

M. A.

T H E S I S

ART AND THE ARTISTS IN LAWRENCE DURRELL

Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina

Departamento de Língua e Literatura Estrangeiras

ART AND THE ARTISTS IN LAWRENCE DURRELL

Tese submetida à Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina  
para a obtenção do grau de Mestre em Letras

Carmen Rosa Caldas Pereira de Mello

1976

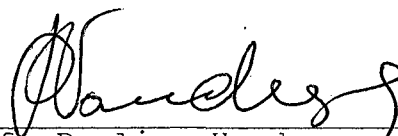
Esta Tese foi julgada adequada para a obtenção do título  
de

Mestre em Letras

Especialidade Língua Inglesa e Literatura Correspondente e  
aprovada em sua forma final pelo Programa de Pós-Graduação



Prof. Thomas Eddie Cowin, MA  
Orientador

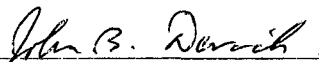


Prof. Paulino Vandresen, PhD  
Integrador do Curso

Apresentada perante a Comissão Examinadora composta dos pro-  
fessores:



Prof. Thomas Eddie Cowin, MA Pres.



Prof. John Bruce Derrick, PhD



Prof. Arnold Selig Gordenstein, PhD

Para  
. Flávio, Sylvia e Pedro

---

### Agradecimentos

À Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina pela oportunidade de me pós-graduar e de apresentar este trabalho.

Ao Professor Thomas Eddie Cowin pela extrema dedicação e profundo interesse com que me orientou.

Aos demais professores que contribuíram para que esse trabalho pudesse ser realizado.

## A B S T R A C T

From Lawrence Durrell's first important novel, The Black Book (1938) to his last one Monsieur or The Prince of Darkness (1974) artists are central characters who transmit Durrell's vision of art and life.

Throughout the study of Durrell's theories of art, the development of his experimental techniques and the analysis of central themes in his work, Durrell's own position as an artist can be traced as well as the role of his artists in life.

For Durrell, the artist is the one who imposes a pattern upon life by trying to rework reality, as Durrell also does by creating characters who are extensions of himself. Durrell, the artist, thus, is projected in all his artists, leading us to the conclusion that the author cannot be separated from his creation. All Durrell's artists are refracted aspects of himself, each one adding a different layer to the total impression of his personality.

In The Alexandria Quartet Durrell is concerned with presenting a reality which is not a single truth, but a composite picture made up of highly subjective truths as seen by observers and actors in the novel. These observers and actors are primarily artists. In Monsieur or The Prince of Darkness interest has changed to an inward-looking analysis of his own creative processes. The artist here is, as his author also is, only concerned with his own possibilities of analysing himself through different angles, and for him, reality cannot be reworked anymore, because reality is confounded with, and indistinguishable from fiction.

This obsessive concern with the self, and the deliberate uncertainty of whether art imitates life, or life art, indicates a tendency towards narcissistic decadence which increases throughout Durrell's work, until it assumes major importance in his last novel.

## R E S U M O

Desde a primeira novela importante de Lawrence Durrell, The Black Book (1936) até sua última novela Monsieur or the Prince of Darkness (1974), artistas são personagens centrais os quais transmitem a visão de arte e vida de Lawrence Durrell.

Através do estudo de sua teoria de arte, do desenvolvimento de sua técnica experimental e da análise dos temas centrais em sua obra, a posição de Durrell como artista pode ser delineada assim como a de seus artistas.

Para Durrell, o artista é aquele que impõe um padrão sobre a vida, tentando modificar a realidade que o cerca. Durrell assim o faz quando cria personagens que são extensões dele próprio. O artista Lawrence Durrell projeta-se, portanto, em todos os seus artistas, levando-nos a conclusão que personagens não são autônomos, mas parte de seu autor. Todos os artistas de Durrell são aspectos refratários dele mesmo, e cada um adiciona ângulos diferentes na composição total de sua personalidade.

Na tetralogia The Alexandria Quartet Durrell preocupa-se em apresentar uma realidade que não é uma única verdade, mas um quadro composto de muitas verdades subjetivas vistas por observadores e atores. Esses observadores e atores são primariamente artistas. Na novela Monsieur or the Prince of Darkness o interesse muda e o autor apresenta uma auto-análise de seu próprio processo criativo. O artista agora está, como seu autor também está, preocupado com a possibilidade de se auto-analisar sob ângulos diversos, e para eles realidade e ficção são confundidas, quase indistinguíveis.

Essa preocupação obsessiva com o próprio ser, e a incerteza deliberada se arte imita a vida ou se a vida imita arte, indica uma tendência para uma decadência narcíssista a qual aumenta através de sua obra, até assumir maior importância em sua última novela.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract _____	vii
1. Introductory	
1.1. Statement of Purpose _____	1
1.2. Review of Previous Criticism _____	2
Bibliographical References _____	9
2. Themes and Theories _____	10
2.1. Themes _____	16
2.2. Theories . The Heraldic Universe _____	27
2.3. The Space-Time Theory and Prismatic Theory _____	31
Bibliographical References _____	39
3. The Black Book _____	41
Bibliographical References _____	51
4. The Alexandria Quartet _____	52
Bibliographical References _____	75
5. Monsieur or The Prince of Darkness _____	76
Bibliographical References _____	89
6. Conclusion _____	90
Bibliography _____	92



## 1. INTRODUCTORY

### 1.1. Statement of Purpose

Lawrence Durrell has been writing continuously since the mid thirties but suddenly achieved success around 1960, with the publication of Justine and then Balthazar followed by Mountolive and Clea, which form The Alexandria Quartet. His other work then began to receive serious critical consideration.

The forms in which Lawrence Durrell has worked embrace a wide range of literary possibility. He is the author of the espionage thriller White Eagles Over Serbia, of several books of poems and ballads, of a trilogy of 'travel or island books' (Prospero's Cell, Reflections on a Marine Venus and Bitter Lemons), of poetic dramas, of comic sketches about the diplomatic corps (Esprit de Corps, Stiff Upper Lip and Sauve qui Peut), of literary criticism, and of the novels The Black Book, The Dark Labyrinth, the tetralogy The Alexandria Quartet, the double-decker Tunc and Nunquam and of the novel Monsieur or the Prince of Darkness, which was published in 1974. Durrell has also turned out public relations copy, newspaper columns and letters (his correspondence with Henry Miller, published by Faber, is of some considerable significance for the study of his work). He is a translator of prose, an anthologist and a magazine editor.

In this dissertation I shall be dealing with Durrell principally as a novelist, because it is in his novels that he shows concern with the concept of "the artist".

In The Black Book, his first important novel, in his tetralogy The Alexandria Quartet ( henceforward the Quartet), which gave him world fame and which is, without any doubt, his most significant work, and finally in Monsieur or the Prince of

2:

Darkness (henceforward Monsieur), I shall study Durrell's search for the meaning of art, the role of the artist in life, and his fascination with the mechanics of the creative process. His artists, related to his own position as an artist, will be studied in depth as well as the relationship between art and life.

I shall analyse, in this dissertation, the technique of prismatic reality, founded on Einstein's theory of relativity, which Durrell appears to believe is important for the artist, and I shall deal with his expressed theory of artistic creation, which is the theory of the Heraldic Universe. Also, I shall pick out central themes, like the spirit of place, escape and exile, decadence and bohemianism and relate them to his own life when relevant, and then, through the central books I have chosen.

I intend to show that in the course of Durrell's life and work, the development we can trace in his various themes and theories about art coalesces into a coherent and unified set of attitudes, which may be regarded as characterizing Durrell's state of mind, at least at the time he finished his last book, Monsieur.

It is necessary first to review critical scholarship, principally that which concerns with Durrell as conscious artist and of his concept of the artist.

## 1.2. Review of Previous Criticism

Since the publication of the Quartet in the late nineteen fifties, Lawrence Durrell has puzzled critics who have tried to discuss and analyse his experimental work. George Steiner, (1) says that:

"there are critics who assert that Durrell is a pompous charlatan; a mere word spinner and gatherer of flamboyant cliclés; a novelist whose angle of vision is grotesquely narrow; a late Victorian decadent and minor disciple of Henry Miller."

He continues saying:

"Elsewhere, however, and particularly in France, it is held with equal vehemence that the "The Alexandria Quartet" is the highest performance in the modern novel since Proust or Joyce, and that he is a genius of the first rank."

Obviously, Steiner is trying to show two extreme critical views of Lawrence Durrell as an artist. I cannot agree with those who say that Durrell is a charlatan, because from my point of view, he is a serious writer trying to create what he thinks is true about life. Nevertheless, in this dissertation, I shall try to show that Durrell has developed in a way that may be characterised as an increasing tendency towards decadence. He cannot be considered as simply a minor disciple of Henry Miller either. Their approach to art and life is different, although they have some themes and attitudes in common, and Miller took on the role of mentor and adviser to the young Durrell. On the other hand, Durrell cannot be considered a genius, because there are flaws and imperfections in his work, some of which will become apparent in this dissertation.

The few critical works which I have at hand claim the significance and importance of Durrell as an artist. For more than twenty years before his name first became widely known with the publication of Justine, Durrell had the support of a vigorous minority which insisted that he was an important writer. Henry Miller was the first to speak out for him. Lawrence Clark Powell was an early and ardent enthusiast. T.S. Eliot gave him

the authority of his support. Richard Aldington, his close friend, also recognized his artistic values. Then, with Justine, in 1957, Durrell struck the wider reading public. His fame increased quickly.

In this section, I am going to review briefly some of the criticisms made of Durrell as an artist, connected with the themes I have chosen to show his concept of art. Most of the critics concentrate on Durrell's experimental techniques, especially in the Quartet. Very little criticism has been carried out on The Black Book, which the critics consider a weak piece of work, but in which many of the themes, techniques and characters will be developed in his later work. For the purpose of this dissertation, however, The Black Book is important as a prototype of the Quartet and Monsieur. I do not have at hand any critical work for his last book Monsieur (1974) and I do not think any serious criticism has been published yet, because the book is very recent.

John Weigel (2), who wrote an analytical study of Durrell's total work, says that Durrell's experimental work, "The Alexandria Quartet" deals with:

"truth telling in which truth is always a function of many voices and of many points of view. It is a lavish and eloquent bearing-witness by many, many witnesses to the many truths in curved, multi-dimensional space-time."

Weigel is talking about the prismatic reality and the influence of the theory of relativity which is a base for Durrell's work. There is no fixed truth, except the subjective one. The prismatic reality technique is analysed in this dissertation as an experimental technique, which Durrell uses in order to work his ideas into the framework of his novels.

Frederick R. Karl (3), also refers to the use of the prismatic reality technique:

"Durrell in the Quartet is often concerned with the purely technical problem of writing a novel, and the author's emphasis on space-time and subject-object is simply one way of making the novel protean and ever -developing as the reader views it from different angles. Durrell cites his influence from science, and a free use of Einsteinean physics is obviously behind the space-time continuum."

Karl also says that this technique is not new because it has already been used by Joyce, Gide, Conrad and Woolf. The prismatic reality technique will be examined in Chapter 2.3.

G.S.Fraser (4), says that Durrell is concerned in his fiction not with a growing change in character but with a process of self-discovery,

"a stripping away of layer after layer of the self of outward social habit till a hard core is revealed, which was always there, and in a sense always half-known."

Fraser believes, at least it seems so, that there is an objective reality, which is not in accord with prismatic reality in which truth is always subjective. The process of self-discovery, nevertheless, is obvious in most of Durrell's artists, as will be shown in the study of his individual artists, and the same process can be traced through the study of his own work, where his personality changes according to his experiences of life. Durrell becomes more and more concerned with the mechanics of fiction than with the end result of the work and his attentions are focused on the means available to the artist to create a reality. Fraser continues saying, that Durrell in his deep self, is a quietist and almost a mystic.

"His personality is in a sense everything in his books and yet it is a remarkably elusive one, what he himself calls an "ingenous mask." Durrell is a near-mystic or a near-mare." (5)

It is true that his personality is very strong in his books and in fact all the artists are himself in a way or another. There is an increasing intrusion of the author in his work, which becomes extremely marked in Monsieur. This line of thought will be followed throughout the whole dissertation, where I try to prove that Durrell's concern with himself as artist is evidence of an introverted narcissism, which may be regarded as decadent. There are indications, in Monsieur, that he has misgivings about his serious stature as an artist.

Alan Warren Friedman, like Weigel and Fraser, also wrote a deep study on Lawrence Durrell's works. He says that Durrell's intense awareness of place imposes a kind of unity in his material. He says that:

"the protagonist of "Justine" is not so much Justine or Darley, or any of the other members of the eternal quadrilateral of mutual, yet uncertain need, as Alexandria itself, the prismatic world of love manifesting itself in various ways and in numerous characters." (6)

Alexandria would manifest itself especially to the artist for whom the city may be regarded as the White Goddess Muse as I suggest in the study of the Quartet, in Chapter 4.

Frederick Karl thinks, however, that Alexandria provides just the sensual background for sex and love:

"The sense of place allows a naturalness of sexual expression that borders on the promiscuous and at the same time it suggests a healthy freedom from puritanical repression." (7)

I do not think that the sense of place would free the characters from puritanical repression, because in the Alexandrian world there is no such thing as puritanism and the characters' sexual behaviour is amoral as the city also is. The characters in the Quartet are functions of the city which dominates them all.

7.

Other critics also have commented on the spirit of place. Henry Miller, Durrell's adviser and critic for a long time, tells him in one of his letters of their Correspondence:

"When I see how you call up the places you've been, how deeply you have absorbed them, how magnificently you have given up their spirit and essence, even to the flea, I am dismayed." (8)

Place is very important throughout Durrell's work. His evocation of it in his later work shows the same tendencies towards decadence found in the other themes and techniques.

Gerald Sykes compares Durrell to Proust in his sensitivity towards landscape and his melancholic preoccupation with old love affairs, and to Joyce, in his use of what seemed like the epiphany method described in "Stephen Hero".

"Durrell belongs to the great British tradition of imaginative travellers (Conrad, Joyce) who realized their best talents by getting as far away from Britain as they could." (9)

The theme of the artist's exile will be analysed in my dissertation. Exile, as a source of creation is not only important to Durrell himself, but also to most of his artists (see 2.1).

In the same book, George Steiner says that:

"mirrors play a crucial symbolic role throughout the action (in the Quartet). And it is a dangerous role, for although they multiply vision and drive it inward, they also shut it off from the outside. In Durrell even the sea is a pool for Narcissus". (10)

The mirror imagery linked to the prismatic reality appears in all of Durrell's books and I shall comment on the use of this technique. What is important in this criticism, however, is that Sykes relates the imagery to narcissistic impulses and

he is the only one who does this. Narcissism, as a form of decadence which is a major theme analysed in this dissertation, is hardly mentioned by critics. They comment on the decadent character or actions, but they do not trace any consistent tendency towards decadence.



BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

- (01) STEINER, George. in the article "Lawrence Durrell: the Baroque Novel",quoted in Moore, H.T. ed. The World of Lawrence Durrell, E. P. Dutton, NY, 1964, p. 13.
- (02) WEIGEL, John. Lawrence Durrell. E. P. Dutton, NY, 1966,p.96.
- (03) KARL, Frederick R. A Reader's Guide to the Contemporary English Novel. Thames and Hudson, London. 1972 p. 42.
- (04) FRASER, G. S. Lawrence Durrell - A Study. Faber and Faber, London, 1973. p. 17.
- (05) FRASER. ibid. p. 148.
- (06) FRIEDMAN, Alan Warren. Lawrence Durrell and The Alexandria Quartet. University of Oklahoma Press. 1970. p. 46.
- (07) KARL. opus. cit., p. 45.
- (08) WICKER, George. Lawrence Durrell and Henry Miller - A Private Correspondence. Faber and Faber, London, 1963. p. 390.
- (09) SYKES, Gerald - article "One Vote for the Sun".quoted in Moore, H. T. The World of Lawrence Durrell, E. P. Dutton N. Y. 1964. p. 152.
- (10) STEINER. opus. cit., p. 20.

## 2. THEMES AND THEORIES

In this section I shall introduce some themes which are central to Durrell's vision of art, and of the artist, and which are necessary to trace through his life and art in order to reach some conclusion about his state of mind at the time he finished Monsieur. Although I shall be attempting to discuss the three themes: place, escape and exile, decadence and bohemianism, as separate entities, they are so interwoven that it will often be necessary to relate one to the other. I shall also introduce and discuss his own theories of art.

### 2.1. Themes

Lawrence George Durrell was born in India in 1912 where he spent his early childhood. The snow-covered peaks of the Himalayas made a deep impression on him as a boy, which he carried throughout his whole life. Perhaps this experience was the germ that led to his conviction that he, and his artists, could only create when they feel themselves in accord with their environment, the spirit of place. By spirit of place I understand the deliberate technique of fusing together historical, geographical, social and personal features of a landscape, townscape, or smaller location, so that the total significance is greater and more meaningful than simply the sum of its parts. We shall see below how, for example, suburban London becomes emblem of creative death for an artist, Alexandria becomes emblem of the total human consciousness, and, at another time, fused together with one of its inhabitants as a muse figure.

