this haven, no track down to Cefalû. After the initial shock of experiencing unadulterated peace, the Trumans attune to their new environment: their inner silence of tranquility is reached. A metamorphosis is achieved when they realize that the roof

of the world does not really exist except in their own imaginations. Ruth Adams sums it up:

..the whole of Western civilization we knew was based on the will: and that led always to action and to destruction. Whereas... there was some thing inside us, an element of repose, ... which you could develop, and alter your life completely. (241)

Yet the drama ends on a lighter tone. Back at Cefalû, a little boy is discovered blowing a ram's horn in one of the tunnels of the cave, the noise taken by the tourists to be that of the minotaur. The boy is paid for this by one of the travel agencies.

Graecen called to mind the terrible groans and bellows of the beast in the darkness of the labyrinth. 'We live in a rational world' he said sadly, 'I suppose everything has a rational explanation.' (260)

The Dark Labyrinth is often long-winded and discursive, and yet it is of interest because it is linked thematically with the better known Durrell novels. With the labyrinth as a central symbol, it recreates the Dionysian death-rebirth theme which is to recur again in Clea's underwater drama in the last volume of The Quartet. The morality also presents at length in its final chapters the theme of pure apprehension being superior to verbalization, at least this is the kind of conclusion that the three survivors reach on the Roof of the World. Ruth Adams asks further questions about the nature of time: "Past tense, present tense -- what does it all mean?" because for her there is only the tremendous stillness of the now (239).

Her brother Godfrey is dead, but her persisting communication with him convinces her that death only exists in the imagination. The great test of life is to be still enough inside to be receptive to life. And when this is realized, love becomes a giant includer of all, rather than a tyrannical prohibiter and selector.

All this facile theorizing is Durrell's way of creating a balance for The Black Book. Where the earlier novel negates, destroys in order to recreate, this novel affirms, explains and reassures. Of the two, the first appears to be more Durrellian in nature. The trouble with The Dark Labyrinth is the fact that the formula smacks too much of undigested Taoist thought. With the aid of this dubious idealism, he is trying to extricate himself from the vortex of The Black Book. In fact, the journey to the Cretan labyrinth can be seen as the metaphoric life-journey that Lawrence Lucifer is planning at the end of his Agon. And once again the journey is enacted in terms of Durrell's favourite heraldic design, including caves, rivers, a nexus of corridors, jumps off cliffs into the water beneath, and mountains.

With this novel Durrell reaches the end of another cycle of his imaginative journey. From this point on, his field of interest widens to include the works of George Groddeck, Sigmund Freud, and random readings of popular physical theories on the universe. In fact, The Dark

Labyrinth announces Durrell's increasing interest in the realm of ideas, and raises the question as to whether or not the mystical message at the end is justified in terms of the fictional reality. In this case, the theorizing is hardly disguised and the incidents, the people and the locale are all chosen to present the final message. By contrast, The Black Book is more real as an experience for the reader; it does not consistently remind him that it is written to provide a dogma, as is the case with the later novel. For this reason, The Dark Labyrinth fits into the category of fiction compared by Proust to "an object with the price ticket left on."⁵⁴ The theory is consistently explained rather than allowed to emerge from the very texture of life within the novel. The next few years will see Durrell as British emissary in Argentina where he is practically forced into the realm of theory, at what turns out to be the expense of his creative writing. This is the period of The Key to Modern Poetry.

⁵⁴ Le Temps Retrouvé, 11, p. 29, as quoted in Robert Liddell, A Treatise on the Novel, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1947), p. 70.

CHAPTER III

A TONGUE IS A KEY

Art.. begins with the world we construct, not the world we see. It starts with the imagination, and then works towards ordinary experience: that is, it tries to make itself as convincing and recognizable as it can.¹

Time and the ego are the two determinants of style for the twentieth century; if one grasps them, one has, I think, the key to much that has happened.²

Much of what has been written on the question of time in the works of Durrell has been motivated by an attempt to prove or to disprove the metaphysic as a shaping influence on the form and language of his novels. The question of the novelist-turned-philosopher-critic is usually the cause of much heated discussion, but in the case of Durrell it is doubly so on account of his claims for the relativity proposition in his novels.³ A critic of Durrell's novels, therefore, inevitably finds himself getting involved in the dialogue, and he must eventually decide whether or not he is to take seriously Durrell's uneven theorizing on the Einsteinian proposition and -- in Durrell's view, its

¹Northrop Frye, The Educated Imagination, (Toronto, 1963), p. 6.

²Lawrence Durrell, The Key to Modern Poetry, (London: Peter Nevill, 1952), p. 117.

³See inscription to Balthazar.

twin-subject -- the psychological hypothesis on the psyche. He has several sources to explore, the first of which is The Key To Modern Poetry, 1952, and the second is the bulk of his creative work following it.

Some of Durrell's critics set out to defend his metaphysical explorations, and they see them as directly responsible for the form of his fiction. Others point out the loop-holes in his argument, stressing that a discussion of Einsteinian theory without a firm grasp of its underlying mathematical core is a risky, if not a questionable, practice.

The World of Lawrence Durrell, 1964, edited by Harry T. Moore, includes examples of both types of approaches; W.D.G. Cox, in "Another Letter to Lawrence Durrell,"⁴ treats Durrell's speculation on space-time in The Quartet as a logical and workable hypothesis underlying the various viewpoints in the series. He goes on to show that the geometric conception of space is of three co-ordinates -- x,y,z -- and that analogously, the first three novels in the series -- Justine, Balthazar, and Mountolive -- represent these co-ordinates, respectively. But with a difference: Durrell reversed the geometric coordinates and used them as viewpoints. In contrast to Cox is Lionel Trilling's "Two Reviews". Trilling cautions us to treat Durrell's claims

⁴The World of Lawrence Durrell, Edited by Harry T. Moore, (New York: Dutton), pp. 112-116.

in his inscription to Balthazar, with reservation, since movement through time in his novels is neither so complex nor unorthodox as not to be readily perceived by the reader. Both critics have one thing in common: they expect a novel, and Durrell's Quartet in particular, to contain a clear philosophical view of the universe as the novelist sees it.⁵ But surely a creative writer is entitled to raise questions without having to answer them definitively; he can suggest problems without necessarily solving them. Certainly, he rarely sets out to write a novel in order to illustrate a theory; and when he does so, he is running the risk of turning his characters into puppets to express his ideas.

Before we turn to Durrell's claim in his Quartet, we shall have to determine the place to be accorded The Key to Modern Poetry in the Durrell canon. This book contains his only sustained attempt at literary criticism and it includes all the themes that are at the source of the controversy, although it is rarely discussed by his reviewers and

⁵At all costs, we must avoid the attitude that art is an illustration of philosophical views, as is the case in Cecily Mackworth's statement that: "The Quartet is, in fact, an attempt to translate into human terms the conception of Space-Time just as Proust attempted to translate the idea of Bergsonian *durée* into human terms." The World of Lawrence Durrell, p. 31. Another and more detailed study in the same manner is Sharon Lee Brown's Ph.D. thesis entitled Lawrence Durrell and Relativity, the University of Oregon, 1965. And yet, it is not the intention of a creative writer to translate ideas into art. His vision springs from a need to create in just the way he does rather than from an urge to illustrate any theory, however stimulating for him may be a particular theory. It is up to the philosophers and psychologists to salvage ideas from literary works and to give them systematic treatment.

critics. Is The Key to Modern Poetry an "introduction" to the themes that Durrell deploys later in his major works? Is it a distinctive literary theory applicable to novels and poems? Is it a coherent representation of Durrell's "philosophy" of the universe? How does it stand in relation to the works preceding and to those following it?

These are some of the questions that are, surprisingly, hardly ever raised by the critics of his theory. In fact, none of his critics is truly cognizant of the remarkable consistency with which Durrell returns to the themes of the thirties. In his 1964 study of Durrell's work, John Unterecker rightly pursues Durrell's childhood days in India, stressing their significant influence on his later development. But he, nonetheless, fails to see the link between the novelist's early involvement with heraldry and his later probes into Einsteinian relativity. In fact, Unterecker typically starts his criticism of the fiction from The Black Book, and when he mentions The Key to Modern Poetry, he does so briefly only to say that it introduced some of the motifs of the later works.⁶ But as we shall see presently, Durrell's "key", far from being an introduction, is a continuation, or an extrapolation of his earlier interests.

Another full-length study of Durrell is John A. Weigel's Lawrence Durrell, 1965. Weigel, like Unterecker, glosses over

⁶John Unterecker, Lawrence Durrell, (New York: Columbia University Press), 1964, p. 18.

the role of the heraldic vision in the early poetry, and he makes no connection between it and The Key to Modern Poetry. In the two pages he allots to Space-Time , and in the chapter on The Quartet, he does not make any substantial study of the ideas contained in Key. And when he quotes the various personae, he does not tell us when, or why, we should accept their views as those of their author. Neither does he indicate whether these ideas are simply discursive, or whether they form part of a giant metaphoric construct.

G. S. Fraser writes his full-length study from a personal knowledge of Durrell.⁷ His remarks, therefore, on the life and character of the poet-novelist are interesting. And yet, even Fraser, who was himself a poet of sorts, only briefly deals with the early poetry, and when he does, he treats it in a kind of vacuum. He is obviously correct in seeing Durrell, as a poet, standing apart from the mainstream of the English cultural tradition, but he cannot be justified in ignoring the continuity, in terms of themes and images, running through the Durrell canon itself. Fraser treats each genre in isolation, as if each were written by a different man, at a different time, with a different subject matter in view.

Of course, there is another book on Durrell, one by

⁷G.S. Fraser, Lawrence Durrell, (London: Faber), 1968.

a close friend and correspondent of his: Alfred Perlès.⁸ It is a refreshing and eloquent account of the trio -- Miller, Perlès, and Durrell -- during The Booster days in the Paris of the thirties. Nevertheless, Perlès's narrative, although it gives a reliable inside story of their growing friendship and of their efforts to make it as writers in the thirties, is of little relevance to our subject.

In these studies -- Perlès's apart -- there is a common factor: the link between the early and later themes and metaphors of Durrell is missing. It is as if Durrell had stumbled upon these twin-themes of time and the ego in the fifties and latched on to them as props for his novels. This is far from being the case, for as we have seen in the previous chapters, Durrell's mythical world has its roots in the prose-pieces and in the poems of the thirties, as well as in the novels prior to The Black Book. He had intuitively entered his world long before he felt a need to justify it. We have his romantic version of it in Panic Spring; and its dramatized version in Zero and Asylum in the Snow; there is the analytical aspect of it in his exuberant letters to Henry Miller, where he announces his universe to be a spatial one from which linear-time has been lopped-off. And he discovers he can treat it with greater clarity in The Black Book. All this happens before 1938. His vision,

⁸ Alfred Perlès, My Friend Lawrence Durrell, (London: Scorpion Press), 1961.

then, is poetic and intuitive; only its outside veneer is influenced in its details by such dissonant literary models as Aldous Huxley, D. H. Lawrence, T. S. Eliot and Henry Miller.

The years following The Black Book seem to have been relatively filled up with readings in physics, anthropology, and psychology.⁹ Durrell pursues his interests through the writings of other men. In the works of some of the popularizers of Einstein -- like Sir James Jeans and Samuel Alexander¹⁰ -- he finds explanations of space-time which suggest something analogous to his own spatial universe. When he turns to the psychologists -- Freud, Jung, Groddeck and Rank¹¹ -- he does so with the purpose of finding hypotheses on the new psyche announced in Lawrence's work -- the unstable psyche. He furthermore borrows from Rank a promising version of the artist's future role in society. Anthropology¹² gauges his interest in myth and ritual -- an interest he has already displayed in Panic Spring and The Dark Labyrinth -- to help him make his imaginative universe

⁹See Durrell's letters in A Private Correspondence, pp. 207-291, where he and Miller mention Groddeck (pp. 209, 222, 221) Sartre (pp. 224) and Freud, Jung and Rank (p. 261).

¹⁰The Key to Modern Poetry, pp. 30 and 32.

¹¹Ibid., p. xii.

¹²Ibid., p. xii.

more recognizable. In fact, when he turns to Relativity, he apprehends it in terms of a new mythic rendition of the marriage of Time and Space. In this sense, his heraldic universe gradually blends into his theoretical explorations, and both together lead to his construct for the novel: the spiral staircase. At the core of his metaphysic lies his heraldic universe, but this, as the years go by, becomes upholstered with Einsteinian theory, and decorated arbitrarily with snippets from psychology.

Durrell's art, therefore, is not created to illustrate a metaphysic; his metaphysic is discovered and tacked on to the art. Far from setting out to define a complete philosophical or critical theory in The Key to Modern Poetry, or anywhere else in his prose works for that matter, Durrell works out some of the implications of relativity as they interest a writer who has already grappled with a view of the universe in which the roles of time and space have been reshuffled. But his primary interest is in creating his fictional world with the aid of his metaphoric structure. By means of his metaphor -- the spiral staircase -- he is able to suggest a view of experience as cyclical: something like T. S. Eliot's "in my end is my beginning."¹³ In addition, his metaphor suggests that a cycle of experience can recur in the form of a helix, and each turn of the

¹³The Key to Modern Poetry, p. 37.

helix represents a different view of the experience, resulting from any one of these factors: change in place or in the angle of vision of the observer, or a change in the circumstances surrounding him, or a change in the rate of his movement. Movement along the spiral is multi-directional: upwards or downwards, and inwards or outwards in the shape of the vortex.

In Durrell's novels, therefore, the implications of relativity are discernible, not in their philosophical totality, but as springboards into the heraldic world. What we get in them is an artist's rendering of a totality of experience in a world liberated from the age-old view of time progressing inexorably towards a predestined end.¹⁴

¹⁴ Compare Reverend Fulton Sheen on the subject of time:

But where does history or time lead us? There have been two general answers to the question. One is the Greek view which held that history is cyclic, a wheel ever turning on its axis; everything that happens is only a repeat; thus all motion is circular and takes us back again to the beginning. Seeing the tides come in and out, the recurrence of seasons, the ancients become so impressed with this odyssey of recurrence that everybody was literally 'going around in circles!' The other view is the Biblical, namely, that time is not a wheel but a road; it has a starting point and it has an ending, which may be expected to be catastrophic, before ushering in a new order. Time is linear, not circular; purposeful not repetitive, and it has a 'fullness' like a harvest... Time in the Biblical view had an invasion by eternity. The beachhead was established at Bethlehem and has been continued ever since.

Quoted in The Hamilton Spectator, (January 27, 1968), p. 19.

This experience is not meant to be taken literally, but metaphorically and heraldically. But, unfortunately for Durrell, he appears to have changed position in mid-stream, and in his inscription to Balthazar insists that Alexandria, his Alexandria, is real. His assertion: "nothing is less unreal than the city"¹⁵ has created a hiatus in his novels between what he claims he has done and the actual environment he depicts there. But this is to anticipate what is to follow. For a discussion of the reasons behind Durrell's statement and for the outcome of this statement within his novels, a subsequent chapter will be devoted.¹⁶

In the meantime, an analysis of the ideas contained in The Key to Modern Poetry will show that Durrell's thought here -- whether critical or analytical -- originates from an innate dualism which renders all experience in terms of two hypotheses: the self and the universe; the inner and the outer; the subjective and objective modes of perception.¹⁷

¹⁵See inscription to Balthazar.

¹⁶See p. 198 below.

¹⁷Speaking of the confluence of Eastern and Western philosophers Durrell says to his interviewer:

It seems unlikely in a way, but nevertheless the two major architects of this breakthrough have been Einstein and Freud. Einstein torpedoed the old Victorian material universe -- in other words, the view of matter -- and Freud torpedoed the idea of the stable ego so that personality began to diffuse. Thus in the concept of the space-time continuum you've got an absolutely new concept of

Understandably, therefore, his explorations into areas outside the literary have been in those fields which deal either with explanations of the nature of the universe, or with probings into the make-up of the psyche. In this series of lectures, he expresses specific interest in those aspects of the works of Freud, Jung, and Groddeck, in which these writers deal with the subconscious forces in man. On the other hand, he finds Einstein, Eddington and Whitehead particularly stimulating in their new theories on time and space. And anthropologists, like Taylor and Frazer suggest to him myth as a way of bridging the gap between the internal and external worlds by linking man's age-old desires and fears with his new and changing concepts about the world in which he is living. In this way, myth is able to transport man beyond the exigencies of time by making him recognize himself in the mythical images of the past. Myth, then, is a language of symbolic forms and of archetypal images, repetitive yet never the same.¹⁸

However, this interest of Durrell in inner and outer

what reality might be, do you see? ... But the thoughts which followed from it, and which I hope will be sort of -- visible as it were, in the construction of the thing [The Quartet] will be first of all, the ego as a series of masks which Freud started, a depersonalization which was immediately carried over the border by Jung and Groddeck and company to end up -- where ... but in Hindu metaphysics?

Writers at Work, (1963), p. 279.

¹⁸See, for example, Durrell's remarks on Tiresias as a resurrected myth of this kind. The Key to Modern Poetry, p. 153.

perspectives does not mean that, in the manner of a nineteenth-century romantic, he has set up these two modes as conflicting views of experience. Quite the opposite. In his opinion, ideas about time and space are relevant or lead to, questions on the nature of the ego, or vice versa. As he makes clear in his remarks on Henri Bergson, William James and Sigmund Freud, philosophy and psychology are working hand in hand to interpret the new time. Theories on the new time, according to Einstein, stipulate that it is a dimension of the hybrid he calls "continuum". They also stipulate that an individual's awareness of this dimension is in terms of an "Isness" inconsistent with the time of clocks and calendars. Consequently, how an individual perceives time, and how he reacts to it are relatively more important in recent decades. Similarly, Durrell points out that after Freud and Groddeck, the psyche too has changed from a stable entity to one that is changing and multi-faceted, yet miraculously preserving an identity even in the midst of the flux of experience.

Therefore, a persistent theme running through the lectures is the marriage of inner and outer modes of seeing reality, although marriage here does not imply either the identity of subjective and objective modes, or the cancellation of the one by the other. What it does imply is simply a rapprochement. In Durrell's practical criticism, a similar unifying principle is in operation: he sees poetry, for

example, not as a mode expressing thought and feeling in a vacuum, but as a facet of the prism called culture.¹⁹

To the question what is culture? he answers, the sum total, not of the best that has been said in the Arnoldian sense, but of all of the efforts of man in interpreting the universe. Durrell stretches this kind of thought to its ultimate limits by stating that, "Everything is part of some greater whole. Everything is the sum of smaller parts. How then can we deal with the object-in-itself?" (2).

If Durrell here seems to be critical of Matthew Arnold's famous dictum that we must judge a work of art as it really is in itself, the difference is in degree rather than in kind. For example, Arnold realized -- as does Durrell -- that for the creation of a work of art, two things must coincide: the power of the man, and the power of the moment. The point upon which they differ is the degree of authority, or perhaps finality, to be accorded a critic's view of literature. Arnold felt that literature was a privilege of a few initiated into sweetness and light; T. S. Eliot later called them the literary élites; and F. R. Leavis further restricted them to those upholding the principles of Puritanism. Durrell, in spite of his dedication to creating the

¹⁹"if we are to consider poetry as a self-contained something which cannot be referred to other departments of human thought, we will be doing it a disservice as critics." Ibid., p. 1.

heraldic universe in his writings, is convinced that art cannot be set above life. Whether deliberately or not -- for here we need to remember his 1965 extravagant praise of Eliot as literary mentor and critic -- Durrell substitutes an inclusive attitude for their exclusive view of the nature and function of art in our time.²⁰ He believes that a critic must avoid making explicit moral judgements about art, and he defines his position by pointing out that any view of an object is bound to be influenced by the personal bias of the observer and by his particular angle of vision. Most importantly, for him, art must not be allowed to suffer from narrow prejudice. In fact, he says, "There is no final truth to be found -- there is only provisional truth within a given context."²¹

At first impression, this reasoning seems to leave the

²⁰"For the central motive (that art is joy, and within the reach of everyone) is something that badly needs emphasizing today, as also does the religious significance of the artistic act." Durrell to Alfred Perlès in Art and Outrage, (New York: 1961), p. 54.

²¹The Key to Modern Poetry, p. 3. Also compare a previous statement of Durrell in his study of Groddeck in Horizon, XVII, (June, 1948), p. 402:

Every observation is necessarily one-sided, every opinion a falsification. The act of observing disintegrates a whole into different fields of observation, whilst in order to arrive at an opinion one must first dissect a whole and then disregard certain of its parts.

This would seem to suggest that Groddeck is a probable source for this view of Durrell.

door open for a comprehensive view of the nature of any object or experience. And yet, it has its pitfalls. For to accept the hypothesis that everything is important because it is part of a whole is only one short step from concluding that nothing is of distinctive importance.²² And this in turn would have to result in a general levelling off into a mediocrity, or an ambiguity, in terms of thought and standards of behaviour. Durrell appears to be aware of this danger when he says:

This question of the inherent duality in things, and an acceptance of it as part of human limitation, you will find in the relativity view and later when you come upon the term 'ambivalence' in Freud... If, then, the opposites are really identical from one point of view they are perhaps reflections of some third unspecified thing? It is a question I wish deliberately to leave hanging in the air -- indeed I must do so because I do not know how to answer it. In the later writings of Aldous Huxley, in the latest poetry of T. S. Eliot you will find clues which may suggest an answer to the question. But whether an answer is taken from the Cathloic mysteries or taken from sacred books of the East satisfies you more will be purely a question of temperamental endowment.²³

Although Durrell does not suggest in this particular passage what this third unspecified thing is, yet we can make an educated guess, since all the writers he admires, Huxley and Eliot included, have developed in the direction of

²² Compare Martin -- Durrell's pardoner -- in An Irish Faustus, 1963, p. 11.

²³ The Key to Modern Poetry, p. 47. Also note his criticism of Miller's Sexus on the grounds that it includes everything and therefore reflects its author's loss of a sense of values. A Private Correspondence, p. 267.

mysticism.²⁴ He does, however, suggest in another passage in this book that the arts and sciences are gradually converging upon an attitude to life as yet out of sight which might have the sanction of the physicist and the mystic, and that such a philosophy can be found in the works of Francis J. Mott. But Durrell's writings are not allowed to reach a philosophical synthesis of this kind.

However, seven years after The Key to Modern Poetry, Durrell commits himself more openly to the importance of mysticism in the life of man. In his 1959 preface to Dr. Arthur Guirdham's Christ and Freud, Durrell singles out a

²⁷ In Art and Outrage, Durrell explains at length to Alfred Perlès that Miller is basically a religious writer, that is in most of his works with the possible exception of Sexus, which Durrell feels is unduly vulgar. However, in 1950, Durrell retracts his criticism of Sexus. For his retraction see A Private Correspondence, p. 270. Most of the writers Durrell reads and admires maintain that mysticism is important in the life of man. Two of the physicists he mentions - Einstein and Whitehead - are primary examples. For the role that mysticism plays in their views, see Mysticism and the Modern Mind, A. P. Stiernotte ed., (New York; The Liberal Arts Press, [1959]), p. 60. Here, T. Buehrer points out that: "Basic to Whitehead's philosophy is his cosmology; and it is not too much to say that in the most profound and inclusive sense of the term all his philosophical thinking is also religious." Buehrer also describes Einstein as an unashamed mystic when he speaks of an impenetrable something in the universe that "manifests itself as the highest wisdom and the most radiant beauty which our dull faculties can comprehend only in their most primitive forms," and when he continues: "this knowledge, this feeling is at the center of our religiousness." Durrell is familiar with Sir Arthur Eddington's New Pathways in Science (Cambridge University Press, 1935, p. 324) where Eddington says: "I am not so sure that the mathematician understands this world of ours better than the poet or the mystic. Perhaps, it is only that he is better at sums."

a belief in mysticism as the one major factor of help to a patient and to his psychiatrist. This is because "religious factors are important in relation to psychiatric conditions and more especially to neurosis."²⁵ Guirdham's thesis, which meets with Durrell's approval, rests upon the axis that psychiatry -- which is concerned with the disorders of the intellect and emotional life -- stands in closest relationship to our religious attitude. And although Guirdham shows that certain religious superstitions are the root cause of psychic fear, yet he never undermines man's need for a sustaining religious feeling based upon faith rather than upon anxiety.

Meanwhile, in The Key to Modern Poetry, a series of lectures given at the British Council in Argentina in 1952, Durrell restricts himself to examining literature in the light of two main tenets: the space-time continuum and the ego. This restriction in approach is awkward. In the first place, because even though these two theories are useful tools for literary criticism in the twentieth century, they cannot be considered exclusively. And secondly, in spite of his oft-repeated reminder that the relationship he draws between ideas and literature is not intended to be causal -- meaning that literary forms are directly influenced by current ideas --

²⁵ Arthur Guirdham, Christ and Freud, (London: Allen and Unwin, 1959), p. 7.

his literary criticism flounders on the rocks of such a predicament. One example is the following: "I would suggest that the growth of these new ideas has had a disruptive effect upon linguistic structure."²⁶ To state categorically that philosophical ideas on time, the ego, or any other hypothesis for that matter, are directly responsible for the changes which occur in literary forms is absurd. Sometimes ideas are first thought out by imaginative thinkers before they are systematized by philosophers. Freud, for example, is the first to admit that the unconscious was discovered before him by poets and that he only systematized it.²⁷ At other times, the man and the moment -- to use Arnold's phrase again -- concur, so that it is difficult to be sure which is the cause and which the effect. Any generalization, therefore, regarding a particular idea being the cause of a specific structure in literature is bound to collapse, since there is only the individual case to be studied.

A survey of Durrell's theory of the new time and its relation to the structure of poetry is sufficient to show that any comparative analysis of his thought alongside that of Einstein is nothing short of quixotic. It is not only be-

²⁶The Key to Modern Poetry, p. 36.

²⁷"The poets and philosophers before me discovered the unconscious, ... What I discovered was the scientific method by which the unconscious can be studied." Freud as quoted in Lionel Trilling's The Liberal Imagination, (New York, 1951), p. 34.

cause their approaches are inherently different and any such comparison is ill-conceived, but because Durrell's fragmentary manner of presenting his material makes such an exercise irrelevant. His ideas are interspersed arbitrarily throughout his book, and he often ignores them in his chapters on practical criticism, with the possible exception of his discussion of T. S. Eliot's poetry, where Durrell's key most aptly fits its designated role.²⁸ To attempt to gather his scattered thoughts into a logical critical pattern is to superimpose a logic upon something that is by its very nature loose and unstructured. Durrell insists that his lectures contain a rough sketch for a method, rather than an organic system for a literary critic.²⁹ Furthermore, Durrell's skirting of the mathematical core of the theory has driven some of his critics to assert flatly that he does not understand it at all.³⁰

²⁸See below, pp.107 -109.

²⁹This may account for his changing the title of his book from The Key, 1952, to A Key, 1964.

³⁰"A mathematical friend of mine says I'm crazy, an idiot, that you can't create a continuum of words. Of course it sounds crazy, doesn't it? I mean you cannot apply scientific hypotheses to the novel. On the other hand, is it so crazy? ... I don't pretend what I am doing is a continuum exactly. What I'm saying is that Mercator's projection is not a sphere but it does give you a very good impression of what the sphere is like. It serves its purpose, and that's how I regard this continuum of mine. It may be that I'm violating

And yet, it would be fallacious to assume, as does R. A. O'Brien, that Durrell's "three dimensions of space and one of time bear no relation to the 'relativity proposition', he is concerned only with past, present and future."³¹ Here, O'Brien chooses to ignore the obvious stimulation that Durrell derived from his readings in popularized versions of Einstein, such as the works of Sir James Jeans, Samuel Alexander and Bertrand Russell.³² Besides, the three tenses of time do not appear separately in Durrell's work even as early as the poems and novels of the thirties.

But how does Durrell specifically define the nature of this new time in 1948?

We are told that the new time is non-linear and non-progressive. It is not the old extended time,³³ but a dimension of the space-time hybrid. He tells us that Einstein has given time a new role to play: instead of time being a

sacred territory, and that indeed I'm seeing the whole thing in the wrong set of terms, but for the moment it seems valid." Writers at Work. p. 276.

³¹R. A. O'Brien, "Time, Space and Language in Lawrence Durrell," Waterloo Review, VI, (Winter 1961), 18.

³²The Key to Modern Poetry, pp. 30, 32, and 161.

³³See above, footnote 5, page 77.

separate dimension moving from here to there along a marked series of stages, it has become a thick opaque medium welded to space. Einstein has further suggested a marriage of time and space into a four-dimensional volume he called a "continuum".

Durrell goes on to portray this time as an "Isness", not a progressive movement from past to present to future, but "a sort of time which contains all time in every moment of time" (29). Or as he puts it in a different context, this "Isness" is a "multiple state of birth-life-death" (36). Seen in this light, death "can be situated in the present as well as the future", and somewhat inconsistently, "time is the measure of our death consciousness" meaning that the ticking of a poet's wrist-watch reminds him that it is imitating his heart-beats, and that when they stop his life will be over (36).

If Durrell's equating of the "Isness" that is time with "the measure of our death consciousness" is a contradiction in terms -- since death is only a part of the multiple state of being he describes, and since "measurement" here implies process in a specific direction -- this is because paradox is a feature of relativity as he sees it. The following assertion is typical: "Time is an always-present yet always recurring thing" (31). Logically, time must pass if it is to recur, and passage implies linearity. But to these

objections, Durrell is quick to counter:

You will begin to see that to think according to the terms of relativity one has to train the mind to do something rather extraordinary: to accept two contradictory ideas as simultaneously true (31).

We are told that another implication of relativity -- and one of particular relevance to poetry -- is the change that has taken place in our view of the subject-object relationship. Victorian science had claimed an absolute objectivity in its judgement upon the universe. Subject and object were then taken to be two distinct things, so that a description of any part of the universe was considered an object independent of the observer. Now, Einstein has suggested a marriage of subject to object, since an objective reality existing independently of an observer is a difficult thing to verify. If for example, different observers take pictures of an object at the same moment in time and the same point in space, their pictures will not be alike unless the observers happened to be moving at the same speed. And even then the results cannot be guaranteed to be identical. Consequently, although we are finding more ways for applying our scientific knowledge, yet paradoxically our knowledge of what reality or the universe is has not increased.

But what, we may well ask at this point, has all this theorizing to do with our appreciation of literature?

To Durrell, the new time is reflected in the new style

of writing for which our century has become famous. He takes the case of Ulysses. Whereas before Joyce, says Durrell, time in the novel and in poetry had been constructed lengthwise, now, it assumes a circular form. Previously, in the novels of Dickens, we had a progress of the plot along a charted scale. Now in Joyce and Proust, we see something of a slow motion camera at work in a circular manner, coiling and uncoiling upon itself "embedded in the stagnant flux and reflux of a medium which is always changing yet always the same!" (31) With characteristic brevity, Durrell established Henri Bergson and William James as foundation stones for the structure of twentieth century literary appreciation. He tells us that Bergson is important because of his views on the nature of time; and that James is, because he is a forerunner of Freud. But Durrell's all too brief resumé here of Bergsonian time does not differ substantially from his own version of the time of physics. We are told that Bergson is a rebel against scientific externality and pure reason since he discovered by intuition that reality existed in flux, in the "indivisible flux of consciousness which he calls 'Duration'" (116-67). Hence, Bergson claimed that science, calendars and clocks have no way of measuring reality; and he advised that reason should be thrown overboard since "intuition" alone is able to capture the qualities of duration.

It is common knowledge now that Durrell, in this version of the new time, confuses the Bergsonian view with the Einsteinian. In 1959, he confesses to one of his reviewers:

I am afraid I made a mistake there as a result of following Wyndham Lewis's Time and Western Man which first led me in the direction of this kind of thinking. I confused Bergsonian time with Einsteinian time. It only dawned on me years later that time wedded to matter in the Einsteinian conjunction is not precisely Bergsonian time, because the motions of time between Plato and Bergson had not changed very much. Indeed Bergson (under whom Proust studied) said he could not understand Einsteinian time and that the continuum is an enigma to him.³⁴

This is in 1959. And yet, it is difficult to judge even from this excerpt, the depth of Durrell's knowledge of Bergson and Einstein. There are numerous points on which the two philosophers differ on time, and these pass apparently unnoticed by Durrell. There is the question of recurrence, for example. Bergson's view of duration³⁵ is that of unfolding multiplicity, which is a succession without distinction and an interpenetration of elements so heterogeneous that former states can never recur. But recurrence is a distinctive feature of Einsteinian time, at least as Durrell presents it.³⁶

³⁴Kenneth Young, "A Dialogue with Durrell", Encounter XIII, (December 1959), 64.

³⁵Henri Bergson, Time and Free Will (New York:Harper, 1919), p. vii; also pp. 75-139

³⁶Later in The Quartet, a character does not change, but his states of mind and his actions recur in cycles. See chapter six, p. 229.

Then again, Bergson carefully distinguishes between the concept of space and that of time. He says, for example, that any number implies a visual image in space, and in this case it is an extensity: that is, a succession with distinction. Therefore, a representation of time as spatial, Bergson regards as an act depriving time of its real character -- which is a feeling of perpetual becoming. But in Einstein space and time are superseded by space-time, so that any measurement of the one involves a reference to the other. In relativity, space and time, taken by themselves, are pure abstractions³⁷. Actually, they always imply each other. Furthermore, Bergson separates subjective and objective modes of perception:

We apply the term subjective to what seems to be completely and adequately known and the term objective to what is known in such a way that a constantly increasing number of new impressions could be substituted for the idea which we actually have of it.³⁸

As we have seen, in relativity the objective mode of perception is indivisible from the subjectivity of the observer.