At the age of twelve, Durrell was sent to England to study there:

"If Durrell's early childhood in India contributed to his work as not just imagery of innocence but a locale of good life, the rest of Durrell's early childhood seemed to have offered him, in England, imagery tied to the experience of corruption and a vision not so much of evil as of hypocrisy, a major ingredient of the "English Death", which is the subject of The Black Book." (1)

In The Black Book, Durrell captures the sad and grey atmosphere of southern London which is an unpleasant setting for the misery and decadence of the characters' lives- humid, dark, and dead. The artists in the book are failures, stultified by the tedium, conventions and lack of stimulation and imagination that characterise the "English Death". Here we see that the spirit of place is tightly linked to the theme of decadence, and the evocation of place is used to convey here the type of decadence typical of The Black Book, that is, the stifling inwardness and frustration of the artist struggling hopelessly against provincial Englishness, and the moral decay of their lives. In the same book, Durrell in contrast, expresses the spirit of place of the Greek Island, where everything is green, bright and alive. This is the place for the artist's exile and for creation. London is death for the artist and the island is life, and there, the artist will be reborn.

Durrell's Corfu-Rhodes-Cyprus books are accounts of interesting places, where all the senses play a very important part. His objective is to evoke the spirit of each place, rather than describe them. He calls up this spirit of place using history, scene and conversation. The three books are non-fiction writing and of the three, Bitter Lemons\* is the most important. Cyprus is almost as fabulous as Durrell's Alexandria

\*Bitter Lemons was first published by Faber and Faber, London, in 1957.

with,

"its echoes from forgotten moments of history." (2)  
Bitter Lemons not only captures an atmosphere and a tone, a way of life and a people, but it details and examines the destruction of the Cypriot peace which culminates in the disastrous outbreak of civil war. The sense of place is brilliantly and appropriately subordinated to the sense of the moment.

While Durrell was thoroughly at home in the Mediterranean, he was unhappy away from it. As a British Council lecturer in Argentina, he spent a sterile, uncreative year. The Argentinian landscape did not attract him and he was homesick for the Mediterranean. Similarly, the two and half years he spent as press attaché to the British Embassy in Belgrade were also frustrating ones. He was overworked and was not able to concentrate on his writing. Nor did he find Yugoslavia congenial. So once again, he returned to the Mediterranean landscape, where he could find his roots and produce his art. Clearly then, although self-imposed exile was important for his writing, the place of exile had to be in tune with his sensibilities.

In 1944, Durrell was posted as press attaché in Alexandria. There he met Eve Cohen\*, who was to become his second wife, and whose recollections of Alexandria helped to focus Justine. He wrote to Henry Miller:

"A strange, smashing, dark-eyed woman I found here last year with every response right, every gesture, and the interior style of a real person, but completely at sea here in this morass of venality and money. The only person I have been able to talk to really; we share a kind of of refugee life. She sits for hours on the bed and tells me the sex life of Arabs, perversion, circumcision,

---

\*Durrell married Nancy Myers in 1935 in England. She left him in 1944. Then he married Eve Cohen in 1947. They separated in 1952. Finally, he married Claude Vinnendon in 1961, who died in 1967.

hasish, sweet meats, removal of the clitoris, cruelty, murder. As a barefoot child of Tunisian Jewish parents, she has seen the inside of Egypt to the last rotten dung-blown flap of obscenity. She is Tropic of Capricorn\* walking". (3)

Egypt and Alexandria were the sources for his most well known work, the 'Quartet.

Although despising Egypt, he collected there all sorts of human, cultural and material experiences. He became especially interested in a Cabalistic group and in the esoteric, in the functions of the symbols and the Tarot. Egypt was the source for all these new interests, which led him to further definition on his "Heraldic Universe" and non-assertive forms, discussed in 2.2. He despised the country because it was decadent, but its decadence was different from that of England. Whereas in Egypt decadence was accepted as normal, the particular sexual and moral decadence of the community described in The Black Book was thoroughly disapproved of by society at large. Of course, Durrell presents the comfortable and complacent values and attitudes of that society as themselves decadent, but in a different way. In The Black Book, the hotel and its inhabitants are very much out of society, because they are decadent, while in Egypt decadent characters like Toto, a homosexual, or Capodistria are well accepted in society. Durrell wrote to H. Miller:

"The Alexandrian way of death is very Proustian and slow. a decomposition in greys and greens." (4)

The Egyptian decadence struck him ( he felt he was a part of it as he was a part of the decadent England) and his reaction to it was transposed to his work mainly in the Quartet and in Monsieur, where a lot of the grotesque and decadent life of the Egyptians is brilliantly recreated. Alexandria would be the emblem or the symbol of a civilization already in decay threatened by war; a place of exile, a place where the artist's loneliness intensifies

---

\*Tropic of Capricorn written by Henry Miller, was first published by the Obelisk Press, of Jack Kahane, in Paris, 1939.

his sense of richness and tragedy of life; a place of great sensuality and yet, also a remote and difficult spiritual artistic aspiration.

The spirit of place is particularly strong in the Quartet. "Alexandria is a place quickened into a character" (5), according to Weigel. The city marks its inhabitants and the inhabitants, in turn design the city. The human element is in its power and there is no escape. The city is mysterious and involving. Alexandria is Groddeck's "IT"\*, the container of all those forces which influence man and make him the mysterious creature he is.

For Durrell, based on Groddeck the consciousness of an individual is an inextricable part of a vast, symbolic whole, which is the sum of their multiple "consciousness" or personalities. Thus, each human being represents an aspect of a larger totality; the "IT" becomes a kind of platonic form of which we all partake, a form which has as many manifestations on earth as there are people. The deliberate evocations of Alexandria as a composite of consciousness and personalities shows the spirit of place expressing a greater significance than simply the sum of its parts. Durrell wrote in his critical book Key to Modern Poetry about Groddeck:

"Phenomema: may be individuals carrying on separate existence in space and time, but in the deeper reality beyond space and time, we may all be members of one body." (6)

---

\*"George Groddeck is the German psychologist contemporary with Freud. Groddeck is against those who propound the notion of an autonomous, powerful ego, since he feels that they are unable to explain the mechanism controlling breathing, digestion, heart action and the like. Groddeck sought a single entity, a unifying concept, a still point at which the parallel lines of voluntary and involuntary processes would meet - and he concluded that the concept of the individual, independent ego would not bear the weight. He posits then, a mysterious Force so powerful that it controls not only the involuntary bodily processes but also the human will - and, in fact, all human as well. Groddeck says:

"The sum of an individual human being, physical, mental and spiritual, the organism with all its forces and microcosmos, the universe which is a man, I conceive of as a self unknown and forever unknowable, and I call this the "IT" as the most indefinite term available without either emotional or intellectual associations. The IT-hypothesis I regard not as truth - for what do any of us know about absolute truth?, but as a useful tool in work and life... the IT is a way, not a thing, not a principle or a conceptual figment... it is imagery, symbol, and the symbol can not be spoken. It lives and we are lived by it. One can only use words that are indeterminate and vague ... for any definite description destroys the symbol." (7)

Based on Groddeck, thus, Durrell creates the n-dimensional novel (the symbol 'n' being taken from Mathematics, signifying 'any number of'):

"a book which is standing above time and slowly turning on its own axis to comprehend the whole pattern. Things do not all lead forward to other things: some lead backwards to things which have passed. A marriage of past and present with the flying multiplicity of the future racing towards one. Anyway, that was my (Pursewarden's) idea."(8)

We can say that Alexandria personifies the mother/mistress figure, because it is a muse for the poet, but at the same time, it is a destructive force which sterilizes him and makes him escape from it. Alexandria, according to Durrell, is essentially an open city, where any variety of religion, any permutation of sex is not only permitted but almost celebrated. Alexandria not only evokes the Egyptian spirit of place, but it also represents decadence and bohemianism, for its inhabitants are decadent and cynical. While they love and exalt their city, they also hate it and Alexandria responds in kind.

The spirit of place in Alexandria characterizes people like Nessim, Leila and Justine who are completely integrated with the land where they were born. Narouz, himself, is the desert and its mysteries.

The revival of Alexandria by Durrell as a place of inspiration and at the same time a sterile place for the artist, the development of characters like Hilda, in The Black Book, and Justine in the Quartet who are mother/whore figures, could be compared to "The White Goddess" of Robert Graves, although there is no evidence in Durrell's work that he has been consciously influenced by Graves. Both however, have the same attitude to the relationship of the poet and his muse, "The White Goddess" which is that of a supplicant lover to a mother, mistress-bitch image.

"The White Goddess", according to Graves, is a many-named and many-formed deity, whose origins go back to the Old Stone Age, considerably pre-dating the more well known and patriarchal myth figures of, for example, ancient Egypt and the Classical World. The true poet, Graves suggests, owes allegiance to her, who

"demanded that man should pay woman spiritual and sexual homage." (9)

Graves continues saying:

"By ancient tradition, the White Goddess becomes one with her human representative - a priestess, a prophetess, a queen-mother. No Muse-poet grows conscious of the Muse except by experience of a woman in whom the Goddess is to some degree resident ... A Muse-poet falls in love, absolutely, and his true love is for him the embodiment of the Muse. As a rule, the power of absolutely falling in love soon vanishes... But the real perpetually obsessed Muse-poet distinguishes between the Goddess: as manifest in the supreme power, glory, wisdom and love of woman, and the individual woman whom the Goddess may make her instrument for a month, a year, seven years, or even more. The Goddess abides; and perhaps he will again have knowledge of her through his experience of another woman.

Being in love does not, and should not, blind the poet to the cruel side of woman's nature - and many Muse-poems are written in helpless attestation of this by men whose love is no longer returned."(10)

Hilda, in The Black Book represents the womb, a source of inspiration and creativity, but is at the same time, a whore. Justine is a bitch/goddess to whom Arnauti and Darley must surrender. Pursewarden nevertheless, does not surrender to her. He regards her simply as

"a tiresome old sexual turnstile through which presumably we must all pass - a somewhat vulpine Alexandrian Venus." (11)

Pursewarden then, was not susceptible to her will. For him, the muse figure was not embodied in Alexandria or Justine, while for Darley and Arnauti, it was.

Alexandria (as well as England) also has the double



nature of the muse, it inspires but it also destroys, and the poet must escape from it. Durrell presents Alexandria as:

"princess and whore. The royal city and the anus mundi. She would never change so long as the races continued to seethe here like must in a vat; so long as streets still gushed and spouted with the fermentation of these diverse passions and spite, rages and sudden calms. A fecund desert of human loves littered with the whitening bones of its exiles... The sadness and beatitude of this human conjuncture which perpetuated itself to eternity, an endless cycle of rebirth and annihilation which alone could teach and reform by its destructive power." (12)

As Durrell escaped from the decadent England, he had to escape from the Egyptian landscape and decadent atmosphere which deprived him of his capacity to create. He had to escape, but he was fascinated by the artificial Alexandrian world as a source of inspiration. He commented on Egypt:

"The atmosphere of sex and death is staggering in its intensity. Meanwhile, the big shots come and go, seeing nothing in a money dream. This steaming humid flatness, not a hill or a mount anywhere- shocked to bursting point with bones and the crummy deposits of wipeout cultures. A sea flat, dirty, brown and waveless rubbing the port - Arabic, Copic, Greek, Levant, French; no music, no art, no gaiety, no subject of conversation except money. And the shrieking personal unhappiness and loneliness showing in every place. No, if one could write a single line of anything that had a human smell to it here, one would be a genius." (13)

The Greek landscape represented for him innocence, and there he would be at ease to rework his human experiences in Egypt and there, he could live at peace. His impressions of the Greek landscape are very different from the ones of Egypt:

"I've told you (H. Miller) how unique it is up here, stuck on the hill side. Well, multiply that by four... I'd like to tell you how many smells and sounds and colours this place is, but my superlatives would give out. As I sit for instance, window, light, blue grey. Two baby Cypress lulling very slightly in the sirocco, the sea all crawling round in a bend as the coast curves away to Lefkimo, with one sailing boat on it. In the road, the peasants are passing on donkeys. I love it really, because it is so

savage and unapproachable." (14)

Durrell and Eve went to the Dodecanese Islands, he as a Public Information Officer in Rhodes. This was another retreat in order to recreate his experiences in a country he despised, experiences which were obviously painful, but which were the source for his major work. The Greek islands, the place of creation, were sources of lyrical and light books which were written later. This need to retreat in order to create is felt by Lawrence Lucifer and Darley, who go to Greek islands, exactly like their creator, to write about their past life.

In Rhodes, Durrell lived one of the happiest periods of his life. Despite the political situation and the poverty of the people, he produced there many poems, booklets, articles and so on. The second of his island books Reflections on a Marine Venus is a retrospective summary of his life in the islands.

Justine and Bitter Lemons brought him world fame. Finally, he could settle down as a full time writer, the dream of all his life. He moved to the southern part of France, Provence, with Claude, his third wife and like Nancy, also an artist (a writer). He has been living there ever since. In France, he wrote Balthazar, Mountolive and Clea. The southern French culture and atmosphere is transposed to his last novel, Monsieur. Durrell relates the Provençal French atmosphere, culture and landscape to the Mediterranean one.

Durrell lived in many countries and experienced expatriation many times. Other writers also exiled themselves, searching for

new experiences and trying to escape from their home countries. The French poet Baudelaire went to India, the German writer Thomas Mann went to Italy. Conrad went in his youth from Poland and Russia to the Mediterranean and then to England. D. H. Lawrence journeyed to Italy and Mexico, Joyce exiled himself in Paris, Zurich, Italy and Austria.

Durrell's artists, as an immediate consequence of his life, are also exiled and they feel, as he felt many times, the negative qualities of it: separation and loneliness. However, like Durrell himself, they can only produce their art far from their countries, because in order to rescue what is best in them, they subject the country itself to the analysis of satirical rejection. Durrell told Henry Miller:

"This is the world (England) which was implicit in our extravagant gust, our laughter, our tears, our poems. That is why, when I tell you I have rejected it, I want you to understand clearly the terms of that rejection. That is an England I am going to kill, because by giving it a quietus once and for all, I can revive it." (15)

Being exiled from England and its decadent world, the artist Durrell could revive it, because, as I have suggested, England like Alexandria, represented for him the White Goddess, a source of inspiration and rejection.

The Greek islands represented for Durrell and for his artists a place of isolation from the cities, in which they would find much of their material, a place in which they can compose their fragmented experiences by linking it to a landscape soaked in the past, but to which they are not attached. Durrell wrote in Prospero's Cell:

"Other countries may offer you discoveries in manner or lore or landscape, Greece offers you something harder - the discovery of yourself." (16)

The place of exile, then, would represent for the artist not simply a place, but also a symbol of existence.

The three books Durrell wrote about the Greek islands, the place of his self-imposed exile, are symbolic and lyrical, because they reflect his life on these islands. They contrast heavily with the novels, which are in part accounts of decadent moments of his life.

In the late thirties, Lawrence Durrell moved to Corfu, with his family. He could not longer bear the English life, and he felt the need to escape in order to free himself and create. In Corfu, he got in contact with Dr. Theodore Stephanides, a physician, an erudite and civilized man, who taught him everything relating to the island and the Greek Culture\*.

The bohemian and decadent life in England from which Durrell escaped, the discovery of the Greek world affected his artistic feelings in such a way that he felt the urge to create. The violent reaction against the English environment led him to an artistic and human development in Greece that culminated in The Black Book and in the Island Books.

The Greek islands, although soaked in their history, myths and memories represented for Durrell, while he was there, purity and simplicity, because their history and memories would not affect him at his present moment. He would be free to create, while in England, he felt he was a part of its history and its dead bodies. He wrote to his friend Alan Thomas:

---

\* It was also from this time that he began his correspondence with Henry Miller, who would be one of the greatest influences on his work and a close friend. Durrell's first letter to Miller praising Tropic of Cancer as the copy book for his generation and the only man-size piece of work which this century boast of, was written from Corfu.

"The sails are set. I'm starting out now in a more splendid curve than you would ever have imagined possible for me. What I mean is this - I have begun to be a real writer." (17)

Alan Thomas says that one of Durrell's most striking qualities as a writer lies in his ability to render scenery and the feel of places. From India to England to Corfu to Egypt to Rhodes to Latin America to Yugoslavia to Cyprus to Provence, with interludes in Paris and in England, each place was material for a book to be written in the next place while getting material for the next.

The importance of "place" and "landscape" in the Durrellian vision is as definitive as the importance of decadence and exile as major themes of his works. For Durrell, a man is only an extension of the spirit of place, because he believes in the "God of Place".

Decadence in Durrell is a complex set of attitudes and interests, which colours many of his other interests and characteristics rather than being an individual trait. For this reason, it is impossible to define with any precision. What we find is a group of characters, a place, a series of events, or a narrative technique which we may identify as being treated in a decadent way, or as exhibiting decadent tendencies in the author. Thus, decadence has many manifestations. We may tentatively characterize decadence as deterioration or decay, from a state of excellence. There is also sometimes, an implied awareness of the decay on the part of those who have suffered it. In a writer, it may indicate affectation, or a derivative style, suggesting a lack of strength or originality. It is implicit in Wilde's phrase that life imitates art, in the sense that an imitation of an imitation is decadent. There is also the

decadence implicit in narcissism and use of the mirror. Finally, an intense interest in decadent subjects may itself be described as decadent. Clearly, decadence here is not reducible to a single definition, but is somewhat of an umbrella term reflecting a particular state of mind. I hope to show that decadence, significant throughout Durrell's work, assumes overwhelming importance towards the end.