The subject-object relationship is explored in greater detail in Durrell's investigations of the nature of the world

³⁷"There is no such thing as the 'same' time for different observers, unless they are at rest relatively to each other. We need four measurements to fix the position of an event in space-time, not merely by a body in space. Three measurements are not enough to fix any position. This is the essence of what is meant by the substitution of space-time for space and time." Bertrand Russell, ABC of Relativity, (Mentor: G. Allen and Unwin, 1958), p.58.

³⁸Bergson, pp. 33-84.

within. This is how he presents his growing involvement with the subject.

First there was Freud. His Interpretation of Dreams, 1900, particularly captured Durrell's attention. He was especially intrigued by the thought that the fantasies of individual patients were often direct copies of race-myths and folk-tales of savage people. Was myth then a kind of fantasy-product which enables man to satisfy his desires, so to speak, in his imagination? This is where psychoanalysis and anthropology joined hands in Durrell's world.

But more pertinent to his interest in space-time theory is Freud's analysis of space and time aspects of dreams:

The dream always turns temporal relations into spatial ones whenever it has to deal with them. Thus, one may see in a dream a scene between people who look very small and far away, as though one were looking at them through the wrong end of a pair of opera glasses. The smallness and the spatial remoteness here mean the same; it is remoteness in time that is meant, the interpretation being that it is seen from the distant past. (55)

and

In the Id there is nothing corresponding to the idea of time, no recognition of the passage of time and (a thing which is very remarkable and awaits adequate attention in philosophic thought) no alteration of mental processes by the passage of time. Conative impulses which have been pushed down into the Id by repression, are virtually immortal and are preserved for whole decades as though they had only recently occurred... the repressed remains unaltered by the passage of time. (5)

However, Freud's mode of interpreting dreams rests upon the principle of causation and this Durrell rejects in favour of Jung's vitalist method. Whereas, Freud had said that the

repressed impulse, looking for an escape hatch, chooses the poetical mechanism in order to escape, Jung said that there was no such rigid causality for the sources of creativity, and that treatment of patients, likewise, was not a pure cause and effect operation, but a spiritual reintegration. To prove this, Jung delved into the question of fantasy and myth and instead of merely explaining them in any of Freud's term, he tried to give them relevance and meaning for the patient's psyche. If we turn from Durrell's explanations to take a look at Jung's Psychology of the Unconscious, we can see in operation some of the links Jung establishes between the individual and the collective unconscious. Jung conducts a detailed study of his patient's poetical unconsciously-formed fantasies and shows that there is a very strong resemblance or identity between the patient's unconscious symbols and those of myth and folklore of past ages. He is convinced that the individual psyche can be understood through a study of comparable rituals and beliefs of the ancient past. His book is a giant manifesto of the patterns of archetypal symbolism uniting past with present, and he successfully demonstrates the common bonds of desire and longing which unite humanity. In the process of his research, the sun, sea, fire, tree, city, cavern, dragon, treasure, hero, among other things, become reservoirs of archetypal significance. And all these symbols, he tells us, are preserved in a repressed and, therefore, unchanging form in the individual's

unconscious, which is itself part of the collective unconscious³⁹. It is, therefore, Jung's study of the symbolic apparatus that has given the artist, and Durrell, in particular, a new creative urge; Durrell discovers that the symbols he has been using are far richer than he has expected. Durrell sees the difference between the Freudian and Jungian principles as those between the mechanist and vitalist attitudes, respectively; or the classic and romantic, or reason and mysticism.⁴⁰ He identifies himself with the latter, and believes that the pendulum is swinging out in its direction.⁴¹

If Durrell skims through Freud and Jung, he lingers long and lovingly over George Groddeck, who, of the three, has had the greatest influence on him⁴². Groddeck's philosophy is more intuitive and, for this reason, perhaps less important than that of Freud or of Jung; and yet Durrell's version of it is clear and compelling. It is, therefore,

³⁹Dr. C.G. Jung, Psychology of the Unconscious, (New York: Dodd, Mead, [c. 1913], 1963), Part I, ch. 4.

⁴⁰For Durrell on Groddeck's mysticism, see "Studies in Genius", Horizon, xvii, no. 102, (June 1948), p. 387. Also Durrell's Preface to George Groddeck's The Book of the It, (New York: Vintage, 1949), pp. v-xxiv; and The Key to Modern Poetry, pp. 72-90.

⁴¹And yet, his play on Faustus, in 1963, and the latest double-decker novel, both rely on Freudian hypothesis. For this influence, see below, pp. 250-51.

⁴²"Studies in Genius," p. 385. In The Key to Modern

useful at this point to include in our discussion a consideration of Durrell's Preface to The Book of the It, published in 1949.

In his Preface, Durrell discusses Groddeck's view of the It, which is a pervasive life-force including and enveloping man. The It antedates the ego, and in fact brings it into being. Because the It comprises all of the psyche with its inevitable dualisms, and is "the sum-total of the individual human being, physical, mental and spiritual,"⁴³ it remains an entity that is unknown and unknowable to man. Groddeck, therefore, displaced Freud's ego as supreme entity, and replaced it with his own It, which he defines as a way of seeing things, not "a thing, not a principle or a conceptual figment."⁴⁴ In this system, the creative individual is no longer regarded as a neurotic releasing suppressed desires, as he is in Freud's, but as "someone who has, by the surrender of his ego to the flux of the It, become the agent and the translator of the extra-causal forces which rule us."⁴⁵ Likewise, Groddeck's Christ, far from being

Poetry, Durrell says of Groddeck: "...he is of interest to me because his equating of the mind and body does, in the medical field, roughly what Einstein has done in the realm of physics with the concepts of space and time." p. 209.

⁴³"Studies in Genius", p. 392.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 399.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 392.

the long-visaged, long-suffering historical figure, emerges as a person who is capable of fulfilling his artistic role -- his artistic sacrifice -- against the backdrop of history. He is the supreme artist who has submerged his ego into the flux of the It. In this sense, he is the eternal Ironist. Groddeck's theory further attracts Durrell on account of its bi-sexuality. Groddeck suggests that male-female impulses could remain with the individual throughout his mature life, and that this dual impulse is an inevitable condition of the It.

Now the hypothetical It-unit, whose origin we have placed at fertilization, contains within itself two It-units a male and a female...It is perhaps necessary here to comment upon the extent of our ignorance concerning the further development of the fertilized egg.⁴⁶

This last sentence is typical of Groddeck; it leaves free a certain intangible something in the It which is ultimately mysterious and perhaps eventually beyond the reach of the intellect of man. Furthermore, his It is penultimate-ly an all-pervasive entity in the sense that "Man is lived by the It,"⁴⁷ a kind of mystical force which works through and encompasses man.

This intuitional mystique allows for a chameleon-like view of man; for in surrendering his ego -- which, says

⁴⁶Groddeck, p. 11.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 13.

Jung, is after all only a hypothesis created by man for his own self-assurance -- to the flux of the It, man becomes a creature of many parts.

We can think of life as a masquerade at which we don a disguise, perhaps many different disguises at which nevertheless we retain our own proper characters.⁴⁸

Here, it is possible to see a similarity between this view of man and Durrell's characters in fiction, particularly in The Black Book and later novels, where each person turns a different face to each of his observers, and yet manages to maintain a specific identity in the end. Durrell shares with Groddeck a fascination with masks,⁴⁹ carnivals, festivals and masked-balls, in fact with any guise the individual may don to go through an imaginative enactment of an unfulfilled-yet-ever-present self. In The Quartet, his masked parties are grotesque, and baroque masques of shadows,

⁴⁸ Compare also his following analysis of Henry Miller in Art and Outrage, (p. 9): "Reading that anthology, The Happy Rock, I was much struck by the number of different Henry facets which emerged; they were all Henry to be sure -- but refracted by the observer." And: "... only a line or two about masks. Certainly I did see several people peeking out of Henry. The most endearing were of course the childish one -- the clown, the American tourist, the gullible one (deliberately: did you ever see anyone enjoy so much being 'taken in'?) He never was, of course. I also saw Myshkin, and once I caught a glimpse of the frightened man in the Letters from the Underworld... what is his name? But I think the best portrait of all -- I mean the silhouette of his personality -- is given by the character of Sylvia on p. 54 of Sexus" (25).

⁴⁹ The Key to Modern Poetry, p. 91.

allowed to exist for a brief span of time until they take flight in the face of the morning light. They present a kind of dolce vita of the imagination.

Such are Durrell's theories in the first four chapters. When we turn to the rest of the book, we find that there is very little correlation between his ideas and his practical criticism. For example, a study of his remarks on the poetry of Kipling and Yeats shows that Durrell's key, promoted so vigorously in the first four chapters, has little or no relevance in the context of their poetry. Perhaps, what he says about both these poets is of interest to us only because of its relation to his own practices as poet, or to his feelings and ambitions as a colonial-exile. When, therefore, he comes to the defence of Kipling's "If", and when he describes him as the poet of "the white man's burden and Imperial preference" (91), Durrell is clearly defining his own code. He praises the poem for successfully presenting "the code of the Samurai of the British Empire": an English mystique built upon chivalry and a taste for adventure (95). His romantic nostalgia becomes more glaring when he insists that if the poem now sounds too sentimental to British ears, it is only because they have not managed to experience the sentiments expressed in it. And yet, he feels that:

as sentiments the recipe for right-minded detachment expressed in the poem seem to me to be above

reproach; while the promise that if one carried them one would be a 'man' is to the last degree illuminating. (105)

A comparable romantic idealism is responsible for Durrell's short-sightedness in Bitter Lemons, where his impressionistic analysis of the root-causes and the objectives of enosis for the Cypriots has little grounding in reality.

Durrell on W. B. Yeats is equally self-revealing. He praises Yeats for all those qualities as a poet that he himself would like to possess. There is, for example, Yeat's use of esoteric symbolism, a characteristic Durrell finds particularly representative of modern trends in poetry. Yeats "was perhaps the earliest poet of his generation to turn the language of theosophy to practical use in his poetry" (128). Yeat's of course, had been using all along a symbolist technique; but when he discovered theosophy, he also discovered that his symbols could be made to yield esoteric meaning as well. If we substitute Durrell for Yeats, and physics and psychology for theosophy, we have an identical case.

It is only when we get to the poetry of T. S. Eliot that Durrell's key most aptly fits its designated role. This statement is particularly true of Durrell's remarks on Prufrock. In the context of the poem, Durrell's metaphor: "a moving staircase of half-uttered associations, memories, questions" is truly applicable (127).

The cyclic technique (the problem is stated, but the statement is not resolved and ended), the halt and recovery, the perpetual branching off to come back to the argument by another road and from another angle--all these qualities are for the first time successfully deployed into English poetry with complete mastery. (128)

This circular method is obviously well-suited to the material of Eliot's poetry, regarded by Durrell as a significant departure from the sentimental escapism of the Decadents. Instead of shirking reality, T. S. Eliot has chosen to portray it. And his version of reality led him to the use of the ironic mode to relay the emotional anaemia and the spiritual impoverishment of his sterile world.

But it is, of course, The Waste Land that has had the profoundest influence on Durrell;⁵⁰ and he regards it as the turning point in the poetry of the twenties. He uses an analogy from film to describe the poem's new techniques. An example is the long-track-shot from Gone With the Wind where:

The camera shuttles across the battlefield, picking up here and there different items in the catalogue of war-- a charred bivouac, a huddle of corpses, an overturned cart. Your eye takes in these images and interprets through them the meaning of war, of disaster, of bloodshed, without the intellectual content of the picture being explicit. (143)

Likewise, Eliot's use of imagery is suggestive rather than explicit. He uses "flight after flight of carefully woven

⁵⁰ See above, p. 54 .

images, sequences of moods, which at first look haphazard, but later on come to be recognized as a skilful patterning of feelings" (145). Eliot's fully-controlled and consciously-used imagery is regarded by Durrell as a new departure, for the value of his images is clear even when the meaning is not.⁵¹ Of course, Durrell had learned to use this technique in The Black Book, back in 1936.⁵² And later on in The Quartet, he uses the conscious -- as opposed to the free-association image -- in the delineation of Scobie, a humorous, pathetic version of Tiresias. Here, in The Key to Modern Poetry, Durrell examines Tiresias in terms of Groddeck's theory of the bisexual It.⁵³ Tiresias, a recreated mythical figure, is not fixed chronologically, since he can move about in history and in time.⁵⁴ Therefore, he can be used quite appropriately to portray in the poem, "a modern city man, a medieval, or an ancient Greek at will" (146). In a similar way, Eliot's charac-

⁵¹The poet of the post-Freudian era finds it impossible to surrender his unconscious in the way that Rimbaud did. His world is moving in another direction. He is learning to interpret his material and bend it to a new use in his life. This growing awareness is what separates the poet of this century from the poet of the last." The Key to Modern Poetry, p. 145.

⁵²See above, p. 42 on Durrell's seasons in The Black Book.

⁵³For Groddeck's It see above, p. 104.

⁵⁴Note my comments on myth, p. 85 above.

ters are praised by Durrell because they show multiple, and sometimes opposing, attributes. For Durrell, this multiplicity is a reflection of modern ideas on the ego.⁵⁵

Far from finding the bisexual theory of the It vague or non-definitive, Durrell hails it as a solution for the fragmentation of values around him, and he frankly admits his source for this idea to be the following passage from the Logoi, one of the older gnostic fragments:

When the Lord was asked by a certain man, When
should His kingdom come, He saith unto him:
When two shall be one, and the without and the
within, and the male and the female. (153)

This new individual is symbolized in Eliot's Tiresias. He is "pointing towards the future integration which lies beyond the hills of science and metaphysics, anthropology, and even perhaps art itself" (153).

Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future,
And time future contained in time past.
If all time is eternally present,
All time is unredeemable.
What might have been is an abstraction
Remaining a perpetual possibility
Only in a world of speculation.
What might have been and what has been
Point to one end, which is always present. (156)

This paradoxical quality of time is also true of the nature of a perceived reality which "is no longer itself once you qualify it with a name" (156). Therefore, for the poet, the

⁵⁵"Psychology has dispersed the old fixed ego, has disintegrated it and joined it up with the myths. Science and metaphysics have provided a new attitude to time and continuity." The Key to Modern Poetry, p. 151.

process of delineating his awareness of time, or his version of reality, becomes a challenging linguistic problem.

How is the poet to convey a state of being for which words are inadequate? How is he to state something beyond opposites in a language that is based upon opposites? The problem of the adequacy of language as a medium of expression is one that has always haunted Durrell. In The Key to Modern Poetry, he pinpoints it as 'The Semantic Disturbance', or, as he explains, the disturbance of meaning within the structure of the sentence. This quality, according to Durrell, is a feature of the literature of the first half of our century, when the artist is struggling particularly hard with a fractured or fragmented reality. A multiple reality is difficult to express in a linear medium; and the modern artist is more than ever aware that the reality he expresses in his art is not the one he is perceiving, but one that is already dead. Consequently, some artists like Lewis Carroll, Nietzsche, Rimbaud and Laforgue tried to express a reality that was beyond the bounds of the linguistic and conceptual apparatus at their command. "They worked language so hard that it fell in pieces."⁵⁶ (Durrell might add here the eccentric linguistic experiments of Gertrude Stein.) In his view, they

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 157. Also note an earlier statement made by Durrell on pp. 20-21 above.

overworked their sensibilities and therefore had to pay the penalty of the hysterical subjectivity which has become their trademark. In the light of this argument, Durrell's own Zero barely escapes the intense Nietzschean anguish which inspires it.

A partial solution for language as a medium of expression is found by Durrell in the combined negative-positive approach of Eliot. The latter states something in his poetry, then corrects it by introducing its opposite, and then measures its claim against what he had already said. Such a procedure is complemented by Eliot's use of antithesis: 'neither' against 'nor', and 'either' against 'or'.

But, perhaps most important for Durrell is Eliot's struggle to liberate his poetry from the bondage of the ego. In most of his discussions on art,⁵⁷ Durrell time and again shows a particular sensitivity to the future of art in the West. He feels that, at all costs, the art of the West must liberate itself from the incubus of egoism, from the illusion of personality. If not, he iterates, how can the artist cling to the projection of an ego that the philosophers and scientists have already dissected and diffused? And yet, having made this query, Durrell realizes that another, though opposing one, demands attention:

⁵⁷ In The Happy Rock, 1945; in Art and Outrage, 1961; and in A Private Correspondence, 1963.

What integration, he asks, is possible for the poet in order to recompose the ego, to give it value and shape?⁵⁸ These two questions, taken together, are not the contradiction they may at first appear to be. For to the artist, there are two necessary phases for his creative journey: the first includes a recognition of the fragmentation of the ego, and the second necessitates a process of reconstruction of the fragments into a pattern of significance for the artist. Both steps are complementary in Durrell's world.

The whole question of the role of the ego in the art of the future is a pivotal one in the works of Durrell. It appears in this series of lectures as it does in a number of his letters to Miller and in his interviews.⁵⁹ He continuously emphasizes that the art pendulum of the future must swing in the direction of an exteriorized art, free from the trappings of a self-oriented literature. That is, if art is to survive at all.⁶⁰ Not only must art become exteriorized, but it must also act cathartically: "Or is art finished for the West? I mean, of course, art as we know it?"⁶¹ And yet, his view of the future of

⁵⁸The Key to Modern Poetry, p. 162.

⁵⁹See Writers at Work, p. 281; Art and Outrage, pp. 24-53; A Private Correspondence, p. 128.

⁶⁰The Key to Modern Poetry, p. 87

⁶¹Ibid., p. 88.

creative writing is not pessimistic, for he draws comfort from Otto Rank's prognostications on the subject of Art and Artist. Rank predicts that the twentieth-century artist is in a transitional stage between the role of the artist-as-egoist and artist-as-seer. The direction is from the first to the second.⁶² Durrell's choice of this particular topic from Rank's work for discussion, is another case of having latched on to a theory to elucidate his already-expressed interest in the artist-cum-prophet theme, or the artist as a man waiting for a time when art will become unnecessary⁶³.

It is evident from the discussion above that I have presented Durrell's thought in a sequence, which is practically absent in his book. In fact, Durrell's remarks on modern poetry are sometimes random, and quite often arbitrarily arranged. Having undertaken an unusual journey into the realm of ideas in his first four chapters, he

⁶²"Especially in poetry which of course represents in general this conscious level of artistic creation, this permeation by the personal psychology of the poet and the psychological ideology of our age is almost completed... The new type of humanity will only become possible when we have passed beyond this psychotherapeutic transitional stage, and must grow out of these artists themselves who have achieved a renunciant attitude towards artistic production. A man with creative power who can give up artistic expression in favor of the formation of personality--since he can no longer use art as an expression of an already developed personality--will remould the self-creative type and be able to put his creative impulse directly in the service of his own personality..." Ibid., p. 89.

⁶³The Happy Rock, p. 4.

picks up a personal anthology of poetry and flicks through its pages, choosing for discussion a favourite poet here, a poem there. The result is a method of thinking aloud, often stimulating but rarely original.⁶⁴ It is true that his vocabulary reveals the poet-in-the-lecturer, and that his imagery is often effective; and yet when this is said there is little else to commend. It is difficult to justify Durrell's restrictive hypothesis as relevant to all modern poetry; in fact, the best parts of his criticism, including that on T. S. Eliot, are interesting in spite of his pseudo-scientific theorizing. It is ironic that the poet of Sappho had to approach modern poetry saddled with his restrictive formula. After all, we would expect him to know that poetry is not made with ideas, but with words.

Yet when his Key is viewed in perspective, that is, in relation to his earlier works, it emerges as a continuation of his favourite motifs. It contains explanations for many of the themes and images that have intrigued Durrell since the thirties. Whereas, in 1936, Durrell has ruefully admitted to Miller that the "heraldic: my pet is in a very muddled state just at the moment,"⁶⁵ now he is able to rationalize with confidence about space-time relations

⁶⁴The Key to Modern Poetry, p. vii.

⁶⁵ See p. 16 above. From this point and on to the end of this chapter, all page references incorporated within the text refer to the thesis.

drawing most of his ideas from popularized Einsteinian thought but with a difference in the make-up of his own heraldic concepts. Previously, Durrell wanted to destroy time altogether; he was anxious then, as he explained to Miller, to write about a spatial existence from which time as chronology has been cut out (7). And in The Black Book, his characters are haunted by the conviction that the time of clocks is dead (39). Now, he readjusts this claim: he exchanges his three-dimensional reality for the four-dimensional one of Einstein, which consists of the three dimensions of space and of non-linear time woven tightly together. Now Einstein's theory provides Durrell with an escape-hatch, by allowing him to change the "living limbo" of experience of Zero, Asylum in the Snow, Panic Spring and The Black Book into a state in which time is comfortably integrated with space. Now he finds -- we suspect with an immense sense of relief -- that he can write about a time that is not necessarily irreversible, relentless or steadily progressing towards death.⁶⁶ And now, the idea that the future is located in the present, and that death is only the other side of life, can be safely included in the theory of the new time. Hence time becomes a measure of our death consciousness since death is part of the texture of experience.⁶⁷ And yet, an ever present time is not totally

⁶⁶ Compare his attitude on linear time on p. 7 above.

⁶⁷ Durrell is to elaborate upon the theme of consciousness of death-in-life in 1960. See p. 53 above.

new in the fabric of Durrell's thought; we have already come across it in simplified form in The Black Book where the gnomic aorist is used to suggest the ever-presentness of past and future (44). Understandably, therefore, a concept of time that is repetitive or recurrent proves attractive to Durrell, since he has always maintained that experience is circular, and that the anatomy of man's journey, whether real or metaphoric, is circular (21). A circular pattern of experience is clearly depicted in Zero, and in the seasonal cycle of recurrence in The Black Book (42). The "circle" of art is also the subject of the poem "At Corinth" (65).

Durrell remains unclear about the precise implications of Bergsonian durée right up to 1952 (7). He admits his confusion about it only in 1959, and even then his understanding of Einstein and Bergson is not complete. However, he shows some change in his view of art, which before 1939 has been a way of circumventing time, and now -- thanks to Einstein -- was become an integral part of a reality from which time is no longer exempt.⁶⁸

In several other areas, Durrell follows up his interests in the writings of other men. There is, for instance, his persistent involvement with the dual nature of reality: that is, with the inner landscape versus the

⁶⁸ Compare the quotation at the bottom of p. 6 above.

outer; the private and public worlds; the logical versus the intuitive and chaotic elements in man. We have met this theme in the Hamlet letters of 1936 (11-12), where two-existing realities destroy Hamlet, as they destroy, later on, Herbert and Grace of The Black Book (44); and we found it dramatized in both Zero and Asylum in the Snow (19-26). When Durrell, therefore, plunges into readings of Freud and Groddeck, and investigates their views on the psyche, he is merely pursuing further the implications of his thoughts in this direction (100-4). However, whereas the earlier Durrell has insisted upon the ego-id polarity of Freud,⁶⁹ the older Durrell accepts Groddeck's It as the more tenable hypothesis, since the It contains a mysterious or mystical quality which supersedes the ego and envelops all the inevitable dualisms in man's nature. This hypothesis appeals to Durrell's sense of the penultimate mystery in human nature. The It is, therefore, one step further from Fangbrand's "final dualism in very self," or the portrait of Jesus in "A Small Scripture" (66).

The pre-Christian spirituality of The Black Book is developed in the chapter entitled "Beyond the Ego" in The Key to Modern Poetry. Here, Durrell touches lightly upon the question of mysticism as an answer to the spiritual

⁶⁹ See his treatment of ego-id in Asylum in the Snow, p. 26 above, and his ancillary presentation of the notebooks of Lawrence and Gregory in The Black Book, p. 43 above.

malaise of his 'value-less' world. But previous to this he has been involved with the theology of the Alexandrian Cabalists during his stay in the Egypt of 1936-38 (61-63).

Even in the case of his investigations into myth as archetypal patterning in literature, Durrell is returning to the devices he uses in earlier novels. In Panic Spring, Durrell recreates the Theseus theme and emphasizes its importance in the lives of the peasants of Mavrodaphne, in itself a place in limbo. And in The Black Book, a recreated mythical world is an essential equipment for the writer-to-be. How important is the reconstruction of a mythical world for Durrell, can be gauged from Lawrence Lucifer's obsessions with his imaginary journeys into an apocalyptic level of visionary experience (49).

But it appears that the writer who has been boldly proclaiming (20-1) the irrational as the very essence of the heraldic existence is now obviously ill-at-ease in his newly discovered world of reality. Whereas, in 1936, he had creatively presented Tibet (20) as the home of primordial chaos which is the sine qua non of the imaginative sensibility, he now easily and glibly espouses an alien world of logic. As the irrational creative man, Durrell appears to be at ease; as the master logician, he leaves much to be desired. After all, in 1942, he had said that logic is secondary to the substance of experience itself, since logic can only describe the world, and is a method and

an instrument rather than a desirable goal in itself. Whatever happened to his statement of the same year, that "the relations between ideas [in heraldry] are sympathetic and mysterious, affective rather than causal"? (20).

This is not to say that we do not expect Durrell to change or revise his views, but we suspect that he unwisely departed -- in Key -- from his true medium. For even though he consistently claims in this book that what he is presenting is only a key for a critical approach, still he cannot escape responsibility for his definitive twin-axis of criticism presented in his first four chapters of pure conjecture.

In the final analysis, it seems that all he has achieved in this adventure of ideas is to make a few suggestions, most of which are extensions from his previous works. And he has given his ideas a coating borrowed from his readings. He tells his audience, perhaps with the touch of a too-confident amateur philosopher, that the more we learn about our universe, the less we may hope to reach definitive conclusions about it. Therefore, we shall have to content ourselves with provisional truths within a given context, rather than hunt for truth. Likewise, in poetry, the ambiguity and indirection we find manifested there are signs that the poet is particularly sensitive to these issues. All these remarks can be made without his borrowings from his sources. All that his reading has done

for Durrell, as did the Cabal of the forties, is to provide him with a peg, or parallel, or a supplement for his personal vision. The result in The Key to Modern Poetry is hardly a systematic philosophy, nor a literary theory of any consistency. It is an apologia.

But Durrell could have, and perhaps, should have written, The Alexandria Quartet without this prior exercise in literary criticism. In terms of assessing Durrell's fiction, we need to consider two important issues: first, whether or not these scientific-psychological twins of Key really usher in a new world for Durrell; and second, whether or not the space-time theory, or Durrell's claims for its relevance in his fiction, is in fact essential for an appreciation of his novels of the fifties and sixties. Should we take his claims seriously and literally, or should we regard them as metaphors for his fictive reality? The first question has already been discussed in the preceding chapters; the second will be the subject of the next chapters.

CHAPTER IV

A KEY IS A LOCK

What's a kaleidoscope like if not unto itself? Always different but always the kaleidoscope: a million and one facets upon which, turn by turn an accenting ray puts a varying emphasis.¹

Messages spoken and unspoken, crossing and interlacing, carrying the current of our lives, the fears, the dissimulations, the griefs.²

In the year following his lectures in Argentina Durrell writes an essay on Miller³ in which he examines the nature, or the phases, of the development of a writer. He says that a writer goes through two major phases: in the first he is a self-explorer, and in the second, he becomes shaper-creator. The latter is the phase of the "real artist". Durrell signifies that Miller is a genius on the first level, but that he does not make it to the second. Miller, of course, feels that art is life, and therefore, it must not be shackled by forms alien to it. While Durrell does not set art above life, at least not in his early

¹Alfred Perlès to Durrell in Art and Outrage, (New York: Dutton, 1961), p. 18.

²Lawrence Durrell, Balthazar, (London:Faber), 1958, p. 49.

³"Studies of Genius VIII: Henry Miller", Horizon, No. 115, (July 1949), pp. 45-61. Compare Lawrence Lucifer's earlier two categories, on p. 49 above.

phases of writing,⁴ he does believe that only art is apocalyptic, in the sense that it can reveal relationships between events that are not easily discernible to man while he is caught up in the moment of experience.⁵

While Durrell's two categories do not display unusual critical acumen -- which in his case is peculiarly uneven⁶ -- they do tell us something about the direction his own writing is taking. When they are seen in retrospect, his own early works -- that is, those that are prior to 1950 -- appear as a group of hardly disguised probes into themes which gauge his personal masks, his ideals, and his goals as a writer. As such, they bear his distinctive stamp. And yet, at the same time, they bear the sign of his youth, for they lack the inner checks -- in terms of the selection of his material, of his words, of character delineation -- all of which he develops in his later works.

⁴In Corfu in 1936, Durrell writes Alan G. Thomas: "Away with these old buggars who want art to be a superior cabinet making. Real art is life." Spirit of Place, Alan G. Thomas ed., (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1969), p. 47.

⁵"Whatever I do will depend upon trying to crack forms. If the form comes off everything comes off." Writers at Work, (London: Secker, 1963), p. 281.

⁶Alfred Perlès has some thoughts on Miller's parallel reduction of thought to its bare minimum: "For genius is essentially innocent, even -- and perhaps especially -- when it is outrageous: as innocent as an erupting volcano." Art and Outrage, (London: Putnam, 1959), p. 13. But we can counter with Durrell's own remark in the same series of correspondence with: must art always be outrage? p. 9.

From his first work after The Key to Modern Poetry, Sappho, and on, Durrell moves on to a phase of greater assurance as artist-shaper. Now his characters -- although they still speak for him -- become more distinctive as people. Durrell learns not to make his appearance in his work, as he does in Asylum in the Snow⁷, and in The Black Book⁸ -- a manner we tend to regard with suspicion in the twentieth century, although it is not necessarily inimical to our imaginative involvement in literature. And when he still allows his people to discuss his metaphysico-aesthetic beliefs, he does so while carefully maintaining for them maximum individual identity.

Therefore, while it is true to say that The Key to Modern Poetry, as a critical theory or as practice, falls short of viable scholarly standards, yet it provides Durrell with a certain degree of objectivity with regard to his own writing. When he resumes his writing after this period of lecturing, he seems to zero in on it with added assurance. Now he is ready for his role as shaper-creator. Now, he begins to differ more sharply from Miller. For, whereas Miller takes pride in the fact that he is "just a Brooklyn boy"⁹ Durrell, after the fifties, is rarely sidetracked from

⁷ See p. 23 above.

⁸ See his apostrophe to Alan G. Thomas in The Black Book, on p. 47 above.

⁹ Lawrence Durrell, "The Happy Rock", 1945, Horizon, (July, 1949), p. 1.

his desire to perfect his conscious control over his material, in terms of language, imagery and form. Miller, perhaps more in harmony with the Freudian theory of art, feels that what is important about writing is the very fact that it provides an outlet for the repressed forces within man. Therefore, he argues what better way to forge truth out of the stuff of life than through obscenity?¹⁰ On the other hand, Durrell's life-long luring imp is design. This is the implication of his persistent courting of the heraldic motif; and of his love for poetry: "Poetry turned out to be an invaluable mistress. Because poetry is form, and the wooing and seduction of form is the whole game."¹¹

At the same time, Durrell is careful not to make his work the result of excessive manipulation, in the sense that he does not want it to be a medium for intellectual interplay. He enjoys the work of James Joyce, yet he feels that:

The trouble with modern literature... is that it has all gone up into the head. You give a man a thousand pages of Joyce to plough through, and what have you

¹⁰Obscenity as opposed to pornography. Durrell carefully distinguishes between both in his apology for Henry Miller in his introduction to The Henry Miller Reader, (New York: New Directions, 1959), p. x:

"To grasp the intention is everything. I am against pornography and for obscenity," writes Miller, and again in another place: 'My books are not about sex but about self-liberation;' and yet again: 'The full and joyful acceptance of the worst in oneself is the only sure way of transforming it.' These statements deserve the reader's fullest attention."

¹¹Writers at Work, p. 270.

got? A dense jungle of ego-mania and forced intellectualism. What I wanted to do was to get back to the origins, reverse the trend. Modern literature goes from Rabelais to Sade. I want to get it back to Rabelais -- out of the mind and into the belly where we can stitch it up again.¹²

He had strained after this Rabelaisian tone in The Black Book and yet what he ended up with there was a black humour calling out for help. In The Alexandria Quartet, he was to score a greater success along these lines. But even then, he devised a double pole for his axis of reality, one spiritual and the other temporal. In this way he tried to portray what he felt were the two main characteristics of the Alexandrians, as he saw them.

Thus, by the late fifties, an inner check against "ego-mania" and "forced intellectualism" in literature becomes his distinguishing feature. He had written about this issue as early as 1942, in "The Heraldic Universe,"¹³ and as late as 1952 in The Key to Modern Poetry¹⁴, where he cautions his reader to avoid blunting the impact of literature

¹²Curtis Cate, "Lawrence Durrell," Atlantic Monthly 208: 6, (December, 1961), p. 69. Durrell gives Pursewarden a similar line: "... turn to Europe, the Europe which spans say, Rabelais to de Sade. A progress from the belly-consciousness to the head consciousness, from flesh and blood to sweet (sweet!) reason. Accompanied by all the interchanging ills which mock us. A progress from religious ecstasy to duodenal ulcer!" From "My Conversations with Brother Ass (being extracts from Pursewarden's Notebook) in Clea, (London: Faber, 1960), p. 135.