The theme of decadence can be related to historical factors and has influenced other writers. It would be possible to trace this theme through from the "Gothic Novelists" of the 18th century (their heroines suffered macabre and melodramatic threats and misfortunes in mysterious castles and houses). In Durrell's Tunc and Nunquam this sort of decadence and macabre atmosphere is also found. Also through Pre-Raphaelite poets (the Rossettis and Morris) the theme of decadence is evident, for there was a continual reference to death and decay, to a sense of purposeless and fatigue, and the creation of a mood of depressed weariness. The same predilection for decay and sickness is found in Baudelaire. Swinburne also wrote of weariness of life and a desire to withdraw from it. During the nineties, the Aesthetic movement in Britain was characterized by decadence. They owed something to Pre-Raphaelitism, to Swinburne and to a large extent to Pater, who had equated the good and the beautiful. Oscar Wilde is often quoted as an example of a decadent Aesthete, though this is perhaps more because of his flagrant flouting of conventional morality than his art. As a final example of the fascination with decadence that relates

to Durrell, we may consider a remark made by Lionel Johnson\* on Wilde's poem "Ballad of Reading Gaol"\*\*:

"Wilde's pleasure and excitement were perhaps increased by the degradation of that group of beggars and pathetics and I remember, too, his smile at my surprise, as though he spoke of psychological depths I could never enter." (18)

The critic A.E. Rodway remarks:

"the comment itself is evidence of a knowledge of such depths - precisely the territory of "decadence" worthy of the name ought to be exploring" (19)

Durrell, as he develops the theme of decadence in his work is also showing a tendency towards decadence, because, like Wilde, he becomes fascinated with the subject. Decadence would be one of his sources of energy and inspiration, although he professed to be depressed by it.

In his early work, decadence is associated mainly with bohemianism. By bohemianism, we understand a philosophy of life adopted by artists which leads them to live free from social conventions. It involves frequently a deliberate flouting of the conventions which are based on habit, snobbery and social niceties. Such freedom is supposed to liberate the imagination and stimulate the development of creative art. Based on this philosophy, Durrell develops his characters who generally live a life without fixed patterns and are against the normal rules of an established society, and are, consequently, outcasts from it. In The Black Book, Durrell was to portray this bohemianism, as well as in the other novels.

The Black Book is the immediate result of Durrell's

---

\*Johnson-an alcoholic writer and reviewer, intimate of Yeats and Wilde, and others of the Aesthetic movement. He made this remark to Yeats.

\*\* This poem was written about his (Wilde's) experience during his two year imprisonment in Reading Gaol.

bohemian and decadent life in London in the early 30's. It offered him not only the grotesque human material but also the decadent atmosphere which surrounded all of the characters. It fictionalizes a year Durrell spent in a London residential hotel in the early 30's, a year of stagnation, of spiritual sterility, of marking time in a smug dying England.

It was in London that he began his first literary activity and he was very much attracted to the bohemianism and the artistic life of the big centre. There, Durrell made a wide range of bohemian acquaintances, including John Gawsworth\*.

In London, he tried a variety of jobs. He wrote to Henry Miller:

"I hymned and whored in London, playing in a night club, composing jazz songs, working in real state. Never really starved, but I wonder whether thin rations are not another degree of starvation. I met Nancy in an equally precarious position and we struck up an incongruous partnership - a dream of broken bottles, tinned food, rancid meat... well, we did a bit of drinking and dying." (20)

He continued, saying from this time in London:

"I had moved to London at the behest of my mother, who tired of my antics, said to me one day: 'You can be as bohemian as you like, but not in the house. I think you had better go somewhere else where it doesn't show so much.' So I left Bournemouth to study Bohemianism at first hand." (21)

Durrell's "cheap" novel, (as he calls it) Pied Piper of Lovers turned out, in spite of its account of bohemian Bloomsbury, to be neither an artistic success, nor a financial one, but it led to his production two years later of a second commercial novel, Panic Spring, a romance by Charles Norden, which was

---

\*John Gawsworth (pseudonym of Terence Ina F. Armstrong. 1912) was a poet, critic and editor. He wrote "Collected Poems" (1948), "Ten Contemporaries". He was a close friend of Durrell and influenced him considerably.



his pseudonym.

The decadence which involves not only the characters, but also the atmosphere (perhaps an immediate consequence of the author's bohemian life) is an intrinsic characteristic of Lawrence Durrell's work. The characters are exotic, since most of them seem to have no roots and no well-defined nationality or background. Durrell manages to create a world where unconventionality is a norm, embodying people who are still part of the established society and existing in an uneasy symbiosis with both, like Mountolive and Nessim, in the Quartet. We also encounter in his work, fetishists, tranvestites, homosexuals and sadists, phallic rituals and onanism, everything presented by the author as acceptable and as part of human nature. The most tragic love story of the Quartet, the intense love of Pursewarden and Liza, is a story of incest. The same happens in Tunc and Nunquam and in Monsieur, in all of which it is a major theme and, within the world of the characters, an acceptable one.

We have seen then, that Durrell was interested in subjects, places and events that in one way or another are decadent. I have also observed that an obsessive interest in decadent subjects may itself show evidence of decadence in the artist. There are other aspects of decadence that need to be stated here, before a more careful analysis of his works.

Durrell imitated the affected and deliberately ornate style of Pater, Landor and de Quincey, but regarded his early use of this style as an affectionate parody. However, he has often been criticized for over-ornateness and word-spinning. Such a conscious cultivation of style, often at the expense of

meaning, is a characteristic usually described as decadent. Derivativeness, of which Durrell was sensitively aware in his early works (Miller) is decadent in the sense that it is an imitation of another's imitation. Although Durrell can be accused of this in his early works, the distinctive style he develops in his later work frees him from this criticism.

All Durrell's characters are fascinated by themselves, and the mirror image is a running symbol in Durrell. It conveys a sense of narcissism, an interest in the self at the expense of others. His characters constantly analyse themselves and their past. Life itself is seen reflected through mirrors or refracted through prisms, and gives the impression that everything is a reflection, an imitation, and that reality is never objectively perceptible.

In his early works, Durrell shows himself concerned with the mechanics of the creative process, and has his artists constantly examining their artistry. As he develops, Durrell becomes more and more inward-looking himself, and is preoccupied with the creative process. More and more, he seems to be using his novels in an attempt to explore the possibilities of creating fiction, rather than as an attempt to create his view of the reality of life. It is as if the end result has become unimportant for him, and he is focused almost exclusively on the available means. We shall see this development particularly in his last novel, Monsieur.

Durrell, then, deals consistently with decadent themes and subjects throughout his work, but what we notice is the way in which other aspects of his works and personality become increasingly imbued with characteristics we may analyse as decadent.

## 2.2. Theories

### The Heraldic Universe

The Heraldic Universe is Durrell's personal theory of the act of creation, which was formulated in a letter to Henry Miller, from Corfu, in 1936. The concepts of art expressed in his idiosyncratic theory I feel are important to define as Durrell appeared to think them important at one time, although the ideas he expresses are somewhat confused and contradictory.

Basically Durrell attempts to describe the moment of perfect creation, which he call "Oneness". This moment can be paralleled to the point in time when the surfer perceives the waves surrounding him as stationary. The creator himself in moment, in time - not merely observing it. Durrell calls this perception Revelation, an integration with the thing which is created.

This moment of creation enables the creator/the artist to see clearly, to understand fully what it is he is creating. Durrell likens the stages of understanding to those stages which are reached in Cabalistic study. He calls these stages of understanding the "Heraldic Universe"; they are the positive creative acts - The Plus Side. The striving to attain this perfection Durrell calls the Minus Side.

In his letter to Henry Miller, Durrell used the words 'structure', 'sculpture' and 'shape' therefore implying that 'heraldic' is something visual, concrete, an emblem, an image representing the creator's understanding. The use of the word 'heraldic' for me implies a sense of history, a tradition into which Durrell is fitting himself. The Heraldic Universe is a metaphysical framework into which each art form fits.

For Durrell this self-created system appeals not only to man's natural abhorrence of chaos but also his personal wonder at a form of cosmic order. He turns towards light and law as opposed to darkness and disorder. Durrell is attempting in formulating this confused heraldic universe, to expand his individual awareness into cosmic awareness.

Durrell's use of cabalistic theory and the word 'Heraldic' could be seen as attempts to add an illusion of depth, of universality to his theory. For a better understanding, I think I must present his own ideas, as put forward in his letter to Henry Miller, mentioned above:

THE MINUS SIDE

THE PLUS SIDE:  
PURE FORMS

THE ONE

I    II    III    IV

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 nonconscious, continual STATE or 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.

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER THAT    IN  
THE FIELD OF PURE REPOSE?

You enter a field of laboratory of the consciousness which is not dangerous because it is based on repose. It does not strain you because having passed... through the impurity 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 etching. This is what I have called THE HERALDIC UNIVERSE. You cannot define these forms except by ideogram: this is "non-assertive form."  
THE HERALDIC UNIVERSE " (22)

In the first column of this equation, Durrell is saying that artists, philosophers and religious thinkers, perhaps, after being troubled by the apparently meaningless flux of existence, have sought and struggled to reach a point, a "Stasis", where time does not exist because the self can be wholly absorbed in the

totality. Human attempts to achieve this moment, using the will, however, cause strain and mental disturbance, because of the inherited deficiency existing in the Human Being. If "Stasis" is reached (the second column), total perception is possible. There is no longer the sense of strain or striving, which is the necessary preliminary to repose. Everything is perceived as a unified whole, and the person is included in Time, enclosed in it, like the surfer on the wave. "Oneness" has been achieved. Fraser, commenting on the theory, says that after the soul has been enclosed in Time,

"it moves through a succession of states of greater clarity and beauty, like the successive states of an etching. What it becomes aware of, cannot, however, be expressed in conceptual terms but only in images or emblems, like the emblems of heraldry. These emblems themselves are even at their most abstract and mathematical, merely, 'contemptible' representations of the thought-forms they stand for."(23)

Elsewhere, in the same letter to Miller, Durrell has spoken of the Circle as the inadequate representation of the first thought-form, and the Square, as the second thought-form. These are the symbols of the Cabal. Durrell continues saying:

"Needless to say I have not yet passed through the ONE to 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. ... Now, what does Art do? Art makes sudden raids on the inarticulate - across the border from Minus to Plus. And so you find in the form of a sculpture or the shape of a poem, a preserving Heraldic structure sometimes which puzzles both maker and enjoyer. Art is bad because it uses the will to do this. Hence the strain and pain of the contemporary artist. Rimbaud, etc" (24)

In the quote above, Durrell seems to imply that although he as yet has not achieved 'Oneness' there have been some works of art that are representations of an artist's understanding, and stand on the Plus Side of his schema. He concludes saying that throughout history, all artists have been working at the

minus-side of his equation, at the subduing of the will to Time, suffering like Rimbaud. He could also have cited his own artistic creations (Lucifer, Darley, Pursewarden, Sutcliffe/Blandford) who suffer in order to create.

The Heraldic Theory seems to be a heavy metaphysical attempt to explain the strain of the artist, to give authority to his work. It is a little elaborate and pretentious, as Durrell should have been aware when he formulated it at the age of 24. It is part scientific jargon and part metaphor, it confounds rather than explicate, as we shall see when we examine his work.

We can compare Durrell's need to create a metaphysical system to give weight and authority to his work to Yeats' Vision, which is also a symbolic system created in order to explain life. Yeats believed that the source of all things is in the mind and that human minds are in some way a part of that source and the world they look out on, an emancipation of it, as well as a reflection. It represents Yeats's effort to construct a metaphor for the correlation of all things.

"A Vision" is Yeats's own myth, a statement of values completely true for himself, though, as his words to Dulac admit, possibly for no one else. The apparatus of Faculties and Principles and whirling gyres amounts to a complicated algebraical formula which arranges in intelligible order the whole of his knowledge and experience.

Hardly anything is set down "as fact". He assumes one concept - the soul, or Daimon, existing in eternity, and though he does not define it very explicitly the meaning is clear enough for anyone but a metaphysician. He conceives each individual Daimon as an aspect of the all-inclusive One, the ground of all being. This underlying One is acknowledged, but neither in "A Vision" nor in his poems as a whole is it the thing chiefly emphasized."

(25)

"A Vision" is the most controversial of Yeats's writings. His system, like Durrell's, has become for him, not reality, but

the pattern of reality. Yeats, after having conceived his system, was not sure of the validity and practice of it in real art. He regarded it:

"as a stylistic arrangement of experiences". (26)

Durrell, also after having conceived his heraldic system, contradicts himself when he says:

"Poetry is the raw material of sensibility, and the poet's job is to go on making poetry, not to think too much about why or wherefore." (27)

He was aware, thus, that the validity of all this theorizing was doubtful. Nevertheless, when he wrote Tunc and Nunquam, 32 years after the conceptualization of the Heraldic Universe, he had in mind another system: Spengler's\* distinction between an organic and local culture and a world-wide civilization and the cyclic nature of history.

We can conclude therefore, that Durrell, perhaps more than other artists, feels a necessity to adopt systems in order to give authority to his work, and to attempt to fit himself into some form of tradition.

### 2.3. The Space-Time Theory and Prismatic Reality

Before Einstein\*\*, the existence of absolute space and time was an accepted belief. Einstein's theory of relativity

\*Spengler, Oswald, 1880-1936. In "The Decline of the West" (Der Untergang das Abendlandes 1918-1923; English translation 2 vols. 1926-1929, one vol. edi. 1933) Spengler advanced the theory that all civilizations pass through a life-cycle and that Western civilization has passed its climax and must inevitably die. Briefly, in Tunc and Nunquam Durrell is concerned with the inner decay and decline of a multi-national organisation. The Firm could be seen as emblem for the decline of Western culture.

\*\* Albert Einstein (1879-1955) published first principles of his Theory of Relativity in 1905.

denied the absoluteness of space and time. Absolute reality did not exist in his theory. For Einstein there is only one single reality and it is this reality that the observer perceives from the place he occupies; it is therefore a relative reality. But as this relative reality is the only one there is, for the observer, it must, as well as being relative, be true or absolute reality.

The application of this theory to the novel is that the artist can present different truths from different points of view.

In his novels, Durrell transmits the sense of a timeless present embodying all time. One event, as for instance Pursewarden's death, in the Quartet, varies as a function of place and time. There are many Pursewarden's death. The first is the first reference to the act. The next is the second reference and so on. This order is chronological in the sense that it follows the order of the pages in the book. But, at the end, when the book is seen as a whole, there is only one suicide, one act with many layers or facets, only one which is perceived by each individual, although the artist tries to represent them simultaneously. Durrell's idea then, as in Ford's The Good Soldier (see page 34) is that the order in which events should be presented in narration is not the order in which they occur, but in the order in which they acquire significance for the narrator.

The theory of the Space-Time novel calls for diverse points of view embodied in many narrators and observers. It calls for spirals, cycles and variations on theme and patterns. In a conventional novel, a sequence of events could be narrated by one voice in one person moving ahead on a straight line,



but in an 'n-dimensional novel the events and characters are viewed from any number of different positions. According to Weigel, in the n-dimensional novel:

"there are no limits to the number of times the axes of reference may be related, so that at any moment and position in space-time, an event may be described from any number of reference points. There are an infinite number of "stories" in any event, all functions of new orientations of the axes from which the location of the characters are being measured." (28)

Pursewarden (or Durrell) claims that his prose belongs to the poetic continuum in the sense that:

"it is intended to give a stereoscopic effect to character. And events aren't in serial form, but collected here and there like quanta, like real life." (20)

The novelist's intention, by applying to his work this experimental technique is to record life as he thinks it is.

The knowledge, gleaned from Einstein, that the events which are perceived by one observer are not necessarily perceived in the same way by another observer, grew into Lawrence Durrell's vision of the prismatic reality of life. Durrell's major books The Black Book, the Quartet and Monsieur could be considered as an extension of experiments into a prismatic structural technique.

The crucial shift towards Relativity is best reflected in the major novelists of this century - Conrad, Proust, Jovce, Ford, Faulkner and Woolf among others. Around the turn of the century, Ford Madox Ford and Joseph Conrad, who according to the critic Alan Warren Friedman were representatives of Impressionism in the British Novel, were agreeing that only novel writing was worth doing, and that a new form for the novel was imperative.

"We agreed (Ford wrote) that the general effect of a novel must be the general effect that life makes on mankind. A novel must, therefore, not be a narration, a report... we saw that life did not narrate, but made impressions on our brain. We, in turn, if we wished to produce on you an effect of life, we must not narrate but render...impressions."  
(30)

Lawrence Durrell wrote:

"I'm so glad I didn't read "The Good Soldier" (Ford's book) before writing "Justine" or I might have never finished her. This novel is an eye-opener with its brilliant organization and gathering momentum; it's fit to put beside the best of our time." (31)

The Good Soldier: A Tale of Passion was written by Ford and published in 1915. It told the story of the friendship of two couples, related by Dowell, a member of the group. It is in the form of a narrative which departs from chronological order - as Dowell learns out of sequence of the events concerning the four. As in Durrell's Justine there is no final truth, only a variety of interpretations as the reader attempts to gain total understanding.

The second precipitating movement of this century, after Impressionism, would be, according to Friedman, the "stream of consciousness"\*. By this term is indicated the flux of a person's conscious and sub-conscious thoughts and impressions that move in the mind independently of the person's will. In Proust, Dorothy Richardson, Joyce and Woolf, external events scarcely matter at all and there are times when we wonder if they even exist.