¹³See p. 20 above.

¹⁴The Key to Modern Poetry, (London: Peter Nevill), 1952, p. 84.

with too much head-work. Indeed, this subject becomes part of his plea for an exteriorized literature for the West.¹⁵

In the interest of accuracy, and in view of the fact that Durrell's views are open to vacillation, it is necessary to assess his formal and informal utterances on modern literature in the light of his own creative writing. For example, what does he have to say about, or how does he react to, his series of lectures once their epoch is closed? How does his work after 1950 correlate with his ideas on the nature of modern poetry? How serious is he on the subject of his own goals in writing when he is being interviewed for the media?

I have already said something about his 1962 retractions of his view of relativity in the lectures;¹⁶ and I have also pointed out what Durrell says about poetry is not always relevant to his own criticism on poetry.¹⁷ This last factor, alone, does not necessarily constitute a breach of

¹⁵On this subject he says in The Key to Modern Poetry: "This detachment of the object from its frame of reference, which afterwards became an article of faith with the surrealists, has the effect of restoring the mystery innate in the object to which habit has dulled us, and the association blunted our responses." p. 87. Not that Durrell associated himself with surrealism or any other movement for that matter. In his early discussions with Miller, he tells him that he does not accept the social goals of surrealism, for he does not want to change society, as he feels they are trying to do, but aims at changing man. See A Private Correspondence, Edited by George Wickes, (New York: E. P. Dutton), 1963, p. 16-20.

¹⁶See p. 98 above.

¹⁷See p. 106 above.

responsibility; but when considered jointly with the first, and with a third -- the question of tone -- it is bound to suggest ambivalence in his attitude as writer. The following is an excerpt, part of a recorded interview made by Julian Mitchell and Gene Andrews for Writers at Work series of 1963, in which the quality of tone, I have just referred to, is clear:

INTERVIEWER: Well, it's always seemed to me that you have a very visual imagination. Even if you do not remember things accurately, at least you imagine them vividly.

DURRELL: I think that's the juggling quality I have. This gentleman who has just been dissecting me astrologically, tells me that, apart from the evasion and the flight and the noncomprehension of what I really am and what I really feel, I am the supreme trickster. Which is probably why my unkinde critics always seize on something like 'sleight-of-hand' or 'illusionist', which are actually words this chap uses. But fortunately I'm not to blame. I gather it's something to do with Fishes, to which I belong. In other words he says quite plainly that Pisceans are a bunch of liars and when you add to that an Irish background, you have got some pretty hefty liar.

INTERVIEWER: Wouldn't you say this was true of all artists probably-- that they lie all the time?

DURRELL: Well, they fabricate, I suppose. It's a form of self-aggrandisement, writing at all, isn't it?¹⁸

To his hostile critics, this kind of talk is equivocal and evasive: a number of his British reviewers have interpreted it as a cover-up for a set of ideas that are faulty by nature. To his admiring French readers, his manner is witty, sophis-

¹⁸ Writers at Work, p. 273.

ticated, urbane.¹⁹ He himself is always on the side of the fun he derives from relative thinking in a world he believes can no longer support thinking in straight lines. More and more, humour becomes his key to creativity and to life's experiences: "I want to be coarse and vulgar and funny."²⁰ Therefore, in several of his interviews and letters he obviously loves to tell how the British do not like his, or Miller's work because "they wish to fence off the great wild scope of their natures."²¹ And conversely, he praises the French for their happy acceptance of a marriage of art and life:

Je suis qu'un artiste parmi tant d'autres, venu déposer une gerbe au pied du monument France. Nous, gens du Nord, désespérons de jamais créer l'union parfaite entre l'art et la vie, l'épanouissement dans la gamme de nos cultures, auxquels vous avez atteint vous, en France. Dites-moi, un peu quel peuple peut exprimer la joie de vivre d'un Rabelais et la joyeux désespoir d'un Pascal; quel peuple peut posséder en même temps un Racine et un Montaigne un Rimbaud et un Hugo? A chaque génération, le miracle français continue, faisant apparaître des inspirations et des tempéraments opposés.²²

As places for writing, France and Greece are favourites with Durrell; he writes three out of the four parts of The Quartet in these countries: Justine in Cyprus, Balthazar and Mount-

¹⁹ See J. P. Hamard, "L'Espace et le Temps chez Lawrence Durrell", Critique, (Paris, May, 1960), 387-413.

²⁰ Writers at Work, p. 281.

²¹ Art and Outrage, pp. 16-17

²² "Lawrence Durrell Vous Parle", Réalités No. 178, (Paris) November, 1960), p. 120.

olive in Sommières.²³ He finds Germany receptive to Sappho, and attributes the Germans' receptivity to what he calls their highly developed metaphysical sense.

I think what some English readers find 'enigmatic' in my novels -- in Pursewarden's remarks, for example -- the Germans find metaphysically exciting.²⁴

Yugoslavia he hates, because he believes that Communism negates all the values he has learned to associate with freedom in society and art. But the two countries that he holds in an ambivalent love-hate relationship are England and Egypt; paradoxically, the two places that have given rise to his most famous works to date. However, more will be said later on about the importance of place in the works of Durrell²⁵.

²³For his views on this subject, refer to Robert-Allan, "Entretien avec Lawrence Durrell", Reflets Méditerranéens, (Avignon, June-July, 1965), p. 21: "Dès ma jeunesse, j'ai toujours senti que la France était la parfaite nourrice de l'artiste. Et, comme vous dites l'endroit que j'habite a beaucoup des qualités de ma Grèce bien-aimée. J'ai donc la chance de pouvoir vivre en Français, dans un décor quasi Grec, dans cette atmosphère si favorable à la penser, à l'esprit, qui me convient parfaitement. Bien sûr, je retourne souvent là-bas, mais mes racines sont déjà bien profondément dans terre française." But as J. P. Hamard puts it in his sensitive study of influences on Durrell. "La France semble avoir été pour Durrell surtout le climat nécessaire à sa libération, le moyen de s'évader de son insularité. C'est à la source grecque qu'il pensa ses valeurs positives." Hamard, p. 389.

²⁴Kenneth Young, "A Dialogue with Durrell". Encounter, XIII, (December 6, 1959), 62.

²⁵This subject is discussed in greater detail on pp. 192 ff. below.

In the fifties and sixties, Durrell maintains this facade of the partly-serious, partly-jovial writer, which continues to charm his French and alienate his English readers. He has continued to insist that those who reject his work, do so because they are looking in it for systematic philosophy whereas he is only offering metaphysical speculation. Even love, he says, is a metaphysical quest. And yet, to probe it does not entail either linearity of thought or consistency in thinking. Consequently, he maintains that many points of view, or even contradictions of the same subject, can be accepted as simultaneously true. This approach marks -- or perhaps mars -- his treatment of Alexandria and its people in The Quartet.

Bearing this insistence on simultaneity in mind, let us take a look at his first verse-play, which is also his first major work after Key to Modern Poetry. Sappho is a significant link between his early and his later creative works, because it shows what happens to his recurrent patterns, images and motifs. Sappho, published before Key, is actually written after Durrell delivered his lectures in 1948. Hence we have to ask ourselves: Are its themes and its images, is its form, a new departure in Durrell-scope?

Durrell borrowed his Sappho from her Greek counterpart of 600 B.C. Both are famous lyric poetesses of Lesbos, and both are powerful political forces of their day, who helped shape the wars of the Greek islands 600 years before

Christ. But this is where the resemblance ends. Durrell's Sappho emerges as a twentieth-century woman, a prototype for the later Justine. Although she is not a Lesbian, Durrell's Sappho has strong masculine qualities reminiscent of Groddeck's ideas on the bi-sexuality of the It²⁶. Durrell, here, demonstrates his ability to create new forms out of traditional material. Not only is his version of Sappho brought up to date, but the world he creates for her has his peculiar stamp. It has three levels of reality: there is the reality of its underworld, Old Eresos, or the sunken city in the sea; that of New Eresos, or the world of action, devoured by colonial wars; and finally, the reality of the contemplative world, which is modelled in part on his heraldic design: this is the island, No Name.

The time is 650 B.C. In depicting Eresos, Old and New, Durrell resorts to a favourite metaphor of his, an island, which is a place in limbo as is Mavrodaphne, or a place in which new realities are forged, as is Prospero's island of art.²⁷ Lesbos is both. It is the centre of political intrigue engineered by the tyrant Pittakos, and his abettor Kreon; but it is also the home of Sappho, Kreon's wife, a renowned poetess, known for her hall of art and for her wine and poetry-reading sessions. Her hall is, of course

²⁶See p. 104 above.

²⁷See p.67 above.

eventually destroyed by the wars which ravage the islands. In contrast to Lesbos, there is No Name, an island and a self-styled refuge for Pittakos's twin brother, Phaon, who was a poet and is now a fisherman and a sponge-diver. No Name is his Nirvana. It is free from struggles for political supremacy and the illusions of power which are its inevitable companions. On his island, Phaon is free to experience inner silence. Ironically this is where Pittakos finally seeks refuge from the consequences of his own misdeeds; but it is too late for him; and when he is murdered by his own last faithful follower, his brother becomes a victim as well.

The two islands -- Pittakos's and Phaon's -- are two sides of a coin: the overworld. The underworld is the part of the island now submerged in the sea: the old city of Eresos. Phaon, as 'diver', is paid by Kreon to retrieve some tablets from Old Eresos which will prove that the lands, now belonging to Diomedes, were originally Kreon's by heritage. Phaon extracts the tablets, but as it turns out he has unearthed only provisional truth, for the tablets are distorted by Pittakos to give some false information about Kreon and Sappho. Durrell's sea throughout the play is a conscious -- as opposed to a free association -- image.²⁸ It surrounds

²⁸Durrell's use of a free association image can be seen in the way he handles snow in his early works such as Asylum in the Snow, and in The Black Book, where snow not only signifies the traditional associations of death, but is also a refuge for the initiated.

and includes all islands as does Jung's collective unconscious. The world which lies submerged within it is the world of which Diomedes, a competent but perpetually drunk poet, lies dreaming in the second scene of the play. With his suicide, Diomedes surrenders the struggle to remain in the overworld. The landscape of the whole play is drenched in sun, as is that of Panic Spring, and is a reminder of Jung's archetypal source of life, object of worship, and core of energy. It is also Durrell's metaphor for the heraldic universe.²⁹

The action is initiated by Minos -- Sappho's dull pedagogue but true ally. In his inimitable pedestrian style, Minos introduces some of the underlying concerns of the play. As he gazes out to sea, he counts the islands which will soon be swept into war. He mourns man's inability to be completely good or happy; he dwells upon his own haunting fear of old age, and death. His suffering, as Phaon points out to him later,³⁰ is due to his reluctance to accept death as the other part of life. Minos even grumbles at the sun: it "ripens us to watch the stars go down" (10). Throughout his soliloquy, his dual voice maintains an undercurrent of thoughts, too deep to be uttered by his conscious mind. "A world without people would be better" (10). Thus his other

²⁹ See p. 68 above.

³⁰ Sappho, (London: Faber, 1950), pp. 86-88.

voice breaks through the web of dissimulation which he has carefully woven around himself, and penetrates through it, to the core of his inner reality.

On the opposite side of the scale of human awareness, there is Diomedes, who, as the play opens, lies drunk on a sofa in Sappho's house. His is the task of living with all the crude realities which people are in the habit of ignoring. He is treated unceremoniously by the three maids who come in to prepare the stage for the approach of Sappho. One of the maids is Cloe, his prospective daughter-in-law. When he is thrown out of the place, Sappho emerges equally haggard and sleepy. She is sporting a golden wig, which, in the true Durrellian style, is her way of side-tracking calendar time. Minos greets her with:

And at last you are here, as always,
Towards the ending of your element, the summer,
Lovely, famous and discontented, Sappho. (18)

As he sees her she is "A creditor to work, to joy an ignoramus" (18). But, this is not the whole truth about her, since she discovers a rapport--however shortlived -- with Phaon, and on a level of reality that would not mean much to Minos. Like the later Justine, Sappho is:

...such a mixture. You combine
The opposites of qualities like no one else I know
Impulse and moderation, faith and treachery,
Virtue and expedience.³¹

³¹Ibid., p. 21. Before Sappho, Durrell praises Eliot's multiple-faceted personalities. For this, see pp. 109-10 above.

How true this is of the latent Sappho will appear in its full potential in the second part of the play. In the beginning, she is languorous, creative, and bored: bored with the moneyed vulgarity of Lesbos. Durrell deliberately sets her apart from the rest, and most of all from her money-lender husband, by a stammer which even hinders her from full participation in her own poetry-reading sessions.

We now find out something about her past. She was discovered by Minos on the streets of New Eresos, and matched by him with Kreon. Like a tragic heroine, she has no place of origin, and her lineage is unknown. She is a perfect misfit in the world of her conniving husband. Kreon's energies are directed with extreme single-mindedness to the amassing of more wealth, and with it the power over people. He hires Phaon to extract some documents from the city in the sea, hoping to prove his own family's ownership of land now belonging to Diomedes. Phaon's dive is a hardly disguised mythic motif: a symbolic descent and rebirth, to be used later in Clea.

In contrast to Kreon, Sappho is absorbed in a personal dialogue. Her doubts are manifold: Is her poetry good? Is she a tolerable wife? A mother? Her dual voice informs her that she is not. Her poetry is written with only partial commitment; and she changes lovers with her moods.

Others devour their young with kisses. Mine
 Are left free to grow. And yet, and yet,
 Perhaps because I never punish them
 They love me less. Because I do not bully them
 For love; since pain creates the deepest bonds
 When we are children: and what we later think

We hated in our parents that we grieve the loss of.
I should be more harsh. (35)

It is pain, throughout this and the other works of Durrell, that creates the deepest bonds; a condition, or a contradiction, or perhaps a perversion that is at the heart of human nature as Durrell portrays it. Thus Sappho and Minos of Phaon:

Minos 'He was always disappearing and returning;
Always a new profession, a new skill,
Always by himself, never with friends...
Always silent and gloomy, never at ease..'
Sappho 'Always and never, eh?'
Minos 'Always and never.' (35)

Kreon makes the first appearance in Sappho's world. He is a helpless mixture of dreams of an expanding empire, and superstitious fear of the Mask, who is the oracle that speaks in the voice of the gods of the island. However, he decides to make his power override that of the Mask: he plans to cross the Mask if the Mask crosses him. If he shrewdly puts up with Sappho's betrayals, it is because he knows the advantages to be gained from a merging of his money-power with her word-power. Ironically, in the end he is outmanoeuvred by Pittakos who wields the real power over the people: the power of the sword.

When Phaon wanders into Sappho's world, what he brings along with him is a set of private images gauging themes which fill Sappho's poems, and Durrell's books. His own life-line is symbolic: he was a poet and is now a fisherman. He was imprisoned in Lesbos, but is now free. He

was sick with leprosy, is now healthy; he was articulate, he is now silent; lonely, and now content. This change in his life is tantamount to a symbolic representation of Durrell's belief that living in harmony with the inner silence is the essence of the heraldic experience.³²

Phaon describes his growing awareness in this way:

..... I had gone
Clean out beyond content, to a new state:
If you can imagine a repose that is
Positive, beautiful, determined as an act,
Without the lumber of the will to weight it down.

Diminished as a man in all I was,
I grew extending faculties.
As a meteor in the night grows hair... I cannot
Possibly express it. I must go. (50)

But he also discovers that speech is inadequate, and that what matters is experience. In answer to Sappho's importune questioning on the nature of this change, he tells her what she half expects to hear:

Useless, Sappho, useless, for our speech
Seems to corrupt it, so the nearer that I get
By definition to it, so far am I from what I really
mean. (50)

And yet he tries to relay his experience:

I sank so deep: past waking it would seem:
Into a clear profoundness like a pool
Where Time became quite innocent of force,
Because simply a contemptible refracturing medium
On which phenomenon were printed.
The world became a flight of printed symbols.
I had the feeling I created for myself
A sort of refuge in the midst of change,
Like a small centre of healing in the midst
Of some great wound -- for that is what the world is. (51)

³²The ideal is silence is an idea Durrell borrows from the Cabal. See p. 63 above.

In contrast to Sappho, time for him does not imply a physical deterioration leading to death; it is devoid of force, and therefore, innocent. Consequently, when Minos entreats him not to turn his back on them, he replies with confidence that on the contrary he will be entering:

... more fully into the world
I share with you, the disturbance called reality. (51)

If Minos joins this dialogue with Phaon, he approaches it from without. He is the watcher of external verities. He admires Pittako's world of power-action. On the other hand, Phaon is for the world within, where "time is eternally to extend itself/Through every category, yet remain unchanging." He prefers the world ten fathoms deep: at the heart of the "normal world." When Minos entreats him to leave Old Eresos alone, Phaon angles him with:

Come you are an old man now Minos;
The Underworld may not be unlike Old Eresos,
Lying below the surface of our lives there. (53)

Minos fears time's progression will result in change; Phaon knows that "nothing changes in the world" (53). Minos sees Pittakos as a glorious victor: has he not advanced triumphant-ly against Athens? Phaon sees through his brother's actions:

For Pittakos every advance is a retreat
Upon himself, upon the burning questions
Natural to a man as great as he is.
He needs all our patience, all our comprehension.
Once he was gentle, gay, and eager to be learning.
All this went by the board to make the soldier. (54)

As though to confuse Minos further but in answer to Sappho's implied questions, Phaon continues:

Knowledge to knowledge gives only hard fact,
 Cold cash, profit and loss.
 We have toured knowledge in philosophy,
 Comfort in science, art in technique.
 There remains some other thing, some other way
 To make them all related to the whole
 So that in them we get our joy at last
 And not feel we are wasting: there is
 A factor, like some colourless precipitate,
 Unlike time, yet of it, that is the clue,
 The great clue to the world of unseen forms. (56)

Minos's reaction is predictable: "And all that talk -- phew
 -- time , reality, and so on" (59). But Sappho, divesting her-
 self of her golden wig -- "deception of wigs" as Diomedes
 puts it -- recites her poem on the water-nymph distressed by
 doubts, longing for a stranger to give her peace of mind (65).
 Only later is Sappho to come to terms with the fact that
 peace of mind can only be had from within. But then it is too
 late. The price she has had to pay for it is weighted down
 with tragedy.

This interlude with Phaon fades out and is replaced
 by a poetry-reading session in her hall of art. By means of
 a cinematic technique of fade-in and fade-out, we are now
 in a scene of poetry-competition, where once more Sappho
 wins the laurel, and Diomedes comes a close second. Another
 fade-out introduces a further lyrical interlude with Phaon
 and Sappho; this time they are discussing the future. Phaon
 sees in Sappho's palm a disposition that is curious and
 ill-at-ease,

Who always finds what she is not seeking for,
 And always seeks for what is not to be found.
 Yet it is a woman's hand. (73)

He warns that love is a modern invention, and that like a dagger, it is "Useful, kills many, but in operation/Generally ugly to watch" (74). Sappho adds that the objective of love is self-possession. They compare their lives' motifs: Sappho has chosen the road to self-gratification, and to articulation in song; Phaon the road to contemplation, and silence. But she insists: "I dare. I am. I will." a motto that could very well serve for the later Justine (77). And yet, the significant part of reality, it is his turn to insist, is surely not in the aggression of the will, but in its submission into the flux of experience.

This discussion has the effect of turning Sappho back upon herself. When she retreats to her room, she has to face "the moment at the mirror" (79). The mirror here is an axis of truth as it is later in The Quartet. Now Sappho faces up to her boredom with the "daylights full of empty men and women;" she listens to her dual voice as it hurls accusations at her: "(Traitor, liar, thief, comedian, prostitute,)" and she quickly acquiesces: "Yes, all of these, and more, and more and more" (81).

A further idyllic interlude gradually works its way towards the darker tones: harbingers of the future. While they bask in the sun, Sappho and Phaon talk about the beauty of form:

PHAON

The three most beautiful forms are
Ships, women, and musical instruments,
Their properties must somewhere intersect:

But this is only seen by mad poets
 For whom there are no single images
 But a continual marriage of attributes. (33)

Kreon comes in and after flattering Phaon's diving skills, divulges his real message: from the scene of war, Pittakos is victorious, but Diomedes's son has been killed. This ushers in Sappho's real antagonist. Pittakos arrives, infused with the mirages of victory he exclaims

... O how beautiful
 Power is, and the good luck that goes with it.
 And how easily won... .(97)

The long-awaited confrontation between the twin-brothers takes place. It is accompanied by a dialogue on the relative merits of the life of contemplation and that of action. When Phaon talks about the importance of coming to terms with his own reality, Pittakos answers with his hopes of an expanding empire, and a great dynasty of tyrants to follow him as kings of Aeolia. Phaon interprets his brother's offer to him of the position of governor of Athens, as a cover-up for his insecurity and fear. Soon afterwards, we are able to see that Phaon's analysis is correct; for Pittakos's so-called victory has cost him more in terms of lives and arms than he has dared reveal. Now he has to find the money to appease what is left of his army; and Kreon is the obvious succour.

Spurned by Phaon, Pittakos turns to Sappho: will she be his ally, and his future spouse when the time is ripe for such a move? She shrugs off his lures of power, and even advises him to relinquish the game before its deceptions prove too costly. But he is powerless against the current of fame:

..... I tremble,
 Divided between policies like to many masks
 To choose from, dexter and sinister, lucky or unlucky.
 The sibyl must decide for me again.
 I dare not move a step without the mask.
 I owe her everything to date. (127)

And he adds as an afterthought:

The luckier may make a luckier pattern-
 The pure ellipse of action freed from will:
 But for most of us, and most of me, there is
 Only the world of opposites, the Either-Or,
 The Both-And, or the But-If worlds.
 That is the only workshop I was given. (131)

And

I have one subject that I really know:
 Myself: do you want to hear of me?

The artist and the soldier, acting
 Separately in time, meet at a point in life
 Where each begins one day to question
 The basic meaning of his practice.
 The sword and stylus both become, it seems,
 Equally a delusion,
 And the merit in their illusion.

Can we change, really change, anything, or alter
 Any part of the world for the better
 They ask themselves? They are both useless
 In the face of this eternal refraction
 Of the thinking mind touching reality. (135)

Ego-ridden Pittakos has stilled the inner man and given free
 rein to the mask of tyranny. Henceforth we know he is doomed.

Sappho voices our first premonition of disaster:

Here comes the perpetual excuse of the feeble
 Unwilling to confront their inner selves. (138)

And when she has had enough of his crudeness:

SAPPHO

Pittakos, the best thing we could do for Lesbos
 Is perhaps to murder you before this pattern
 Begins to spread about us like a stain:
 Perpetual increase of ruin, nobly excused,
 Perpetual fraud of the humble doing your work... (140)

From this point on in the play, there is the clash of their tragically opposed wills. Their struggle is pre-faced by Diomedes's suicide. In Sappho's arms he confesses that he has been defeated by his succubus. He has taken poison, not as is commonly supposed because of his son's death, but because he cannot live with the baseness within him. He has fallen in love with Cloe, and is happy at his son's death. It is Sappho's turn to confess to him that she is the voice in the Mask -- something he already knows -- and that furthermore, she feels responsible for the ravages of war since she had instigated it by pushing Pittakos to the battle of Athens at a point when he had begun to bore her as a lover. She had not, as she was supposed to, taken the drug before she enacted the oracle, and had therefore acted upon her own initiative, and not at the behest of the gods. This ploy reveals more than one motive for an action which will become a keynote in the structure of The Quartet.

The ritual of the Oracle reveals several esoteric implications in the play. The people are gathered in front of the cave to hear what the Mask has to say about their destiny, or, more specifically, about that of their leaders. The Priestesses chant verses about all time being condensed into the present moment of time; they sing about individuality as a series of deceptions, or masks. They affirm the Mask's ability to heal the opposites in man; and to join male with female, or square to circle, into a perfect unit. They talk about divine acceptance of multiplicity. And

Sappho as Mask:

I have encountered the voice of the God,
 Neither within nor without
 Neither here nor there,
 Neither this nor that.
 But everywhere at one in time and place. (151)

Kreon confesses to the Mask that he has discovered a secret about Sappho: the tablets tell him that she is his daughter. What is he to do about it? The answer he gets is to suffer any punishment deemed necessary by the Senate: a sentence that destroys all his plans, and gives Pittakos -- the real author of this incestual relationship -- the power he needs to exile Kreon and Sappho, while holding their two children as hostages.

Nemesis catches up with Pittakos fifteen years later, when Sappho has had time to entrench herself as the dictator of Corinth. Maddened by the death of her son, which Pittakos claims is accidental, she seeks her revenge in sure, calculated strokes. She haunts Pittakos with the venom of a vampire until she recovers her daughter, Kleis, and kills the brothers in their sleep on Phaon's island.

Sappho has gained complete mastery of the islands. She is reunited with Kleis. Apparently she is successful. But inwardly she knows that her revenge has turned her into an empty shell, devoid of love. She turns to Kleis:

Come here and look upon my face:
 The tortured wicked features of your mother,
 Like some ghastly figurehead washed up
 On the bare island of her good intentions.
 You are young now, I am old. Look at me.
 Would you have recognized me if we met
 By accident upon some narrow street? (185)

Yet, the last note of this tragedy of misguided energy is not totally dark:

.....You shall weep for both of us,
 For the whole world if you have tears enough,
 And for yourself long after you imagine
 There are no tears left in the world to weep with.

Then perhaps you may be blessed, only perhaps.
 Out of its murderous armament time
 May select a single grace for you to live by:
 But that we dare not hope yet: weep, child,
 Weep, weep, weep. (186)

Throughout this discussion, I realize that I have stressed those aspects of the play that pertain to literature rather than to drama. Perhaps because its distinctive characteristics are those relating to its poetical truths and to its general mood of luminous contemplation: hardly dramatic qualities. But also, because as a lead into the world of The Quartet, Sappho emerges as a significant hinge for past and future works of Durrell. As drama, it is relatively high on landscape tones, reminiscent of the Jungian inner landscape, and low on stage action. Its final impression is that of a duet between two opposed voices: Pittakos's making loud claims for the excitement and the challenge, not to mention the satisfaction he derives from a life of ego-ridden action; and Phaon's, lower but just as strong, maintaining that inner solitude affords the most lasting rewards. In between them is Sappho's voice, hesitant at first and closer to Phaon's and later aggressively enacting the role of Nemesis to Pittakos's Tyrant. The fact that she meets a tragic end, as indeed they both do, does not mean that Durrell rules

out the validity of her will-to-action under certain circumstances, or that there is no affirmative tone to the whole. In fact, he grudgingly admires her, and he, perhaps unwittingly, puts in an equally strong case for her opponent: Pittakos. Conversely, Phaon tends to look anaemic by comparison to either of them, although this is perhaps farthest from their author's intention.

Primarily, what surfaces here is the poetic role in its various guises. There are three poets, each enacting his own destiny. Diomedes, who is a competent poet and visionary, is a weak man, and he gives in to his world of nightmare. Sappho, perhaps because she renounces her destiny as a prime-mover of people through her gift for words, becomes a shadow of what she once was. Phaon fulfils his role as a poet, and he goes beyond it to his life of contemplation. But his world is shattered from without by trespassers. And yet, Durrell tells us there is still hope for Kleis.

In retrospect, Sappho is a lyrical song incorporating several of Durrell's themes prior to, but strengthened by, The Key to Modern Poetry. In this sense it is a pivotal work in Durrell's evolution from the intuitive to the rational. We have seen the Pittakos-Phaon polarity before in the Hamlet themes of the thirties; but here it re-emerges bedevilled by Freudian repression. Pittakos is destroyed from within, when he refuses to face the truth about his personal fears and insecurity. Taken together, the brothers can be

seen as two parts of a single identity at odds with itself. In The Quartet, we see a similar, although a more positive dialogue, between Darley and Pursewarden. Perhaps the relationship between the two writers of the later work is closer because they are both influenced by a pervasive life-force akin to Groddeck's It.

Groddeck's bi-sexual It³³ may also be a factor influencing the characterization of Sappho. In his play, Durrell recreates myth to incorporate contemporary notions on the psyche, after Freud and others. Thus, both his Sappho and her world mirror the world he lives in. For example, a prominent theme in his play is Groddeckian: the theme of the will's relationship to the It; Durrell, like Groddeck, suggests that it is best for man to learn to submerge his will in the flux of the It, rather than follow its unbridled path to the ruin of self and others, as Pittakos does here. This theme becomes pervasive in The Quartet. Through his re-enactment of myth, Durrell is answering by implication a question Lawrence Lucifer asks about how the new myth will emerge in an arid land. Here, Durrell finds means by which he can bridge an apparent gap between past and present patterns of thought on time and place, and the ego, among others.³⁴ In this way he gives a prominent place to ritual and magic

³³On Groddeck's It, see p. 103 above.

³⁴See Lawrence Lucifer on recreated myth on p. 49 above. See also pp. 104, and 131.

in his depiction of any locale, and he impresses upon his reader the belief that time does not bring about change but only apparent change in man's age-old preoccupations. In *Mavrodaphne*, the ritual of the fireworks is an annual affair of great momentum to the inhabitants of that island; the cave is a focal point for the tourists of Cefalû; the occult figures in both works as it does in The Quartet, and in Tunc-Nunquam. In Sappho, the authoritative voice of the Oracle manipulates the emotions and the actions of the people and their leaders. Later, there is the anachronistic Carnival in Alexandria. The voices of the gods, humourous or otherwise, seem to become more audible than the people's with each successive work of Durrell. And yet, paradoxically, these gods speak with the voices of the people. In Sappho, the mask responds to the wishes of the masses of Lesbos. The spirit of place is more pronounced here than previously; and the island is more than ever a metaphoric locale for the life of the inner man: a kind of inner landscape of man; a spring-board into his heraldic reality.³⁵ Phaon's island also stands out as a link in Durrell's two-fold development of the visionary.³⁶

³⁵The island image is a recurrent one in Durrell's work. There is *Mavrodaphne* in The Dark Labyrinth, and Lawrence Lucifer's island on the Ionian, and later the Cyprus of The Alexandria Quartet.

³⁶Phaon expresses some of the themes of the Cabal as Durrell envisaged it in the forties: see pp.61-62 above. In The Key to Modern Poetry Durrell also explains the two-fold development of the poet, p.112 above.

The total pattern of images in this play is part of a long chain of images connecting Durrell's entire work. Sea, mask, buried city, earthquake, diver, water-clock, mirror are all continuous in the heraldic design he is weaving. Now, his images work, not by haphazard association, but by conscious intent as parts of a metaphoric design of the traveller in a visionary world of space-time. Similarly, his themes of love and war, life and death, self-contradiction and silence, art and beyond it, are all continuous and permeate his future works. All these aspects, and many more, mushroom in Alexandria.

CHAPTER V

HEART OF THE FIRE OPAL

...the slow spirals of consciousness
towards the heart of the fire opal.¹

...for at each stage of development each
man resumes the whole universe and makes it
suitable to his own inner nature: while
each thinker, each thought fecundates the
whole universe anew.²

I know that the key I am trying to turn is
in myself.³

One of the first problems facing the reader of The Quartet is the question of the "reality"⁴ of Alexandria and its people. To each of his four parts, Durrell appends a note with the claim that his city is "real". The immediate question here is, real for whom: the author? the historian? one of the characters? This question in turn evokes the problem of the point-of-view, or the author's identity in terms of the stand-in characters. With so many of the persona using Durrellian terminology for the discussion of Durrellian obsessive themes, with whom, if any,

¹Lawrence Durrell, Tunc, (London:Faber, 1968), p. 303.

²Lawrence Durrell, Justine, (London:Faber, 1961), p. 176.

³Lawrence Durrell, Balthazar, (London:Faber, 1961), p. 23.

⁴For want of a better word. "Reality" in terms of the author's point of view.

are we to associate the author's point of view? Many of the people in his novel, particularly those who are either writers, or artists, or professional talkers, as is Balthazar, are very much involved with such subjects as the relationship between creating a word continuum and depicting the new ego, or the nature and the goal of art. This knack is most obvious in the cases of Arnauti, Pursewarden and Darley; to a lesser extent, in Justine, Balthazar and Nessim; even Keats and Leila take part in this particular climate of thought. Out of the web of human relationships, we have to reach some kind of consensus as to whose views approximate most nearly those of the author.

In a previous chapter⁵, I mentioned Durrell's wish to regard each of his characters as one of his masks. But because of his frequent equivocations in interviews⁶, I find it necessary to approach this and other relevant questions through documentary evidence from his works.

So far in Durrell's work, there are numerous reminders of author-character links: the narrator of Asylum in the Snow, Lucifer and Gregory of The Black Book, and finally, Diomedes-Phaon-Sappho. But in a poem entitled "Eight Aspects of Melissa", published in Cities, Plains and People in 1956,

⁵See p. 68 above.

⁶G.S. Fraser rightly points out that Durrell plays up in a spoofing way to the special interests of the people who are probing him. Lawrence Durrell, (London:Faber, 1968), p.25.