The dual tradition of Ford-Conrad impressionism and of Proust-Joyce stream of consciousness, of course had an effect

---

\*Stream of consciousness - A term used by William James in "Principles of Psychology" (in 1890)

upon Durrell's work. If we briefly consider Ford's The Good Soldier and Joyce's Ulysses, we will perhaps gain some idea as to the amount of their effect upon Durrell.

Joyce, in Ulysses, followed just one day in the life of Leopold Bloom. Time is developed chronologically through the novel - we meet Bloom even before he has had his breakfast and the novel ends with his wife Molly sliding into sleep. The individual action - of Bloom, Stephen, Molly, is shown within the totality of all possible relations at the moment. We are given a time sequence in depth receiving an effect of simultaneous activity, reminding us that the characters have not ceased to exist because they are not being described at the moment. Joyce then creates a sense of a total perception through this technique of time manipulation.

As we have seen above, The Good Soldier does not have the fixed chronological time sequence of Ulysses and it uses the technique of presenting events not in chronological sequence, but as they acquire significance to the writer. In Durrell's terminology, the reality for the observer alters according to his changing position in the configuration of events.

In Durrell's work, there is no single internal or external truth of any event or character presented. Truth is constantly being modified by its observers, who distort the scene they observe and are in turn distorted by it. G. S. Fraser viewed the Quartet as:

"a cosmic myth set within the framework of the psychological novel. Both in its structure and in the views expressed by the most important characters in it, the work is the expression of a fairly coherent and systematic philosophy. The epistemology of this system insists that there is neither absolute error or absolute truth. Our observations of life are bound to be subjective and therefore, expansible and corrigible: but the most fantastic lies and fables

are not mere errors, they have some root in experience, they riddlingly reveal some truth about the world of ourselves. And, at the other end of the spectrum from subjective observation, the grandest and most general statements about life or love or art or death are still subject to questioning. The evidence can never be complete. For each of us, our cosmos is a construct from limited observation." (32)

Durrell bases his ideas in Einstein 's theory of Relativity and says that:

"The picture which each observer makes of the world is in some degree subjective. Even if different observer all take their pictures at the same moment of time, and from the same point in space, these pictures will not be alike, unless the observers happen to be moving at the same speed." (33)

According to this theory, then, Durrell develops his technique in presenting a single situation which is seen and analysed by different characters. This happens in The Black Book as a prelude to the Quartet and Monsieur, where this experimental technique will be developed to a far greater extent. In Justine, for instance, Darley has his version of the Alexandrian truth; however, with Balthazar's manuscript, he tries to understand how Balthazar's reality differs from his version of it. As he reworks the first reality, he creates other layers of reality, feeling himself changing too, until he seems to change from observer to narrator to finder. Balthazar draws the same analogy with:

"some medieval palimpsests where different sorts of truth are thrown down one upon the other, the one obliterating or perhaps supplementing another."(34)

G.S. Fraser, however says that the work is:

"an archaeological excavation of motives, in which it is difficult to get down to the layer below without destroying the layer we are at, and in which, the very bottom layer is never reached at all, perhaps."(35)

The idea of layers, sliding panels, revolving axes of

reference and new or confounded dimensions in space-time - all suggest the theory of Relativity. Fraser suggests, with his idea, that there is a bottom layer, which would be the objective reality. Fraser's analysis does not seem to agree with Durrell's interpretation of reality which is in accordance with Einstein's theory.

Durrell admits that this attempt to create layers of reality is not original, as I have already mentioned, although the creation of this world through several simultaneous novels is new.

In order to transmit his concept of the prismatic reality, Durrell uses symbolically the imagery of the prism which is related in tone and use to the mirror imagery.

"In Durrell's space-time novels, mirrors and prisms reflect and refract the various aspects of reality as devices for improving and sharpening vision."(36)

Almost all the characters see themselves and others in mirrors. There are mirrors in almost every room in Durrell's novels. They are associated with the personalities of the characters, because they reflect in a direct way, not a true reality, but what the person in a narcissistic and decadent way, wants to see; they are repositories of memory; they are linked to the landscape. The image of the mirror is the image of the other self, the double, accepted or refused without question. Multiple mirrors reflect the multiple dimension of Durrell's space-time theory.

The prism, which is also a symbol of the prismatic reality, does not reflect, like the mirror, but it diversifies the image into many different aspects, changing therefore its patterns and shifting its light. Justine, looking at herself in

five different mirrors says:

"Look, five different pictures of the same object. Now if I wrote, I would try for a multi-dimensional effect in characters, a sort of prism-sightedness. Why should not people show more than one profile at a time?"(37)

This is exactly what Durrell tries to do in his novels. Multi-dimensionality and prism-sightedness are then, the metaphors that suggest Durrell's technique for telling his truth about a universe without fixed points of reference. Truth and reality, for Durrell, do not exist by themselves, but they are creations of the character, refracted according to their different backgrounds, view of the world and position in it.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

- (01) UNTERECKER, John. Lawrence Durrell. Columbia Essays on Modern Writer, n° 6, Columbia University Press, 1969.  
p. 8.
- (02) DURRELL, Lawrence. Bitter Lemons. Faber, London, 1973.  
p. 20
- (03) WICKER, George. ed. by Lawrence Durrell and Henry Miller - A Private Correspondence. Faber, London, 1963. p. 190.
- (04) WICKER, ibid. p. 181.
- (05) WEIGEL, John - Lawrence Durrell. E. P. Dutton e Co. N.Y. 1966. p. 97.
- (07) GRODDECK, George. The Book of the It, N. Y. Vintage Books, 1961 - quoted in Friedman, Alan Warren - Lawrence Durrell and the Alexandria Quartet - University of Oklahoma Press, 1970, p. 67.
- (06) DURRELL, Lawrence. "A Key to Modern Poetry" quoted in Fraser, G.S. Lawrence Durrell Study. Faber, London, 1972. p. 116.
- (08) DURRELL, Lawrence. Justine. Pocket Books, N. Y. 1963.  
p. 252.
- (09) GRAVES, Robert. The White Goddess. Faber, London, 1962.  
p. 4.
- (10) GRAVES, ibid. p. 490-1.
- (11) DURRELL, Lawrence. Balthazar. Pocket Books, N. Y. 1972.  
p. 105.
- (12) DURRELL, Lawrence. Clea. Pocket Books, N. Y. 1969. p. 55.
- (13) WICKER, op. cit. p. 187.
- (14) THOMAS, Alan edited by Spirit of Place - Lawrence Durrell - Letters and Essays, Faber, London. p. 34-40.
- (15) WICKER, op. cit. p. 95.
- (16) DURRELL, Lawrence. Prospero's Cell. Faber, London, 1967.  
p. 11.
- (17) THOMAS, op. cit. p. 50.
- (18) RODWAY, A. E. article "W.B. Yeats, Autobiographies" quoting Lionel Johnson, in Ford, Boris ed. From Dickens to Hardy, The Pelican Guide to English Literature, n° 6. Penquin Books, 1958. p. 399.
- (19) RODWAY, ibid. p. 199

- (20) WICKER, op. cit., p. 60.
- (21) THOMAS, op. cit., p. 17.
- (22) WICKER, op. cit., p. 202-3
- (23) FRASER, op. cit., p. 102.
- (24) WICKER, op. cit., p. 203.
- (25) STOCK, A. G. in the article "A Vision" quoted in Unterecker, John - Yeats, A collection of Critical Essays, Twentieth Century Views, Prentice Hall, N. Y. 1963. p. 143-4.
- (26) UNTERECKER, John. A Reader's Guide to W. B. Yeats. Thames and Hudson, London, 1973. p. 24.
- (27) DURRELL, Lawrence. A Key to Modern Poetry. p. 64. quoted in Friedman, op. cit. p. 168.
- (28) WEIGEL, op. cit. p. 86.
- (29) DURRELL. in Balthazar, op. cit. p.241.
- (30) FORD, Madox Ford. Joseph Conrad: A Personal Remembrance. p. 182-4 in Friedman, op. cit., p. 171.
- (31) DURRELL, Lawrence. in "A Dialogue with Durrell" (by Young, Kenneth, p. 65) quoted in Friedman, op. cit., p. 62.
- (32) FRASER, op. cit., p. 120.
- (33) DURRELL, Lawrence - in A Key to Modern Poetry, in Friedman op. cit., p. 178.
- (34) DURRELL, Lawrence - Balthazar. op. cit., p. 177.
- (35) FRASER, op. cit. p. 121.
- (36) WEIGEL, op. cit. p. 105.
- (37) DURRELL, Lawrence in Justine. op. cit. p. 18



3. THE BLACK BOOK

In this chapter, I shall examine the treatment of themes introduced in the preceding chapter. I shall deal with the use Durrell makes of place and try to show that in The Black Book place is identified as England, and appears to the artist as a suffocating womb to be escaped from. I shall relate England to the whore-mother figure, who may be regarded as a muse for the artist and as a creative stimulus, but also as a restricting force that he must break free from. I also intend to deal with bohemianism and decadence. In The Black Book Durrell does attempt to put his ideas of the Heraldic Universe into practical shape, but, I think, without consistency or conviction. Also I shall try to show how in The Black Book we can see the beginning of the narrative techniques that foreshadow the more sophisticated experiment in the Quartet.

The Black Book is Durrell's first really original and personal novel. In his preface to the 1959 Olympia Press reprint of The Black Book, Durrell wrote:

"With all its imperfections lying heavy on its head, I can not help being attached to it because in the writing of it, I first heard the sound of my own voice, lame and halting perhaps, but nevertheless, my very own. This is an experience no artist ever forgets - the birth cry of a newly born baby of letters, the genuine article. The Black Book was truly an agon for me, a savage battle conducted in the interests of self-discovery. It built itself out of a long period of despair and frustration during which I knew that my work though well contrived, was really derivative. It seemed to me that I would never discover myself - my private voice and vision. At the age of twenty four, things usually look black to one." (1)

When he says that his work was derivative and that it seemed he would never discover his own voice, we get the impression that he was aware of copying somebody and even though he admired

his source, his own art lacked validity for him. At that time, he was too much influenced by Henry Miller's "Tropic of Cancer", where sexual licence is evident as well as an apparent lack of formal structure. This also happens in The Black Book and Durrell was aware of this influence. He wrote to Henry Miller:

"I've been rereading The Black Book with a blue pencil marking all the echoes of you." (2)

He was also influenced by D.H. Lawrence who had also struggled against conventions to portray sexual frankness, but stylistically he transposed the 'mannered ornate' fiction of Sterne, Pater and De Quincey.

Originally, Durrell had not intended to publish The Black Book, but the enthusiastic response to the manuscript he sent to Henry Miller led to its publication in Paris in 1938, and to its discovery by critics like T.S. Eliot. Although having many imperfections, as Durrell puts it, its importance lies in the fact that not only its structure, but the development of its themes, plot and characters are a prelude to the Quartet. George Sykes says that:

"all of Durrell's favorite colours are already spread out on the palette, they are merely waiting to be put to mature use." (3)

Because of all its crudities, it had been banned from England till 1973, when it was first published.

The theme of the book, according to Henry Miller is: "death and rebirth".

"Your rebirth is the most violent act of destruction"(4)

The symbolic motif of the book is the motif of a sense of enclosure in the womb, the violent emergence from it and the danger of the regressive wish to get back. The death and rebirth themes are related to the "artist". Death Gregory (symbolic

first name) is crushed by England and Lucifer is threatened with the same suffocation. This suffocation comes from the sense of conventional cosiness, the regulated normality of "English Death". This bland self-satisfied mediocrity did not welcome unconventionality, especially from would-be artists, whose sexual morals in particular were widely regarded as scandalous. Lucifer (Durrell) regarded this England as a womb to be escaped from, in order to be free as an artist. Durrell says in the book:

"We are a generation enwombed, a still birth. Like blind puppies we are seeking that way back to the womb, we are trying to wipe away the knowledge of our still birth, by a new, a more glorious, more pristine event. We have been expelled from the uterus blind and marrowless, and we grovel back toward it in a hysterical regression of panic."(5)

Hilda, the whore, can be interpreted as representing the mother-figure, the White Goddess. She is at once mother and mistress, a prefiguring both of Justine and Alexandria itself. Older, experienced, time-ravaged, she represents for Lucifer both a wide-ranging sexual education and a comforting freedom from responsibility as a mother figure. She does not have, however, the bitch attitudes and attributes of Justine and Alexandria, though they are found in other characters, like Fanny, also a whore, and Chamberlain's wife. Hilda is the personification of the womb, and the womb though for Durrell, the symbol of life, must be escaped from. She serves as a Mistress-muse for Lucifer as an artist, because he sees in her the symbol of all creativity. The White Goddess as a symbol of life is opposed to the English disease, or the English environment, the spirit of place, which only brings frustration and sterility and so the artist must break free from it in order to create. Thus, Lucifer must get away to the Greek island, otherwise, like the other characters, he would become conditioned to the sterility

and decay.

In terms of Durrell's interpretation of Groddeck, all human personality, will, emotions and aspirations are part of the universal "IT", or "Oneness". It may be argued from this that he could give individual human beings predominant characteristics or roles, and regard the total sum of such individuals as the "IT". If we can accept this, we can regard the characters in The Black Book as possessing predominant characteristics or fulfilling one basic role. It would then be argued that as Lucifer, the "I" narrator, presents his characters, Clare, the gigolo, Lobo and Perez, the outsiders to society, Chamberlain, a life worshipper unable to satisfy his wife sexually, Gregory and Tarquin, the failed artists, Hilda, the whore/mother figure and Fanny, the whore/bitch figure, we can perceive that they are not really characters. They are "logic of personalities" (6), according to Weigel. As patterns and devices, they will be projected in space, out of time. If one can take Durrell's claims about Groddeck's "IT" seriously, then these characters are simply functions of the total personality, the universal ONENESS.

There are two narrators in The Black Book, both autobiographers: Lawrence Lucifer, who is telling of his former experiences, at a run-down hotel, the Regina hotel in London, and his life as a teacher (Darley is also a teacher, as Durrell was) from his perspective of "now" on Corfu, the Greek island; Herbert Gregory or Death Gregory is the author of a diary called "The Black Book" found by Lucifer in a room of the hotel. The use of the diary as one facet of reality, one face of the prism, so to speak, is common in Durrell. In The Quartet, Arnauti's "Moeurs" is another

view of Justine, presenting a character which is half-familiar and half-unknown to Darley. There is also in the Quartet Justine's false diary about herself as well as Nessim's diary. In Monsieur there are Bruce and Pier's diaries. The two narrators of The Black Book deal with the same material and the same characters in two different times. The resulting confusion is deliberate, for here are both the projections of action in space (time is controlled) and the heraldic patterns which intrigued the young writer and which led to the theoretical structure of his later work. Gregory and Lucifer see the same people, but from a different angle. Lucifer transcribes Gregory's diary, but Gregory does not comment on Lucifer, because Gregory was anterior to Lucifer in time. The development of the Prismatic Reality technique, which will be extensively used later, mainly in the Quartet where all the characters comment on each other, is not fully developed in The Black Book. Otherwise, Durrell could have had Gregory revealing further aspects of the events, commenting on Lucifer. Time is not yet completely controlled, but we can see here Durrell moving towards the more controlled, complex framework of the Quartet.

The outer narrator, Lawrence Lucifer, is like L.G. Darley, a version of Durrell himself. Even in his first book, Durrell is fascinated by his own self and particularly with his creative self. This fascination increases through his work, reaching obsessive proportions by Monsieur. Lucifer lives in a world of shabby hotels, of grotesque characters, failed artists and defective lovers. In the book, a sub-world is created in which all varieties of sexual experiences are considered normal by the people who live them, but not by the ordinary society. This

sub-world is apparently necessary for artistic freedom, though we can say that all the artists are failures, because their world is decadent. Freedom from conventions is not enough. Lucifer is the only exception, because he escapes. These odd bohemian experiences anticipate his exile to the Greek island. Like Durrell and Darley, Lucifer goes there, his exile, in order to create. The theme of exile, as necessary for the artist's rebirth, appears here as a strong central theme and is refined and developed in later novels.

Like Darley/Durrell, Lucifer is lost in a world he never made, a rebel without a cause, a young, sensitive member of the "modern generation", seeking for values and coherence in a world essentially chaotic. As a writer, however,

"he is a vitriolic narrator, stereotyped, two-dimensional, flattened and narrowed by the pervasive "English Death".

Lucifer, as the "I" narrator, assumes little responsibility for his own contribution to the book, none for Gregory's diary. He locates his narrative in space:

"I live only in my imagination, which is timeless".(8)

This affirmative would be a foreshadowing of the Heraldic Universe theory, in that in the Heraldic Universe theory, art created by the "sudden raids on the inarticulate" is timeless and emblematic, with a "preserving Heraldic structure (which) sometimes puzzled both maker and enjoyer".

The inner narrator, who has disappeared before Lucifer's meditations begin, is Death Gregory, a forty-year old English man, who has left a diary, which Lucifer reads, telling the agonies of his life. He represents the narrator's alter ego, the forces which Lucifer must overcome to survive and grow.

Gregory may include the time dimension in his diary, but as the diary is used by Lucifer, it is a projected map rather than a chronology. His diary forms the only completed story within the book.

Gregory is a lonely man with minor and precious literary talents, typical victim of the dominating mother. He is a self-punisher, full of proud self-disgust. His relationship with Gracie, a half-educated girl he met on the street, is frustrated as his whole life is. He feels tenderness for her, even real love. She reminds him neither of his mother nor of the prostitute Fanny, who initiated him sickeningly into sexual experience. He can not, however, express his tenderness properly. The girl dies without really knowing about his love. This girl, Gracie, is a pre-figuring of Melissa in the Quartet. Both are whores, simple, uneducated and sickly. Both die of the same disease - tuberculosis, a decadent disease, without any doubt. Both are unloved and alone, and able to give and love.