Durrell turns to a device of characterization he uses in The Quartet. This poem is divided into eight parts, each part portraying an aspect of the girl, and at the same time embodying a facet of the poet's own personality. John A. Weigel rightly reminds us that this Melissa may have little to do with an original Melissa⁷ but she does foreshadow the Melissa of The Quartet. Whether or not there is in fact an original is irrelevant to our present study, and is more properly the subject of genetic or autobiographical criticism. What is relevant here is Durrell's trick of allowing each aspect of Melissa to speak out for one part of himself:

If seen by many minds at once your image
As in a prism falling breaks itself.⁸

Eventually, each of the aspects of the girl's character emerges as an ideogram for the poetic experience. Thus, the Melissa of the poem embodies the night in her troubled tears⁹; she stands for all those wounded in their sex, as she is in fact in the novel¹⁰; she is a reminder of the autumn-dwinding of love, but also of the cool muslin dress in summer;

⁷John A. Wigel, Lawrence Durrell (New York: Dutton, 1956), p. 38. The sources of Durrell's fictional characters do not concern me here. What I am interested in, is the obvious points of resemblance, biographical or in aesthetic theory, between Durrell and his various mouthpieces in literature.

⁸From "By the Lake", in "Eight Aspects of Melissa", 1, Cities, Plains and People, (London: Faber, 1956), p. 7.

⁹From "The Night", Ibid., p. 8.

¹⁰"The Adepts", Ibid., p. 9.

her suffering reflects to him his own cruelty in love;¹¹ but she also represents their happier moments together, when "like riders on the cloud/Whom kisses only can inform,"¹² they hate the sun for its invasion of their privacy.

Similarly in The Quartet, we have three parallel but distinct views of art in general, and of the novel in particular. If we attempt to break up what Clea calls "the artist tribe"¹³ to concentrate upon the three major writers within it, we shall find that two of them share some personal idiosyncrasies with their author. Pursewarden, like Durrell, takes pleasure in equivocation, and sees this as a quality essential to the writer.¹⁴ Like his author, he believes that "The object of the art of writing is to grow a personality which in the end enables man to transcend art."¹⁵ He writes a

¹¹"The Encounter", Ibid., p. 9.

¹²"The Rising Sun", Ibid., p. 11.

¹³Clea, (London:Faber, 1960), p.120. For his previous use of multiple narrators, see The Black Book on page 52 above.

¹⁴"When I was chided by Balthazar for being equivocal I replied, without a moment's conscious thought: "'Words being what they are, people what they are, perhaps it would be better always to say the opposite of what one means?' Afterwards, when I reflected on this view (which I did not know that I held) it seemed to me really eminently sage!" Clea, p. 134.

¹⁵Compare this statement of Pursewarden's with Durrell's in "The Happy Rock", Horizon, (July, 1949), p. 4. "Like all great artists he wants a world where art would become unnecessary; he wants a New Jerusalem."

Rabelaisian apostrophe on Nelson Stylites, just as Durrell does.¹⁶ Then there is Darley, the ex-teacher and presently Foreign Press Officer to the British Embassy in Cairo, and narrator of three of the four parts of the novel. Leaving aside the question of his name, he shares with his author the fact that he is writing about his novel from a Greek island and that his novel is about an Alexandria extracted from memory¹⁷. They are both Irish and, as Justine puts it, mental refugees in Egypt.¹⁸ Both of them believe, as indeed does Pursewarden, that art in the future is going to be classical.¹⁹ It is Darley who points out that:

¹⁶Mountolive writes to Clea: "In the Square itself your poet stopped to apostrophize Nelson Stylites in pure calf-killing fashion. I have forgotten exactly what he said, but it was sufficiently funny to make me laugh very heartily." Mountolive (London:Faber, 1958) p. 65. Compare this with Durrell's "A Ballad of the Good Lord Nelson", in Collected Poems, (London:Faber, 1960).

¹⁷Durrell wrote Justine in Cyprus.

¹⁸"You are a mental refugee of course, being Irish." Justine, p. 39.

¹⁹Classical in the sense that both language and structure are polished. Hence Durrell's note to Balthazar: "But it would be worth trying an experiment to see if we cannot discover a morphological form one might appropriately call 'classical'!" Likewise Darley: "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 which hides the cloth -- of gold -- the meaning of the pattern." Justine, p. 17. This method is analogous to the one that Darley is engaged in, in The Quartet: reordering reality into his metaphoric structure forever revolving upon its own axis of reality.

...we artists form one of those pathetic human chains which human beings form to pass buckets of water up to the fire, or to bring in a life-boat. An uninterrupted chain of humans born to explore the inward riches of the solitary life on behalf of the unheeding forgiving community, manacled together by the same gift.²⁰

And also:

Arnauti, Pursewarden, Darley -- like Past, Present and Future tense! And in my own life (the staunchless stream flowing from the wounded side of time!) the three women who also arranged themselves as if to represent the moods of the great verb, Love: Melissa, Justine and Clea.²¹

These three writers suggest, although they do not merely illustrate, the three stages in a writer's development.

It is the naive and fumbling Darley who is the writer of the future; he makes this clear in the first few pages of Justine, as he writes from his island:

We have all of us taken different paths now, but in this, the first great fragmentation of my maturity, I feel the confines of my art and my living deepened immeasurably by the memory of them.²²

He is the writer-neophyte, now ready to create his word-continuum, that is, ready to make words suggest a four dimensional experience. What he has to say about his life on the island is his future potential; his experience in Alexandria is the "present" of the young Darley, or the

²⁰Clea, p. 177.

²¹Ibid., p. 177.

²²Justine, p. 17.

"past" of the mature Darley. These two tenses co-exist, almost simultaneously, in the mind of the reader, at least until he sorts them out later.

In this way, Arnauti is in the early phase of creative development. His diary, Posthumous Life, is a kind of notebook where he makes all the entries for his future novel. But as we see him, he has not progressed in his writing beyond autobiography. Some of his remarks on art sound like the first notes to the Durrell-score. "Life, the raw material, is only lived in potentia until the artist deploys it in his work."²³ Therefore, he dreams of writing a book, which would contain on its first page "a synopsis of the plot in a few lines. thus we might dispense with the narrative articulation. What follows would be a dream freed from the burden of form. I would set my own book free to dream."²⁴ But Darley finds fault with this dream in a way similar to Durrell's criticism of Miller's work:²⁵ On the grounds of its freedom from pattern.

The main dialogue on life and art takes place between

²³ Ibid., p. 75.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 75.

²⁵ Darley says: "But of course one cannot escape from the pattern which he regards as imposed but which in fact grows up organically within the work and appropriates it. What is missing in his work -- but this is a criticism of all works which do not reach the front rank -- is a sense of play. He bears down so hard upon his subject-matter; so hard that it infects his style with some of the unbalanced ferocity of Claudia herself." Ibid., p. 75. Compare also footnote 4 on 123 above.

Pursewarden and Darley.²⁶ Pursewarden's loving-contempt²⁷ -- contradictory as is his nature -- for Darley, at first appears to be the dominating authoritative view of The Quartet. But gradually, the reader realizes that it is not Pursewarden who is closest to Durrell, but what Darley learns from Pursewarden. From his island, Darley writes:

...it is only here that I am at last able to re-enter, reinhabit the unburied city with my friends; to frame them in the heavy steel webs of metaphors which will last as long as the city itself -- or so I hope ... But strangest of all: I owe this release to Pursewarden -- the last person I should ever have considered a possible benefactor.²⁸

In terms of the reader's now, Darley's writing from the Greek island is the latest point in time. Darley's deepened insight in the end (which is also the beginning of his writing) is largely due to his observations of Pursewarden's struggles, in much the same way that Joseph Conrad's Marlow learns

²⁶ Compare Lawrence Lucifer's two-fold development in The Black Book. Also note Durrell's conversation with one of his reviewers: "J'ai deux sosies -- Darley et Pursewarden. Je n'approuve pas tout ce qu'ils disent, mais ils sont moi; si un personnage est vrai, ce qu'il pense et ce qu'il dit correspond à sa logique propre et n'a rien à voir avec l'auteur. Pursewarden est mon préféré; je vis dans l'espoir de la réformer. Darley m'agace à être aussi bête et Anglo-Saxon, mais il est également moi. Que faire?" "Lawrence Durrell vous parle", Réalités, No. 178, (Paris, November, 1960), p. 105.

²⁷ Pursewarden writes to Mountolive: "Darley is in fine voice this eve, and I listen to him with grudging pleasure. He really is a good chap, and a sensitive one." Mountolive, p. 164. At the same time he dubs Darley: "Lineaments of Gratified desire." Balthazar, p.2.

²⁸ Justine, p. 115. Compare Lawrence Lucifer on the artist's development, page 49 above.

through the misguided prophetic genius of Kurtz.²⁹ Therefore, to trace Pursewarden's growth as an artist is also to trace Darley's imaginative enactment of it, and hence his own pattern of growth.

However, the older Darley does not accept all of Pursewarden's cynicisms. For Darley, the novel is not merely "The grumus merdae left behind by criminals upon the scene of their misdeeds,"³⁰ as it is for Pursewarden. For Darley, the novel is also a careful reworking of life's raw material into a meaningful pattern. Characteristically, he views with reservation Pursewarden's advice about the pains of writing: "force it a bit and tell yourself that you don't give a damn if you do go mad, and you'll find it comes quicker, you'll break the barrier." He answers cautiously, "I don't know how true this all is;" and yet, he admits that, "... the money he left me in his will has served me well, and I still have a few pounds between me and the devils of debt and work."³¹ Of the two, Darley has the advantage of being able to observe Pursewarden's mistakes. He does not embrace wholeheartedly Pursewarden's statement that "The effective in art is what rapes the emotions of your audience without nourish-

²⁹See Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness, (New York: Bantam, 1960), pp. 84-86.

³⁰Justine, p. 138.

³¹Balthazar, p. 17. For Durrell's early fears of madness see p. 15 above.

shing its values,"³² for he is now reassembling the whole experience into a meaningful pattern. But he does share certain hypotheses with the older writer, one of which is about reality "trying to copy the imagination of man from which it is derived."³³ Darley develops this theme to the point where reality becomes a sackcloth covering for the meaning of the pattern to be revealed by the artist. Even though Pursewarden realizes that, as an artist, he must learn to resolve his problems as a man, he does not successfully achieve this in life. It is left to Darley to make the necessary adjustments in his own life. Further, Pursewarden's dabblings in Relativity provide a spring-board for the formation of Darley's metaphors for the novel:

The Relativity proposition was directly responsible for abstract painting, atonal music, and formless (or at any rate cyclic forms in) literature. Once it was grasped they were understood too... In the Space and Time marriage we have the greatest Boy meets Girl story of our age. To our great-grandchildren this will be as poetical a union as the ancient Greek marriage of Cupid and Psyche seems to us. You see, Cupid and Psyche were facts to the Greeks, not concepts. Analogical as against analytical thinking!³⁴

Darley is now³⁵ working on his word continuum. Again, Purse-

³²Pursewarden's sentence is reported by Balthazar in his Interlinear to Darley. Balthazar, p. 115.

³³As reported by Balthazar in Balthazar, p. 116. Compare with it Darley's statement on page 17 of Justine, quoted in Footnote 22 on p.156 above.

³⁴Balthazar, p. 142.

³⁵The "now" of the reader, that is.

warden sees the psyche as "completely unsubstantial as a rainbow -- it only coheres into identifiable states and attributes when attention is focussed on it,"³⁶ and he states that "The classical in art is what marches by intention with the cosmology of the age."³⁷ Hence, Balthazar, who is the sole link between the two writers in the second part of the novel, joins Pursewarden's ideas together to suggest to Darley a new form of the novel, in which intercalation of fact and fancy can be realized through an imaginative construct based upon ideas of this cosmology, but not necessarily embracing them in their logical totality. An intercalation of realities, he suggests, is the closest thing to being faithful to time, "for at every moment in Time the possibilities are endless in their multiplicity."³⁸ It is also Balthazar who prompts Darley to use the structural potential that such a view entails:

So many truths which have little to do with fact.
Your duty is to hunt them down. At each moment of time
all multiplicity waits at your elbow. Why, Darley, this
should thrill you and give your writing the curves of
a pregnant woman.³⁹

It is left to Darley to work out the details of his metaphoric

³⁶ Balthazar, p. 141.

³⁷ Balthazar, p. 245.

³⁸ Balthazar, p. 226.

³⁹ Clea, p. 73.

construct,⁴⁰, a process which is his raison d'être in the novel, and his sole activity on the island. In this way, he avoids Pursewarden's peculiar misery:

I am ashamed of one thing only: because I have disregarded the first imperative of the artist, namely, create and starve. I have never starved, you know. Kept afloat doing little jobs of one sort or another: caused as much harm as you and more.⁴¹

Darley goes beyond Pursewarden's assumption that the writer is simply a register for the electromagnetic charges which cannot be rationalized, and he rehearses a reality to be created as a kaleidoscopic experience.⁴² It is, of course,

⁴⁰ Darley has received help from Pursewarden on this score as well: "You might try a four-card trick in the form of a novel; passing a common axis through four stories, say, and dedicating each to one of the four winds of heaven. A continuum, foresooth, embodying not a temps retrouvé but a temps délivré. The curvature of space itself would give you a stereoscopic narrative, while human personality seen across a continuum would perhaps become prismatic? ... I can image a form which, if satisfied, might raise in human terms the problems of causality or indeterminacy... And nothing very recherché either. Just an ordinary Girl Meets Boy story. But tackled in this way you would not, like most of your contemporaries, be drowsily cutting along a dotted line!" From "My conversations with Brother Ass", Clea, p. 135-136.

⁴¹ Balthazar, p. 148.

⁴² Pursewarden writes Mountolive: "For the artist, I think as for the public, no such thing as art exists; it only exists for the critics and those who live in the fore-brain. Artist and public simply register, like a seismograph, an electric charge which can't be rationalized... to break up the elements and nose them over-one gets nowhere." Mountolive, p. 115. And yet there surely is a difference between a snapshot caught at random, registering what comes accidentally within its range, and that which is planned in all its details by the photographer to impart a mood, or an idiosyncrasy or a characteristic of a person. The first process might produce one successful shot in a thousand; the latter is bound to have a greater relative success in commu-

through his perusal of Pursewarden's letters to Liza that Darley receives the shock of recognition that is to ignite his own future works. In retrospect, he admits that up to this point, he is a failure as a creative artist, because he does not believe in the discrete human personality.⁴³ The letters reveal to him, among other data, a fact that has always been evident to his readers:

I realized that poetic or transcendental knowledge somehow cancels out purely relative knowledge.... There was no answer to the questions I raised in very truth...Blind as a mole, I had been digging about in the graveyard of relative fact piling up data, more information, and completely missing the mythopoetic reference which underlies fact. I had called this searching for truth!...If two or more explanations of a single human action are as good as each other then what does action mean but an illusion -- a gesture made against the misty backcloth of a reality made palpable by the delusive nature of human division merely?⁴⁴

Reality, then, is trying to copy the imagination of man from which it derives; and "real 'fiction'" is not in the pages of Arnauti, or Pursewarden or his own, but in life. Life is fiction; imagination, reality. Yet, he also sees that his

nicating with its observer. In his introduction to Brassai, (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1968), Durrell realizes that Brassai's careful planning of a shot is the secret of his success. For Brassai, selection and order are essential to photography as an art: "The mobility of the face is always an accident, but I hunt for what is permanent". p. 12.

⁴³Justine, p. 196-197.

⁴⁴Clea, pp. 176-177. Here, poetic truth is more important than relative truth, an idea which is not apparent in The Key to Modern Poetry. See p. 88 above.

own power to create is limited by "an intelligence too powerful for itself, and lacking in sheer word-magic, in propulsion in passion, to achieve this other world of artistic fulfilment."⁴⁵ On the question of words, there is a general consensus among all writers in the novel that:

Truth is double-bladed, you see. There is no way to express it in terms of language, this strange bifurcated medium with its basic duality! What is the writer's struggle except a struggle to use a medium as precisely as possible, but knowing fully its basic imprecision? A hopeless task, but none the less rewarding for being hopeless. Because the task itself, the act of wrestling with an insoluble problem, grows the writer up!⁴⁶

Neither Pursewarden nor Keats survive to take on the problem of language. The first commits suicide and the second dies as a reporter in a desert skirmish during the war. Darley's work, in this sense, is the history of artistic growth where the writer as subjective explorer becomes a prober of mythopoetic consciousness. What Pursewarden suggests now, Darley adopts: "Truth is a matter of direct apprehension -- you can't climb a ladder of mental concepts to it."⁴⁷ But it has taken Darley a whole novel to come to this resolution.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 177.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 184. Compare Durrell's analysis of the nature of the Semantic Disturbance in The Key to Modern Poetry, p. 111 above.

⁴⁷ Balthazar, p. 142

⁴⁸ Writers at Work, pp. 276-277:

INTERVIEWER: One critic said, 'The novel is only half secretly about art, the great subject of modern artists.' How do you feel about that?

It is with these parallel and interlocking versions of reality in mind that we approach the people of The Quartet and their nebulous relationships. Each of them is portrayed differently by every one of his observers. In this sense, the truth about a person can be apprehended, rather than verified.

There are four characters at the center of the novel, and from these there is an ever-expanding spiral of connections; Justine and Nessim; Melissa and Darley; the four faces of love.⁴⁹ Justine is married to Nessim, and is the mistress of Darley; Melissa loves Darley, but finds herself

DURRELL: The theme of art is the theme of life itself. This artificial distinction between artists and human beings is precisely what we are suffering from. An artist is only someone unrolling and digging out and excavating the areas normally accessible to normal people everywhere, and exhibiting them as a sort of scarecrow to show people what can be done with themselves.

I have not shown what the major characters, and some of the minor ones say on the novel. What Justine, or Nessim, Leila or Clea say are contained in essence within the overall structure of the Arnauti-Purserwarden-Darley discussion. Fundamentally, each one of them latches on to aspects of the subject which seem of greater significance to him. For example, Balthazar is obsessed with 'truth' or 'reality'; Justine with 'time'; Clea, with the artist's role; Nessim, with the conflicts between individual and social roles. Mountolive, like Durrell, is influenced by his childhood days in India; and he is caught in the paralysis of inaction in the world of power. His intimations of power (Mountolive, p. 136) turn to a garrish surrealism of impotence, and he finds himself in the process: "a garde malade, a male nurse to a short-legged lapdog." Ibid., p. 299.

⁴⁹See the note from Freud at the beginning of Justine: "I am accustoming myself to the idea of regarding every sexual act as a process in which four persons are involved." In a similar vein Darley says: "Nessim is beginning to explore

consoling Nessim; Darley is in love with Melissa, and yet cannot live without Justine. Melissa bears Nessim a daughter and in this paradoxical way returns to him the child lost earlier to Justine. This network of reactions expands further and outwards into relations with several other characters. One of them is the Cabalist and all-time consoler, Balthazar, author of the interlinear, and main link between all the characters.

Another is Clea, a painter and lover of Justine and Darley, and a narrator of some portions of the last part of the novel. Leila is mother of Nessim and Narouz, and mistress to Mountolive; Pursewarden, a continuous commentator throughout, is his own sister's and Melissa's lover; Arnauti, Justine's ex-husband, is also the author of the interlinear Moeurs. Mountolive, who is the main subject of the naturalistic third part of the novel, is a lover of Leila and finally of Liza. And surrounding these are the even more nebulous interrelationships between people of various nationalities, creeds and races forming the backdrop of the spectrum. Gaston Pombal "pegamoid sloth of a man",⁵¹ is a French diplomat, and eternal galant; Cohen, the old Jewish furrier and

and love Melissa as an extension of Justine, delineated perfectly the human situation. Melissa would hunt in him for the qualities which she imagined I must have found in his wife. The four of us unrecognized complementaries of one another, inextricably bound together." Justine, p. 238.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 21.

Melissa's lover; Capodistra "the old Porn himself"⁵² is responsible for Justine's Check and is always associated with a reptilian sexual prowess; Mnemjian, a barber and a dwarf, plays his ungainly traditional role of "Memory man, the archives of the city."⁵³ There is also the fellow-occupant of Darley's rooms: Scobie, a quixotic transvestite, and Durrell's version of the modern Tiresias, an object of ironic laughter, and a double agent for the Arabs and British. Pordre is in the French foreign service; John Keats, a journalist and writer-to-be; and so, the spiral of relationships unfolds continuously, and, as Durrell suggests in his work-points at the end of Clea, it could go on expanding indefinitely.⁵⁴

Let us consider for a moment Justine. When Darley first describes her, she is a character straight out of Groddeck: "how touching, how pliantly feminine this most masculine and resourceful of women." She also reminds him of:

The giant man-eating cats like Arsinoe were her true siblings. Yet behind the acts of Justine lay something else, born of a later tragic philosophy in which morals must be weighed in the balance against rogue personality. She was the victim of truly heroic doubts. Nevertheless I can still see a direct connection between the picture of Justine bending over the dirty sink

⁵²"He [Pursewarden] had coined this nickname from the word 'pornographer'." Balthazar, p. 144.

⁵³Justine, p. 36-53

⁵⁴See p.241 below.

with the foetus in it, and poor Sophia of Valentius who died for a love as perfect as it was wrong headed.⁵⁵

Darley sees Justine as a cartoon of a woman representing someone released from bondage in the male. And yet, Nessim informs Darley⁵⁶ that Justine is also weak: he has to out-love her and anticipate her lapses in order to keep her. He believes that she has a beneficial effect on people: "those she harmed the most she made fruitful. She expelled people from their old selves. It was bound to hurt, and many mistook the nature of the pain she inflicted. Not I."⁵⁷ Her ex-husband, Arnauti, regards her less favourably in Moeurs, where she is portrayed not as a woman, but as an incarnation of Woman. She appears to him to be engaged in a kind of subjective masque, giving a series of savage caricatures of herself, the most striking of which is a narcissism which is the result of "sexual exhaustion expressing itself in the possessive symbol."⁵⁸ Clea, also dragged into the miasma of Justine's personality, and her one-time lover, sets Justine above morality, if there were indeed such a hypothesis,

⁵⁵Justine, p. 20.

⁵⁶There is always a credibility gap between what Nessim says he feels and what he actually feels. It may be explained away by the deliberate deception he practices to hide the true nature of his intrigues.

⁵⁷Justine, p. 33.

⁵⁸For Arnauti's account of Justine in Moeurs, and in Posthumous Life, see Darley's report on pages 64-83 of Justine.

and above humanity: a mythical goddess. Clea particularly objects to Arnauti's way of labelling Justine a nymphomaniac as though this word explains her character or pinpoints it.⁵⁹ As for the Check, it does not explain, but simply illuminates Justine's actions. If Arnauti is all-Freud, Clea is Groddeck simplified.

Next, Balthazar comes in to set Arnauti's records straight. Justine's malaise is now connected with the loss of her daughter. The child is rumoured to be in a house of ill-fame. Justine adds to this mêlée the following sentence written on a page of her diary: "It is hard to fight with one's heart's desire; whatever it wishes to get, it purchases at the cost of the soul."⁶⁰ Her statement about her actions is supported by Darley's belief that she is one of those marked for self-destruction: a somnambulist treading a high tower: any attempt to wake her would be disastrous. And paradoxically, this is what most attracts him to this wierd, kinetic, personality.

When all these people treat Justine with the special tact due to an expensive artefact, it comes as a relief to know that there is one -- Pursewarden -- who simply regards

⁵⁹On this point, Clea seems to be echoing Groddeck's belief that the It is finally mysterious, and that all labels we use to describe it are merely suggestive rather than definitive. See p.104 above.

⁶⁰Justine, p. 103.

her as the "tiresome Jewess of neurology,"⁶¹ and an "old sexual turnstile through which presumably we must all pass."⁶² In his darker moments, Nessim concedes the same point: "I think this Jewish fox has eaten my life."⁶³ On her side, Justine plaintively assures Clea that all she wants is her child and some quiet corner where she can possess herself. And Balthazar, as though to lend support to her version, is certain that her only true love is Pursewarden, because for him sex is the nearest thing to laughter.

Along this spiral of descriptions and counterjustifications of Justine there is another Justine made manifest to the Darley who has returned to Alexandria. Now she is a shrew. Shorn of her political and sexual roles, she "lay now in the hollow of my arm, defenseless as a patient on an operating table."⁶⁴ Gone is the mystery of the other woman; captured is the nausea of unrequited desire. But she does not remain in this guise for long. In the end, Clea describes a rejuvenated Justine walking down Rue Foad, triumphantly trailing her latest amorous find: Memlik. Justine is now ready to begin a new round of political and sexual embroilment.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 149

⁶²Balthazar, p. 115.

⁶³Justine, p. 159.

⁶⁴Clea, p. 71.

In contrast to her sinister tragi-comedy, there is the plaintive and graceful story of Melissa, or Greek charity. Whereas Justine takes, she gives; Justine demands, she accepts; Justine wills and searches, she passively awaits results. Justine surges back to life, and she sinks into a fatal consumption. Melissa best describes herself to Pursewarden. When at her café he asks her how she manages to put up with loneliness, she answers: "Monsieur, je suis devenue la solitude même."⁶⁵ We met Melissa earlier in Grace, and in the poem bearing her name. Here, in the novel, like her earlier counterparts, she does not emerge clearly as a person.⁶⁶

Durrell's manner of presenting Justine is his particular mode of characterization. In the first two parts of the novel, he gives us intercalated realities of the characters: that is, each observer starts with the same premise, but his conclusions are nearly always different. Some views on the character are in agreement, others in direct contrast. In Mountolive, we get an objective mode of presentation, and yet, even there, we depend in large measure upon personal reports or letters. These include Mountolive's letter to

⁶⁵Mountolive, p. 168.

⁶⁶Neither does Pursewarden, although he is much discussed by his friends. His continuous discussion of metaphysical and aesthetic subjects renders him a giant imago and somewhat unreal.

Leila on Pursewarden and Liza in London; Pursewarden's equally naive letter to Mountolive on the political scene in Cairo; and Clea's story to Mountolive on the romantic hunt of Amaril for his mysterious love, Semira. And, finally, the axis of reality is given a jolt in the added disclosures brought about by time in Clea. Seemingly, with the passage of time, the city is wearing a new exterior, and the people new faces: so, at least, thinks Darley on his return to Alexandria. But in the process of recapturing time-past, he discovers that time does not involve real change at all. Apparent change is only a mask of time which hides the ever-present reality. Seemingly changed people are exactly the same as before; Pombal is still the galant at heart, even after the tragi-farcical death of his Fosca; Clea is very much the self-possessed artist and she remains so even after she gets her new iron hand; Nessim and Justine return to fresh intrigues; and Narouz, thoroughly dead at the end of Mountolive, still haunts his island.⁶⁷ Nothing has changed; only Darley's memory appears to have falsified things. Scobie's death, though it is metamorphosed into a local miracle, is very much in line with Scobie's perversities.⁶⁸

⁶⁷As does the spirit of Miss Graecan's brother in Panic Spring. See p. 73 above.

⁶⁸In his Consequential Data at the end of Balthazar, p. 247, Pursewarden discourses on his interest in Sade: "Why do I always choose an epigraph from de Sade? Because he demonstrates pure rationalism -- the ages of sweet reason we have lived through in Europe since Descartes. He is the

Everything appears to be changed, yet everything is still the same. Instead of radical change, there is only metamorphosis.

Time involves little change in the interpretation of incidents as well. Pursewarden's suicide is a prominent example. This incident is viewed on a revolving axis, which is brought sharply against a temporal lapse. But this discloses that time only uncovers more of the same things. The suicide is first mentioned by Darley casually, almost as soon as Pursewarden makes an appearance in the novel.⁶⁹ This disclosure is followed by a conversation between Darley and Pursewarden, in which the latter mentions that he is catching the night train to Gaza. This turns out to be their last conversation together, for shortly afterwards Pursewarden takes his own life. But he does not disappear; he simply ceases to exist. Darley says:

...he has simply stepped into the quicksilver of the mirror as we all must -- to leave our illness, our evil acts, the hornet's nest of our desires, still operative for good or evil in the real world -- which is the memory of our friends. Yet the presence of death always refreshes experience thus -- that is

final flower of reason, and the typic of European behaviour. I hope to live to see him translated into Chinese. His books would bring the house down and would read as pure humour. But his spirit has already brought the house down around our ears."

⁶⁹"I did not recognize the heavy musty odour of the room as the odour of his impending suicide -- how should I?"
Justine, p. 114.

its function: to help us deliberate on the novelty of time.⁷⁰

Time plays havoc with the concept of death as destroyer; but it also shakes the "dusty spectrum of memory."⁷¹ Darley reports that already people are finding it difficult to remember whether Pursewarden is tall or short; whether he has a moustache or not. Pombal credits Pursewarden with an humeur noire; Balthazar, with a sense of humour that contains no trace of spleen. More amazing still are the reasons given for the suicide. Darley thinks it is the outcome of the stresses and strains of writing.⁷² Mountolive and Nessim both suspect that it is a form of escape from the dual pull

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 118.

⁷¹Justine, p. 168. As in The Black Book, for the artist there is no memory; just the periodicity of the time of writing. See Lawrence Lucifer on page 47 above.

⁷²Justine, p. 117. This version is Darley's. Compare it with the following one by Balthazar: "Of all things his suicide has remained for me an extraordinary and quite inexplicable freak. Whatever stresses and strains he may have been subjected to I cannot quite bring myself to believe it... this was surprisingly out of character. You see, he was really at rest about his work which most torments the artists, I suppose, and really had begun to regard it as 'divinely unimportant' -- a characteristic phrase." Balthazar, p. 141. Clea insists that his suicide be respected as private: "They are his own secrets, after all, for what he actually saw in him was only the human disguise that the artist wore." Balthazar, p. 241.

of duty and friendship;⁷³ Liza triumphantly displays her letters from her brother revealing an incestuous relationship as a possible motive for the incident. This last revelation is withheld till the final part; now Darley's version of Pursewarden must be thoroughly revised.

According to The Quartet, we reveal a different face of the prism of our personality to each of our acquaintances; but also that each one of our observers chooses to think about that aspect of our personality with which he most easily identifies. Hence, if Justine can say of Pombal: "he is one of the great primates of sex," Darley can respond with his view of a Pombal who is "self indulgent to a ludicrous degree."⁷⁴ Yet there is a constant as well. Pursewarden's suicide is an eye-opener for everybody; it is the only incident capable of shocking the smug Mountolive out of his own self-approval, and forcing Nessim to face problems of decision and duty.

Although the novel does not offer a progressive line of action, it interweaves various lines of interest with an

⁷³They come to this conclusion because Pursewarden's last message to each of them revolves around the discovery of the Palestine plot. Mountolive, p. 215.

⁷⁴Justine, p. 119. On p. 67 above, I mention Durrell's presentation of multiple aspects of personality in his poetry.

effect of simultaneity.⁷⁵ There is the love-game; the political game; the spiritual shuffle-board; and numerous other themes: love, what is it? the psyche, the ego, the will, what are they? Time-place? All these queries which in the end Darley admits, rather ruefully, are unanswerable.

I have already suggested⁷⁶ the interlocking nature of the love-game. If Nessim-Justine, Darley-Melissa have anything in common, it is their sadism.⁷⁷ Perversity governs passion in The Quartet.⁷⁸ Terrible, indeed, are the four faces of love.⁷⁹ The lovers are never equally matched; the only constant in their relationships is this love-hate polarity: the positive-negative poles to this game. But eventually, each individual has his own view of love, and the final vision of the goddess of love cannot be assembled simply by working out the pieces. The one factor that remains clear, is the over-all prevalence of her negative aspect. Hence, although there is the fragile Amaril-Semira, or the Osiris-

⁷⁵I realize that simultaneity in the medium of language is a hypothesis merely. I use it to suggest parallel growth of various lines of interest within the novel.

⁷⁶See p. 165 above.

⁷⁷Clea says: "It is quite possible to love those whom you must wound." Balthazar, p. 48. After all, Durrell defines hate as unachieved love. Justine, p. 207.

⁷⁸See Pursewarden's note on de Sade, footnote 68 of this chapter.

⁷⁹Quoted from Arnauti's notes, Justine, p. 238.

Isis romance worked out on the fringe of the novel, the rest of the scene is a spider-web of travesties of love. The horrific masks of love take over. Justine's for Nessim -- if indeed it can be apprehended at all -- is a mixture of narcissistic-maternal vampirism kept alive by Faustian intrigue. Nessim's for her is equally nebulous, a mixture of conniving self-interest and quiet martyrdom. It is no wonder that she queries: "who invented the human heart, I wonder? Tell me, and then show me the place where he was hanged."⁸⁰ Darley informs us that he loves Melissa, meaning that he finds her easiest on his self-esteem; but he expresses this same love to Justine.⁸¹ Melissa is forever overflowing with solicitude, and is unable or unwilling to get what she wants; she therefore settles for what she can get, and in the end, for nothing. There are several iterations of the same tone: Pombal, "I never want to hear the word again;"⁸² Clea, "How disgusting, how unfair love is!"⁸³ Toto, "Love is a liquid fossil;"⁸⁴ Justine, "Damn the word, 'I would like

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 98.

⁸¹ Darley: "Every kiss takes her near Nessim but separates me further from Melissa." Ibid., p. 86. And Clea tells Darley: "The love you feel for Melissa, the same love is trying to work itself through Justine." Clea, p. 97.

⁸² Balthazar, p. 178.

⁸³ Ibid., p. 231.

⁸⁴ Justine, p. 27.

to spell it backwards as a part of evolution or revolt.

Never use the word to me."⁸⁵

Throughout, love⁸⁶ is Narcissus,⁸⁷ love is refuge,⁸⁸
 love is Serapis,⁸⁹ love is Tiresias,⁹⁰ love is Oedipus.⁹¹
 But love is also pain,⁹² pederasty,⁹³ prostitution,⁹⁴
 "flirtation of minds",⁹⁵ Platonic.⁹⁶ Above all things, love
 is grotesque -- "an indistinct mass of flesh moving in
 many places at once, vaguely stirring like an ant-heap."⁹⁷

⁸⁵Ibid., p. 75.

⁸⁶The note to Balthazar says: "The central topic of the book is an investigation of modern love."

⁸⁷As in Justine's case, Justine, p. 50. Sex is also Narcissus in The Black Book. See above p. 43 .

⁸⁸Melissa is driven to Darley for refuge. Justine, p. 198.

⁸⁹Ibid., p. 97.

⁹⁰As in the case of Scobie.

⁹¹Narouz's for Clea, and Mountolive's for Leila.

⁹²Balthazar on love: "delicious thrill which comes from the consciousness of perverting, or pulling them down into the mind from which passions rise-together with poems and theories of God." Balthazar, p. 58.

⁹³Toto, Balthazar and Scobie. Balthazar, p. 25.

⁹⁴Mnemjian. Justine, p. 52.

⁹⁵With Leila. Mountolive, p. 52.

⁹⁶Balthazar: "Sex has left the body and entered the imagination." Justine, p. 86 ff.

⁹⁷From Darley's description of a couple in a prostitute's booth, Ibid., p. 186.

It is paradoxical since it drives a person to hurt the one he loves;⁹⁸ for "concentration on the love-object and possession are the poisons."⁹⁹ In fact, more than one of the characters is willing to concede that although love is knowledge -- attained through the sex-act -- yet it only manages to reaffirm loneliness. Justine tells Nessim "Nothing except the act of physical love tells us this truth about one another;" and similarly, Clea tells Nessim, "Sexual love is knowledge, both in etymology and in cold fact; 'he knew her' as the Bible says!"¹⁰⁰ Pursewarden iterates that "Sex is a psychic act and not a physical act",¹⁰¹ and in this way his own loves confirm his loneliness. For him, "There is no Other; there is only one's self-discovery."¹⁰²

It seems then that if time is the only sounding-board for love, and if, as Pursewarden puts it, "The richest love is that which submits to the arbitration of time,"¹⁰³ then none of the pairs of lovers stand up to the test, with the

⁹⁸"Do you not believe that love consists wholly of paradoxes?" Ibid., p. 112.

⁹⁹Darley in Balthazar, p. 117.

¹⁰⁰Balthazar, p. 63; and Clea, p. 113.

¹⁰¹Balthazar, p. 124.

¹⁰²Clea, p. 99.

¹⁰³Ibid., p. 257.

possible exception of Amaril and Semira. Darley effectively ruins Melissa; Nessim and Justine stay together only when they have a Faustian pact going. Justine eventually disgusts Darley, as she always has done in potential. When Darley turns to Clea, it seems for a while that they will have a lasting rapport. But even this relationship erupts when Clea is bothered by occult pulls from Nessim's underworld of revenge. Pombal swiftly forgets his divine Fosca; Balthazar, his Greek actor; Mountolive, Leila; and Liza, Pursewarden. Only unrequited love hovers sullenly over its object of unfulfilled desire. Leila holds on to Mountolive, although in her case, she is true, not to Mountolive himself, but to her image of the young lover she knew; and Narouz enacts his revenge on Clea from his underworld. Melissa remains a question mark in Darley's life.¹⁰⁴

This is not to say that there is no love-plot in the novel, simply because there is no progressive one. We do have point-events in the reality of love, although we are never certain of relationships of before and after. We know that somewhere along the line Darley comes to Egypt, falls in love with a Greek cabaret dancer called Melissa, and while

¹⁰⁴"What remains unresolved in my life is not the problem of Justine but the problem of Melissa." Justine, p. 231. In this sense, Herbert and Gracie are the proto-types of Darley and Melissa. Few of the characters of The Quartet, if any, realize that, as Clea puts it., "True pleasure is in giving." Balthazar, p. 53.

living with her has an affair with Justine, a Jewish wife of a Coptic millionaire, Nessim. Melissa works to give the money to Darley to pay Justine for her loan; but eventually, Melissa succumbs to consumption, and is sent away by Darley to a clinic in Palestine, where she dies. After a period of despair and drugs in Upper Egypt, Darley returns to his Greek island, where he gets occasional news from wartime Alexandria. When he returns, he thinks he can see change everywhere, but gradually realizes that time brings about no fundamental changes. He rediscovers Justine, but this time he sees in her only those aspects that he missed the first time around. Now he hates Justine, and loves Clea. Still later, Clea leaves him, and he finds his feelings for Melissa still unresolved within him.

This outline, though faithful to the bare skeleton, is probably the farthest thing from the reality of line in The Quartet. It shows how fruitless is the effort to try to reorder Durrell's material into a story. The result can only be sheer distortion of experience, as is the case with the Twentieth Century-Fox film entitled "Justine". The essence of any topic in The Quartet, is in the apprehension of a massive totality of experiences offered, rather than in a reworking of it into a logical sequence. Perhaps, at the source of the confusion is a question of semantics: words are finally inoperative in relaying, tabbing, or labelling experience. Darley sums up the difficulty in this way:

My 'love' for her [Justine], Melissa's 'love' for me, Nessim's 'love' for her, her 'love' for Pursewarden -- there should be a whole vocabulary of adjectives with which to qualify the noun -- for no two contained the same properties; yet all contained the one indefinable quality, one common unknown in treachery. Each of us, like the moon, had a dark side -- could turn the lying face of 'unlove' towards the person who most loved and needed us. And just as Justine used my love, so Nessim used Melissa's...One upon the back of the other crawling about like crabs in a basket.¹⁰⁵

And from Eugene Marais's The Soul of the White Ant, he quotes:

Like most natural phenomena it is polarized -- there is always a negative and a positive pole. The negative pole is pain, the positive pole sex.¹⁰⁶

When love is reviewed in this light, the network of the love-plot appears ironic, as it is in Pombal's remark to Darley about Fosca: "Je suis enfin là!"¹⁰⁷ when he is least aware of the approaching hand of disaster. Love totters between its twin poles, but the final impression it leaves with us is one of negativism.¹⁰⁸

Likewise, we are left with a parallel impression of man. To the question, what is the makeup of the psyche, we get various suggestions from each person, and yet the whole picture builds up to a negative one. Justine's view of man

¹⁰⁵Balthazar, p. 121-123.

¹⁰⁶Ibid., p.131.

¹⁰⁷Clea, p. 164.

¹⁰⁸Alfred Perlès finds this the essential weakness of the novel. See Alfred Perlès, My Friend Lawrence Durrell, (London:Neville:Spearman, 1955), p. 38.

starts the ball rolling on the subject. Perhaps because it suits her way of life, she believes that man has no choice; that his will does not enter into the picture at all: "We are not strong enough to exercise choice. All this is part of an experimental arrangement by something else, the city perhaps, or another part of ourselves."¹⁰⁹ The young Darley seems to bear this out in his discussion on Mountolive's and Nessim's political dilemma; they:

...embarked on a free exercise of the will only to find themselves shackled, bricked up by the historical process. And a single turn of the kaleidoscope had brought it about. Pursewarden! The writer who was so fond of saying 'People will realize one day that it is only the artist who can make things happen ...' A deux ex machina! ¹¹⁰

The later Darley, writing from his island, reaffirms the by-now familiar Durrell view of the psyche as "an ant-hill of opposite predispositions", and personality -- something with fixed attributes -- as an illusion, "but a necessary illusion if we are to love!" he admits.¹¹¹ Also from his island, he writes that as a poet of the historic consciousness he believes that:

...the wish is inherited from the site; that man depends for the furniture of the will upon his location in place, tenant of fruitful acres or a perverted wood.

¹⁰⁹ Justine, p. 27.

¹¹⁰ Mountolive, p. 216.

¹¹¹ Balthazar, p. 15.

It is not the impact of his free-will upon nature which I see (as I thought) but the irresistible growth through him, of nature's own blind unspecified doctrines of variation and torment.¹¹²

Man does not superimpose his wish upon nature; he is merely her vessel. Arnauti joins the ranks with his remark that "the contemporary psyche has exploded like a soap-bubble under the investigations of the mystagogues."¹¹³ And Justine complains to Darley: "It is simply that I have no power to decide things now, any more. I feel as if my will had snapped."¹¹⁴ It is not an exaggeration to add that her complaint is generally descriptive of all the people in Durrell's world. The exceptions reinforce the rule: Amaril's hunt for Semira and his creation of a new nose for her face is one. Another is Darley's rescue of Clea from the sea and his willing her back to life.¹¹⁵ Darley's positive act to the contrary, the overall effect made by the people of this novel, coincides with Balthazar's notion that man is

¹¹² Justine, p. 112.

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 113.

¹¹⁴ Clea, p. 57.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p. 25. The whole incident is a heavy-handed treatment of the importance of the spirit of place. Another example of this, is Narouz's djinn-ridden speeches in Mount-olive, p. 231. Nessim is thinking: "Narouz was right in his desire to inflame the sleeping will --! for he saw the world, not so much as a political chess board as a pulse beating within. A greater will which only the poetry of the psalms could invoke and body forth. To awaken not merely the

"a passage for liquids, solids, a pipe of flesh,"¹¹⁶ and that he does not affect nature, but is affected by it. He does not determine his actions, but allows his site to suggest to him what his actions will be. In the final analysis, this view undermines man's brain-power, and his sensibility two of the qualities which constitute his humanity.

The surprising thing about Balthazar's remark is the role he plays as arch-Cabalist. He is supposedly at the spiritual nexus of the novel. In Justine, Balthazar starts out as an enlightened Cabalist, with some lofty notions about life and art. He is willing to discourse at length with the young Darley about man's psyche, and about its ability to perceive an inherent order underlying the apparent formlessness of phenomena. He believes that if it is disciplined, man's mind can penetrate behind the veil of reality to discover harmonies in space and in time which correspond to the inner structure of his psyche. He feels confident that the Cabal is different from any other spiritual discipline because it is both a science and a religion. Instead of posing a whole set of prohibitions, it creates a motto of: "indulge but refine." And the main aim of the group is to

impulses of the forebrain with its limited formulations, but the sleeping beauty underneath -- the poetic consciousness which lay, coiled like a spring, in the heart of everyone."

¹¹⁶Justine, p. 93.

enlist everything in order to make the wholeness of man match the wholeness of the universe.¹¹⁷ He unfolds a whole set of ideals not the least of which is: "The mission of the Cabal, if it has one, is so to ennoble function that even eating and excreting will be raised to the rank of arts"(113); or that evil is good perverted; or that love even for a man's own wife is adultery. Therefore his crude summary of man as a pipe of flesh would come as a jolt, were we not prepared for it by Pursewarden's cynicism on the subject. Pursewarden derisively rejects the aims of the Cabalists ("One needs a tremendous ignorance to approach God "¹¹⁸) because it is God who makes a powerful appeal to what is lowest in human nature -- our feeling of insufficiency, fear of the unknown, personal failings. Therefore, thinks Pursewarden if there is indeed a God at all, he is an art.

Balthazar's lofty ideals are not merely contradicted by his own view of man, but by his own life. He is utterly degraded at the hands of a venal Greek actor, who by Balthazar's own admission looks like a god, but is only a small-spirited and empty person. Truth is what most contradicts itself in time. It does not, therefore, come as a

¹¹⁷This conversation between Balthazar and Darley comes early in Justine, p. 100.

¹¹⁸Ibid., p. 118.

surprise to us, as it does to the returned Darley in Clea, to learn that the Cabal is disbanded.¹¹⁹ When Balthazar is finally restored to his senses, the Cabal remains dispersed. Perhaps what happens to Balthazar is not a real change but is inherent all along in his make-up. The same thing applies to the Cabal. The cynicism applied by Pursewarden to the Cabal is more in line with a study of this group's activities in Italy, this time made by Thornton Wilder in his book entitled The Cabala.¹²⁰ Wilder's version is of a group of very affluent people, organized by sinister and unoccupied ladies in order to protect their own wealth and to promote their power in political circles. In Durrell's novel, Darley's innocent account¹²¹ of the Cabal, accepted as it is wholesale from Nessim, turns out to be another of Darley's unhappy delusions.

The many faces of truth are never more apparent than they are in the political implications of the novel. The young Darley is obviously not aware of the real motives behind his attraction for Justine. As an unofficial spy for the British Embassy at Cairo, he is a desirable mask for the

¹¹⁹"The Cabal is now disbanded..., it went the way of all words. Mystagogues, theologians, all the resourceful bigotry that heaps up around a sect and spells dogma!" Clea, p. 67.

¹²⁰Thornton Wilder, The Cabala, (New York: Boni, 1928).

¹²¹Justine, p. 170: "... the Cabal was a harmless sect devoted to Hermetic philosophy and that its activities bore no reference to espionage."

Hosnani intrigues. In Justine, the love-plot is paramount, and the political manoeuvring is kept at a minimum. A few intimations of power hover in the background against the back-drop of the Hosnani parties; some questions arise, such as why Nessim does not enter his wife's chamber when he knows that Darley is in it; or the real reasons for Nessim's shadowing of his wife; or the real nature of the fight that is going on between the British and the French in Egypt for the lion's share. With Balthazar, Darley is gradually made aware of the political games these people are playing. Scobie mumbles weakly: "They're [Nessim, Justine, Balthazar, Capodistra] up to something. Cairo says so."¹²² Darley now sees Scobie differently:

When he was in the upper town his walk and general bearing had an artificial swagger -- it suggested a White Man at large, brooding upon the problems peculiar to White Men -- their Burden as they call it. To judge by Scobie, it hung heavy. His least gesture had a resounding artificiality, tapping his knee, sucking his lip, falling into brooding attitudes before shop windows. He gazes at the people around him as if from stilts. These gestures reminded me in a feeble way of the heroes of domestic English fiction who stand before a tudor fireplace, impressively wacking their riding-boots with a bull's pizzle.¹²³

If Darley's increased objectivity has improved his sense of humour, it has also sharpened his awareness of the significance of some of the other less prominent people around him.

¹²²Balthazar, p. 29.

¹²³Ibid., p. 31.

For example, Narouz here emerges as a political force, independent of his brother's more polished style. Previously, Nessim was the brain of the movement, keeping his brother in relative ignorance of the real motives behind the Coptic formation.¹²⁴ Now the ungainly brother, strong in his newly-discovered mystical power over his people, begins to issue orders.

Once again, Pursewarden acts as a catalyst, this time to the political set-up. His suicide is the point d'appui of the whole. In life, he is the link between the two opposing forces formed around Nessim and Mountolive. In death, he unmaskes them to one another. The full significance of his two farewell messages, one marked out to Nessim on the mirror, and the other in the form of a letter to Mountolive, is not revealed until Mountolive.¹²⁵ In Balthazar, we only get short glimpses of Selim shadowing Justine's car, and being spotted by the guilty cicisbeo, Darley. Later on, we realize that Selim is a double-agent, working for the Copts and the British. Mountolive contains the political game par

¹²⁴ Balthazar, p. 93: Nessim tells Narouz, "in the early stages this [the Coptic festival at Mareotis] should not have a political character. It must grow slowly with the understanding of the matter."

¹²⁵ In Balthazar, p. 150, Nessim is reported to have been in Pursewarden's room turning out drawers. It is only in Mountolive, p. 215, that we know of Pursewarden's warning to Nessim, and of Nessim's erasing of the message in the mirror prior to the arrival of the police.

excellence, and perhaps this is why it is narrated by an omniscient observer. Durrell, in a manner that is almost self-parody, appends an apologetic note to this part about his awkward tampering with Mid-Eastern History, but he follows this up with his carefree rejoinder: "Honni soit qui mal y pense," as though this were sufficient to absolve him of responsibility for his newly-coined ideas.

In a sense, Mountolive is a study in the profound illusions of power. The newly appointed Ambassador to Egypt (chief of mission at last) is the most ironic example. Waving aside the warning of his own previous head of mission, Sir Louis with his paralyzed world of hints and nods and inactions, Mountolive hails with delight his own long-awaited promotion to the corridors of power. The moment he becomes Man Number One, his real education in the vocabulary of hints and nods begins. First, he stumbles unwarily into Hosnani resentment by presupposing that being a Copt is synonymous with being pro-British. In Cairo, he launches himself aggressively in his shining exterior into the political demi-monde, only to realize that although he is slowly becoming irresistible to himself, he is achieving little else. He gradually faces up to the impossibility of taking action in a world rendered inactive by the delicacy of its problems. In Berlin, he sees Nessim having supper with dealers in armaments, and he does not make the necessary interpretations, until it is too late. He obviously makes the wrong choice

between Maskelyne's and Pursewarden's versions of the activities of the Hosnani family. Kennilworth's prognostications of Pursewarden -- "he is opinionated and difficult. Well, soit! He is a writer, isn't he?" (90) -- turn out to be correct. All these mistakes are Mountolive's deliberate forms of self-deceptions, entertained to make his job of dealing with Nessim and Leila somewhat easier on himself.

He is forced to face issues with Pursewarden's brutal discovery of reality. Henceforth, Mountolive's inner death races towards him on the tracks of duty-versus-friendship. With the setting in of inaction, he sinks deeper into despair. When he cannot escape any longer the confrontation of the plot of the Copts and the Jews against the Moslems and the British in Egypt and in Palestine,¹²⁶ he reports his discovery to Headquarters and waits again. The rest of the story involves a waiting-game in which the British sound off the "Egyptians" as to what the "Copts" are contemplating, and through this shielded warning they too await results. Memlik, cashes in on both parties by taking Nessim's money and planning to kill his brother. The scene is a static frieze of

¹²⁶The ridiculous nature of Durrell's political prognostications hardly bears discussion. For example, how can 10 per cent of the population [the ratio of the Copts to the rest] overthrow the 90 per cent? Why would the Christians in Egypt wish to create a totally Jewish state in the Palestine of the thirties when a high proportion of the Palestinians -- approximately 50 percent -- are Christians? Would they not by this act alone be destroying their own religious and cultural heritage in the Holy Land? And why does Durrell insist that Copts are contradistinct from Egyptians?

inaction:

Now the masters were beginning to find that they were, after all, the servants of the very forces which they had set in play and that nature is inherently un-governable. They were soon to be drawn along ways not of their choosing, trapped in a magnetic field, as it were, by the same forces which unwind the tides at the moon's bidding, or propel the glittering forces of salmon up a crowded river -- actions turning and swelling futurity beyond the powers of mortals to harness or divert.¹²⁷

After Pursewarden's disclosures, it now appears that Nessim's monomania is not, as is previously supposed, the result of his love-struggle, but of the tensions of his power-struggle. Nessim is worrying about Narouz, who is now a djinn-ridden prophet of visionary pretensions, boding destruction to the powers that be. Nessim is cornered into the responsibility of "having to do away with Narouz."¹²⁸

Ironically, Memlik's crime comes as a resolution for his own problem. Both his and Mountolive's indecisions are brushed aside by the crude force and the gigantic cupidity of Memlik.

But little so far is said of the city, this city that throughout the entire novel gives the impression of a giant protagonist, and its people its agents. In Justine, writing

¹²⁷ Mountolive, p. 214. Intimation once again of Groddeck's It.

¹²⁸ Mountolive, p. 213. This is another instance where Durrell's logic is difficult to construe. No matter how djinn-ridden the British-hating Narouz is, surely he can realize the uselessness of having a sprinkling of Copts fight the rest of their country-men? Even Narouz's delusions could not have driven him to such a preposterous suicide. Durrell resolves Nessim's dilemma by getting Memlik and his men to do his job for him.

from his island, Darley refers to it as "the city which used us as its flora-- precipitated in us conflicts which were hers and which we distort as our own; beloved Alexandria!" (13). At first impression, Alexandria, Durrell's Alexandria, looms as a giant gravitational field, surrounding those it has chosen as its exemplars. Its people appear to be trapped in the projection of a will too powerful and too deliberate to be human. The city lives. In the imagery that Darley chooses for it, it is always alive, though non-human. "The city unwrinkles like an old tortoise and peers about it." (19). Darley is convinced that people are the children of landscape and not vice versa; that the city dictates behaviour and even thought in the measure to which people are responsive to it. But Alexandria, for Darley, is also "the capital of Memory" (188), in Jungian terms, it is the inner city of his mind that he must re-enter in order to relive again. In his own words, "it is only here that I am at last able to re-enter, re-inhabit the unburied city with my friends to frame them in the heavy steel webs of metaphors" (114). On the city as a metaphor for the inner man, Pursewarden is more explicit:

Pursewarden is speaking of the book which he has always wanted to write, and of the difficulty which besets a city-man when he faces a work of art ... 'If you think of yourself as a sleeping city for example... What? You can sit quiet and hear the processes going on, going about their business: volition, desire, will, cognition, passion, conation. I mean like the million legs of a centipede carrying on with the body powerless to do anything about it.

One gets exhausted trying to circumnavigate these huge fields of experience.¹²⁹

Is the city then a gravitational field surrounding its people, a will underlying their actions? Or is it a metaphoric inner city¹³⁰ revisited, recreated, and re-experienced in order to be exorcised?

On this subject as well, we have various view-points. For Balthazar, the city is a giant body, the people its parts. When he refers to his profession, he describes it as living "at the centre of the city's life -- its genito-unitary system."¹³¹ Arnauti refers to it as "This horrible city;"¹³² Darley sees the people as parts of the functions of the city: "Mnemjian is the archives of the City, Balthazar is its Platonic daimon -- the mediator between its gods and its men."¹³³ For him it is a Gargantuan figure of many races, a mixture of health and disease and ugliness. He

¹²⁹ Justine, p. 139. If Pursewarden sees the city in terms of a giant human biological centre, Darley sees man in terms of his city.

¹³⁰ Darley sees much of the city in terms of the poetry of the Alexandrian Greek poet Cavafis, whose poem in the work-points to Justine, p. 251, says:

..... 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.

¹³¹ Ibid., p. 92.

¹³² Ibid., p. 80.

¹³³ Ibid., p. 90.

associates Justine with "her" city, "in that they both have a strong flavour without having any real character."¹³⁴

Indeed, like everything else in The Quartet, he projects it with two centres of gravity -- "the true and magnetic north of its personality" -- "the one is spiritual, and the other temporal."¹³⁵ This duality is characteristic of the two extremes of behaviour of his people: the extreme of sensuality, and that of intellectual asceticism.

But when all this is said, and in spite of Darley's occasional great descriptive scenes such as the duck-shoot at the beginning of Mountolive, what remains with the reader is the impression of a city of malaise. Through the eyes of Darley, we see Alexandria as a giant sore; its streets are burdened with a "tattered rotten supercargo of houses, breathing into each other's mouths, keeling over"; its balconies are swarming with rats; its old women's hair is full of the blood of ticks; its children's lips laced with "the black ribbon of flies;" the noises of the streets are "as of some small delicately-organized animal being disemboweled."¹³⁶ All this is highly subjective reporting; but as if this were

¹³⁴Ibid., p. 135. Alexandria is only Justine's city in so far as it appears to the young Darley. For indeed, how can an Arab city be identified with a European Jewess, unless this process of identification is made to take place in the mind of an impressionable foreigner?

¹³⁵Ibid., p. 40.

¹³⁶Ibid., p. 24.

not enough, Darley compounds other details he filches from memory. He recalls walking through "Arab-smudged streets;"¹³⁷ he describes in painstaking detail a house of child prostitution; his servant Hamid apparently believes that the sewage system is djinn-ridden; Darley even recollects obscene Arabic proverbs of dubious origin. When he walks with Scobie to his apartment, he must transverse "the sordid purlieus of the town" and mount up a "fly-blown staircase with its ragged rat-holes", a place he chooses later as his home.¹³⁸ The crowning description is of Carnival time, a time for Darley to describe mad aberrations of all description:

And concealed beneath the carnival habit (like a criminal desire in the heart, a temptation impossible to resist, an impulse which seems preordained) lie the germs of something: of a freedom which man has seldom dared imagine himself. One is free in this disguise to do whatever one likes without prohibition. All the best murders in the city, all the most tragic cases of mistaken identity, are the fruit of the yearly carnival; while most love affairs begin or end during these three days and nights during which we are delivered from the thrall of personality, from the bondage of ourselves. Once inside that velvet cape and hood, and wife loses husband, husband wife, lover the beloved... You cannot tell whether you are dancing with a man or a woman... the perversions which are, I suppose, the psyche's ailment -- in forms which you would think belonged to the Brocken or to Eblis. Yes, who can help but love carnival when in it all debts are paid, all crimes expiated or committed, all illicit desires sated-- without guilt or premeditation, without the penalties which conscience or society exact?¹³⁹

¹³⁷ Ibid., p.53.

¹³⁸ Balthazar, p. 35.

¹³⁹ Ibid., p. 191. The carnival is itself a metaphor

Pursewarden's version is hardly less vociferous. He sees Egypt as a conglomeration of "rotten states, backward and venal,"¹⁴⁰ and his version of the Coptic celebrations are just as Gothic as are Darley's of carnival. Pursewarden borrows his details straight out of William Beckford's Vathek: he sees, for example, camels being hacked to death as part of a religious ritual. He is equally misinformed about the historical background of the Copts, for he grandly refers to them as to a group of "foreigners" in Egypt.¹⁴¹ Similarly, Clea loses her habitual poise when she talks about Alexandria: "this cursed city of ours, Alexandria, to which we most belong when we most hate it."¹⁴² And Scobie, reflecting his own inner man, says: "If you have Tendencies, you got to have Scope. That's why I'm in the Middle East, if you want to know."¹⁴³

This major impression of the locale seems to suggest that each character makes what he will of the city. And yet, there is the other opposite impression also created, and which I have discussed earlier in this chapter, that the people are

for the imaginative enactment of suppressed desires. Compare in this context what I said earlier about Groddeckian masks, pp. 105-106 above.

¹⁴⁰Mountolive, p. 103.

¹⁴¹"The brains of Egypt, as you know, is its foreign community... The Armenians, Greeks, Copts, Jews." Ibid., p. 108. Of course, Copt is a religious denomination, not a national identity, as Pursewarden makes it out to be.

¹⁴²Balthazar, p. 237.

¹⁴³Clea, p. 261.

only the flora of Alexandria. Which is it then: Is the city a gravitational field,¹⁴⁴ or is it the inner city of man? This hiatus is also present in Darley's thoughts, as is clear from a comparison of the two following passages both from

Balthazar:

...standing on the balcony I watch the sky darkening over the harbour and hear the sullen hooting of the ships' sirens, emphasizing our loneliness here, our isolation from the warm Gulf Stream of European feelings and ideas. All the currents slide away towards Mecca or to the incomprehensible desert and the only foothold in this side of the Mediterranean is the city we have come to inhabit and hate, to infect with our own self-contempts. (104)

And thus also Darley:

I see all of us not as men and women any longer, identities swollen with their acts of forgetfulness, follies, and deceits -- but as beings unconsciously made part of place, buried to the waist among the ruins of a single city, steeped in its values.... All members of a city whose actions lay just outside the scope of the plotting or conniving spirit: Alexandrians. (225)

His uncertainty is at the core of indecision of the novel. Sometimes the city is inner landscape, sometimes outer, even for the same person, and for the chief narrator. On his return to Alexandria in Clea, Darley realizes his failure in presenting the "reality" of the city.

...this total failure to record the inner truth of the city. I had now come face to face with the nature of

¹⁴⁴Durrell's interest in the spirit of place is expressed in his poem "Deus Loci", 1950. See Lawrence Durrell: Selected Poems, (New York: Grove Press, 1956), p. 78.

time, that ailment of the human psyche. I had been forced to admit defeat on paper. Yet curiously enough the act of writing had in itself brought me another sort of increase; by the very failure of words, which sink one by one into the measureless caverns of the imagination and gutter out. An expensive way to begin living, yes; but then we artists are driven towards personal lives nourished in these strange techniques of self-pursuit. (12)

This he writes from his island. It is followed by a dream which presents two contrasting realities, two landscapes; the Grecian world and the Alexandrian, or presumably for him, the Apollonian and the Dionysian versions of reality, respectively. The first he loves, the second, he hates. But as he admits he must return to it once more in order to be able to leave it forever, to shed it. And he continues to explain the relation of this cathartic process to the time question in the novel:

If I have spoken of time it is because the writer I was becoming was learning at least to inhabit those deserted spaces which time misses --beginning to live between the ticks of the clock, so to speak. The continuous present, which is the real history of that collective anecdote, the human mind; when the past is dead and the future represented only by desire and fear, what of that adventive moment which can't be measured, can't be dismissed? For most of us the so-called Present is snatched away like some sumptuous repast, conjured up by fairies -- before one can touch a mouthful. Like the dead Pursewarden I hoped I might soon be truthfully able to say: 'I do not write for those who have never asked themselves this question: at what point does real life begin?' (14)

If he expects change, he appears to find it, only to rediscover the sameness that underlies the difference. In his case then, reality is a copy of the imagination from which it derives. The mind that has created, or perhaps, recreated

these people, has also authored the sprawling gargoyle which is the city.

But having said this, what are we to make of Durrell's insistence in his notes to Justine that the city is real? Anyone reading his notes cannot but interpret them to mean, or at least to imply, that his city is recognizable, factual. However, what his mangled city relays is not a coloured version of the real city, but a Dionysian image continuously part of the recurrent heraldic design of his novels. Why does Durrell insist that his Alexandria is real?¹⁴⁵ Where but in his city can one see Alexandrians eating olives on the streets?¹⁴⁶ or using butter on their local bread?¹⁴⁷ or keeping snakes for pets?¹⁴⁸ or using gold ink-pots?¹⁴⁹ or candles instead of electricity or gas-light?¹⁵⁰ Why does a Coptic household have a koran hanging on its walls?¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁵ See Kenneth Rexroth's Assays, (Norfolk, Connecticut: New Directions, 1961), pp. 118-130.

¹⁴⁶ The equivalent of seeing Canadians eating smoked salmon on theirs. Justine, p. 32.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 29. Only a Western custom.

¹⁴⁸ Balthazar, p. 75. The equivalent of keeping tigers for pets in Canada.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 78.

¹⁵⁰ Clea, p. 50.

¹⁵¹ Justine, p. 162.

Similarly, how can Durrell account for a harem in a Coptic household, where adultery or divorce spell public shame and social disaster?¹⁵² Who but Durrell's Pombal can make the remark that a "cicesbeo is a normal enough figure in Alexandria life?"¹⁵³ Where has Durrell seen a motor boat on the Nile River of the thirties?¹⁵⁴

Apart from these peculiarities, there are the various misrepresentations of Arabic words, like "mahubbah"¹⁵⁵ for "marhubbah"; and "waiter, kam wahed!"¹⁵⁶ instead of "kaman wahed". Mahmoud Manzalouui has outlined similar irrelevancies in his article on The Quartet¹⁵⁷. It can be argued that no one with a serious interest in the novel would criticize it on account of its falling short of geographic or social verisimilitude, and that the novelist enjoys the prerogative of inventing his people and reordering their locale, so long as he can convince the reader of their reality. Admittedly; a willing suspension of disbelief is

¹⁵² Balthazar, p. 79.

¹⁵³ Justine, p. 63.

¹⁵⁴ Mountolive, p. 257.

¹⁵⁵ Balthazar, p. 89.

¹⁵⁶ Mountolive, p. 163.

¹⁵⁷ Mahmoud Manzalouui, "A Curate's Egg. An Alexandrian Opinion of Durrell's Quartet", Etudes Anglaises, (Paris, Juillet-Septembre, 1962).

the first requirement of the recreative reading process.

But what of the novelist who insists that his city is real even when he concedes that his people are not?¹⁵⁸ How are we to interpret his use of the word "real"? Two possible alternatives suggest themselves here to us: First, that the city is the product of a creative imagination, and is not meant to be taken literally as the actual city; and the second, that the city is a factual rendition of the real one. The first possibility is ruled out for us by Durrell himself in his Note to Balthazar, where, having established his characters as imaginary, he sets them against the reality of Alexandria. Are we then meant to believe that the city is what the characters are not? And if Durrell has committed himself to this stance, why does he permit himself to publish the kind of inaccuracies pointed out in Manzalouei's paper? Or the hurried references in Arabic? Why his ridiculous confusion between national and religious designations? Why his revival of carnival in the thirties when it has been extinct for several decades?

Had Durrell not insisted on the reality of his locale, John A. Weigel's remarks would have been in order: "The writer calls up the 'spirit of place' using history, scene and conversation. His objective is to evoke, not describe..."

¹⁵⁸"The characters and situations in this novel..... are entirely imaginary, as is the personality of the narrator. Nor could the city be less unreal." Note to Balthazar.

Landscape is heraldic reality."¹⁵⁹ Had the writer admitted that his place is metaphoric, his inaccuracies would have passed as parts of the chosen aspects of his "cosmic symbol... [his] heraldic emblem."¹⁶⁰ But he has chosen not to. An Egyptian then, is bound to feel nothing but exasperation at remarks such as the following one, made by Richard Aldington: "One or two persons who claim to have spent at least a week-end in Alexandria assure me that the city he has evoked is imaginary, not the reality. If so, the more poet he!"¹⁶¹

Durrell touches lightly upon this hiatus in his presentation of Alexandria, in a conversation with one of his reporters: "I had to have enough colour to support four long volumes without boring. At first I started a book about Athens, then switched to Alexandria. There I had everything, different cultures, civilizations, religions all together; so I could, if I was clever, keep my paint from drying until I had finished the whole canvas." ¹⁶²

He therefore chooses this locale for his specific

¹⁵⁹ John A. Weigel, Lawrence Durrell, (New York: Twayne, 1965), p. 122.