Later, Gregory marries another woman, older and common, who feels no emotion for him, who is mean and undemanding, as Gregory will be with her. The new life, a lower-middle-class interior life, will enclose him in a grim womb substitute, the English death. He has tried to write a book called URINE, but only the title page has emerged.

Lucifer, like Gregory, appears to need a mother figure, and finds it in Hilda. Hilda, the elderly, battered whore, also represents the womb for him. He is tormented by a love-hate relationship with the English past and with a young woman who symbolizes English pastoral poetry; she is the anima-figure of the book, who does not appear as an active character. Lucifer loves and

hates her because she is young, fresh and normal, the perfect antithesis to the world he and his friends inhabit. But the mother on whom Lucifer is most fixated is England herself, with her richness in architecture, landscape, literature, but constructed on graves and tombs. England is also associated with the White Goddess, but a repressive form of the repressive mother-figure which the artist must escape from.

Tarquin, the most sinister figure in the book, is a sublimated homosexual, obsessed with the gigolo Clare. His only heterosexual relationship was a disgusting experience, which brought out his latent homosexual impulses. Even seducing Clare, he feels nothing but disgust and self-contempt. He can not feel tenderness for anything or anybody. He is a composer of some talent, though. He collapses in a sterile and solitary womb-world, as Gregory, the writer also does. He ends up lying in bed more and more in a state of semi-paralysis and finally being taken to the hospital in a foetal position as the writer Sutcliffe also does in Monsieur (see Chapter 5).

Gregory and Tarquin are the failed artists, the self destroyers. They live, like whores, outsiders from the society they belong to.

"Between the artist I, and Hilda the prostitute, there is an immediate correspondence. We recognize and respect each other, as pariahs, but we do not understand each other." (9)

They are decadent, although they always make attempts to fulfill themselves. The attempts are mostly through sex or art. Their sexual life is a disaster and as artists, they are corrupted, because they live a corrupted life. The question of the strain of the artist's life recurs frequently in Durrell. According to the Heraldic Universe theory it is the strain of



trying to create that caused strain in life. That is why, Durrell argues, art is bad. However, it appears more the other way around. The personal strain of the life of these artists (caused by the English death, the sense of isolation from society, sexual decadence and so on) interferes with their abilities to create. In later work, the psychological and social motivation for the failure of the artist becomes more convincing, and the top-heavy theory of the Heraldic Universe has less relevance to Durrell's actual novels. Since Durrell appears to give so much weight to this theory, however, it is necessary to show how it is applied, even if it shows only as inconsistent.

For Durrell the emotional sterility caused by the English environment or the state of enslavement to a sterile muse (England) is the sickness of the failed artist. Lucifer, however, is for Durrell the true artist. Like himself, his artist is aware of the life he is living and tries to escape. Lucifer says:

"Escape is the endless theme of our contemplation, escape, escape. I'm fighting in order to try and break free from, in order to re-create and re-enter a new gnosis." (10)

His act of escape brings suffering and pain, because in order to be reborn he must cut his umbilical cords through suffering. In the Quartet Darley also escapes from Alexandria, the whore/mother figure, to create, as well as Charlock and Caradoc in Tunc and Nunquam.

The paradox is then, what I have mentioned before. Durrell/Lucifer/Darley is fascinated and hypnotised by the muse, but must break free from it in order to create from the inspiration received.

As Durrell recognizes, many are the imperfections of The Black Book. Had Durrell not written the Quartet, the book

might have remained obscure, for despite its lustiness, it is a fragile thing. The characters are dusty and shifty, loaded with adjectives and bright, tense phrases. Nevertheless, the young Durrell tried to produce the sort of art he thought was the most valid one:

"The Black Book is epileptic, a fit, why? Was I a monster? I tried to say what I was... I wanted to write myself so miserable and wormy and frightened as I was. Numb, really. That terrible English provincial numbness, the English death infecting my poor little colonial soul." (11)

We cannot avoid admitting that its structure is loose. Gregory's tight monologue within Lucifer's loose commenting monologue gives a certain general shape: a framework into which Durrell can fit his blocks, as H. Miller called them. Many of the blocks could be shifted around without a great deal of difference, in the total effect. The richness of the language makes it sometimes messy, painful to read, sometimes embarrassing

For my study of the Artist in Lawrence Durrell, The Black Book is important, for the major themes in Durrell's concept of the artist are present; the importance of place and its relationship to the muse, the love-hate need for exile, wide-ranging and grotesque sexual experience and amorality as a norm, the artists failing through the strain of life and the creative process, a tentative approach to a prismatic view of reality, the juggling with space and time and the use of narration within narration.

Durrell's artists in The Black Book are prototypes of more developed and structured ones later. Durrell proves here, that the artist can not be separated from his creation, which or who (if a character) is a projection of his inner self.

Lucifer is Durrell as Farley also is, and it is Farley I shall discuss next.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

- (01) DURRELL, Lawrence. The Black Book. Olympia Press, 1959, Introduction.
- (02) WICKES, George. edited by. Lawrence Durrell and Henry Miller, A Private Correspondence. Faber & Faber, London, 1963. p. 49.
- (03) DURRELL, Lawrence. The Black Book. Faber & Faber, London, 1960. Introduction by George Sykes.
- (04) WICKES, op.cit., p. 78.
- (05) DURRELL, Lawrence. The Black Book. Faber & Faber, London, 1973. p. 139.
- (06) WEISEL, John A. Lawrence Durrell. E. P. Dutton, N. Y., 1966. p. 45.
- (07) FRIEDMAN, Alan Warren. Lawrence Durrell and The Alexandria Quartet. University of Oklahoma Press, 1970. p. 4.
- (08) DURRELL, op. cit., p. 59.
- (09) DURRELL, op. cit., p. 96
- (10) DURRELL, op. cit., p. 160.
- (11) WICKES, op. cit., p. 83-

#### 4. THE ALEXANDRIA QUARTET

In this section, I shall trace the development of technique and themes in the Quartet which are relevant to the artist and which were raised in the chapter 2 and developed in The Black Book. I intend to deal with narrative structure, prismatic reality, the individual artists and their collective image, decadence, Justine and Alexandria as bitch/goddess/muse, and finally, escape and exile.

As I have mentioned before, the tetralogy the Quartet is considered Durrell's most important artistic achievement so far. Here, he develops fully his experimental techniques, the prototypes of which can be traced in The Black Book. The full complexity of his treatment of time and the excavation of a given area of place-time in layers recalls the events in the order in which they first become significant to a particular narrator. Past events are sometimes presented in the historical present, sometimes in the preterite. The juxtaposition of the two tenses creates the sense of "timelessness" so important to Durrell. In Justine and Balthazar however, the actual present is used to describe the narrator's situation on a remote island and his feelings about past events as he now recreates them. In Mountolive, the omniscient author Durrell also analyses (like Darley, the narrator of the first two books) situations in retrospective time. In the fourth volume Clea, time moves forward but it is still dominated by what has been explored before. Durrell writes in the Introduction to Balthazar:

"Three sides of space and one of time constitute the soup-mix recipe of a continuum. The four novels follow this pattern. The three first parts, however, are to be deployed spatially (hence the use of "sibling" not "sequel") and are not linked in a serial form. They interlap, interweave, in a patchy

spatial relation. Time is stayed. The fourth part alone will represent time and be a true sequel. ... I'm trying to complete a four-decker novel whose form is based on the relativity proposition." (1)

According to his own words, then, his work is based on Relativity, which means that there is no objective truth, but many truths which are exclusively subjective, depending on the position of the observer in the configuration of events. As the observer perceives events with new insights, so his perception of the configuration changes. In other words, he perceives a new reality. The techniques are of far greater subtlety and sophistication than in The Black Book, where Gregory was not able to comment on, or even perceive, Lucifer's reality. Durrell thus presents many realities in the Quartet, because events are different when seen from different observation points. He shifts the point of view from volume to volume and its effect is the expansion, alteration and deepening of the reader's knowledge of what has happened. The reader is made more omniscient than Darley. This does not mean, however, that the reader is made to be more omniscient than Durrell, because he presents at the end of the books, except in Mountolive, his "Work-points" or "Consequential Data", which suggest that other stories could be generated from the material already presented and other realities be discovered. Durrell here shows great awareness of himself as writer and maker as to a lesser extent in The Black Book. The self consciousness becomes almost obsessive in Monsieur.

Justine is narrated by Darley not in a simple chronological real progression but according to his dream-like memories. Balthazar, supposed to have been written a few years later, is

Darley's commentary on Balthazar's commentary on the manuscript of Justine\*.

Balthazar adds a lot of important events to the first book, Mountolive ("a straight naturalistic novel") (2), as Durrell puts it, is told in an objective, realistic third person style. Darley, who is the narrator of the first two books turns into a character in Mountolive and becomes an object, created directly by Durrell. This third volume covers, in addition to part of Mountolive's story, the same basic events as the first two volumes. The fact that Mountolive is objectively narrated by the novelist with access to what is called a God's-eye view, implies that the account of events given there has more authority than the version offered by the characters immersed in them. It seems to offer another truth where the others offered opinion, objectivity as a corrective to their subjectivity. However, we cannot consider Mountolive's truth as the final one, according to the relativity theory on which Durrell based his work. Mountolive represents a normal "novelist's" eye view of reality, because most novelists have a version of the reality they wish to create, and convince readers of its truth. Durrell, perhaps, in writing Mountolive in an objective way, tries to offer this kind of truth simply as another kind of truth, the novelist's eye view, which has no more nor less validity than that presented from other positions.

Clea, again written by Darley, is a later sequel of the events of the first three books. It extends the reader's acquaintance of the characters and alters our attitude towards

---

\*Justine and Balthazar deal with essentially the same material, although Justine is temporally more inclusive (moving into the past through Moeurs and forward to the duck-shoot and Justine in Palestine) and Balthazar moves spatially from Alexandria and the Alexandrian to the Hosnani manor.

the main action, because it is the necessary and final part of a sequence, not only a sequel in the sense of following the novels which have preceded it, but a continuation, an inevitable consequence, but not a final conclusion. The "Workpoints" suggest that there are other possibilities, which might again rework reality.

What Durrell tries to develop with his word continuum or prismatic reality technique, based on Relativity, is a way of revealing different realities each of his major characters observe, experience and communicate to the reader through manuscripts, letters, diaries or simple impressions written by the objective narrator. This particular technique of writers writing about themselves or others which is already found in the Quartet is taken to extreme lengths in Monsieur.

The prismatic reality technique, therefore, is the way through which Durrell develops his narrative structure. While in The Black Book there were only two narrators, one commenting on the other (although both deal with the same material), there is only one complete story written in one diary. In the Quartet the structure is far more developed. In order to give different versions of reality, there are many narrators (Arnauti, Darley, Pursewarden, Falthabar, the novelist himself) there are many stories which are viewed and analysed by different people. Here, but not in The Black Book there are unlimited possibilities for exploiting the story-material by radiating out from new reference points in old directions or from old reference points in new directions. Pursewarden says:

"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 of reality is based upon a unique position. Two paces east or west and the whole picture is changed...." (3)

The implication is that art and life are inseparable and that what we consider as reality is simply our own recreation of events, with no more nor less validity than any one else's. It follows that there is no objective reality in life, which is exactly what Durrell tries to convey through the Quartet. Pursewarden here may be regarded as spokesman for Durrell, and the concept is close to the remark of Wilde's that life imitates art. The decadence implicit in this (art imitates life, so if life imitates art it is imitating an imitation, or reflecting a reflection) becomes much more marked, as we shall see in chapter 5. In Durrell's last novel, Monsieur, the same devices of the Quartet are also used, but the narrative structure is deliberately far more complicated and perhaps deceptive. There is a novel within a novel within a novel, not just stories or events seen by different characters. It will be analysed in the next chapter.

Darley's initial version of a set of events (Justine, for instance) is modified by Arnauti's diary "Moeurs", by the diaries of Nessim and the false diaries of Justine. These versions are in turn corrected by Balthazar's Interlinear and to that Interlinear, new versions of reality are presented by the objective narrator in Mountolive. In Clea time offers a shifted perspective and each of the central characters is allowed the opportunity to re-examine and re-evaluate his past and the past of the others.

The use of the narrative devices analysed allows Durrell to present his view of life at his period. Basically there is no absolute truth, but many equally valid subjective truths and there is no clear cut distinction between fact and fiction, because both are "selected fictions". In Monsieur, Durrell's views remain basically the same. There is, however, in this last book, a far more deliberate



playing with "selected fictions" which may be characterized as decadent.

All the evidences used by Durrell in the narrative-structure (letters, diaries and so on) refract and distort reality. People show more than one profile at a time. Durrell states his view of the human character as:

"a sort of rainbow which includes the whole range of the spectrum. I imagine that what we call personality may be an illusion and thinking of it as a stable thing, we are trying to put a lid on a box with no sides." (4)

He continues saying:

"We have to break up the old pattern. That's what I've tried to do in this series - break up the personalities and show its different facets." (5)

Not only personalities, but also events change according to new layers of reality.

In Justine, while Darley was having an affair with Justine, Nessim, her husband, invited him to a duck-shooting party. Darley was aware of a certain tension, and half-suspected Nessim had discovered the affair and intended to murder him. In fact, or so it appears in Justine, it is Capodistria who is killed. Later, in Mountolive, we discover that Nessim and Capodistria deliberately arranged to fake Capodistria's death, and that the mutilated body belonged to someone else. The reason we are given is that Capodistria, involved in Nessim's political conspiracy, had been compromised, and a supposed death allowed him to drop out of sight. Pursewarden's suicide was first presented as a gesture of contempt for the world. It seemed to us that his reasons were metaphysical ones, and that he wanted to break through from the mirror-world of reflexive consciousness to the real world of absolute self-identity. It appears later, in Mountolive that Pursewarden killed himself as the result of a

cowardly incapacity to choose between duty and friendship. The final layer, in Clea explains that his guilty love for his sister was the cause of his act and by committing it, he wanted to free her and leave the way clear for her marriage to Mountolive. None of the layers can be the final reality, but a complex combination that the reader perceives as a whole, but which the protagonists glimpse parts of.

Balthazar tells Darley he knows, (he thinks he does) though he may not always fully understand, the significance of the "real" motivations for Justine's giving herself to Darley, the real reasons for Pursewarden's enigmatic personality, the real meaning of happiness, of love, of time, of reality. Durrell's technique forces us to ask whether anyone even as perceptive, objective and honest as Balthazar can "tell the truth, the whole truth, nothing but the truth." It seems that according to his theory, nobody is the owner of the truth. Each character can analyse events in different ways and have their subjective truth. For the reader, however, the final explanation of each event seems to be the most valid, but this does not mean that it is the final truth.

The symbolic elements Durrell uses to transmit his view of the prismatic reality are the mirror and the prism. Mirror imagery pervades the whole the Quartet, beginning almost at once. They sometimes distort reality, sometimes reveal unsuspected facets of it. Melissa's former lover, for instance, the bestial, pockmarked Cohen, glimpsed by Darley, is not ugly and Darley pities him and understands him:

"I caught a glimpse of him in one of the long mirrors, his head bowed as he stared into his wine-glass. Something about his attitude - the clumsy air of a trained seal grappling with human emotions - struck me, and I realized for the first time that he probably

loved Melissa as much as I did." (6)

Actually, Cohen's love for Melissa is far greater than Darley's and the mirror has not simply returned the appearance of reality presented to it but has made a comment on it in reflecting the beautiful beneath Cohen's ugliness. This, then, would be a positive side to the use of the mirror. Perhaps, without the mirror image, Darley would not have perceived this particular truth. The use of the mirror for narcissistic purposes, as I have already mentioned in earlier chapters, shows the decadent aspect involved in the mirror image. Justine lives within mirrors and Darley enters her "mirror life" as Arnauti did.

Darley says:

"The first words we spoke were spoken symbolically enough in the mirror." (7)

They meet in the same mirror in which Arnauti met his Claudia\*. Melissa frequently stares at herself in mirrors, and reference is made to her "fragile mirror-worship". (8)

Pursewarden discovers death image in the glass on his wall and when he dies he is said to have:

"stepped into the quicksilver of a mirror".(9)

This means that Pursewarden, after death, will now "be" whatever the observer is looking for when he considers him and his actions. The mirror will reflect back what the observer wants to see and the reality of Pursewarden will be relative to the observer.

Mirror images have personalities of their own. They also provide a second self. Darley's envy, passion and pity are called "distorting mirrors"(10). Both Leila after her illness and the

---

\*Claudia, in Arnauti's diary - novel, is really Justine, to whom he had got married and on whom he had based his novel.

ugly harelipped Narouz abhor and avoid mirrors. Both are concerned with outer beauty and see only their disfigurement in the mirror. They are, perhaps, predisposed to see their ugliness, and the mirror obligingly reflects that, and does not show their inner truth, truths that we know of them from other people's observation. The mirror shows what we want to see and the morbid fascination and horror of Leila and Narouz with their reflection indicates a perverted narcissism, a masochistic attraction to ugliness, which can be characterized as decadent.