¹⁶⁰ As G.S. Fraser describes Durrell's Alexandria. Lawrence Durrell, (London: Faber, 1968), p. 131.

¹⁶¹ Two Cities, (Paris 1(1), Avril 15, 1959), contains "Homage à Durrell".

¹⁶² Ibid., p. 28.

version of humanity, in a way that calls to mind the Renaissance writers' use of Italy, and of Machiavelli. His city then is an ideogram, a cosa mentale, also responsible for the London of The Black Book, and for the later Greek and Turkish nightmares of Tunc-Nunquam. Similarly, his Alexandrians are merely descendents of the earlier misfits of The Black Book and are among a host of discordants who jostle continuously in Durrell's imagination, and have done so long before Alexandria came into his orbit. And they are to remain there until they resurge into a renewed myth of the Gothic shadow-play of Tunc-Nunquam.

CHAPTER VI

SPIRALS OF CONSCIOUSNESS

A troubling counterpoint of the known and the unknown.¹

...once you become aware of the operation of a time which is not calendar time you become in some sort a ghost.²

It is all a merry-go-round, isn't it? New partners until the music stops! But you'll come back, won't you, and share this place?³

In the previous chapter, I discussed Durrell's Alexandria, its people and the games they are playing, and in the process pointed out that truth about anyone or anything, or incident in The Quartet cannot be sought in a step by step analysis, but can be grasped in its total impact. Truth can only be apprehended imaginatively.⁴ Now we have another, though related, task: that of assessing some of the tools the author uses to create his own brand of reality. How does Durrell relay his kaleidoscope to us? What are some of his goals, his achieved effects? By posing these questions at this point, I am not separating the form

¹Clea, p. 27.

²Ibid., p. 23.

³Ibid., p. 45.

⁴See p. 181 above.

of the novel from its substance. The what and the how of the novel cannot be disentangled, for inevitably they must overlap.

One immediate link with the question of verisimilitude in The Quartet is the use Durrell makes of ideograms in relaying states of mind or feeling as related to place. We have already seen how he employs snow and seasonal change in The Black Book⁵ to suggest emotional states rather than the literal thing. Now in The Quartet, he resorts to the same images, as in this example from the first page of Balthazar:

Mareotis under a sky of hot lilac.
 summer: buff sand, hot marble sky.
 autumn: swollen bruise-greys.
 winter: freezing snow, cool sand.
 clear sky panels, glittering with mica.
 washed delta greens.
 magnificent starscapes.

And spring? Ah! there is no spring in the Delta, no sense of refreshment and renewal in things. One is plunged out of winter into: wax effigy of a summer too hot to breathe. But, here, at least in Alexandria... (13)

These images might have evoked the actual Alexandria, were it not for the snow. Or is this meant as a description of Alexandria? Is it not rather a region of the mind, where the seasons are emotional states, and where spring is the cruelest month of the year, in the Eliot-Durrell tradition?⁶ Is not this Durrell's mythical locale, a continuation of his No

⁵See p. 38 above.

⁶In Justine, p. 147, spring offers no refuge from the gales of dry air; it is a time of choked fountain-pens, dry lips, ghostly felucas; and in fact "exhaustion of spirit."

Man's Land?⁷ Is it not his private landscape? In fact, is it not his recreated myth, totally imagined rather than "wholly real"?⁸

This interpretation is strengthened by the summer of the last part of Clea. Here summer is visibly a metaphor for the couple's rapport. In Darley's words:

Ah! I am hunting for metaphors which might convey something of the piercing happiness too seldom granted to those who love; but words, which were first invented against despair, are too crude to mirror the properties of something so profoundly at peace with itself, at one with itself. Words are the mirrors of our discontent merely. (222)

In this world of Darley's, we are transported to a place where fact is unstable by its very nature; and where the very existence of an object, as an object, is not verifiable. Thus, when he goes to visit the dying Cohen, Darley relays both the dying man's thoughts, and his own responses to him as an observer, in terms of ideograms. Thus, Cohen's mind wanders in a dense jungle where unknown kinds of trees arch over him, while "cobbles punctuated the rubber wheels of some dark ambulance full of metal and other dark bodies, whose talk was limbo."⁹ Cohen is, by turns, a sweaty porcupine, a tame

⁷On seasonal change in The Black Book, see p. 47 above.

⁸This is what Darley claims, although, unlike Durrell, he qualifies it by saying that: "The city, half-imagined (yet wholly real), begins and ends in us, roots lodged in our memory." Balthazar, p. 13.

⁹Justine, p. 108.

seal, a bird of prey, and "one of the beasts of the Apocalypse."¹⁰

Throughout, Durrell creates his mythic locale by means of recurrent image patterns. One of the most outstanding is the mirror. Others are the sea, the island, the mask, Narouz's whip, Balthazar's watch, the key to Nessim's safe, Scobie's bathtub, carnival, and even the city itself. The mirror, of course, is the most insistent, since it is a focal image for love. In the beginning, it is basically associated with Justine. Later it is a continuous reflector for others as well. Justine watches her image in the multiple mirrors at the dressmaker's:

Look! five different pictures of the same subject. Now if I wrote I would try for a multi-dimensional effect in character, a sort of prism-sightedness. Why should not people show more than one profile at a time?¹¹

The mirror is a prism-reflector. If Justine is first glimpsed by both Arnauti and Darley in the mirror at the Cecil Hotel,¹² they each see in her different qualities. But when she looks at her own reflection, it is basically her narcissism which is reflected back to her. Opposed to Justine's plush mirrors, is Melissa's poignant strip of cracked mirror. She hardly uses it except to apply her jumble of powders and crayons.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 106

¹¹Ibid., p. 27.

¹²Ibid., p. 65. Darley says "They met, where I had first seen her in the gaunt vestibule of the Cecil, in a mirror."

Her mirror relays humility. Leila stops the time of clocks by avoiding mirrors; her pock-marked visage prompts her withdrawal from time.¹³ Conversely, Mountolive admires his own image, before he lapses into indifference, brought about by a kind of inner despair.¹⁴ His mirror at first flatters him; and later, like the reproachful face of his clock, reminds him of the passage of inactive days. Arnauti's mirror too reminds him that he has turned forty, but nevertheless, he cannot help his attachment to Justine. Pursewarden's mirror does not like him: it always moves him to expressions of disgust. And when he commits his final outrage, he simply steps "into the quicksilver of a mirror."¹⁵ Similarly, other crucial announcements or discoveries are made in mirrors. Pursewarden's dying message to Nessim is one; Nessim's own flirtations with suicide is another; Sir Louis's wry remark "time is up",¹⁶ Balthazar's cynical pronouncements on good and evil;¹⁷ even Liza turns her blind

¹³ Similarly, Narouz stops the clocks at Karm Abou Girg when Nessim comes to visit. He tells his brother: "Your stay with us is so brief, let us not be reminded of the flight of the hours." Balthazar, p. 79.

¹⁴ Mountolive, p. 131. His self admiration is only equalled by his later self abhorrence. Mountolive, p. 232.

¹⁵ Justine, p. 118.

¹⁶ Mountolive, p. 80.

¹⁷ "The most tender, the most tragic of illusions is perhaps to believe that our actions can add or subtract from the total quality of good or evil in the world." Clea, p. 71.

face to the mirror. On the humorous side, as always, is Pombal: he expounds his love problems at length to Darley, and when he turns his face to the mirror, he is astonished to find a happy visage: "Well anyway... I am probably wrong."¹⁸

The mirror, at first Justine's emblem, gradually reveals other realities, and becomes almost human in its likes and dislikes, and in the nature of the truths it chooses to reveal to people about themselves. In this sense, it is treated surrealistically. As an image, it sometimes reflects the passage of days, and at other times, inner states of mind; occasionally, it carries messages from the other side of life.

There are other symbols used primarily as emblems of specific people. Such is Nessim's telescope, Balthazar's watchkey, Narouz's whip, Leila's snake, Justine's Tibetan mask, and Scobie's bathtub. But even these expand to touch off relationships with other people. It is difficult to think about Balthazar, without recalling his search for the key to his father's watch. On the first night he meets Darley, he is on the wind-swept Corniche hunting for this key. A total stranger then, he pleads with Darley to help

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 44. The mirror invariably reflects back to him his self-deception. It confronts him with the truth about his love: "It was seeing her naked in front of the mirror. ...All of a sudden I sat up in bed and said to myself, 'My God! She is an elephant in need of a coat of whitewash!'" Justine, p. 143.

him in his search. Darley later finds out that:

... behind the urgency of his expression he masked the symbolic meaning that this watch had for him: signifying the unbound time which flowed through his body and mine, marked off for so many years now by this historic time-piece. The watch had ticked softly against his father's body as well as his own -- like time fermenting in them. It was wound by a small key in the shape of an ankh which he kept attached to a strip of black ribbon his key-ring. Today is a different sort of time obtained here, and he was not wrong. 'If I don't find the key it will stop'... Without the key it was useless to open the delicate golden leaf and expose the palpitating viscera of time itself stirring.¹⁹

They do not find the key. But the hunt is on. For Balthazar, it is for a key to historic time. Darley is also searching for a key: "I know that the key I am trying to turn is in myself."²⁰ Justine is hunting for the key to Nessim's safe on the pretext that the safe contains information about her lost child that Nessim is keeping from her.²¹ As it turns out, it is she who has Balthazar's key, but it does not fit Nessim's safe. When she returns it to him, he has already had a new one made to replace the old. But there is another version of the story: Pursewarden's version. He says that it is Selim -- Nessim's servant and double agent -- who has

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 94.

²⁰ Balthazar, p. 23.

²¹ Balthazar's version of the disappearance of Justine's child: "Narouz telephoned to say: 'I saw the Magzub by chance last night and forced the truth out of him. The child is dead.'" Ibid., p. 129.

taken the key, and that his purpose is to get into Nessim's private papers. In this way, the watch-key, at first emblematic of Balthazar's time-obsession, becomes a spiraling symbol to touch off various other cycles of individual searches. The key is the way to some personal verity. Even Abdul has a key to Maquam El Scobie: Scobie's last ironic jest.²²

The sea is another vital link between people; it signifies an individual's private sense of time. For Darley, writing from memory in the seclusion of his island, the sea is "one clock" which punctuates his winter evenings. "In the great quietness of these winter evenings there is one clock: the sea. Its momentum in the mind is the fugue upon which this writing is made."²³ His aim is to rework this dim momentum into a pattern until it shows its significant side. The way he plans to do this is to set it down, not in the order in which the incidents happened -- that is assuming that he can do this -- but in the order in which he recalls them. And as he admits in Clea: "calendar time gives little enough indication of the aeons which separate one self from another, one day from another. And all this time, I had been living there, truly, in the Alexandria of

²²Clea, p. 80. The bathtub that Scobie used for brewing has now become a holy relic.

²³Justine, p. 16.

my heart's mind."²⁴ The sea, for him, is the only momentum, or time, by which he punctuates his life. Hence, at one point he recalls seeing Justine in the candlelight as some "great sea-bird" who has come at last to where he is standing.²⁵

But the sea is also a dim momentum in the lives of many, and in Jungian terms, is a metaphor for the collective unconscious. If, therefore, Darley's experience with Melissa is a block of his life "which has fallen in the sea",²⁶ Nessim's private world of decisions is paralleled by the motions of the sea, for on the day of his decision to marry Justine, the sea is high and four fishing boats tack furiously towards the harbour with their catch. The waters of Lake Mareotis are the underworld of Narouz which he proudly shows to the visiting Mountolive. Later, Narouz disposes of a human head in the still waters of the marshes: one of the numerous macabre incidents we learn to associate with him. Narouz's rapport with the underworld is manifest in his island, where dead bodies of sailors stand sentries at the mouth of an underwater cave. This is where he revenges himself on Clea for failing to come to him at his moment of death. This final

²⁴Clea, p. 11.

²⁵Balthazar, p. 48.

²⁶Justine, p. 18.

confrontation with Clea is the culmination of a series of violent incidents which gather throughout the novel whenever Narouz makes his appearance, and here explode in Narouz's ferocious will-power to keep Clea with him.²⁷

It is true that the sea engenders a rapport between Darley and Clea; but it also forces their hands to actions which eventually undermine their love. It is an appropriate introduction to these Alexandrian experiences, as it is a fit ending for them, since it engenders those incidents which bring about the temporary halt in the action.

Thus it is that the key and the sea are dominant patterns in winding, or unwinding, the spirals of experience. Another significant pattern in the novel, associated this time, not with recollection in time, but with the psyche, is the mask. Like the velvet domino, the mask is worn at festival time, and is a prime disguiser of identity, and, paradoxically, a dynamic discoverer of identity. For in veiling his outer identity, man expresses his inner self with its other desires. The un-lived lives are now lived. The Cervoni's masked ball is a pretext for allowing "the invisible lords of Misrule" sway.²⁸ The great houses are thrown open to expose their fabulously rich interiors. Snatches of

²⁷ Durrell's use of the macabre goes back to his early portrait of Fonvasin and the two monks in Panic Spring, p.30 above. Here in The Quartet, Da Capo is the chief dabbler in the occult.

²⁸ Balthazar, p. 188.

music and laughter are everywhere. Justine's dress is the colour of hare's blood. Amaril is once more on the hunt for Semira; thus far, she is only a pair of anonymous hands and a carnival voice. Pursewarden regales everyone with his Gothic-Sadistic story of a diabolist-poet and his vampire; Toto wears Justine's ring to facilitate her disappearance from the dance, but also to use it as a passport to his own pleasures. He is murdered at the ball in a case of mistaken identity, thus appropriately bringing to an end this crescendo of hooded anguish. All the while, the theme song is a Tiresias limerick. At carnival time, some achieve their desires -- as does Amaril -- many are frustrated -- as is Narouz over Clea's absence from the ball. Hoods, shadows, masks²⁹ and songs fizzle out before the hushed presence of death, as do the revellers in Edgar Allen Poe's "The Masque of the Red Death."³⁰

Opposed to this method of revolving patterns of imagery

²⁹Apart from the masks, there is the Tibetan idol, with its eyes lit from within by electricity, hanging on the wall in Justine's bedroom. Justine acts her role before this mask, and gets to associate with it her "Noble Self." Justine p. 136.

³⁰Death appears in Capodistra's masquerade of Mephistopheles, Balthazar, p. 207. Capodistra, the seducer of Justine, is also the snake of The Quartet. See Justine, p. 33: "The flat triangular head of the snake with huge frontal lobes."

is one in which multiple imagery highlights a character from different angles. Thus, Justine is by turns a swallow, an owl, a sea-bird,³¹ a fox,³² a snake coiled at the center of Nessim's life,³³ and a dead bird in a gutter,³⁴ depending on her observer's mood.

By and large, imagery, like the double positive-negative-axis of the city, is also double-edged in its extremes; and between these extremes there are varying shades of experience. What in the long-run emerges as a final impression is a Dionysian vision occasionally relieved by glamorous landscape,³⁵ but generally relaying an animal level of experience. The city is a tortoise and an old reptile.³⁶ The characters are often seen through animal imagery, with the birds of prey, or carnivorous beasts, as the most pervasive. The snake is Capodistra's metaphor; but it is also associated

³¹Balthazar, p. 48. The first three, in Darley's opinion.

³²Mountolive, p. 83. Nessim of Justine: "If you let the Jewish fox into your vineyard it will eat your life."

³³Balthazar, p. 99. Leila's view of Justine as reported by Balthazar.

³⁴Clea, p. 62. As seen by the returned Darley.

³⁵Two of his great descriptive passages are: Lake Mareotis at the beginning of Mountolive, and the harbour scene at the beginning of Clea.

³⁶Justine, p. 19; and Clea, p. 14, respectively.

with Justine, and with Leila's withdrawal from life at Karm Abou Girg. Narouz's toys are symbolic of his violent life and death: his whip, his harpoon-gun, his family's metal shield. Moreover, his harelip gives his appearance a reptilian ugliness. Consistent animal imagery is used for the Alexandrians: "children darted here and there like mice among the stalls."³⁷ The splendid descriptions of Lake Mareotis at dawn notwithstanding, Durrell creates a macabre city, overburdened with dark details, which includes the house of child-prostitution, Narouz's disposal of the shrunken head in the waters of Lake Mareotis, Pursewarden's suicide, Narouz's murder and ritual burial, Capodistra's letter on the occult, and lastly, Clea's brush with death. These grotesque incidents increase with each part of the novel, until they appear to get out of hand in Clea. Furthermore, Durrell's imagery is occasionally heavy-handed: "the great car purring like a moth in the palm-cooled dusk of the road."³⁸ Other images build up the negative spectrum; one of these is the telephone, a "modern symbol for communications which never takes place,"³⁹ another is Nessim's telescope as an instrument of invasion of privacy; or Leila's sudden attack

³⁷ Balthazar, p. 155.

³⁸ Justine, p. 158

³⁹ Balthazar, p. 169. The telephone is previously used to suggest broken communications in The Black Book, p. 108; and will be extensively used later in Tunc-Nunquam.

of small-pox marring her once beautiful face.⁴⁰ In this way, the novel builds up into a Gothic romance, replete with mysteries, murders, unexpected suicides, and punctuated with the occult.

What emerges here is a kind of reality exaggerated to the point of myth.⁴¹ The whole is a network of mythical references. The first part is full of references to Justine's mythical counterparts: "The giant man-eating cats like Arsinoe were her true siblings,"⁴² and paradoxically, she is like Valentis "who died for a love as perfect as it was wrong-headed."⁴³ Again, "her love was like a skin in which he [Nessim] lay sewn like the infant Heracles."⁴⁴ Clea thinks of her as "a shallow twentieth-century reproduction of the great Hetairae of the past, the type to which she belongs without knowing it, Lais, Charis and the rest."⁴⁵

⁴⁰Mountolive, p. 58. This is perhaps the only way that Durrell could have ended this episode for Mountolive, prior to the Liza involvement.

⁴¹Darley refers to his novel as a "mythology of the city." Justine, p. 121.

⁴²Ibid., p. 20.

⁴³Ibid., p. 21.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 32.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 77.

On the other hand, poor burnt-out Melissa is likened -- in one of the most awkward similes in the novel -- to Cleopatra, simply because Darley carries her out of Pursewarden's apartment in a rolled carpet, releasing her when he reaches his own.⁴⁶ Although Darley says he loves Melissa, his references to her always appear as afterthoughts. When he talks about her, the imagery he chooses reflects his frame of mind. As a result, Melissa remains a subdued shadow in the background.

References to Tiresias are everywhere in Balthazar. They reflect Balthazar's role in the novel and adequately build up the mood of carnival. In Mountolive, Alexandria is an underworld of political and social embroilments only paralleled by the underwater life of Lake Mareotis which begins this part. Hence, dominating symbols are Narouz's whip, his mother's serpent, and the Magzub's ritualistic performances. All these cast their shadows on the other world of social hypocrisies. In Clea, images of death and rebirth intercalate. The romantic Amaril-Semira affair is a new rendition of the Pygmalion story, as is the story of Osiris and Isis -- the race of the sun and moon, here projected as Pursewarden and Liza:

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 57. It seems that Cleopatra is a favourite of Durrell's, for he also likens Justine to her: "I think Cleopatra was probably something like her [Justine]." "Homage to Durrell", Two Cities, (Paris, 1, 910, April 15, 1959), p. 27.

In Egypt as well as Peru, the king, who was considered as God, took his sister to wife. But the motive was ritual and not sexual, for they symbolized the moon and the sun in their conjunction. The king marries his sister because he as God the star, wandering on earth, is immortal and may therefore not propagate himself in the children of a strange woman, any more than he is allowed to die a natural death.⁴⁷

This is how Liza explains it. But in fact, the Osiris-Isis story is traditionally a death-rebirth theme; here, Durrell twists it around and gets Pursewarden to take his own life in order to set his sister free. Liza is very different from her mythical counterpart in that she lacks fidelity.

In retrospect, the mythical implications of the work begin with the rituals of the observable world; they take a plunge into the underworld of spiritualism and surface again in the end with harbingers of rebirth. And yet in this new promise of life, death is not eliminated. Thus mythical patterns are established to suggest a cyclical experience in time. The characters are attached to this revolving wheel of time, reenacting mythical roles of the past; patterns in love and war, triumphs and defeats.⁴⁸ This impression is not far from Durrell's avowed aim: "I'd like to hope that seen from the other end of the continuum my characters seem not just 'people' but symbols as well like a pack of Tarot

⁴⁷ Clea, p. 191.

⁴⁸ Compare Durrell's previous recreation of myth as a way of satisfying man's dreams, above, p.49, re- The Black Book; and p. 101 below, re- The Key to Modern Poetry.

cards."⁴⁹ His words lend additional support to my view that far from writing about a world that is observable, Durrell uses Alexandria as a springboard into an imagined underworld,⁵⁰ where, as one reader puts it, there is: "an Alexandria inflated into a Sadean dream of the unleashed subconscious -- everywhere and nowhere, the world with its polite lid off."⁵¹ Perhaps this is the kindest thing that can be said about Durrell's tampering with another people's locale and culture.⁵² But the irony is that this same reader is unwilling to surrender the illusion that Durrell creates and she goes on to say,

At any rate, this particular landscape obviously provides a perfect culture in which the full 'multiplicity', of the various characters can develop, free from the restrictions that would be imposed on them by an occidental society. Alexandria is not just a décor, but a living element of the story, and without Alexandria, the story of Justine and her friends could not have happened.⁵³

This passage sufficiently demonstrates the dangers of the

⁴⁹ Hommage, p. 83.

⁵⁰ So called by Darley on the first page of Clea.

⁵¹ Cecily Mackworth, in The World of Lawrence Durrell, ed. by T. H. Moore, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1962), p. 24.

⁵² See Kenneth Rexroth, "What is Wrong with Durrell?" Nation, 190: 493, (June 4, 1960), p. 493.

⁵³ Moore, p. 29.

kind of game that Durrell is playing. It also adequately exemplifies the following remark made by Lionel Trilling: "Alexandria is 'the mysterious East of Western Legend.'"⁵⁴ Durrell does not at any point in the novel, nor in his interviews, discourage this view; like the Elizabethans before him, he has constructed a Machiavellian dream which he passes off as reality.

Image-patterns, and mythical patterns, run in interlocking spirals, sometimes achieving points of apocalyptic vision, and at others plummeting down to rediscovered underworlds. Darley, and by implication Durrell, has his reasons for choosing this mode, and he makes constant reference to a metaphor which becomes his raison d'être in this novel.⁵⁵ The Greek island from which he is doing the writing is a metaphoric Grecian world:

...invaded by the odours of the forgotten city -- promontories where the sweating sea captains had boozed and eaten until their intestines cracked, had drained their bodies, like kegs, of every lust, foundering in the embrace of black slaves with spaniel's eyes. (The mirrors, the heart-rending sweetness of the voices of blinded canaries, the bubbles of narguilehs in their rose-water bowls, the smell of patchouli and joss). They were eating into one another, these irreconcilable dreams.⁵⁶

The Grecian and the demonic encroach upon one another.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 61.

⁵⁵ See p. 158 above.

⁵⁶ Clea, p. 13.

Darley stands poised between them, unwilling to relinquish the one, and yet aching to encounter the other. This tension remains throughout: it involves two dreams, two landscapes, and two times. The past is the present, and the present past. Both together contain the future. So poised, he constructs his spirals of reality, framed in "the heavy steel webs of metaphor".⁵⁷ He wants to:

record experiences, not in the order in which they took place -- for that is history -- but in the order in which they first became significant for me.⁵⁸

Contrary to Proust,⁵⁹ Darley's fugitive memories do not illuminate the past; they merely recur to form the mesh of the present of experience.⁶⁰ Hence, in Darley's world, each "thought fecundates the whole universe anew,"⁶¹ and Justine's acts are "wishes from the past to the future" which invite self-discovery.⁶² Nessim, after Justine's disappearance, adopts a new mask: a vulgar caricature of himself. Pursewarden explains this:

⁵⁷Justine, p. 114.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 115.

⁵⁹Note my comparison of time in Bergson, and in Durrell, pp. 98- 99 above.

⁶⁰Justine, p. 142. Compare, Einstein on time as involving no change on p. 97 above; and Jung on archetypal symbolism on p. 101 above.

⁶¹Justine, p. 176.

⁶²Ibid., p. 202.

...we live lives based upon selected fictions. Our view of reality is conditioned by our position in space and time -- not by our personalities as we like to think. Thus every interpretation is based upon a unique position. Two paces east or west and the whole picture is changed.⁶³

Not permanently changed, of course, but modified. Apparent change is only part of the illusions of perception.⁶⁴ And yet, illusion itself is an enriching process. Darley feels that Clea gains from her experience with Justine, even though the face Justine turns to her is deliberately misleading. "Are we then nourished only by fictions, by lies?" Darley questions.⁶⁵ Darley is disturbed by this thought; but Balthazar is reassuring about it:

These obstinate little dispossessed facts, the changing of our human existence which one cannot insert like a key into a lock -- or a knife into the oyster: will there be a pearl inside? Who can say? But somewhere they must exist in their own right, these grains of truth which 'just slipped out.' Truth is not what is uttered in full consciousness. It is always what 'just slips out' -- the typing error which gives the whole show away.⁶⁶

It is Balthazar's contention that we see truth as she seems, never as she is. His version parallels Pursewarden's for whom truth has no heart like a woman. When, therefore,

⁶³ Balthazar, pp. 14-15.

⁶⁴ In Acte, 1961, Nero tells the poet Petronius: "we will have two forms of art to compare, Reality and illusion, you in words and I in life." Acte, (London: Faber, 1965), pp. 58.

⁶⁵ Balthazar, p. 140.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 146.

Darley thinks about "how to harness time in the cultivation of a style of heart.... Not to force time, as the weak do, for that spells self-injury and dismay, but to harness its rhythms and put them to our own use."⁶⁷ Balthazar advises him to seek to do so with illusions of truth. He believes that a diary is the last place to go for the truth since nobody dares make the final confession to themselves on paper. This idea is supported by the quotation from de Sade prefixed to Clea, which asserts that motion is the most primary and beautiful of Nature's qualities. But Sade has to tack on to this the idea that motion is the perpetual consequence of crimes, and is conserved by means of crimes alone. Durrell does not discourage this last view, since Melissa, the one faithful primate of love, is also the victim of disease and inaction. On his return to Alexandria, Darley fails to hypnotize his memory of her by frequent repetition of her name. She quietly falls into disuse. On the role of time as a revealer of hidden truths, Darley calls to mind Balthazar's statement:

One lies here with time passing and wonders about it. Every sort of time trickling through the hour-glass, 'time immemorial' and 'for the time being,' and 'time out of mind'; the time of the poet, the philosopher, the pregnant woman, the calendar... Even 'time is money' comes into the picture; and then, if you think that money is excrement for the Freudian, you understand that time must be also!⁶⁸

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 242.

⁶⁸Clea, p. 71.

All these realizations catch up with him on his return to Alexandria. He stumbles into the recognition that having gone through all the spectrum of relative values of good and evil, of time and motion, of truth and personal verities, that only poetic or transcendental knowledge is the anchor of the artist.

In relaying his experience to us, Darley uses a whole set of cards which he shuffles to produce different combinations. His trump is a series of interlinears and letters which complement, contradict, and highlight one another by turns. There is his own version in the pages of Justine, but it is interrupted by pages from Arnauti's diary and novel. Although Darley is not satisfied with the versions he gets from people's diaries, still Arnauti's diary and his novel Moeurs are the only written clues to a past perfect unknown to Darley. Later on, by word of mouth -- through Mnemjian the Barber, through Pombal, Cohen's last minute confessions about Melissa, and Clea's letter at the end of Justine -- he gradually builds up his spectrum, overshadowed by the ego-ridden Justine.⁶⁹ This done, he is confronted by Balthazar's Interlinear, delivered to him on his Greek island by Mnemjian. In the second part, Darley reorders his reality incorporating Balthazar's comments. Balthazar's single most significant revelation

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 54. "She was not really human -- nobody wholly dedicated to the ego is."

concerns Justine's use of Darley as a decoy for her one true love who now appears to be Pursewarden. Darley believes at this point that he has rediscovered reality. But his axis of reality has only taken another twist; what is now disclosed to his view is another past encroaching on the substance of the present, and overlapping it in still newer patterns. His own personal Alexandria has become "a philosophy of introspection, almost a monomania."⁷⁰ He reworks his portraits of people from different angles and puts emphasis on newer aspects.⁷¹ Scobie gains new stature, and with him the concept of God as a humourist is more evident.⁷² Darley loosens up a little. Justine is more human, less of a goddess. Narouz comes into focus. Leila emerges from her hideout. But Mountolive still remains on the periphery of the action. Pursewarden's cynicisms ring louder; after all he now appears to be Justine's coveted lover. His suicide -- comparable in several ways to Petronius's in Acte -- is again the prime subject for discussion. This time, Balthazar sees it as an enigmatic act. The unseen world encroaches further into the act through the activities of the Magzub and Narouz, who jointly get a vision of Justine's lost child drowned at the bottom of the lake. Added to this is Scobie's ironic

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 19.

⁷¹Petronius in Acte, says: "I am a writer, / We meddle with life from odd angles." p. 55.

⁷²Pursewarden gives his trilogy the title of God is a Humourist. Justine, p. 244.

exit from life; and Toto de Brunel's mysterious murder which rounds out this part. Darley's reflections clarify the roles of the two observers so far:

The wicked Interlinear, freighted with these doubts, presses like a thumb, here and here, always in bruised places. I have begun to copy it whole -- the whole of it -- slowly and painfully; not only to understand more clearly wherein it differs from my own version of reality, but also to catch a glimpse of it as a separate entity -- as a manuscript existing in its own right, as the determined view of another eye upon events which I interpreted in my own way, because that was the way in which I lived them -- or they lived me. (185-6)

Balthazar's part is appropriately dominated by sterility, frustration and death; the carnival is its suitable end. The only points of affirmation come in the end in Clea's letter to Darley, and in his answer to her. With Mountolive -- "the fulcrum of the quartet and the rationale of the thing"⁷³ -- the subjective spectrum gives way to an objective one. The cards are now shuffled by an unseen narrator, and Mountolive assumes the center of the stage. We watch him make his debut in the higher circles, detached and self congratulatory, gradually become the victim of

⁷³George Wickes, Lawrence Durrell and Henry Miller, (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1963), p. 327. In spite of its focal position in the novel, Durrell writes Miller: "Don't bother with Mountolive; it's a genre I know you hate as much as I do, the naturalistic novel." Ibid. pp. 342-343. But Miller in true character casts aside Durrell's deprecatory remark with: "It fits into the tetralogy like a key in the lock; gives me a thrill to get behind previous scenes, in and under certain characters encountered before." Ibid., p. 351.

uneasy doubts, and later on, of feeble petulance. In the meantime, there are new focuses: there is the disciplined and efficient Maskelyne, Head of Intelligence, who finds himself playing a countermovement to Pursewarden's unwary moves. Amaril's search for Semira gains the stature of a knight's search for the Holy Grail. The Pursewarden-Liza affair is still secret. Through the omniscient observer, we at last get a view of the Nessim-Justine liaison prior to Darley's time. Instead of love, we now see intrigue as the primary mover of things in their orbit. We can see their past as a disinterested person might have observed it. Pursewarden's suicide is seen from the political angle. And finally comes the slaughter of the sacrificial goat of designs and counter designs: Narouz is murdered, and his ritual burial brings to a close this saga of intrigue. In the process, we have experienced the same slice of life, this time seen from the outside, with occasional glimpses into private worlds of letters.

Now time elapses. Darley, who has been on his island, comes back to Alexandria. His major discovery in Clea is re-discovery. Time involves neither passage, nor change: it just is. The old and new are remarried in a new liaison. Although Justine does not measure up to his memory of her, she is basically the same, repeating familiar pattern of behaviour. The same thing applies to the Alexandrians, one and all. The lover-gallant, Pombal, one moment almost dying

for love, springs into new position, ready for a new assault on life. Nessim, seemingly vulgarized, dons his polished exterior for a fresh sally into the world of power. Even Clea, new woman and all, is still very much of the artist-cum-amateur philosopher, unattached and thinking only of her art. Everything is different, yet everything is still the same.

In this way, Darley winds his spirals, unwinds them, distances them, zeroes in on them, and rewinds them. And because of his precarious balance between old and new, he devises the historic present and the preterite to portray past events, and the actual present he preserves for his situation on the island as he sits writing. His reality revolves with the axis of the city and its people, and the whole is a continuous present for him as it is for the reader. This effect of simultaneity is strengthened by his abrupt intercalation of tenses, and by his peculiar way of introducing character, whereby when he first mentions a character he immediately follows it up with a reference to his manner of death. In this way, the person's past and his future are aspects of his present. He does this with Melissa; the first time he mentions her, he also says: "After all what is the good of a fine metaphor for Melissa when she lies buried deep as any mummy in the shallow tepid sand of the black estuary?"⁷⁴ His work, in contrast to the life-span of the people he is writing about, proves that

⁷⁴Mountolive, pp. 194-206.