In the Quartet, the imagery of the prism is related to that of the mirror. Reality is seen best as refracted and analysed through a prism. At dusk, Alexandria is:

"stained with colours as if from a shattered prism." (11)

Darley fears that as a narrator he lacks clear vision. He thinks that for him, truth is refracted by his own personality disorders. Pursewarden, the expositor of Durrell's theory about the prismatic reality says:

"human personality seen across a continuum would become prismatic." (12)

Durrell's claim that he based his four-decker novel on the relativity proposition is a coherent one. Evidence within the work shows definite responses to the relativity propositions. These responses are seen mainly in the use of the prismatic reality technique that makes acceptable various points of view rather than just one. The manipulation of time sequences and the references to time have increased significantly since The Black Book. Truth is elusive; multiplicity rules. Characters tend to be seen as events rather than personalities.

In order to consider Durrell's concept of the artist further, it will be fruitful to consider the artists themselves

in the Quartet in greater detail. The Quartet is overrun with artists of one kind or another. Arnauti, Pursewarden, Darley and Keats are writers, Clea a painter. There are casual diarists like Nessim, Mountolive and Justine. The artists and writers in the novels feed on each other and identify with each other. By offering this collection of interrelated artists and writers, Durrell is essentially creating a composite picture of his concept of "the artist" and becomes his own protagonist. He is fascinated by the image of himself and is becoming as narcissistic as his characters. This tendency becomes much more morbid in Monsieur where Durrell, in a very complex way presents many writers who are all one person. There, however, Durrell focuses far more on the writer as writer and maker.

Like Lawrence G. Lucifer in The Black Book, who bears Durrell's first name, LG Darley in the Quartet has Durrell's own initials. However, he assigns his own ideas to several of the other writers, showing us that the unity of the concept of the artist is highly controlled. The writers Arnauti, Darley and Pursewarden, thus, represent three aspects of creative activity; withdrawal from the rawness of experience, fluid involvement in it, and masterly command over it. Clea, the painter, is a puzzle. She is from the beginning at a sympathetic distance from life. She remains on the periphery of the other characters, especially of Darley. Throughout the novels, her transformation from insecurity to maturity (which happens in the last volume) is the clearest story-line in the Quartet. Before her maturation as an artist and as a woman, her attitude to life and sex is an experimental one. She is grateful to learn from her lesbian relationship with Justine that she has her own sexuality. Her virginity, at one stage, she thinks of

as an impediment to her progress as an artist. Cool and rational as she seems, however she tells fortunes and has obscure premonitions. She is one of the most romantic figure in the whole Quartet. Her calm gift and her beauty have to be outraged by pain, terror, near death, mutilation, before she can break through into proper art. Her very nature, in a way, inhibited art. Only through pain, physical in her case, art could be born.

Johnny Keats, who could be considered a would-be artist is shaken into proper creativity by his experience in war. For Keats, in Clea, active service in war is a kind of a shock therapy which can shake a potential artist into the kind of awareness that born artists acquire slowly, naturally and peacefully. Keats, like Clea, only becomes an artist after experiencing violence, war for him, although we are given little evidence of his creative ability.

Art, then, for Durrell, like love, death or power is not something pursued for its own sake or as a final solution. Art is one of the many ways in order to reach revelation of Oneness (see section 2.1). According to his Heraldic Theory, nevertheless, such awareness can ever at best only be reached momentarily, because the more the artist strains to create, the greater the pressures preventing him from reaching Oneness.

Darley is the "I" of three parts of the Quartet. There is a clear distinction between Darley-the-narrator and Darley-the-character. As narrator he seems most useful to Durrell-as novelist, when he hesitates, when he stops and confesses that he is on the wrong track, when he admits his incompetence as an artist. At the beginning of the book, Darley's position is insecure. Again and again, although he remains a sympathetic

character, he reveals great ignorance of others and of himself. His views in artistic matters are often unsatisfactory. He is intensely jealous of Pursewarden, whose ideas he does not entirely understand until the "Brother Ass" section of Clea\*. He writes:

"I lacked a belief in the true authenticity of people in order to successfully portray them."(13)

He needs to learn, and he will, both that people and events embody the relativity theory of which he has been unaware and that we can never be certain of our understanding of people, because our vision of truth is only one of many. He tries, then, to explore the meaning of "truth", and for that, he has recourse to many documents like Balthazar's Interlinear and Nessim's diaries. Trying to rework reality proves a very difficult task. After reading Balthazar's manuscript, Darley is troubled by the contradictory evidence of his own experience as recorded in Justine. He questions his very ability to know:

"Did I really miss so much that was going on around me? Must I now rework my own experience in order to come to the heart of the truth?"(14)

Truth, however, according to Durrell/Pursewarden "has no heart". "Truth is a woman. That's why it is so enigmatic".(15) Darley, in Balthazar, then, has been forced to acknowledge the inadequacy of his theorizing about events and people. His involvement in the events told by himself is just a single facet of the prism, as Balthazar's Interlinear also is. By the end of Balthazar, Darley has learned much since Justine, especially from Pursewarden's view on art, love and God. Pursewarden who seems to be the real author-identification and

---

\*"Brother Ass" is a set of notes written by Pursewarden, which recorded his conversations with Darley, whom he calls not unaffectionately "Brother Ass".

is considered the real artist by the other characters, commits suicide halfway through the Quartet, proving then to be a failure for not having endured the strain of his private life. Can the artist's life be separated from his private one? According to the Heraldic Universe, art is bad exactly because man cannot endure the strain of life caused by trying to create.

If Durrell is holding to his Heraldic Theory of the artist, it must be that it is the strain of writing brought about Pursewarden's suicide, with the additional, but perhaps unnecessary stimulus of any one of the other possible reasons given. If Pursewarden is the great artist he is claimed to be, the strain on his life would be proportionately high, hence suicide would be predictable. However, in the novels, Durrell seems to provide ample non-mystic complex motivation for Pursewarden's suicide, and there is little to indicate that Pursewarden is driven to his fate by the dictates of the Heraldic Universe theory. Once again, Durrell's metaphysical theorising about art seems unconnected with what he actually does. Perhaps he has now the confidence of an assured artist and does not need the proof of a metaphysical framework.

Darley is not overcome by the stresses and strains of his private life and survives until the last page, discovering his limitations as an artist and discovering the illusory nature of the universe he must attempt to represent. Through a process of maturation he has learned the simple and essential truth that things are often not what they seem - and that conflicting testimony may imply not the inadequacy of an observer but, on the contrary, his great perceptivity. He has learned, thus, that his observations which he thought were wrong, were not wrong, but subjective and therefore true for himself.



Darley retreats three times in order to re-evaluate his private and artistic life and in order to rework his own reality. Coming back from his second exile, he meets in Clea what he has not met in Melissa or Justine. Their love seems idyllic at first, but it also requires a horrible accident to separate them eventually and bring them to terms with their art. We must assume that this last love relationship will endure, apparently in France, for both Darley and Clea have passed through a process of regeneration in their lives and in their art, and they can assume their full artisthood. Darley has successfully undergone the rites of initiation to maturity and the future for him and Clea has become uncertain, complex, but still possible.

The enigmatic Purswarden assumes a continually enlarging role as both a character and as a spokesman throughout the tetralogy. Most of the time he is already dead and has become only a remembered voice or text. He, or the memory of him, hangs around throughout the Quartet. This gives the observer the opportunity to find in Purswarden what he wants to find. Purswarden's own reality will always be relative, therefore. His poetry is quoted, his tetralogy God is a Humorist referred to in passing, his letters reprinted, as well as his diary which is extensively quoted from. It becomes the heart of Clea containing important comments on the past. His poem about Liza, his sister and lover, is read by Mountolive. His suicide letters - one to Mountolive, the other to Liza, give two versions of his suicide. Darley quotes Purswarden a lot, especially in the fourth volume. Darley's near obsession with the memory of Purswarden is more than casual; it is a means of keeping him alive as a commentator after he has died as a character. According

to G. S. Fraser, Durrell in Pursewarden:

"has attempted to create an artist who is in Yeats' phrase in "A Vision", more or less exactly Durrell's own antithetical mask, an amalgam of Wyndham Lewis and D. H. Lawrence, both artists who were preachers and prophets as well as pure artists." (16)

The technique here for the creation of Pursewarden is much more elaborate, that is why we see Pursewarden through the eyes of many observers and he becomes a prophet and a preacher. The same does not happen with Gregory, in The Black Book, because he is only presented through one point of view. The technique used in the Quartet will be far more developed in Monsieur, where artists become their own protagonists, talking about themselves as projections of other writers.

According to Durrell, Pursewarden is his most successful creation in the Quartet. Pursewarden, nevertheless, does not seem to be wholly successful. We are not given any fragments of his novels, we get only examples of his elaborate brilliance, as in "My Conversation with Brother Ass". The real evidence of Pursewarden's greatness as a writer, his letters which were praised by Darley, we never see. Possibly this is because Durrell, having created "the great novelist", felt inadequate to write what he could have written. Henry Miller's opinion about Pursewarden is this:

"To be frank, of all the characters in the Quartet, Pursewarden is the least interesting to me. Darley and he seem to be two halves of the coin - like Lawrence in "Aaron's Rod". I never get the conviction that he was the great writer you wish him to seem. I think he'd come off better - forgive me, if you sliced down his remarks or observations. Too much persiflage. What I mean, more precisely, is that one is not sure at times whether the author is taking his double-face protagonist seriously or ironically." (17)

Pursewarden is supposed to be Durrell's voice on the theory of art and literature and that is why, perhaps, he

remains detached, an outsider. He watches Humanity and despises it, instead of steeping himself in it. Durrell's theory of the Heraldic Universe also seems like an external imposition on his novels, somewhat detached from what is actually written. Possibly the detachment and lack of involvement of Pursewarden and his theories reflect the discontent of Durrell with his own theories and doubtful application.

Pursewarden's suicide is a symbol of sterility, of everything coming to a dead end, of decadence. In this sense, he contrasts strongly with Darley, whose life suggest creativity. For Pursewarden, /Durrell life, an imitation of art, leads back to art, an imitation of life. As we have noted, life which imitates art is decadent because we have imitation of an imitation. The impossibility of becoming an artist - the prerequisite is to shed those qualities such as egotism, that lead to the decision to become an artist, is called by Pursewarden "The Whole Joke". It is in his sharp remarks to Darley (as Brother Ass) that he takes himself seriously and unseriously. His passion and his confusion have dramatic value. He justifies himself with a smile. To Pursewarden, only the artist makes things happen, and society should be founded on him.

Pursewarden's claim is that the artist must abdicate his life and surrender it to art. He does not do this, and yet, he is an artist. He fails as a man for not having endured his decadent love-relationship with his sister. The strain in his life made it unbearable to continue living. Nevertheless, he produced good art, it seems. Again, we can refer back to the Heraldic Universe Theory, which says that art is bad, because of the strain imposed on the artist's life.

Alexandria is a world of romance and decadence. It is the

mixture of races, classes, nationalities, religions, civilizations; the intrigue, the power, the mysticism and superstition; the ostentation of shameless riches, the destitution of ~~a~~bject disease and of bitter poverty, consciousness of vice, perversion, injustice. It is a world of lust, of indifference, of sordidness, but at the same time it is a world of passion, of meaningful relationships, of love and sex.

There are many sexual relationships among the characters. One thing in common is that almost all of these relationships are decadent, all conceived by Durrell as aspects of, and sustained by, the Alexandria complex, which is essentially amoral and valueless. Most sexual relationships are decadent in the sense that they have nothing to do with love, they are simply reflex actions. Even those affairs which show positive passionate love are decadent and tragic. For example, Cohen and Melissa (pathetic ugliness loving uncaring sick beauty), Narouz and Clea (brutal ugliness loving sexually unstable beauty), Leila and Mountolive (beauty turned small-pox ravaged ugliness loving young and handsome diplomat), Liza and Pursewarden (incest). The prismatic world of love, manifesting itself in various ways and in numerous characters is a part of Alexandria and its spirit.

The city, like its human inhabitants, has many sides and many voices. Like love, it is at one and the same time a moment of beauty and passionate tenderness with Justine or Melissa or a moment of carnal lust in a filthy whorehouse. It engages people, and this Darley finds out after losing Justine. He then tries to escape from it and goes to the Upper Egypt for two dismal years. In Upper Egypt, however, he feels that nothing is meaningful and that he must come back in order to experience more from Alexandria, his White Goddess, a perverse Goddess, who never

grants peace to her seekers and nevertheless has a strange equivocal power over all of them, as Darley recognizes.

The relevance of the notion of Groddeck's "IT" to the all-pervasiveness of the atmosphere of Alexandria is crucial. The lives and loves of all Durrell's characters are, in one way or another, interconnected with this unique Egyptian city. Durrell implies that Alexandria, unknowable and mysterious, is the "IT" whose forces, conflicts and will are greater and more real than its uncertain inhabitants. He does not conceive the individual and the Alexandria "IT" existing in isolation from each other, they are interwoven and relative, but all part of the same universe. Love, thus, and its manifestations, would also be an expression not of the individual, but of the "IT", or of Alexandria which imposes its essence upon those within its web, as Justine suggests.

The characters, living in this unity of being-world, seem to complement each other: Darley working up towards the state of an artist, Pursewarden moving beyond it. Nessim is complementary to his brother Narouz. The first has become wholly westernized, a cool refined modern man, the second, a primitive country squire, fierce, cruel, powerful and tender. Justine is aggressive and powerful as Melissa is gentle and weak. Balthazar and Scobie, the one sage, the other a fool, are both homosexuals and the murder of Scobie, when disguised as a woman, could be compared to Balthazar's social disgrace, physical decadence and attempted suicide.

Characters again may be mirror-images of each other. All these mirror-image characters living in a unique world of love and lust, and under the power of the White Goddess are extremely decadent as well as narcissistic, because these are the

characteristics of the mirror-gazing world.

The decadence shown in the Quartet is different, nevertheless from that one presented in The Black Book, where the characters are contaminated by the English Death. In the Quartet, the inhabitants are decadent but they love and hate their city. They are:

"beings unconsciously made part of place, buried to the waist among the ruins of a single city, steeped in its values." (18)

Decadent inhabitants like Capodistria, the depraved symbol of lust and degraded human emotion (his nickname is the Great Porn), the homosexuals (Toto de Brunel, Scobie, Balthazar), Justine and Melissa, belong to the city. Clea is the only Alexandrian who has never been in love with Alexandria, because she is aware of its decadent aspect and she, herself, cannot be considered a decadent character but a romantic figure with gold hair and blue eyes on whom all the others rely. She refers to the city:

"as it really is - with its harsh, circumscribed contour and its wicked, pleasure-loving and unromantic inhabitants." (19)

She likens Alexandria to "some great public urinal"(2) and escapes from it twice.

The foreigners, like Pombal and Pursewarden, are also decadent figures. They represent the bohemianism Durrell has presented in The Black Book. Pursewarden's incest is one proof of his decadence and the source of his tragedy. The incest theme is repeated in Tunc and Nunquam and in Monsieur and always leads to tragedy. One of the couple dies while the other goes mad, like in the case of Benedicta (Tunc and Nunquam) and Sylvie (Monsieur).

Pombal is a minor French consular official always busy-

ing himself with love affairs - his own and others. Darley is first presented as a teacher and then as an official for the British Embassy, but we never see them at work and work is never mentioned by any of them. Although being bohemian and decadent, they are accepted in the Egyptian society as normal people and not outcasts, as they would be in an English environment and as the characters in The Black Book are. Also, in Monsieur, the trio Bruce/Sylvie /Piers have retreated from their society. Even Mountolive and Nessim, who could not be considered bohemian, are never seen at work and they mix perfectly with the bohemian group. In some ways, Mountolive embodies the "English Death" dramatized in The Black Book.

Durrell uses degeneracy and sexual degradation, closely linked with the grotesque, to create a total impression of a world of decay, where the finer human sensibilities are mocked and travestied. This can be seen in the rutting of Narouz in a whorehouse, the transformation of beautiful Leila into a small-pox ravaged, foul-smelling old hag, the transformation of Justine, Mountolive's horrifying experience in the child brothel, the unfeeling slaughtering of animals on the city streets, and so on. The total picture gives an overwhelming sense of physical decay and degradation, and a corresponding brutalizing and degeneracy of the spirit. He also shows decadence when he insists in writing about the same subject: Mouers is a reworking of Arnauti's Justine, Justine is a reworking of Darley's memories, Balthazar is a reworking of a reworking written by Balthazar. Durrell, then, by using his prismatic technique reworks the same reality many times and shows an almost morbid fascination in going over a grotesque and decadent past, over and over again. The same device will be used, with much more evidence, in Monsieur.

where the tendencies towards decadence increase considerably.

The spirit of place is very strongly evoked in the Quartet. Alexandria for Darley/Durrell would be a mother/bitch figure and a muse, by whom the writer is fascinated. According to Graves, as I have already mentioned, the artist must experience the power of the muse in a real woman who later will withdraw, refusing him. In terms of human relationships, there is a certain unhealthiness in the concept of the artist's interest in a woman being inspired fundamentally not by the woman herself, but by the muse figure embodied in her. Durrell does not, as I have said, explicitly claim that he or his characters are muse-inspired in this way, but the problem remains whether Darley's relationship with Justine, for example, or Arnauti's with Claudia/Justine would have been more successful in human, if not artistic, terms, if the women had not been playing a dual role. Clea, as I have said, is not a muse-figure for Darley, and their relationship is less complicated and less stressful, with the corollary that Darley is artistically uninspired during their affair. The pastoral girl in The Black Book like Clea represents purity and consequently is not a source of creativity. In Monsieur there is a further development towards decadence in the muse figure, as we shall see in the following chapter.

Darley exiles himself three times in the Quartet. The first time is not for reasons of art, but to escape for personal reasons, while the second and third times he retreats to be free and create.

For Darley, the Greek island would be the place to isolate himself from his experiences in Alexandria, "The White Goddess" and reorder them. The Greek island is the ideal place, for the artist is not involved in its history. He says:



"I have escaped to this island... I do not know why I used the word "escape". The villagers say jokingly that only a sick man would choose such a remote place to rebuild... I light a lamp and walk about, thinking of my friends - of Justine and Nessim, of Melissa and Balthazar. I return link by link along the iron chains of memory to the city which we inhabited so briefly together: the city which used us as its flora - precipitated in us conflicts which were hers and which we mistook for our own - beloved Alexandria."  
(21)

Again, it is symbolically on a little island where Clea and Darley spend their idyllic love affair, that Clea, almost dying, will be reborn as an artist.

Pursewarden is also an expatriate. He hates the British attitude towards life but England and his English sister are his muses. He escapes from them, but we never know if he writes about them. We only hear his theories of art.

In the Quartet, like in The Black Book, we have artists who are bohemian, decadent, linked to the place where they live and generally escaping from it. Durrell's artists, however, make up a composite concept of what Durrell thinks an artist is. This composite concept is explored more specifically in Monsieur. Using his own words when asked if he were Justine:

"No. Nor am I Mountolive. But they are my pets, my toys, my inventions, my recreation... In England, I'm always asked who the original of this or that character is. There don't seem to be any originals; these paper creatures simply present themselves. I don't want them to be copies from life but to have (apart from their reality) a symbolic life of their own." (22)

In this remark we can see Durrell's intense concern with his own creations, and his consciousness that he is playing with a series of possibilities. He claims they simply present themselves to him, without originals in reality, but we shall see

in Monsieur that he comes deliberately to use originals, and to experiment with them, juggling with his perceived reality and the fictions he makes up, in order to create a world in which it is impossible to separate reality from fiction. The prime focus of interest is however, as I have indicated earlier, in the techniques of manipulation rather than the end result. This is symptomatic of an increasing tendency towards decadence, which we shall analyse more thoroughly in the following chapter.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

- (01) DURRELL, Lawrence. Balthazar. Pocket Books, N. Y., 1972, Introduction
- (02) DURRELL, *ibid.* Introduction.
- (03) DURRELL, *op cit.* p.
- (04) DURRELL, Lawrence. The Kneller Tape - L. Durrell speaking in Moore, Harry T. - ed. by The World of Lawrence Durrell. E.P. Dutton, N.Y., 1964. p. 163.
- (05) FRIEDMAN, Alan Warren. Lawrence Durrell and The Alexandria Quartet. University of Oklahoma Press, 1970. quoting "Durrell's Key to Modern Poetry" p. 60.
- (06) DURRELL, Lawrence. Justine. Pocket Books, N.Y., 1963. p.14.
- (07) DURRELL, *ibid.* p. 64.
- (08) DURRELL, *ibid.* p. 46
- (09) DURRELL, *ibid.* p. 115.
- (10) DURRELL, Balthazar, *op. cit.* p. 18.
- (11) DURRELL, *op. cit.* p.
- (12) DURRELL, Lawrence. Clea. Pocket Books, N.Y. 1969. p.
- (13) DURRELL, *ibid.* p. 159.
- (14) DURRELL, Balthazar. *op. cit.* p. 180
- (15) DURRELL, *ibid.* p. 180.
- (16) FRASER, G.S. Lawrence Durrell. Faber and Faber, London, 1968. p. 137.
- (17) WICKES, George, ed. by Lawrence Durrell and Henry Miller, A Private Correspondence, Faber and Faber, London, 1963. p. 361.
- (18) DURRELL, Balthazar. *ibid.*, p. 221.
- (19) DURRELL, Lawrence. Mountolive. Pocket Books, N.Y., 1969. p. 138.
- (20) DURRELL, Clea. *ibid* p. 95.
- (21) DURRELL, Justine. *ibid.* p.3.
- (22) DURRELL, in Moore, *op. cit.*, p. 159

5. MONSIEUR OR THE PRINCE OF DARKNESS

In this last section, I will continue to show the development of the themes of place, escape, exile, bohemianism and decadence which were already studied in the previous sections, as well as the development of the techniques used by Durrell. I shall try to show that in his last novel these themes become dominated by the overriding theme of decadence and also the narrative structure reflects a narcissistic, introverted Durrell minutely examining his own acts of creation through a series of writers writing about each other, all essentially Durrell. The writers in the novel are constantly made to analyse their own acts of writing, consciously fusing reality and created fiction, so that they are wrapped up completely in their own craft. Thus, the attempt to create a reality based on a multiple point of view, with the actual narrator Durrell relatively unobtrusive, is abandoned in favour of an open manipulation by Durrell of characters and events. The tale itself is fairly straightforward, and the devices and stratagems of the artist appear more important than anything else.

In The Black Book and in the Quartet, the artists needed to escape from their sources of inspiration, England and Alexandria, in order to write about them, and their exile was artistically productive. In Monsieur the major characters withdraw from the world, some to Venice or to a decaying chateau in Provence, to stagnate or die. Much of Monsieur takes place in Provence, at the chateau of Verfeuille, and Durrell deliberately creates an atmosphere of great age, decay and sterility. The artistically dynamic bitch/mother/muse found in The Black Book and in the Quartet has degenerated into the ancient debilitated Duchess of Tu, who turns out finally to be dead, and now existing only in the artist's imagination. Finally, the ostensible concern of the novel is with the essential nihilism and negation of gnosticism in which no positive act is possible, except resignation to the hopelessly immutable fact that the world is ruled by Monsieur or the Prince of Darkness.

The narrative structure of Monsieur is much more complicated than all the other books, because Durrell creates a whole novel about writers writing about themselves, each one being a creation of another. Although using almost the same techniques as the Quartet (the use of diaries, letters, stories), the relativity theme here is not so

strong as it was in the Quartet, as the story is really quite straightforward, as are the motivations. It is however, the deliberate confusion of multiple narrators, each being a creation of another, that is deceptive. Since a central concern of the book is the way in which a novel is woven out of fact and fiction, deliberately intermingled and mutually reflecting, the structure of the book is extremely convoluted.

The basic structure of Durrell's book called Monsieur or The Prince of Darkness consists of Durrell as omniscient narrator, who has created the novelist Blanford. Blanford is conscious of being a creation of Durrell, and has gathered material for his novel also called Monsieur or The Prince of Darkness, not all of which is actually used, and the characters and events are supposedly based on his own life. Among the characters he toys with are Sutcliffe, Bruce Drexel, Sylvie and Piers de Nogaret and Toby, the historian. The whole book, apart from the last section, is written as if by Blanford. Blanford creates Sutcliffe the novelist, and amuses himself by also creating Bloshford, and the novelist Bloshford is meant to be a parody of himself Blanford, of whom Sutcliffe is both envious and contemptuous, because of his cheap popular success. Sutcliffe also writes a novel about Bruce, Sylvie and Piers, which is discussed and quoted by the three characters, and also by Sutcliffe. He also writes a novel with a first person narrator, and objectifies himself as the main character. Here he creates another character, Oakshot, who Sutcliffe identifies with Bruce. Bruce's diaries form a large part of the novel, as well as stories, diaries, letters, etc, from others. All characters are highly conscious that they are either creating fiction or reworking reality, and there is much deliberate thinking of possible lines of development and characterization, and critical comment on these possibilities.

The book is divided into five chapters. In the first one "Outremer" Bruce Drexel is the first "I" narrator presented. He writes a diary about himself and his relationship with the other

characters, especially with Piers and Sylvie de Nogaret, the brother and sister who he met while young and who became his lovers, as well as having an incestuous relationship themselves. The second chapter, "Macabru" is also written by Bruce. Here, he refers back to his life in Egypt with Piers and Sylvie, to their introduction to the theory of gnosticism in Macabru, to Sutcliffe's life and misfortunes with his wife Pia. Piers, Bruce and Sylvie are introduced to Akkad through Sutcliffe, and through Akkad to the theories of gnosticism. One aspect of gnosticism relevant here is that devotees are warned of their impending execution by a member of the sect. The date of this, determined by unspecified gnostic calculation is charted on the death map. Piers, absorbed by the mysticism, is executed in this fashion, as was the Duchess of Tu. Bruce, in this second chapter, tries to rework the past through another angle, and here we already sense the narcissism of the writer writing about his own self.

The third chapter, "Sutcliffe, the Venetian Documents", is written by Sutcliffe who writes about himself, about the trio Bruce/Sylvie/Piers and about Bloshford. Sutcliffe writes as an "I" narrator, but he also writes about himself as a character, as a third person. Here the decadent nature of self-concern, of writing about one's life as a third person becomes explicit. Sutcliffe is entranced at the way he can manipulate himself as a third person character.

In "Life with Toby", the fourth part, Bruce writes again. Piers is dead, Sutcliffe is dead. Bruce tries to reorder things with the help of Toby, the English historian who is studying the mysteries of the Templars.\* Running through the whole book is the interest in the mystery of the extinction of the Templars. Toby is dissatisfied

---

\*-Templars: military religious order founded by Hugues de Paysn not much before 1118 and officially suppressed by Pope Clement V in 1312. The Templars were warriors who took the traditional monastic vows of chastity, poverty and obedience. Expanding rapidly in size and wealth they became an organized order. Their work was to aid and protect Christian pilgrims. The supreme work of the order in the 12th century was the conduct of a permanent crusade against the infidel. They became deeply involved in financial operations. Its great wealth evoked hostility for the princes of Europe. In 1307 Philip IV of France, moved against the order. All the Templars were arrested and charged with heresy, witchcraft and sodomy. Eventually 120 Templars were condemned and executed. (1)

with the traditional explanation and his ultimate solution (given in a lengthy extract from his book) suggests that the order became converted from within to gnosticism. It was an ancestor of Piers who betrayed the order, and Piers, as last of the line, is also desperately interested in discovering the secret.

"The original de Nogaret had become a Templar himself in order to penetrate the order and destroy it more completely from within. The role of Judas suited him admirably and like Judas he went mad and at last hung himself."(2)

According to Toby, the sin of the Templars was that they were corrupted from within and that they became gnostics. Thus, they had to accept the death and extinction which was imposed by the Inquisition. Piers, the last of the Templars, felt the guilt of his ancestor and became a gnostic himself. Toby's concern with death and the corruption of an organization as well as his research carried out in the ancient and dusty atmosphere of the muniment room at Verfeuille, where all the old dusty records of generations were piled up, shows his interest in a decadent past.

In the last chapter, "Dinner at Quartilla's" we meet an omniscient author, presumably Durrell, who suddenly presents to the reader, the writer Aubrey Blanford, who has never been mentioned before, and who is the creator of all the characters. It appears then that there is one more layer between Durrell and his characters, and that all we have been reading is supposedly the work of this author, behind whom stands Durrell. It is now revealed that when Sutcliffe (Blanford's creation) was writing about the writer Bloshford, he was writing about Blanford, who deliberately changed his own name. Blanford also appears in Bruce's diary as a novelist and the biographer of Sutcliffe after his death.

According to Blanford, his characters are based on real figures of his own life. He discusses how he uses real people as models for his creations, but later he is confused as to which are real and which are fiction. But what is reality, truth or illusion in this world of writers? Blanford himself, is made to doubt his own existence when he says:

"It is a moot point whether Socrates is fact, existed as something more than a character in a novel by Plato. And what of me, he thought? Am I possibly an invention of someone like old D - the devil at large?"(3)

Lawrence Durrell, the old devil, as he calls himself,

plays with himself and retreats into his own creation, for he is the creator of Monsieur. This extra layer, allowing for further self-conscious experimentation, involves Durrell farther in narcissism and confusion of art and reality.

The use of prismatic reality as a technique was scarcely developed in The Black Book. We had there two narrators, only one commenting on the other, as I have already concluded in Chapter 3. In the Quartet, however, this technique was far more developed - many narrators there describe events according to their own subjective points of view. Here, in Monsieur, Durrell still follows the same prismatic line of thought. Truth for him does not exist in itself.

"Toby, in a flash of sincerity said: 'I have never spoken a truthful word in my life and I have always given several conflicting accounts of the same incident - so aware am I of the relativity of knowledge and the distortion of human vision. "(4)

The difference between the Quartet and Monsieur is that in the latter Durrell creates characters deliberately selecting and discarding fact and fiction to create a plausible reality. Whereas in the Quartet the total vision is a composite of events viewed through the eyes of multiple characters, in Monsieur, there is no such total vision, only a series of possibilities contrived by various creators. Much less frequently than in the Quartet do we see the same event through different eyes. The Christmas party, for example, is described by Bruce and Sutcliffe and nobody else. Bruce writes what he thinks about himself, Sylvie and Piers and Sutcliffe also views the trio from a different angle, but most of the time, Bruce (or Sutcliffe) analyses his own actions and feelings. Although many narrators are presented, we realize by the end of the book, that there is only one narrator, who creates new truths about himself and presents himself through different angles. While in



the Quartet reality is diversified according to different individuals, in Monsieur reality is centralized, in a very narcissistic way around just one person - Durrell. It might appear that Durrell has simply abandoned the pretence in the Quartet of a prismatic reality, since at bottom, any novel is essentially the creation of its author, and any attempts at presenting multiple versions of reality are only an extension of what the omniscient author is able to create anyway. This however is simply a recognition of a self-evident truth and does not account for Durrell's feverish interest in the manipulative options available to him as a writer.

Durrell's interest in his creative process and the fascination with his own ability and techniques of composing a reality, is decadent. It shows a switch of interest from the end result to the machinery of the artist's techniques. Durrell is obtruding himself and his craftsmanship so much that they become the central concern of the novel.

From a consideration of the self-involved narrative structure we may consider the artists Durrell creates in order to tell his story. The main concern of Durrell in Monsieur is the writer. Therefore, there is Blanford, who creates another writer Sutcliffe who is made to create Oakshot. Bruce is a diarist, who it seems, is not interested in being an artist. He only tries to rework his past experiences.

"It has done me good to put so much down on paper, though I notice that in the very act of recording things, one makes them submit to a kind of ordering which may be false, proceeding as if causality was the real culprit."(5)

Bruce, thus, is highly conscious of the implications of the reworking of reality. He is the narrator of the straightforward story of his love affair with Piers and Sylvie who were also lovers. The love affair/incest between them, although it seems to be a perfect relationship lived outside ordinary conventions, led them finally to tragedy.

"The three of them could hardly tell themselves apart, become a sort of congeries of loving emotions, all mutually complementary. None of this was achieved without a tremendous struggle against their sense of rightness, logic, even appropriateness. They won, but it severed them from the world, and yet, they lived a quasi-wordly life for years, which had little reality outside the company of each other. A happy trinity of lovers."(6)

Their relationship is specifically compared to that of Hamlet, Ophelia

and Laertes. Sylvie goes mad, like Ophelia, Piers dies, Bruce survives, but alone and isolated, living in a decadent world of memories. Life here, imitates art.

Through Bruce, we know about Piers' involvement with the gnostics and his later death; about Toby, the English historian. Still through Bruce, we know about Sylvie's madness and about Sutcliffe's life and death. Bruce describes his involvement with the others. As a character in Blanford's novel, he survives.

Sutcliffe is the writer created by Blanford who wrote a novel based on the same characters Bruce has already mentioned. He suffered a great deal in his life. His marriage with Pia (Bruce's sister) is a disaster, as Blanford and Livia's also is. Both women are male lesbians. Between Sutcliffe and Pia, there is Trash, the American negress with whom Pia falls in love. As her name indicates, she is vicious, morbid, half-educated. Trash and Pia's relationship indicates depravity, and can be characterized as sexual decadence.

"To be more explicit still, it was here in Venice that she (Pia) had elected to tell him (Sutcliffe) everything which explained the peculiar hold of the place. Those scenes had marked his mind as if with a branding iron. The old American duchess, for example, who entrained them into her circle. Pictorially alone, the scene was extraordinary. Huge sides of oxen were delivered to the house in the Via Caravi, whole beefs split down the middle. In these bloody cradles they would lie and make love while the men in blood-stained aprons stood around and jeered. He could see the pale Pia like Venus Anadyomene in a thoroughly contemporary version of Botticelli lying pale and exhausted in a crucible of red flesh with the black glossy body of Trash looming over her." (7)

Pia/Livia commits suicide. After Pia's death, Sutcliffe has a sexual relationship with Sabine, and through her, he learns more about Pia. Their relationship indicates Sutcliffe's interest in raking over the ashes of a sexually degenerate past. Sabine was a sort of a bohemian gipsy, but the daughter of a rich banker. She is shown living the kind of double life that Justine lived - equally at home in sophisticated society and in the unrestricted role of a bohemian gipsy. She was also a member of the gnostic sect. Sutcliffe's great love, however, was for Pia and he fails as a man because Pia leaves him for Trash, the lesbian. Like Pursewarden, Sutcliffe was considered a great artist, but both committed suicide. Both created, although suffering. Sutcliffe ended his life in a total regression to childhood. His decline and fall began after

he realized he and Pia would never live together again. He isolated himself in two rooms in the house of an old crone in Avignon who took in unwanted or illegitimate children for a small fee and who ill-treated and starved them to death. She was Sutcliffe's only company. They drank and took drugs. He had deliberately taken to wetting his bed. Bruce says:

"all this ostentatious display of infantile regression was all the more mysterious for being conscious. After all, Sutcliffe had started life as a psychologist."(8)

He died drowned in the river while riding a horse and was found hunched in a foetal position, like Tarquin in The Black Book who was taken to hospital in a foetal position. Sutcliffe's physical and spiritual degeneration was the result of his suffering over Pia.