"Life is short, art long", a truism also applicable to Justine's ring taken from the tomb of the Byzantium youth. Apart from Melissa, the work outlives Narouz, Cohen, Scobie, Keats, Leila and Pursewarden.

But Darley's medium of expression is linear. How then can he relay the feeling of all time in a single moment of time if he is dealing with words arranged in a sequential order involving progressional development?

Truth is double-bladed, you see. There is no way to express it in terms of language, this strange bifurcated medium with its basic duality! Language! What is the writer's struggle except a struggle to use a medium as precisely as possible, but knowing fully its basic imprecision? A hopeless task, but none the less rewarding for being hopeless. Because the task itself, the act of wrestling with an insoluble problem, grows the writer up!⁷⁵

This is Keats. Darley, too, is conscious of these drawbacks of his medium, and has no real answers to them.⁷⁶ He echoes Durrell's own misgivings on writing, which he expresses intermittently throughout his career, beginning with his piece on "The Heraldic Universe" in 1942.⁷⁷

Darley, to avoid linearity of narration, depicts his two locales -- the island and Alexandria -- simultaneously. He also employs letters and interlinears for intercalations of realities. He talks about a character's present and his

⁷⁵ Balthazar, p. 234.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 222.

⁷⁷ Refer to his discussion on the Semantic Disturbance in The Key to Modern Poetry, p. 113 above.

death in the same breath. Or he introduces short, abrupt sentences in long descriptive passages, thereby fracturing their extensivity. These gnomic sayings achieve the effect of discontinuity: "In marriage they legitimized despair," or "Every kiss is the conquest of a repulsion,"⁷⁸ made by Nessim while thinking about his father's life. Sometimes, imagery reflects the state of mind of a person, such as the following reference of Arnauti to his and Justine's European tour taken to cure Justine of her obsessions:

Basle, Zurich, Baden, Paris-- the flickering of steel rails over the arterial systems of Europe's body: steel ganglia meeting away across mountains and valleys. Confronting one's face in the pimpled mirrors of the Orient Express.⁷⁹

or the following feel of the desert: "...the first pure draughts of desert air, and the nakedness of space, pure as a theorem, stretching away into the sky."⁸⁰ In some cases, one cruel sentence describes the person; this is Darley's reference to Mnemjian on his return to the city: "Only the smile, the infant smile was unchanged, and the oiled spitcurl was still aimed at the frontal sinus."⁸¹ Or an image relays the essence of a personality in a moment of time.

⁷⁸Justine, p. 212.

⁷⁹Ibid., p. 78.

⁸⁰Balthazar, p. 85.

⁸¹Clea, p. 17.

Thus Clea is a nun in search of her subliminal self; Telford has "podgy hands which were stuffed with bluish clusters of veins like plums in a cake;"⁸² But this method miscarries when pushed too far, as it is in this heavy-handed description:

Unaware that their mother city was dying, the living still sat there in the open street, like caryatids supporting the darkness of futurity upon their eyelids, sleeplessly watching, the immortality-hunters throughout the whole fatidic length of time.⁸³

Sometimes, Durrell's take-off on fine writing becomes fine writing. This happens in the case of Darley's descriptions of the sunset from the Yacht Club in Justine.

Some of Durrell's best descriptive passages suggest a strong visual orientation.⁸⁴ Others have effective evocatory powers such as the duck-shoot at the end of Justine, and the murder and burial scenes of Narouz at the end of Mountolive. But, at other points, Durrell's style is clogged

⁸²Clea, p. 17.

⁸³Justine, p. 188.

⁸⁴Durrell is an amateur painter in his spare time. Some of his paintings are included in Exhibition of Paintings by Oscar EPFS, [another of his pseudonyms] (Paris, 1963). It has his water colours and sketches. He also has edited a book on the French photographer Brassai: Brassai, With an Introduction by Lawrence Durrell, (New York, the Museum of Modern Art, 1968). Durrell's correspondence with Miller also shows evidence of their mutual interest in painting, and they occasionally traded their works.

with over-writing.⁸⁵ It can be argued, as does G.S. Fraser, that this over-writing is deliberate, since Durrell is trying to write a gnomic prose, and that vulgarity and excess in language are part of one kind of comic writing.⁸⁶ But Darley himself is more critical of his own weakness than is Fraser.⁸⁷ Ultimately, a baroque style must be distinguished from awkward mannerism. Clea, for instance, contains whole passages which look like self-parody. One of these is Darley's evocations of the halcyon summer at the end of the novel. It is one thing to say -- as does John A. Weigel -- that language in Durrell relays the moment of epiphany,⁸⁸ and quite another to admire a shell that has no kernel. It is true that Durrell, ever since the days of Zero and Asylum in the Snow, probes language as heraldic ideogram and as metaphor, and feels that a polished style is a worthwhile aim, and in this sense courts heightened speech.⁸⁹ But it

⁸⁵In reference to his style, he admits: "It's too juicy...I am conscious of the fact that it is one of my major difficulties. It comes of indecision, when you are not sure of your target." Van Wyck Brooks, Writers at Work, (London: Secker and Warburg, 1963), p. 267.

⁸⁶G. S. Fraser, Lawrence Durrell, (London: Faber, 1968), pp. 212, 123.

⁸⁷See footnote 85 of this chapter.

⁸⁸John a. Weigel, Lawrence Durrell, (New York: Twayne, 1965), p. 47.

⁸⁹In Wickes, Durrell discusses his view of the heraldic ideogram: "When a Jap writes 'cherry', 'moon', 'grass',

is also true that in some cases his forced vulgarity becomes sheer perversity. Few can defend Durrell's offensive humour in the incident of Scobie's parrot and his phrases conned from religious books. To be genuinely naughty with words, one does not need to throw mud at other people's beliefs. These incidents mar an otherwise creative use of language, where the choice of words is a challenge in effective communication. Durrell is specially good at relaying feeling or emotional states. His admirers consist of those who have a taste for the power of words to state rather than understate in the Samuel Becket tradition of muteness. Henry Miller tells Durrell: "Nobody can wield the English language like you."⁹⁰ Alfred Perlès rightly points out that Durrell is never ignorant of the value of his words;⁹¹

the ideogram has a mystical-metaphysical ring quite different from the set of associations we stir by using them; hence the image-making that we have to put into it. I work hot to cold like a painter. Hot noun, cold adjective ('mathematical cherry' rather than 'sweet cherry'). Or an abstract word like 'armature' a warm sweetish one like 'melodious.' The Chinese ideogram carries the 'given verb'; our syntax dictates a subject-verb-object copula in order to create a complex of affective sounds. Tough on us, isn't it?" p. 329. In an Author's Note prefacing his second verse play, Durrell wrote: 'I think it is to T. S. Eliot we owe the phrase heightened speech; It is something for which he hunted long and patiently... I am conducting the same sort of hunt for myself.'

⁹⁰ Wickes, p. 308.

⁹¹ Alfred Perlès, My Friend Lawrence Durrell, (London: Neville Spearman, 1955), p. 16.

Durrell's feeling for words is, in fact, his trademark as poet and novelist. Perhaps it is his special ploy in externalizing his fiction, and in getting closer to his view of the classic in literature.

His concern with the perfection of style is at the core of his second verse play, Acte. Once again, his stand-in, Petronius, is a writer, and, in this case, hatcher of a political plot to get rid of Acte and Flavius simultaneously. In Petronius's opinion, "Style is the word. That is what the world needs."⁹² Obviously, he is here referring to a style of heart, but throughout the play, medium as effective expression is also of the essence, and reflects the style of heart he is referring to. In spite of his title, and regardless of the fact that the play revolves around its political-historical core, the essence of the piece is contained in the role of the artist-as-master ironist. Here, Petronius while advising his niece, Flavia, about the way to handle Flavius's infidelity to her, is himself busy writing a play about Acte and Flavius. In this way we have the two versions of reality progressing side by side, and illuminating one another. There is the dimension of metaphor, and that of life. For Petronius, art is reality and life an illusion. So when his plot succeeds, and Acte fulfills her

⁹²Acte, (London: Faber, 1965), p. 70.

tragic role against the backdrop of history (she insists upon the Scythians fighting the unequal battle with the Romans) he is convinced that life is the stuff of illusion, since nothing he can write can have been more ironic or tragic.

In his written version, he realizes that reality is bound on an axis of perceptions and possibilities. His first version is a romance, in which the characters run away with the action. Acte abdicates and goes over to Egypt with Flavius; both are banished, and in exile they experience a new dimension of their love. However, when his niece presents life's version that Flavius and Acte had mutually destroyed each other, Petronius quickly devises a new ending to his story. This time it is a tragic one, with Acte marrying Amar -- her Scythian fiancé -- and both being defeated from within their empire by mutiny, disorganization and poverty. Finally, Petronius admits that life's story is the real genius, the ultimate irony, the last work in illusion. Only art is real, in the sense that it is predictable.⁹³

In life there is only ironic truth. Flavius returns victorious having destroyed Acte: but he has also destroyed his inner man, and what is left of him is a living metaphor

⁹³Durrell tells his reviewer: "I find art easy. I find life difficult." Brooks, p. 282.

of the price man pays for his humanity by colonializing others. Life returns Flavia's child to her, the child for whose future she allegedly seeks to destroy Acte. Now the child is mad. Acte dies, predictably, fighting colonialism with her flimsy resources. She is out of her element in the political game. And her mistakes are too costly. But in the end, she preserves her integrity, in a world where the word has ceased to have any meaning. Petronius's self-styled ritualistic suicide is a sadistic death of the master-fabricator; he dies of nausea. In his symbolic bleeding to death, Petronius proclaims the death knell of the vampirism of colonialism: "ACTE: You are vampires; / You want silver mines, the corn, the grain" (25). His life bleeds out of him in acquiescence.

In a cavernous kitchen Acte reveals the nature of the ruler of this decadent empire. Nero is a resurrected Oedypus. The mask he wears on the other side of his face is suggestive of the frightened child behind the tyrant, and of the necessity of maintaining a facade in the political arena. Acte is blind, a symbolic feature Durrell devises for her to indicate her vulnerability in the world of action. Her style of heart is too supple.

It appears that here we have an implied answer to Darley's earlier question: "Are we then nourished only by fiction, by lies?" Petronius's implied answer is in the affirmative. For the play is not only about the hazards of

colonialism, but also about the destiny of the artist as ironist. The play, in one sense, is a metaphor for creative writing and its relation to life's ironic twists. Nor is this the only link between this play and The Quartet. Nero's mask, and his dependence upon it is a continuation of the mask imagery of the novel; Acte's blindness is reminiscent of Liza's: they are both unable to face the world on its own terms. Once again, the artist as ironist-interpreter-seer is killed off by Durrell as he has been disposed of in *Campion*, *Gregory*, *Phaon* and *Pursewarden*. Once more there is a struggle to make words relay the whole story.

In essence, the nature and goals of the creative process are central concerns of Durrell's in most of his serious works; both are most apparent in The Alexandria Quartet and in Acte, where they are stressed thematically, as well as worked out practically. After the realities of The Quartet, its counter-realities, and its workpoints for future realities have been experienced, what will probably be of lasting interest is not its content but its mode. For when all is said about Durrell's fictional world, it is difficult not to reach the conclusion that -- as *Pursewarden* puts it -- everything is true of everybody, or that potential ramifications of anything are essentially endless. This takes us back to our point of departure. In this context, John Unterecker's undue emphasis upon the positive orientations of Clea are misleading. He suggests that

the novel as a whole works up to a strong emphasis on rebirth in Clea. But rebirth as a thematic goal in the novel suggests a planned end, as well as a linearity in the method of its progression, both of which are not in harmony with the metaphoric structure of the work. For Unterecker, Clea is an epiphany for the whole; and he presents as evidence the restoration of the virtuous Semira's nose, the period of achieved tenderness between Clea and Darley, Clea's almost miraculous return from the dead; Keat's equally forced metamorphosis into a Greek God, and Scobie's elevation to sainthood.⁹⁴ But surely all these revelations are merely turns in the gyre? In the case of Darley and Clea, there is no indication that the future promises them a permanent relationship; the implication is not true that tenderness is finally redemptive, but that it is temporarily so. Their relationship comes into existence against a backdrop of war, and ends as suddenly with it. It too is a spiral staircase with no end in view. It is true that Darley restores Clea to a new creative life as a partner; but it is also true that he loses her as a lover. Keat's turn-about-face is superficial, and smacks of sensationalism. In any case, he is killed shortly afterwards in a skirmish in the desert. Irony, rather than tenderness, is the key-

⁹⁴John Unterecker, Lawrence Durrell, (New York: Columbia University Press), 1964, p. 40.

note to Scobie's sainthood, irony at the expense of the Alexandrians. The rejuvenated Justine and Nessim are playing old roles. Does anyone seriously expect them to succeed in this new behavioural pattern? Thus, by means of the ironic tone, rebirth is only momentary. Epiphany, when it occurs, is short-lived. And time, far from bringing solutions or fundamental changes, just is.⁹⁵ The workpoints reinforce the cyclical pattern of experience. Rebirth is only the other side of the coin of life or death. It is a slice of experience, rather than a final version of a specific experience.

If there are only four parts to the novel, this is because, as Durrell explains to his reviewer, it is a structural thing, and not because the work reaches an end.

Durrell, in a manner of speaking, calls a halt:

Théoriquement vous pourriez écrire trente sosies à Justine. Pourquoi vous arrêter à quatre.
Comme les petits scénarios dans les notes de Cléa vous indiquent, il serait possible d'écrire beaucoup d'autres livres; mais, si ma notion de la forme est exacte, le résultat en serait toujours un continuum et non un roman-fleuve. C'est mon unique profession de foi. Je suis arrêté à quatre livres parcequ'il a quatre dimensions: C.Q.F.D. La forme est respectée, meme si le lecteur reste sur sa faim!⁹⁶

⁹⁵Time does not constitute change in The Key to Modern Poetry either, see above, p. 92; and in Jung, archetypes are essentially the same throughout time, p. 101 above.

⁹⁶"Lawrence Durrell Vous Parle," Réalités, No. 178, (Paris, November 1960), p. 106.

Today, almost a decade since its publication, The Quartet remains attractive for the way it is put together, rather than for what it presents. This is the case in spite of the fact that some of its scientific statements underlying the metaphor are not wholly sound. For instance, time is not always stayed in the first three parts of the novel, as he claims it is in his Note to Balthazar. Some progression is implied in the action, particularly in the naturalistic Mountolive. Furthermore, the hiatus in the novel between the character-city focus is weakening to the over-all effect. Is the human will stronger than the site, or is it subservient to it?⁹⁷ Again, his use of recurrence of incidents sometimes plays him false, as in the case of having three of his characters in Clea give an imitation of Scobie. Some interlinears to the Darley narrative are forced, as are Pursewarden's all too frequent metaphysical expositions, and his explanations of relativity in literature. And there is that other instance, where Clea, in bed with Darley, discourses at length on her affair with Pursewarden, her love for Amaril, Liza's love for Pursewarden, Mountolive's love for Liza, and tops it all off by analyzing the artist tribe.

⁹⁷ He does resolve the issue in his article "Landscape and Character", published in the New York Times Magazine Section, (June 12, 1960). Reprinted in Spirit of Place, 1969, p. 156. "I willingly admit to seeing 'characters' almost as functions of landscape. This has only come about in recent years after a good deal of travel."

Miller correctly pinpoints this weakness in the character of Pursewarden:

I never get the conviction that he was the great writer that you wish him to seem. I think he'd come off better -- forgive me! -- if he sliced down his remarks or observations. They get sententious and tedious and feeble sometimes. Too much persiflage... What I mean, more precisely, is that one is not sure at times whether the author is taking his double-faced protagonist seriously or ironically.⁹⁸

This uncertainty of tone is at the heart of the ambivalence of the novel. This is born, I believe, of an irresolution in Durrell's own vision of the world of The Quartet. With his next work, Durrell seems to vote for irony as the key to life's experiences.

⁹⁸ Wickes, p. 361.

CHAPTER VII

CRYPTOGRAM: OR RAVENS IN AN OAK-TREE

A giant work is a successfully communicated state of mind -- cosa mentale!¹

Here we have lying about us in our infancy... a whole culture tied to the stake, whipped blind, torn apart by mastiffs.... And here we are, three men in black overcoats, ravens of ill-omen in an oak-tree.²

...an old shadow-play manipulated by the figures of some great invisible shadow-master.³

If the world of The Alexandria Quartet is multidimensional, grotesque and ambivalent-paradoxical in its details, that of Durrell's following double-decker is more so, and sinister as well. It is a world coloured by a peculiarly ironic vision, and touched up with episodes of wild fantasy and Gothic shadow-play. It is drenched in dark laughter. All its gods are on a holiday, leaving man in control of the show. When its details are looked into, it emerges as a world that Lawrence Durrell has carried with him since the days of The Black Book, and before. In its most serious ver-

¹Tunc, (London: Faber, 1968), p. 242.

²Ibid., p. 11.

³Nunquam, (London: Faber, 1970), p. 219.

sion to date, it appears in its full heraldic warning as a bitter-tinged pronouncement on a life geared and controlled by the technological organization. The disturbing quality of the novel is enforced by the naive narrator -- "your humble Charlock -- the thinking weed: on the run again."⁴ He is by now a familiar character in Durrell's personae, and here a type of ironic counterpart to Chaucer's narrator in the Canterbury Tales. In Tunc-Nunquam, the narrator's insensitivity to what is occurring around him first acts as a built-in protection for him against the machinations of the firm. But gradually, this very quality causes him to be victimized by the firm, at first unwillingly, and in the end happily, since he himself assumes the highest position within it. Thus the novel ends at its own genesis, but reversed. Charlock's sense of reality is, as it were, turned inside out.

This account of man's inhumanity to man, and in the end to himself, is told in a re-enacted Faustian theme. But Durrell's Felix Charlock is both Mephistopheles and Faustus: tempter and tempted. He propels himself along the firm's winding staircase of power, telling himself that his real goal is the perfection of his work on Abel -- the almost human computer who eventually helps Charlock to simulate a human being to the point where the creation, in true monster-

⁴Tunc, p. 11.

fashion, helps to destroy its creator. A new Frankenstein is hereby let loose on the world by Durrell.

This is a theme also underlying Durrell's morality play, An Irish Faustus, published in 1963. In the play, the Faustian thirst for the role of God is cut down to size by Durrell, for his Faustus rejects magic for a new reality to be achieved, not in magical acts, but in a new metaphoric Jerusalem, where: ".....Everything/Begins to cohere, the dance of the pure forms/begins,"⁵ and where there is: "An immortal trinity to live by and to recreate./ In fact, the recreation of time itself in the/recreation of man" (88).

In his play, Durrell returns to his interest in man as questioner-searcher-creator, who finally concedes that the quest he is engaged in takes its point of departure from within himself, although it ends in the world around him. Once again, as in Darley's case, the key he is turning is within himself. Here, Dr. Faustus -- a tutor to Princess Margaret -- is pulled in opposite directions, not between the traditional poles of good and evil, but the positive-negative poles of Durrell's axis. He teaches Margaret, as he claims, only what she already knows without being aware of; and he does this by unfolding to her, in true Freudian style, that her "field of grace" can only be discovered by the act of

⁵An Irish Faustus, (London: Faber, 1963), p. 85.

dreaming (10); that, in fact, the world without is the world within; that what she observes around her is an emanation of what she is herself.⁶ Opposed to this white path of knowledge is the black one epitomized in the ring of alchemist's gold, left him by his magician-teacher, Tremethus, and sought by the vampire Queen Katherine, and her husband's spirit, Eric The Red. Margaret succumbs to her aunt's request, and steals the ring with its magic sheets from Faustus. By this act, the forces of hell break loose, and in a scene of conjuration, the drunk Queen conjures up the spirit of her dead husband. But Faustus's real conflict is not with the Queen, but with Mephistopheles, who is his alter-ego.⁷ To dabble in the occult or not to dabble, is his problem. In fact, it is Faustus who half-wills the theft of the ring. In his dreams, he enacts the theft, and in waking life, he inadvertently mentions the significance of the ring to Margaret. It is now that he is faced with the theft of the ring as a reality. To recover and destroy the ring is his next question and he debates it with Mephistopheles. In the showdown between him and Queen Katherine, Faustus debates his dilemma armed with a holy cross, given him by the priest, Anselm. Faustus eventually realizes

⁶ Compare Durrell's study of the subjective-objective worlds in Einstein, in Freud, and in others, pp. 94, 102-4 above.

⁷ "Mephisto materializes. He is almost the double of Faustus." p. 31.

that at least he is "free to question and to wonder", and therefore his state is superior to any other subjugated to a specific path (53). He is forced to face the issue, long suspected by him, that Tremetheus is the Deathshead who appears in the Queen's incantations, and that he is a spirit captured in the demonic world. Tremetheus teaches Faustus the only Formula that can destroy the ring. Now Faustus is ready to confess to Anselm that he should have run away from magic like Matthew the hermit. Faustus, therefore, resolves to pit the cross against the ring. Now he has no use for the ring, for "I imagine, therefore I am free" (64). He recites the formula, and the ring is destroyed and with it:

The matrix of creation's illness... Yes.
 prodigious vistas of terror and unreason
 Where volcanoes spout the blue blood of fire
 From all the severed arteries of time. (64-65)

But Mephistopheles has no choice now; he is sent back into the world of despair from which he came. His warning words to Faustus are ironically: "You are killing reason; you will reverse the wheel/Of cause and effect. Faustus desist" (66). Having survived the struggle with Mephistopheles, Faustus recounts it to Anselm:

... Down there, in the pit
 I... felt the very heart of process beating;
 All time, the annals of our history were spread. (69)

He resolves to go on a typical Durrellian journey. But first, he gets to know through Queen Katherine that because he has restored her to reason, she can resume her duties alone and

does not need his services any longer.

Free at last, he goes on his journey, accompanied by another Chaucerian figure: Martin the pardoner, seller of false absolutions. They both retire with Matthew the hermit in his log hut in the mountains, where "The moments fuse and intersect suddenly" (86). Mephistopheles follows them to play a game of Fortune. Martin, the pardoner, is a serio-comic portrait. He is the traditional pardoner, now turned psychoanalyst, and father-confessor. He freely admits that his pardons are fake, but then, he claims:

... I am a member of a respectable profession -- a Pardoner!
I fulfil a public need. I am more use than a gravedigger. (76)

As for his faked pardons: true or false, what does it matter if the result is positive? His Jerusalem is of the same order of provisional truth; if it is not the Jerusalem, it is one in the metaphoric sense: that is, it is a place where he makes his false indulgences or cures, and where even Faustus is part of the group who choose to live a life out of them.

This play harkens back to prominent themes of The Quartet: it is concerned with the conflict between inner and outer realities, and the journey as a refuge for an imaginative sensibility not attuned to a life punctuated by clock time. The images, here, are heraldic: the snow-capped mountain of Jerusalem is a place of death for the uninitiated, but a recreational spot for those who are. Moreover, the play tackles a major preoccupation of Tunc-Nunquam: now or never --

the initial condition facing man in Durrell-scope.

In Tunc-Nunquam, Durrell's last novel to date, there is an abstract of all his fictional visions up to this point. But here, his vision is mainly negative, so that what emerges is a sinister shadow of a world gone mad on its axis of reality. In Tunc, Felix Charlock, although a great scientist-creator of Abel -- a computer 'who' can decode the meaning of the smallest conceivable unit of meaning in speech, the pogon -- is nevertheless a child-like obtuse person. A simple-minded automaton, Charlock can create Abel, who if given a sigh or the birth cry of a baby, can tell everything about the man (11). And yet, he consistently remains unaware of the pitfalls awaiting him in Merlin's in the shape of Benedicta -- his seductress-vampire. Merlin's, or the firm, is a giant technological organization controlling all aspects of man's life -- his political and his social life, his amusements, purchases, thought, and even his mind. It creates his desires for him; and it fashions his dreams. A giant octopus, it closes in upon the individual and never lets him go unless to kill him or to destroy him. Its temptations are its outer veneer: its material possessions, and its comforts. What it promises in return for man's life and all his future works, is maximum technological knowhow, and maximum research potential. The Faustian contract here comprises man's aspirations in return for material comfort, prestige or unshackled intellectual pursuits. It comprises power,

in all its forms.

The two parts of the novel work in ironic reversal to one another; the spiral of human relationships is wound one way in Tunc, and the opposite way in Nunquam. Both revolve around the life of a young inventor, a Felix Charlock, who is a resident of Athens. He is drawn, in spite of his misgivings, into the toils of the organization in Tunc; but in Nunquam, he progresses willingly and even greedily, until he rises to the highest rung of the ladder of power within the firm. In between these two extremes of behaviour, he experiences a whole range of emotional scales before he unexpectedly reaches the top. What is revealed in the process of the escalation of his greed or permissiveness is the subtle effect that his contact with the organization has on him. His goals are side-tracked; his sensitivity, dulled. Not that he changes fundamentally; but by joining the racket, even temporarily, he makes a fundamental decision, and so becomes accessible to its pernicious influences. He fails to make his decision now; therefore it turns out to be never.

His failings are innate from the beginning: he is obsessed with a gluttonous love for his "toy", Abel the computer with the illusion of a proximate intuition. In a close-up of Abel, we find out that Charlock designs the machine for those "who talk endlessly to themselves for Everyman that is" (15). Abel records as a person speaks. The machine has a feminine voice, and relays the words into a

tiny phonetic alphabet, and then transfers it faultlessly typed onto a sheet of paper. So far, she, or he--for Felix refers to it in both ways -- is something comparable to the telex machine. But more significantly, Abel "x-rays time itself photographing a personality upon a gelatine surface of flux" (12). Just by pressing a button Charlock can get the name and voice of a person from the machine. Abel can then give some points of the required curriculum vitae, dealing with the three basic ones -- birth-love-death. But he does not perform this in a chronological fashion; Abel's control of human memory involves a process of "refining of false time" (20). Through his toy, Charlock creates a memory to conduct his "survey of the past, plan the future, mark time" (23). And thus Abel: "If we could only make all time proximate to reality we could see a little more deeply into the heart of our perplexities" (30). If Charlock develops Abel, it is not for the purpose of manufacturing a factitious literature, but by way:

... of remodelling sensation in order to place one in the position of 'self-seizing.' Such words then become merely a novel form of heartbeat as they do for the poet. In 'real' life. (54)

Therefore, when Charlock later begins his persecutions of the head of the firm, Julian receives phone calls in which he hears his own voice talking to him. Abel is on the line. In this way, Charlock triumphantly asserts: "I could see backwards and forwards along the tragic ellipse of these seg-

mented lives, to come up now and again with partial fragments of truth" (301). Abel is to become instrumental in creating the mechanical Iolanthe.

In the meantime, Charlock meets the "real" Iolanthe in a brothel in Athens. Iolanthe -- a descendant of Hilda in The Black Book -- is the bovine, loving mistress consistently at the center of Durrell's world. Here, she is also a symbol as potent as Helen of Troy, and a more ambitious person than is either Hilda or Melissa. Although Charlock appears to be fond of her, she does not emerge into his world at all. She remains a kind of legendary figure, a foremost screen personality of his time. But he first meets her at Mrs. Henniker's brothel, which he describes in its gruesome details. Most of the people with whom he associates in Athens frequent this brothel. You could say that it acts as the converging center of all their lines of motion. There is Nash, the prim psychoanalyst; and Caradoc, the habitually drunk, but competent architect; Pulley, Banubula, and Sacrapant. The last is eternally fired with nationalism for the firm; at least, until he takes his own life for being asked to kill Charlock: a feat he cannot achieve.

On the fringe of this group is Hippolyta, an affluent Countess, presiding over the Greek cultural scene from her country-home: Naos. And, inevitably, there is the undesirable Sipple, a clown, a perverted clown, and an arch-resident of the Henniker ménage. He is the vulgarest yet in Durrell's pack.

From this outer fringe emerges Benedicta Merlin, who soon gains the center of the stage. She is a blond wearing a black wig, and is to play a multidimensional role in the novel.

Tunc is a cryptogram arranged pell-mell; its letters are the ill-assorted crowd surrounding the heart of the message which concerns the ambivalent relationship between Felix Charlock and Benedicta Merlin. It consists of a complex of mysteries put together until they are divulged in chaotic but meaningful flashes later. We know that Charlock has got himself into an in-between position, with his mistress Iolanthe on the one side, and his potential fiancé, Benedicta, on the other. He meets Benedicta in Turkey, at the headquarters of Merlin, where Sacrapant has taken him to meet Jocas, who is one of the "heads" of the firm. There, Charlock is attracted to the dark girl with the falcon on her wrist. Everything about her suggests that she is a priestess of the underworld. In his dreams she appears as a giant bird making tender and obscene sounds; she is dovelike, but also as sinister as a hissing snake.

Many things spell doom in Tunc. Benedicta's association with captured birds, which Jocas loves hunting; bird-killing, a favourite sport at Jocas's hideout; Caradoc's drunk speech at the Acropolis on the plight of modern architecture: the perverted image of man. "Buildings are like the people who wear them" (78). There is Sipple's histrionic

appearance at the lecture, disrupting it at a timely moment, and disappearing in melodramatic fashion over the wall overlooking the city, but falling safely onto a ledge beneath it. There is his near escape from the charges of murder of Iolanthe's brother found in Sipple's bed. Charlock joins a bird-hunt with Benedicta and Jocas: a symbolic war between hunter and hunted soon to engulf Benedicta -- huntress, and Charlock hunted. When he is least aware of it, Charlock is being drawn into the tentacles of the organization. He predictably falls in love with his vampire-temptress, and by this single act -- "But I loved her, I loved her, I loved her" -- he signs himself into the firm (132). Now he begins moving along "the great moving staircase of the heart" (154) right into the core of darkness, in much the same way that Conrad's Kurtz does in Heart of Darkness. At the same time, he is no longer the narrator; we see the whole action from the view-point of a third person singular, a shift that predicts the beginning of a process of self-alienation in Charlock.

Self-alienation is stepped up by Sacrapant's sudden suicide, an incident reminiscent of Pursewarden's in The Quartet. Both incidents act as catalysts for the discovery of provisional truth: "I realized that any explanation would do, and that all would forever remain merely provisional. Was this perhaps true for all of us, for all our actions? Yes, yes" (159). From now and on, Charlock is never quite certain

about the real nature of events. Somewhere on the fringe of his consciousness, there is a poet by the name of Koepgen, resident in Turkey. He very seldom appears in the novel although he is an alter-felix, in the tradition of Pursewarden to Darley. Koepgen's function is to weep for man's overweening hubris, to announce that "There is no difference between truth and reality", and to assert that "human life is an anthology of states; chronological progression is an illusion" (35); all those topics that Pursewarden, and Death Gregory before him, were assigned to handle. And behind this gathering of human gargoyles is Julian: head of the firm, and a shadow hardly ever appearing in visible form throughout Tunc. Whenever he makes his appearance, there is a light at his back, throwing his face into shadow. He is the focal darkness of this macabre shadow-play. He portrays the no-identity man at the heart of such organizations. He is the colossal vacuum at its core; the hollow man.

Mystery is compiled in a chain-like sequence in this cryptogram, adding shadows to an already dark amphitheatre. What Julian is to Benedicta, we do not know for sure, except that his shadow is always near her. At some points, the reader is almost led to believe that there is in fact no Julian, and that they are both one identity. But in the end of Tunc Julia lies sick in her bed, and there is another shadow in the room that is Julian's. From then on, there

is no deliberate confusion of their identities.

Following his marriage, Charlock's descent into the vortex of melancholy is speeded up. That his resulting condition is a gradual loss of identity is not surprising. His inner strain is presented in the third person. He begins to think in two voices, one invariably at odds with the other. With one part of his mind he is aware that he is his own best enemy: "we are forced to choose as lovmates, shipmates, playmates those that best match our inward ugliness -- the sum of our short-comings" (137). The chain of mystery winding around him pushes him further in on himself. Benedicta is getting more evasive: "Never ask me anything about myself, will you? You must ask Jocas, if you want to know anything. There's a great deal I do not know. I mustn't be frightened, you see" (141). A network of ambiguities gradually closes in upon him. For one thing there is Benedicta's mental illness: a shadow he has come to endure without fully comprehending. The reason she gives him is the baby she is carrying, who she fears is going to come between them.

In the meantime, Koepgen is busy searching for his lost ikon in Turkey -- "ikons -- the portfolio of the collective sensibility" (270). Hyppolyta's brother is murdered. Sacrapant commits suicide. Benedicta recedes further from Charlock, and disappears in London, among other places. Julian's shadow looms larger. Overnight, Charlock's ex-mistress becomes a screen-star. Caradoc is killed in an air-

crash. In the midst of all this *mêlée* a child is born to Charlock: Mark. But Charlock is busy meeting with a disguised Iolanthe, now grown poised and intelligent, and sensitive about recognition by the press. Caradoc is next rumoured to be alive. Charlock, crowded in by these raids upon his reason, tries to track down Julian for explanations. Predictably, Julian is not about to come forth.

Cornered, Charlock has no avenue but that of revenge. He resorts to Abel to fight the machine of the firm. His attacks upon Julian constitute telephone calls in which Julian hears himself on the line. A parallel turn in the action is Iolanthe's confession that she is her brother's murderer, because he has disgraced the family honour; apparently, this is her way of preventing her father from taking this action himself. And then Pulley, after a diligent search, finds Caradoc on an island playing the grotesque role of a Tiresias suckling two kids, while reworking his view on the architecture of the future. The spiralling tension in Charlock reaches the breaking point when he finally locates Julian on the telephone and rages at him: "how long has Benedicta been your mistress, and what is the name of the drug?" (288). Silence from the other end convinces Charlock that Benedicta must be the key to everything. From this point on, the tragic consequences of his actions build up. He tracks down Benedicta, and in a fit of anger beats her up. "I was beating Julian, I suppose" (293).

When Benedicta disappears once more, Charlock retreats into progressive melancholia. But he turns to Abel for consolation and builds him up to fight Julian further. However, this time his own son, Mark, is in on the project, and in this way the son becomes a tool for the firm.

The sound of a distant report, muffled by the heavy walls of the building, was barely loud enough to pierce the hard integument of Julian's abstraction or of hers. She still stared at him with admiration and pity, and he gazed down at her as he had always done -- his eyes full of impenetrable sadness. It was left to Nash to sit up in his chair and say: "Surely that was a shot?" (316)

Since this is the last note in Tunc, we are left with the cryptogram still unsolved. Is it a shot? And if so, is it a suicide or a murder?

Some answers, or partial answers, are given in Nunquam. In Paulhouse, the firm's asylum, where Charlock has landed, he is seen recuperating from a breakdown with Benedicta, of all people, at hand. We now discover through her that Julian is her brother and lover. But she says she is free of him at last. Mark, it turns out, has fired that shot on himself; but his real murderers are his own parents pitted against one another and the firm. Julian, in true Freudian style, is a case of infantilism; Jocas is the illegitimate ugly brother. The Benedicta-Julian story, is a case of perversion and incest. When Sacrapant "falls out of the sky" he does so because he is not able to kill Charlock as is his mapped-out role (41). Caradoc returns to the world of action to tell

of his near escape from the crash.

But to say all this is not to suggest that there is a clear progression to the path of truth. For no incident is finally explained; it is only partially illuminated. Nunquam, more than Tunc, revolves on an axis of irony-paradox. For when Charlock is in the asylum near madness, he is at his sanest, since he sees Benedicta and the firm in their true perspective. When his reason is restored, his toys are returned to him, and he involves himself with them readily. He also readily believes that Benedicta is free from Merlin's. Now he loses his grip on his inner reality, and gradually evolves into an ego-filled monster. But this process is so subtle as to be almost imperceptible. Hence, when he regains his happiness with Benedicta, he is simply getting more entrenched into the firm. Benedicta, apparently free from the firm sells her shares in it. Consequently, the infatuated Charlock repeats his previous mistakes, this time more dangerously. He plunges with venom into his Mephistophelian dream of power. He eagerly launches Julian's dream-project of building the mechanical Iolanthe; the real one has died of tuberculosis. The real Iolanthe is an obsession with Julian, since she is the only one to be able to move his impotent rage to something akin to love. From now on, the spiral of doom is inverted, and in a vortex-like fashion sweeps the drunk Mephistophelian-Faustian-Charlock to his self-willed slavery.

The rest is degeneration. Almost all of those who have previously struggled against the firm take a round-about face. They are now happy to be in. These include Caradoc who is back at his position with the firm: he now thinks Julian is a marvelous character, and one he would like to know better. Banubula is ecstatic about his own re-instatement: "I'm in at last" (72). Charlock becomes obsessed with his and Marchant's invention, the new synthetic Io. With Julian's growing weakness for gambling, the new Io gains strength. She walks and talks just like her 'real' counterpart. Her body, although controlled internally by a complex tangle of wires, appears human. The only exceptions are her simulation of bodily functions. The rest is predictable: one day she dupes her attendant, Mrs. Henniker, and runs away, going back to the life of a prostitute among sailors. They all take her for real; in fact, she is more real than the original. Which of the two is the dream? The implication is that imagination is more real than reality, and that in life there are only ironic versions of truth.

Charlock is in a state of bliss about the success of his project. He never, of course, takes a minute to consider the expected outcome of his action. When the great catastrophe takes place in St. Paul's Cathedral, he is driven to kill his invention after she kills Julian, but he does so reluctantly. And now the whole responsibility for the firm is left to him as his due heritage. He resolves: "We will

keep on this way, dancing and dancing, even though Rome burn" (283).

All this sounds like a new Frankenstein; or a new Gothic romance complete with the trimmings of an innocent getting enmeshed in an underworld of anguish, and yet meriting it since he fails to make the decision which is to save him from his fate. Charlock's humanity is crushed from within. But Tunc-Nunquam is all this and more. It is more than a sum of murders, suicides, Faustian contracts, and Mephistophelian greed. It is Durrell's commentary on the industrial-technological complex of capitalism. It is the sum total of his vision in his previous novels. In his own words: It's a sort of novel-libretto based on the preface to The Decline of the West... a culture-reading merely ...an Ur-novel"⁸ Its code message is: there's nothing wrong with cogito or with sum; its poor bloody ergo that's been such a curse. The serial world of Tunc whose God is Mobego."⁹

Durrell's quarrel with the world of Tunc is with a serial-world of clock-time, but also with Tunc or Tunk -- the small fertility God who is responsible for so much of the overpopulation in Malaya. The idea that time is money is linked in an illogical manner with Banubula's preposterous tale about Tunc's power to put an end to national mob-

⁸Ibid., Postface, "P.S. to Ur is human to forgive divine."

⁹Tunc, p. 13.

hysteria regarding Koro, an imaginary disease of the genitals. Out of this bawdy association, there emerges the initial Durrellian hypothesis on time and the ego. If time is progress, then the over-expanded ego becomes the death of the inner man. Time-sex is the twin-pole of this distorted world, where man's most pressing need is to make a choice now. Faustus in Durrell's play makes the break in time; Felix undoubtedly does not. Nunquam. In a final demonic gesture, Charlock, as Merlin, destroys the firm's microfilm-archives which house all the contracts for the firm. By this action, he sets man's egoism free to create and to destroy.

The important issues of this industrialized, time-controlled complex are expressed in Tunc, before the double-edged irony of Nunquam sets in. The main issue is identity. Into this world governed by clock-time and debauchery move effigies of people, who are shadows of themselves, searching for a spark of identity. All their actions are counterpoints to the theme of identity. Involved is the question of no identity -- Julian; changing identity -- Benedicta; schizophrenic identity -- Charlock; distorted identity -- Nash and Iolanthe; disappearing identity -- Sacrapant and Sipple; insecure identity -- Jocas; grotesque identity -- Caradoc; and various shades of the problem, ranging from the humorous to the sinister. People are question-marks in a fast-moving world of mock-allegiances. They are manipulated, not by the hollow man in the center, but by the

autonomous firm which they have set in motion, but which is now independent of them. The firm is a "sort of snowball with its momentum"¹⁰ Nobody runs it: it runs itself. "The firm has given and the firm has taken away, blessed be the name of the firm."¹¹

If the firm is Merlin's dream come true, the Holy Grail is "The Fund of Funds."¹² In fact, this is "our new Middle Ages."¹³ Naturally, Merlin's has everything; but paramount in its possessions is Paulhouse -- an inversion of the house of Paul -- and this is where most of the characters wind up. Moreover, Durrell pits Paulhouse against the house of Paul, in that they both are scenes for the most dramatically opposed moments of decision in the life of Charlock. In Durrell's ironically reversed world, the insane come closest to reality, and the sane stray the farthest from it.

In some way, this topsy-turvy state of affairs prompts Charlock's interest in memory-tools. Charlock studies memory in birds and mammals. His own memory takes him back to the clock at the Victoria Station where his parents first meet. "Each had been waiting for someone quite different. The clock decided my fate. It is the axis, so to speak, of my

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 226.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 13.

¹² Ibid., p. 21.

¹³ Nunquam, p. 86.

own beginning. (The first clocks and watches were made in the shape of an egg.)"¹⁴ Recorders become point-events in reality. "Thus do I kill time till time kills me."¹⁵ They bring him in touch with others who want to pin-point moments in reality. Hippolyta wants a recording made of Caradoc's speech at the Acropolis. And rival political groups want a slice of the proceedings in the other camp.¹⁶ Most importantly, there are his own manifold recordings used in his creation of the synthetic woman.

The firm and its time-structured complex, then, is for Durrell the corpus of a civilization that is at the core of all his novels. The firm, Julian explains, is a reflection of civilization. In this ironic Middle Ages,

...investment has become the motor response of all religion, not in God as he was known (he hasn't changed), not in the psychic Fund of Funds which pretends to chime with the ways of universal nature No, for us money is sperm, and the investment of it the ritual of propriation.¹⁷

If people are the reflections of their culture, their culture represents "something like the total psychic disposition of man in terms of his destiny."¹⁸ The firm is the microcosm

¹⁴Tunc, p. 22.

¹⁵Nunquam, p. 15.

¹⁶See Charlock's night journey with Sacrapant. Tunc pp. 128-131.

¹⁷Nunquam, p. 86.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 87.

of a culture; yet this culture is the reflection of the people who make it. Hence, culture, like place in Durrell's work, is centrifugal and centripetal. In this sense, as Julian emphasizes, technology has come after the Fall and not before it. Money is the dynamo of this world: "the power of money to bear interest, its basic raison d'être has created the big city."¹⁹ This is also Caradoc's theme in his drunken oration at the Parthenon where he says that the city is a likeness of man, but that it is also a factor that shapes and controls his life.

In an analogous manner, the scientists build up the synthetic Iolanthe in an exact likeness of her human counterpart; but the new version outstrips the old. Ur-Iolanthe emerges in Nunguam, as a giant symbol at the fulcrum of its creator's civilization. She is the walking-memory and the mnemonic monster (96-7); the inflated hubris (99); a murderess (105); a prostitute-actress (106); a love machine (181); and paradoxically, a respected mummy (129); an autonomous mechanism (182); a Kafka-like representation of the activities of the firm (199); and a horrific suggestion of the free-will let loose in an amoral world (230).

All this happens in a world in which "The gods are all dead, or gone on a holiday. They've left their looms and spindles behind for us to use as we see fit" (208). Man

¹⁹Ibid., p. 178.

assumes the load, but not the responsibility. Charlock announces dolefully that he is a living corpse suffering from the beta decay of his world. He has effectively changed roles with his dummy: he is the corpse, she the living organism. Caradoc, re-instated with the firm, sings: "Surrender and identify and nod./That's why you came, remember, little God?" (71). This ironic song is a reminder of Aldous Huxley's motto for his brave new world: "Community, Identity, Stability."²⁰ Similarly, Charlock talks about "our collective breath" (73). As the firm closes its tenacles around them, they are happy in their imprisonment, afraid of their previous freedom. The firm even cashes in on Koepgen's new philosophy of prayer and designs prayer wheels for the lazy imported by the Tibetans. This and other similar pronouncements made by Julian have the characteristic Durrelian double-tone-comic pathos, depending on which side of the capitalistic-technological wheel the reader happens to be on. But these patches of dark humour apart, Durrell leaves little doubt about his own view. Julian makes this statement:

I have been studying the demonic of our capitalistic system through the eyes of Luther -- a chastening experience in some ways. He saw the final coming to power in this world of Satan as a capitalistic emblem. For him the entire structure of the Kingdom

²⁰ Aldous Huxley, Brave New World, (Chatto and Windus, Penguin Books, 1932), p. 15.

of Satan is essentially capitalistic -- we are the devil's own real property, he says: and his deepest condemnation of our system is in the phrase 'Money is the word of the Devil, through which he creates all things in exactly the way God once created the True Word.' (177)

And man is the creator of this synchronized world of automats: "Causality is an attempt to mesmerize the world into some sort of significance. We cannot bear its indifference " (178). This is why he has made a god out of clock-time, of production, of so-called directed progress. "If time had a watermark like the paper, one could perhaps hold it up to the light?" (23). This is also why Charlock spends so much time on his memory machines; this is why Abel is important for him as for the firm. Abel is the only way for man to make all time proximate to reality, thus seeing more deeply into the heart of things. Koepgen sums it up in this way: "human life is an anthology of states, chronological progression is an illusion" (52).

Durrell's re-enactment of the Middle Ages takes the form of an ironic reversal of its myth. Merlin's is the magician and seer of the technological needs of to-morrow; its Holy Grail is the Fund of Funds; its avatar is the mask of gold; its fabled Avalon of old Merlin's dream, a mirage.²¹ If at the outset, Merlin's is Cain plotting to

²¹A group from Merlin's go to Turkey to see Jocas. Symbolically, it has the overtones of a metaphoric quest for an island paradise. But when they get there, they only witness Jocas's death.

destroy Abel, in the process the game is reversed so that Abel triumphs over Julian and his cohorts by creating the new monster and letting it loose on society. The fabled limbs of Osiris must be gathered again, but they never are; and Humpty Dumpty remains in pieces.²² Very little is said about the alternative to this; very little about the heraldic mode of being. Little, that is, apart from Koepgen's shadowy and ineffectual remarks about reality and the dream. His lost ikon, which has formed a religious motif of quest throughout the novel, capsizes, and it too has a different face.

Yes, I found my ikon, at last -- and what I took to be some sort of mystical awakening waiting for me turned out to be the most prosaic thing imaginable..... My father's will was gummed into the back of it, together with the deeds of our property in Russia -- if they decide to give it back to us.²³

There is only heraldic warning.

Tunc-Nunquam is a successfully relayed state of mind, presumably Charlock's, if we are to limit our view of it to this double-decker. But this view has clear back-references to Durrell's previous novels. Is this not, in fact, the world that Marlowe rejected in Panic Spring, and that Lawrence Lucifer tried to destroy in The Black Book? Is it not a

²²"Ah Osiris, we must gather up the loaves and fishes; O Humpty Dumpty we must put you together again." Nunquam, p. 13.

²³Tunc, p. 307.

continuation of Durrell's time-and-sex ridden world of Alexandria? Is not this the latest abstract version of his inner landscape?

There are various lines of interest continued from The Quartet. His simpleton here is Felix Charlock; his alter-ego, influenced by his readings in the works of Pursewarden, is Koepgen. His demented heroine is Benedicta; his simple-minded whore, Iolanthe. Parallel to Alexandria, there is here the organization, made by man, but eventually making him what he is. Durrell's deck of cards is initially the same, but the tone is even more sombre. The central metaphor of the later work is the spiral staircase, with its end out of sight for its climbers, so that they unwittingly end up where they least expect. Durrell uses the metaphor of the moving staircase for all the significant experiences of the novel. Charlock is travelling up the great moving staircase of the heart. Sacrapant's suicide happens on the circular staircase of the mosque. Caradoc explains his escape from the firm in the same imagery: "I had missed a step on the ladder, on the moving staircase, and I would have to wait awhile until the turn came around again."²⁴ Jocas lives in an old tower in Turkey, and to reach him his visitors have to climb a ruined staircase. The final show-down between Ur-Iolanthe and her befuddled creator predictably takes place up the spiral stair-

²⁴Nunquam, p. 67.

way in the south-side of St. Paul's. This is the culmination of the build-up of the image.

In this shadow-play, the people are suitably presented in one aspect of reality at a time. It is not multi-dimensional in the sense of The Alexandria Quartet. Each person, here, is a shadow of what he might have been in more human circumstances. Vibart tells Charlock:

All you need is one cardinal aspect for each one -- a ruling bent, in fact the person's 'signature' in the heraldic sense: hunchback, money-lender, myopic scholar, deist king.²⁵

It is a fitting method for a play of shadows. Beneath the original dreamer-up of the firm, Merlin, there are the lower rungs of the hierarchy: Julian, the infantile, impotent son of Merlin and the king of this hollow land; Jocas is the illegitimate brother and illusory partner; Benedicta the arch-priestess of mental decay; Charlock, the simple-minded Frankenstein; Marchant, an avowed hater of mankind in his collaborator; Nash is the harbinger of Freud; and so on. Hardly ever is there multiplicity; and rarely is there change.

But if the characters are mere shadows, the corporation is not. It controls all the functions and aspirations of man, and is complex enough to be able to comprise and contain all future human potential. Within it, linked like a giant nervous system, is the metaphor of the spiral staircase, leading up to unknown regions, but winding and unwinding.

²⁵Ibid., p. 52.

ding in patterns of grotesque human activity. There are only illusions of directiveness and purposefulness.

If the previous world of Alexandria mirrors the loves and struggles of manhood, that of Tunc-Nunquam reflects the nostalgia of middle-age. The shadows of this latest work are increased; its hopes diminished. Somewhat sadly, its perversions are more outspoken. Although its narrator is still a stand-in for the author, he is here more evasive, less committed. However, he is more aware of the necessity of choice in a world where the idea is a mere illusion. In fact, the entire make-up of Charlock's world has an illusory quality about it.

G. S. Fraser pinpoints this quality in the following statement:

Tunc has a dream-like quality, the passage of time is not quite real in it, things seem to happen magically by fearing or wishing or breaking a taboo, or not breaking a spell, but the dream is, in a Freudian sense, doing dream-work. In dreams we try to escape from reality but are brought back to it.²⁶

In Nunquam reality breaks in with a vengeance, sweeping Charlock in a tide that he cannot resist. The hollowness that is at the core of the people of The Quartet now becomes a pervasive condition of man, symbolized by the shadow-like evasions of Julian, by the total lack of feeling, and the recurring broken telephone conversations -- disembodied voices relaying broken messages. The telephone network governs human

²⁶G.S. Fraser, Lawrence Durrell, (London:Faber, 1968), p. 169.

communications; when it is not used, letters are. The telephone is also supplemented by recorders, telex machines, and other sound instruments developed by Charlock. The lack of warmth in The Quartet, criticized by Alfred Perlès,²⁷ Lionel Trilling,²⁸ and Louis Fraiberg,²⁹ is now the message of the people of Tunc-Nunquam.

It now begins to appear that the trilogy that Durrell planned as early as The Black Book is finally completed. The trilogy consists of an Agon -- a struggle or a contest between

²⁷ Alfred Perlès, My Friend Lawrence Durrell, (Scorpion Press, 1961), p. 39:

I sense Larry's warmth in his voice, in his smile, in his gestures, but I can't find it in the Quartet. The human touch is lacking. I desperately want to be moved, but I am not moved. I am so made that I cannot be moved by a display of fireworks however brilliant and spectacular, if there is not, at the dead centre of it, a warm heart that lays itself bare.

²⁸ Lionel Trilling (in "The Quartet. Two Reviews," The World of Lawrence Durrell, ed. by Harry T. Moore, New York: Dutton, 1964, p. 57) attributes the disturbing quality of the novel to the fact that it stands in a negative relation to the will. He believes that Durrell, by chucking the will out, deprived the whole of meaningful relationships.

²⁹ Louis Fraiberg, "Durrell's Dissonant Quartet" in Contemporary British Novelists, ed. by Charles Shapiro (Toronto: Forum House, 1969), pp. 16-35. Fraiberg deals at length with the emptiness at the core of Justine, and illogically sees it as part of the emptiness at the heart of Alexandrian life. Interestingly, George Steiner attributes the same hollowness at the core of The Quartet, to the kind of people portrayed in it. These two writers have come to diametrically different conclusions, even though they have started from the same premise. See H. T. Moore, The World of Lawrence Durrell, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1962), p. 20.

protagonist and antagonist; a Pathos -- a passion, a suffering evoking pity or compassion; and an Anagnorisis -- a making known, an act of recognition. I suggest that the Agon is The Black Book; the Pathos, The Alexandria Quartet, and the Anagnorisis is Tunc-Nunquam. For whereas Lawrence Lucifer struggles with a shadowy alter ego in a defunct world and emerges to plan his metaphoric journey, Darley undergoes a process of maturation, a suffering and a passion. Unwittingly, Charlock is an agent of recognition and discovery. He unveils a whole cultural scene, a mode of being, a cosa mentale. But he stands apart from it: he is a man dissociated. His own sensory center has gone dead. He uses machines to record memory; but he has lost the ability to participate fully or actively in the human predicament. Yet he has acquired an uncanny power of mind reading, of being able, with the help of Abel, to look before and after.

Moreover, the language of the three main narrators of the novel undergoes a similar process of modification. Lucifer's is ebullient, expansive, rambling, hallucinatory, imaginative and uncontrolled. Darley's is still fruity, imaginative and elaborate, but also more consciously contrived into an interconnecting pattern of significance, in terms of imagery. And now Charlock's is subdued, even more consciously controlled, hardly ever baroque, but sombre, gnomic and prophetic. His expression is balanced precariously

between dream and reality, but his dream has the added quality of revealing not only reality as it is, but as it is likely to be. He has woven a spell of hints, associations and mythical memories to evoke for us a way of being which comes to us as a disturbing vision of a future near at hand.

CONCLUSION

WILL THERE BE TIME?¹

Few writers are discussed from as many view-points as is Durrell by his critics and reviewers. Fewer are the subjects of such extremes of criticism and praise. Remarks about him and his work range from such partisan praise as Henry Miller's "Oh master of English prose", "Oh, master of the heraldic line"², and Alfred Perlès description of Durrell as a young Jupiter,³ to F. R. Leavis's astringent remarks on his immorality in the novel.⁴ T. S. Eliot welcomes his Black Book as the first piece of original writing by a writer of the thirties.⁵ Gerald Sykes hails him as the poet of heraldry in a world rendered inactive by absurdity.⁶ Nigel Dennis

¹"Somewhere in the heart of experience there is an order and a coherence which we might surprise if we were attentive enough, loving enough, patient enough. Will there be time?" Lawrence Durrell, Justine, (London:Faber, 1961), p.221.

²George Wickes, Lawrence Durrell and Henry Miller, (New York:Dutton, 1963), p. 71.

³Alfred Perlès, "Enter Jupiter Jr.", in "Hommage à Durrell", in Two Cities, I, No. 1, (April 15, 1959), p. 8.

⁴See footnote 31, p. 59 above.

⁵See cover of The Black Book, Cardinal edition, 1962.

⁶In H. T. Moore, The World of Lawrence Durrell, (Carbondale, Southern University Press, 1962), pp. 154-155.

refers to him as the four-star king of novelists⁷. G. S. Fraser regards him as a lyrical comedian⁸; John A. Weigel as a modern romantic⁹. Martin Green hails him as the artist who has helped give Britain what she most needs: a world of mythical size and complexity which yet need not be taken seriously¹⁰. Kenneth Rexroth, initially an admirer of Durrell's works, is critical of his unrestrained handling of the political and historical aspects of the Middle East¹¹. Two areas that come under a constant barrage of criticism and praise are the form and the language of his novels.¹²

On both counts, Durrell enjoys a higher degree of popularity in the foreign press than he does in England. In this statement, I am excluding the opinion of his close friends and acquaintances, such as Alan G. Thomas, G. S. Fraser, and T. S. Eliot. Several of his English reviewers dismiss his structure and language in the later novels as pompous. But

⁷Nigel Denis, "New Four-Star King of Novelists," Life, 49: 21, (New York 1960), pp. 96-109.

⁸In the Northrop Frye tradition of comedy as an area of literature that is concerned with life and fulfilment, with sympathetic not cruel laughter, and happy endings after threatening intrigues. G. S. Fraser, Lawrence Durrell, (London: Faber, 1968), p. 134.

⁹John A. Weigel, Lawrence Durrell, (New York: Dutton, 1955), p. 146. Weigel's view is shared by Cecily Mackworth in "Lawrence Durrell and the New Romanticism," in Moore, pp. 24-37.

¹⁰Martin Green, "A Minority Report", in Moore, p. 140.

¹¹Kenneth Rexroth, Assays, (Norfolk, Connecticut: New Directions, 1961), pp. 118-130.

¹²See for example R.O. O'Brien, "Space, Time and Language in Lawrence Durrell", Waterloo Review, (Winter, 1961), p. 20.

this same pomposity, when viewed from a different angle is termed baroque¹³ or praised as a poet's vision or prose¹⁴. Hostile critics invariably dismiss his language as fruity and hollow¹⁵. Generally, his French critics -- J. P. Hamard, F. J. Temple, and Alfred Perlès¹⁶ -- proclaim his works as new and exciting departures in fictional structure, and challenging as metaphysical quests. They enjoy his writing, for, and not in spite of, his heightened language. Whether or not we accept their position as valid is a question of personal taste and depends entirely on what we learn to associate with, and expect from a work of fiction.

Durrell's novels to date suggest that if they continue to be read in the future, this is likely to be on account of their form and language, rather than Durrell's generally faulty political prognostications¹⁷. I believe that at the

¹³George Steiner, "Lawrence Durrell: The Baroque Novel", Moore, pp. 13-23.

¹⁴G. S. Fraser stresses the importance of the poetic vision in the works of Durrell.

¹⁵Kenneth Rexroth, "What is Wrong with Durrell?" in Nation, 190: 493, (June, 1960), p. 493.

¹⁶Jean Paul Hamard, "L'espace et le Temps dans les romans de Lawrence Durrell", in Critique, (Paris, May, 1960), pp. 387-413; F. J. Temple, "Lawrence Durrell", in Reflète Méditerranéens, Avignon, June-July, 1965; Alfred Perlès, My Friend Lawrence Durrell, (Scorpion Press, 1961).

¹⁷Witness his views on enosis for the Cyprus of Bitter Lemons and his treatment of Arab-Israeli relations in The Quartet.

heart of the Durrell world there is an uncertainty of vision, which, while perhaps relaying his own particular morphology of existence, seems to leave a hollowness at its core. Moreover, this vision adds little that is new or sustained about man and his world. It could be that his hesitancy is an outcome of Durrell's semi-commitment to his destiny as writer: to the fact that he did not, or could not afford to, want to write real books all the time, and therefore ended up by getting out of his natural element. Perhaps it is the result of his public stance as joker, puppeteer, upholder of fun and laughter as opposed to the tragic or sad, no matter what. For tragedy in his works is often -- as in the case of Petronius's death -- turned to farce; and faith -- as in the farcical episodes of Scobie's sainthood -- turned to bawdy laughter. Perhaps he should have confined his humour to his translation of Pope Joan alone? Almost in spite of himself, his Rabelaisian stance turns bitter in Tunc-Nunquam.

In retrospect, it appears that the period of greatest significance for Durrell as a novelist is that between 1936 and 1938. During these two years, he probes new ideas on time and space and on the fragmented psyche. He feels that clock-time is irrelevant to the life of the imagination and that there is only a feeling of existing in space. This kind of awareness he defines as heraldic vision. So far his expression of new ideas is based upon intuition and is not cluttered by borrowings from the writings of other men. He

begins to see art as a cure and the artist as a visionary trying to express his feeling of spatial existence in terms of the linear medium of words. He therefore decides that to be able to side-track the problem of linearity in language, a writer must resort to the use of ideograms to create multiple facets for each individual; and that he must use the gnomic aorist to transmute into writing the feeling of all time contained in a moment of time. Thus in his early works, in Zero, Asylum in the Snow, the Hamlet writings, Pied Piper of Lovers, and Panic Spring, the Durrellian protagonist is consistently engaged in a metaphoric quest for a heraldic experience which he is to relay in his future writings.

In 1938, Durrell's quest for heraldic experience materializes in The Black Book. This is perhaps his only real book. In it he assumes no poses, and makes no generalizations. His double-edged vision -- demonic and heraldic -- is his own. This is his first attempt to create his visionary experience in a work of considerable magnitude. This novel climaxes a period of discovery. He discovers himself as a writer with a style of his own. He uses certain symbols for heraldry: the motif of the journey, snow imagery, the seasons and sexual fantasy. He successfully uses the gnomic aorist to show the confusion of tenses in Gregory's mind when he thinks about Grace's death. Durrell also introduces the interlinear to Lawrence Lucifer's story in the form of Gregory's diary. He traces patterns of the journey, death and rebirth, decadence and metamorphosis to emphasize the sharp difference

between No Man's Land and its imaginative counterpart: the Heraldic Universe here associated with sexual liberation. In anticipation of the form of The Quartet, Durrell employs the circular mode for a novel which reaches its conclusion at its own genesis.

Therefore, when Durrell next turns his attention to a study of the Alexandrian Cabalists in the forties, he does so with the intention of probing within their philosophy for parallels for his own heraldic design. In the same spirit, he turns in the later forties and early fifties to the areas of physics, anthropology, and psychology. He probes Einstein on Relativity, Freud on the space-time aspects of dreams, Groddeck on the It, and Jung on mythical archetypes. At this point he is working out a rationale for his intuitive world. In this sense, A Key to Modern Poetry is not a record of Durrell's discoveries on time and the ego as twin poles for the modern novel, but a continuation of his initial search for a personal metaphysic. However, he is now able to see his favourite themes from other perspectives. For instance, via Freud he comes to realize that he can write about a time welded to space. Soon afterwards, he defines his metaphor for the novel as a spiral staircase, implying a multi-dimensional reality that is forever changing.

In The Alexandria Quartet, this metaphor reaches its fullest realization. Here, each of the major themes -- love, time, the psyche and art -- undergoes mutations every

time it is presented from the point of view of a different character. Hence, totality becomes the sum-total of all these point-events in reality, and truth appears to be what most contradicts itself in time. This view of life is presented in cycles of experience wound up one way at one point, and unwound at the next. The central axis of experience is the city. But it is the city which involves a hiatus at the core of Durrell's world. Durrell claims his Alexandria is real, and yet what actually emerges from his books is a giant metaphor for the destructive elements in life. He says his axis has a positive and a negative pole, but he has created an unbalanced axis weighed down on the side of the demonic. In fact, his city is an inflated vision of a Sadean world, where desires are unleashed in an abrupt sequence. Furthermore, his political prognostications are nothing short of the macabre.

Therefore, it is his metaphoric device in the novel that emerges as his distinctive trademark. He returns to it, although in a more subdued way, in Tunc-Nunquam. In this double-decker, as in The Quartet, Durrell's metaphoric construct provides a potentially exciting formula for the novel. This construct is responsible for a network of interdependencies in imagery, in the use of ideograms, symbols, spirals of themes, and multiple tenses to divulge a reality that is essentially provisional and non-definitive. This reality, when it does not dissolve into ambiguity, provides

a searching probe into the nature of experience. But when it is forced into a specific metaphysical or aesthetic questionnaire, it becomes a double-edged weapon and destroys the multiple-fictive reality it is intended to create. The Quartet may remain Durrell's most popular work, although Tunc-Nunquam is more subtly and cohesively held together and avoids the lushness of the language and the indecision of tone of the earlier work.

The prism-sightedness relayed through the spiral structure of the novels is also explored in their language. Durrell experiments brilliantly with the tenses of narration, in some cases using the aorist to relay the feeling of all time contained in a moment of time. This experimentation with the tenses of time necessitates the use of various "nows" worked out in a delicate balance throughout the novel. There is the "now" of his almost invariably naive narrator as he relates the experiences he only partially apprehends at their moment of occurrence: the narrational "now". And there is the "now" of the same narrator at a certain distance in time, as he reorders his reality. In both these, the past and the future form parts of the texture of being.

Basically, in Durrell's work, "language is king"¹⁸, and "the wooing of form is the whole game"¹⁹. The main

¹⁸As he says in "Sappho and After," New Saltire 1, Summer, 1961), p. 43.

¹⁹See footnote 5 on p. 123 above.

issue for each reader to decide for himself is whether or not Durrell's language manifests a core as well as an attractive shell. In effect, has Durrell created a new mode for the novel and can this mode withstand the audio-visual thrust? Logically, only time can tell. Assessed in terms of Henry James' twin characteristics of the novel -- its plasticity, and its elasticity²⁰ -- Durrell's novels certainly qualify. But in terms of Leon Edel's views that²¹ James's certainty of the novel's survival came prior to the powerful mechanical audio-visual anodynes, which are hostile to the quiet practice of reading by the fireside, they are questionable. According to Edel, the novel has survived as the most characteristic literary form of our time, but for how long it will survive, few venture to say. Since Edel, Marshall McLuhan has ventured in The Medium is the Message to show some of the powerful audio-visual influences now reshaping the responses of the technologically-directed man, and veering them away from typography.

If Durrell's Quartet, with its decided visual appeal, its intercalating panels of reality, its straining after simultaneity of effect, and its spatial language, is his way of reshaping the novel form to fit the new multi-stimu-

²⁰ Henry James, The Future of the Novel, (Vintage, 1956), p. 33.

²¹ Ibid., p. vii.

lus of the technologically-directed man, his Tunc-Nunquam is less incisive. Although it utilizes similar techniques of narration and language, his double-decker relays a more sombre version of the technological thrust and its outcome for the intellectual autonomy of man.

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This is a selected bibliography of the primary and secondary sources of Lawrence Durrell, and books of interest as background material for this thesis. Section One, Part 1 cites the primary sources of Durrell now available in print or in circulation from private and rare collections, such as the Lawrence Clark Powell Durrell Collection of the University of California, Los Angeles. Section One, Part 2, "Contributions", includes material by Durrell such as prefaces, introductions, articles, reviews and other miscellanea not included in his printed works. Section Two, Part 3 cites major bibliographical sources. Part 4 lists background material relevant to the subject of this thesis, such as influences on Durrell and critical studies on the problem of time in the novel. Part 5 presents secondary sources on Lawrence Durrell.

Parts 1 to 3 are arranged chronologically by year and alphabetically within the year. Parts 4 and 5 are arranged alphabetically by author.

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