"The greater the artist, the greater the emotional weakling, the greater the infantile dependence on love."(9)

He failed as a man because of his dependency on love. His suffering, however, seemed to heighten his art. According to the Heraldic Universe Theory, art is bad because of the suffering of the artist. Sutcliffe, like Pursewarden, contradicts the theory, because he produced good art in spite of his sufferings.

Sutcliffe, as an artist, is too concerned with himself. The crucial thing is that he treats himself as an "I" narrator and as a third person, and after all, he is only a creation of Blanford. Blanford, thus, creates an artist who is a projection of himself and Sutcliffe refracts and reflects his own personality. Sutcliffe also creates a character called Oakshot, who becomes more and more real for him. Oakshot however, is not placed in any novel, though Sutcliffe imagines him as Bruce. We simply see Sutcliffe playing with the possibilities of creating such a character. This shows again the concern with the mechanics of creation, the narcissistic and decadent worry of the introverted Sutcliffe with his own possibilities as a writer.

Blanford lived in the dying Venice. Like Darley in the Quartet, he doubted his capacity to reveal truth and reality.

"He supposed he was simply another vainglorious fool of a writer with insufficient courage to tell the whole truth about life."(10)

His physical defect ( he was a crippled) was perhaps, like Clea's, the motivation of his real art. Like Sutcliffe, his private life only brought him sufferings. According to Blanford, all his characters were part of himself, and they could even become real to him as Oakshot became to Sutcliffe.

"He felt so close to these people, he saw them everywhere; yesterday he had lunched at Sardou's right behind Sutcliffe - at any rate, it was the back of his head. At the end of the meal a hunchback woman came in to speak to him; she was very striking and resembled Sabine - expect for her disability."(11)

The confusion of fiction and reality is evident here. Does art imitate life or life imitate art? That is, while Blanford used models to create fictional characters and events, those characters and events afterwards appeared in a world of reality. Blanford's art and life degenerated to a mixture of fiction and reality. The only certain thing was that as a man and as an artist he was alone. The only truth would be death, which would come through "a flesh and blood postman", according to the gnostic practice in which the death sentence would be sent by post.

For artists like Sutcliffe/Blanford there is no way of beginning again, of being reborn as there was for Lucifer and Darley, who escaped and exiled themselves because they still had a chance to be reborn. Lucifer in The Black Book had to escape from the womb/death of England to be free to write, Darley also escaped to the Greek island, like Lucifer in order to create as an artist. In Monsieur , Piers/Sylvie/Bruce withdraw from society and Bruce writes his diary in the place of retreat, Verfeuille. He has gone there not to be reborn, but to decline and die. Sutcliffe/Blanford are exiled from Britain, but they exile themselves in the decaying city of Venice and in the graveyard atmosphere of Provence, surrounded by the ruins of the past. For them, then, there is no regeneration, but slow decline and death.

The places which were all so important in Durrell's books, are here also important. Nevertheless, all of them are overshadowed now by the main theme of decadence and decay. Avignon is

the old Provençal city where Blanford's characters lived for some time and the home town of Piers and Sylvie de Nogaret. It has also been in the past, the main centre of the order of the Templars, but nowadays, ruins and ancient buildings are found everywhere. A relationship like that of the trio could only happen in Avignon, with its forgotten moments of the past:

"We were old-fashioned, we belonged to the age of piety, and perhaps Avignon was the perfect site for this kind of blind adventure which would leave no trace behind, except for a lot of mouldering papers in an old chateau which interest nobody and one day would be sold for scrap."(12)

The Avignon countryside was a part of their lives, although we cannot say that it was a source of inspiration for the artist, like Alexandria or England. The sterile graveyard of Provence paralleled the sterility of the relationship of the trio. In the past, Verfeuille has been a prosperous and beautiful place, but after Piers's parents' death, its decline was gradual but sure. The trio, and occasionally their friends, lived there for a time. Piers, as a diplomat, had to work abroad in order to sustain Verfeuille. By the end of the book, Verfeuille is in a state of complete decay, and Bruce abandons it - Piers is dead, Sylvie is mad.

Blanford lived, as Sutcliffe also did for a time, in Venice, a symbolic choice, because of its slow sinking into the sea. It would be difficult to imagine a city more suited to a theme of slow decline and decay. Venice represents the hopelessness of the inevitable death.

"Blanford ... let his melancholy eyes wander along the delectable contours of dying Venice - the orchestra of divine buildings hallowed by the opalescent water-dusk."(13)

Durrell is evoking the spirit of place, not as a source of inspiration but because the writer can only create amongst ruins for he is becoming a ruin himself.

We have seen how Durrell established relationships between his artistis and women who were a source of inspiration, like Lucifer with Hilda, /Darley, Arnauti/ with /Justine, Claudia, . These women were regarded at various times as representing the bitch goddess/mother figure in whom the muse resided and from whom the artist ultimately had to break free. In the Quartet, we saw how Alexandria the place, and Justine the person, fused into the one

symbol. In these cases, the woman/muse was a dynamic figure, essential to the creative need of the writer.

In Monsieur , the muse figure has degenerated into the pathetic figure of the old Duchess of Tu. She is an old friend of Blanford, and we are not told of any earlier relationship. She could be considered his mother/muse figure, because she was the only one who could give him support. During her life Blanford regarded her as an authority for judging his work and she influenced him strongly. She appears in Sutcliffe's documents as an aging bohemian decadent. She writes to Sutcliffe:

"voluminous letters almost every week in which she has distilled the essence of her kindly and amoral philosophy of disenchantment. She smokes long green cigars, and once played the banjo in a diplomatic jazz-band. ... She is the only old lady I know who relentlessly summers at the little town of Cz and this in memory of a love-affair which endured for a decade, only to be cut short by death. Cz! "(14)

Even her name "Duchess of Tu" is a symbol of a fading gentility. "Tu" in French means "you" (the intimate form). We could relate her name, thus, to the mirror image and narcissism. She could have existed as a real figure, but she also could have been Blanford's other self.

In the final section of the book "Dinner at Quartilla" related by Durrell, Blanford meets the Duchess of Tu for dinner and they discuss his book and their past life. On the last page, however, we discover that she died some time ago, and Blanford has been talking to himself. Here the narcissism implicit in the muse figure becomes clear. Whether he knows it or not, Blanford is talking to himself. The question arises to whether in any muse relationship the creator is in fact drawing inspiration from an external source or whether it is simply a device enabling the creator to stimulate himself. In Monsieur, Durrell appears to take the latter view, emphasizing it by deliberate choice of the muse figure and then administering the final thrust by revealing the figure now exists only as a projection of the writer's mind.

The gnostic theory of the Egyptian thinker Akkad shows us once more Durrell's fascination with metaphysical and religious

systems. This theory, however, is completely pessimistic. According to it, the Prince of Darkness, the Evil God, has usurped the throne of the true God. There is no way of replacing him and no God to pray to and to help man.

"Evil rules the day"(15). Men are ruled by the Demon of Darkness and death and decay, destruction and tragedy are the consequences of its power.

"What sort of God, the gnostic asks himself, could organize things the way they are - this munching world of death and dissolution which pretends to have a Saviour, and a fountain of good at its base? What sort of God could have built this malefic machine of destruction. of self-immolation? Only the very spirit of the dark negative death - trend in nature - the spirit of nothingness and auto-annihilation. A world in which we are each other's food, each other's prey. "(16)

To the gnostics, the poetic act is a refusal to save oneself. Suicide however, is forbidden as it is a positive act. The essence of gnosticism as Durrell presents it, is nihilistic, although the intellectual and mystic aspects of it can be extremely stimulating, as Piers discovers. Gnosticism cannot then be described as completely sterile, if it absorbs the mind and spirit, even though its teachings demand an acceptance of the utter hopelessness of life under the Prince of Darkness. Whether Durrell believes in this is not clear though right at the end of the book we learn that Blanford himself is expecting a death-call soon.

In order to show the decisive nature of the contrast between Christian teaching and gnostic beliefs, Durrell presents two great set pieces in the form of religious services. The first one is the Christmas dinner celebrated at Verfeuille steeped in traditional lore. There, Piers, Sylvie, Bruce and their friends as well as the people who work in Verfeuille have their Christmas meal and distribute gifts. They are close to each other, but in truth, this is their last celebration and perhaps their last hope for life. Piers announced that he will leave Verfeuille. As soon as he leaves it, the inexorable process of decay begins. This service is a nostalgic evocation of traditional Christmas practice. It is a loving description of an irretrievable lost past, as innocent celebration of a faith which, according to gnosticism, has been corrupted and overthrown by Monsieur.

The second piece is the gnostic service in Macabru, Egypt, where all the guests after having eaten mummia flesh and after

having been drugged, see the Prince of Darkness. There, death and decadence are explicit. There is no way of escaping Monsieur and all must surrender to him .

There is a strong contrast between the two. In the first, there is the safe comforting belief in a Christian God and in salvation which in fact, will not be achieved. In the second, only the negative nature of life is shown. Man eats dead man and "evil rules the day". There is no hope.

Death, as the final step in the decline, occurs many times. In the Quartet there are many deaths, but in Monsieur the characters show a morbid attraction and fascination to it. Piers' funeral is described in a very detailed way and by the end of the ceremony, we find out that his head has been cut off from his body. We never know for certain why. Toby suggests that it was still a vengeance from the Templars, and therefore, that the order was still alive. Trash dies in the jungle, Pia and Livia commit suicide, Sutcliffe ends up in an almost subhuman condition. Bããnford is awaiting his death sentence. In this world where only decay and decadence are found, death is the only possible end.

In this final book then, the theme of decadence, which was just one of several in Durrell's early work, comes to overshadow all the other themes. Also Durrell's art has changed in the sense that instead of attempting to present a vision of a reality, using techniques based on relativity and the prism, he has come to concentrate on the mechanics of the creative process. The end result is irrelevant in a sense, for it is only one of a multitude of possibilities. Durrell copies himself, he makes art imitate life, and then life imitate art, and continues the process until we no longer know what is a reflection of what. We are forced to watch Durrell self-consciously and narcissistically manipulating life and art, employing more and more tricks and devices to confuse the reader. He has moved a long way from the ambitious attempt at creating a reality in the Quartet.



BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

- (01) ENCYCLOPEDIA INTERNATIONAL. Grolier Incorporated, N.Y., 1969, Vol. 17.
  - (02) DURRELL, Lawrence. Monsieur or the Prince of Darkness. Faber, London, 1974, p. 272.
  - (03) DURRELL, *ibid*, p. 281
  - (04) DURRELL, *ibid*, p. 265
  - (05) DURRELL, *ibid*, p. 171
  - (06) DURRELL, *ibid*, p. 43
  - (07) DURRELL, *ibid*, p. 182
  - (08) DURRELL, *ibid*, p. 16
  - (09) DURRELL, *ibid*, p. 171
  - (10) DURRELL, *ibid*, p. 281
  - (11) DURRELL, *ibid*, p. 283
  - (12) DURRELL, *ibid*, p. 23
  - (13) DURRELL, *ibid*, p. 276
  - (14) DURRELL, *ibid*, p. 210
  - (15) DURRELL, *ibid*, p. 132
  - (16) DURRELL, *ibid*, p. 137
-

6.

CONCLUSION

Artists, in Lawrence Durrell's major novels are those who reflect his own personality. We can feel Durrell's intrusion in all his artists. From Lucifer in The Black Book to Blanford in Monsieur, we have a composite of Durrell's different facets, concepts and vision of life. All of the artists add a different layer to our total view of Durrell as an artist. We can conclude, therefore, that his characters are the inevitable extension of his inner self and that he, as an author, cannot be analysed apart from his creations and vice-versa. Lucifer had his own initials and escaped from England, as Durrell did, to a Greek island in order to create. Darley had also Durrell's initials and like Lucifer, also exiled himself on an island in the Mediterranean. Darley lived in Alexandria which was a source of inspiration but from which he had to escape. Pursewarden was Durrell's voice in art and life. At this stage of Durrell's life, the artist was the one who could perceive reality and the only one to reorder and rework it. The artist, through his own experiences and with the help of many voices and many points of view, underwent a process of self discovery and maturation, and for him, the creative act was the source of life and hope.

In his last book, Durrell's concern with his own creative self, which was apparent but not obtrusive in his earlier works, develops to a great extent and Durrell becomes essentially inward-looking and narcissistic. He now uses his art as an attempt to explore experimental creative processes and possibilities of creating fiction. His main concern is with the technical problems of writing a novel and with the means available to the artist to create a reality. Durrell's fascination with these experimental techniques is evident from The Black Book onwards. However, in Monsieur, Durrell is asking the reader to watch him consciously shuffling with possible characters and events, deliberately showing that life reflects art, and that the distinction between the two is a false one. Durrell focuses the reader's attention on how this is done, rather than on the end result.

Decadence, for Durrell, has been a source of inspiration,

although he confesses being depressed by it. His early artists struggled against the moral decay in their environment, although being attached to it, in order to create. His last artists, however, are suffocated by decadence, are decadent themselves, and do not try to escape from it. Decadence is a part of their lives. They are fascinated with their own selves and become introverted and inward-looking. For them, the act of creation is a narcissistic manipulation of art, which imitates life.

Durrell, although perceiving the decadent side of life in his early works, still had a positive feeling towards it in the sense that the act of creation was a synonym for hope. The themes that are important to his work, which I have considered in this dissertation, have all become overlaid with decadence. In Monsieur, Durrell appears essentially inward-looking and nihilistic and his interest, and his creative techniques can be characterized as decadent.

It appears that Durrell has brought himself to a position where there is no hope of rebirth from degenerate narcissism. However, in view of his past prolific output, it seems unlikely that he will remain quite so hopelessly introverted and pessimistic much longer. It remains to be seen whether his next novel will continue in this vein, or whether he will strike out in new directions.

---

BERGONZI, Bernard. ed. by The Twentieth Century, Sphere History of Literature in the English Language. Vol. 7. Sphere Books Limited, London, 1970.

Encyclopédie Internationale - Grolier Incorporated, N.Y., 1969. Vol. 17.

DURRELL, Lawrence. Balthazar, Pocket Books, N.Y., 1972.

\_\_\_\_\_ . Bitter Lemons. Faber and Faber, London, 1973.

\_\_\_\_\_ . Clea. Pocket Books, N. Y., 1969.

\_\_\_\_\_ . Justine. Pocket Books, N. Y., 1963

\_\_\_\_\_ . Monsieur or The Prince of Darkness. Faber and Faber, London, 1974.

\_\_\_\_\_ . Mountolive. Pocket Books, N. Y., 1969.

\_\_\_\_\_ . Nunquam, Faber and Faber, London, 1968.

\_\_\_\_\_ . Prospero's Cell. Faber and Faber, London, 1967.

\_\_\_\_\_ . The Black Book. Faber and Faber, London, 1973.

\_\_\_\_\_ . The Dark Labyrinth. Faber and Faber, London, 1972.

\_\_\_\_\_ . Tunc. Faber and Faber, London, 1968.

FRASER, G. S. Lawrence Durrell - A Study. Faber and Faber, London, 1973.

FORD, Boris, ed. by - From Dickens to Hardy. The Pelican Guide to English Literature n° 6, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1963.

FRIEDMAN, Alan Warren - Lawrence Durrell and the Alexandria Quartet. University of Oklahoma Press, 1970.

GRAVES, Robert. The White Goddess. Faber and Faber, London 1962.

HENN, T. R. The Lonely Power. Studies in the Poetry of W. B. Yeats, Methuen and Co. Ltd, London, 1969.

KARL, Frederick R. A Reader's Guide to the Contemporary English Novel, Thames and Hudson, London, 1972.

MOORE, H. T. ed. The World of Lawrence Durrell, E. P. Dutton, N. Y., 1962.

ROBSON, W. W. Modern English Literature, Oxford University Press, Great Britain, 1971.

THOMAS, Alan ed. by Spirit of Place. Faber and Faber, London, 1969.

UNTERECKER, John ed. by. A Reader's Guide to W. B. Yeats, Thames and Hudson, London, 1973.

\_\_\_\_\_. Lawrence Durrell. Columbia Essays on Modern Writer nº 6. Columbia University Press, 1964.

\_\_\_\_\_. Yeats A Collection of Critical Essays Twentieth Century Views, Prentice Hall, Inc. N.J.; U.S.A. 1963.

WARD, A. C. Twentieth Century Literature. Longmans, London, 1970

W: B. Yeats, A Vision. Macmillan Press Ltd, Great Britain, 1974.

WEIGEL, J. A. Lawrence Durrell . E. P. Dutton, N. Y., 1966.

WICKES, George. ed. by. Lawrence Durrell and Henry Miller - A Private Correspondence. Faber and Faber, London, 1963.

Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English, A. S. Hornby, Oxford Press, 1974.

The American College Dictionary. Random House, N.Y., 1962.

Novo Michaelis. Dicionário Ilustrado - Português-Inglês vol.II. Edições Melhoramentos S. Paulo, 1968.