

THE MYTHOPOESIS OF LAWRENCE DURRELL

by

PHYLLIS MARGERY REEVE

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Department of English

The University of British Columbia,  
Vancouver 8, Canada

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ABSTRACT

In The Alexandria Quartet Lawrence Durrell develops a series of images involving mirrors, to suggest that truth, especially the truth about oneself, is to be approached only through the juxtaposition of many memories, times and selves. Since the self must find itself through other selves, the artist is concerned with love and friendship, where self is revealed in its relation to the other. In narcissism and incest, the self becomes the other, in relation to its own divided being.

The use of mirror allusions in connection with the acquisition of self-knowledge is apparent not only in the Quartet, but also in Durrell's poetry and in the early novels The Black Book and The Dark Labyrinth. In these works the mirror of self-knowledge is related to the problem of action. Obsessive preoccupation with the reflection, the inward vision, prevents one from acting or creating or looking outward. When Durrell's man unifies this reflection of his various selves and times, he is able to live productively, as Darley is beginning to do at the end of the tetralogy.

Both denotations of "reflection", the outer image and the inner thought, are involved in Durrell's allusions to mirrors, since both are aspects of the self, since the outward is continually used to suggest the inner, and since the goal is to unite outward and inner in the unitary self. The process is never completed, and Durrell deliberately leaves unanswered questions about his major characters.

Frequently the attempt to find an accurate reflection proceeds through the means of another "I" whose words or person may serve as a mirror. The "mirror" may be a lover, a friend or even a mere acquaintance or a stranger. The Alexandrians often watch each other in mirrors, so that the insight gained may be not into oneself only, but also into the character of another.

The multiple-view mirror, which reflects and distorts one object in various ways, is important in Durrell's scheme. There are always several ways of viewing anything, and the disparity may occur within the vision of one person, as well as among those of a number of people. The disunified self, with its conflicts and polarities, is a distorting mirror. To satisfy the need for definition of oneself, one creates from "selected fictions", from the relative truths of life, a self and a will which can love and act in relation to other selves and wills. Because the self must be created, the artist is a crucial symbolic figure.

The multiple-view mirror provides a narrative structure for the Quartet, the four novels providing four views of one series of events. Within this structure, episodes, images and phrases are echoed in various contexts to qualify and illuminate each other.

Important types of mirrors are the artist, who holds the mirror up to nature; the lover, who sees others in close relation to himself, especially if his love is homosexual or incestuous; the patient or hypochondriac, whose obsession with his physical self parallels a mental preoccupation.

The settings, Alexandria, Greece and England are extensions of the inner landscapes of their inhabitants. Alexandria reflects the multiple tumults of the non-rational self, Greece is a longed-for ideal of clarity and calm, and England is "Pudding Island", the repressive conventions of western civilization.

Durrell's "Heraldic Universe" is a comprehensive system of hinged mirrors, in which inner self and outer world reflect each other, as do one self and another self, creator and creation, macrocosm and microcosm. Symbolism is not merely a literary device but a characteristic of even the factual landscape of his travel books. Temporal and spatial positions are relative and prismatic. Durrell's heraldry is both a multiplicity of possibilities and a unity of interrelated realities.

This thesis proposes to show the consistent patterns of the mirrors and associated motifs and to suggest their significance within the context of Durrell's writing and theory, and in relation to the work of some contemporary writers, critics and psychologists. The argument follows the general sequence outlined above, beginning with the various uses of actual mirror images, proceeds to consider love, art, illness and landscape as reflectors and concludes with a general look at the "Heraldic" totality.

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ABBREVIATIONS

In references to books by Lawrence Durrell, the following abbreviations have been used:

<u>A &amp; O</u>	<u>Art and Outrage</u> (London, 1959)
<u>B</u>	<u>Balthazar</u> (New York, 1961)
<u>BL</u>	<u>Bitter Lemons</u> (London, 1957)
<u>BB</u>	<u>The Black Book</u> (New York, 1963)
<u>C</u>	<u>Clea</u> (New York, 1961)
<u>DL</u>	<u>The Dark Labyrinth</u> (London, 1961)
<u>J</u>	<u>Justine</u> (New York, 1962)
<u>Key</u>	<u>A Key to Modern Poetry</u> (London, 1952)
<u>M</u>	<u>Mountolive</u> (New York, 1961)
<u>P</u>	<u>The Poetry of Lawrence Durrell</u> (New York, 1962)
<u>Pope</u>	<u>Pope Joan</u> (London, 1960)
<u>Cor</u>	<u>A Private Correspondence</u> (New York, 1963)
<u>PC</u>	<u>Prospero's Cell</u> (London, 1945)
<u>MV</u>	<u>Reflections on a Marine Venus</u> (London, 1953)
<u>S</u>	<u>Sappho</u> (London, 1950)

All page references will be included in the body of the text.

A Brief Summary of the Alexandrians

The plot of The Alexandrian Quartet defies summary, but a brief outline of characters and their relationships might be helpful to readers of this thesis. The following dramatis personae is arranged roughly in order of importance.

- Darley: a not-yet-successful writer, the narrator of Justine, Balthazar and Clea.
- Pursewarden: a successful writer, who works in the British-Egyptian war office. He and Darley are often spokesman for Durrell. His unexplained suicide is a central problem for all four novels.
- Justine: a neurotic Jewish Cleopatra, formerly the wife of a writer Arnauti and now married to Nessim. She is mistress of both Darley and Pursewarden.
- Nessim: a wealthy Copt, engaged in subversive attempts to smuggle arms to Palestine.
- Melissa: a frail Greek prostitute, the mistress of Darley and, briefly, of Nessim. Her former lover is a Jewish businessman Cohen, through whom she learns compromising facts about Nessim's activities.
- Clea: an artist, the friend, and later the mistress, of Darley; the lesbian lover of Justine, and the confidante of nearly everyone.
- Balthazar: an aging doctor, philosopher, pederast and a leader of the Alexandrian cabal. He reveals to



Darley the double meaning of the events chronicled in Justine and is instrumental in other moments of truth.

Mountolive: the British ambassador to Egypt.

Leila: Nessim's mother and mistress of the youthful pre-ambassadorial Mountolive.

Liza: Pursewarden's blind sister and mistress, later Mountolive's wife.

Narouz: Nessim's brother, in love with Clea. He is physically gross, the opposite of the suave Nessim, and remains on the land. He is at times possessed by strange powers of speech which he employs fanatically in the Coptic cause.

Scobie: a comic character, an old wanderer finally more or less in the employ of the police department. The major characters spend many pages retelling his tall tales. He is homosexual and vaguely connected with Tiresias.

Pombal: a Frenchman, friend of Darley.

Capodistria: a pleasantly satanic friend of everyone. He disappears for political reasons and dabbles in black magic.

Amaril: a doctor, once Clea's lover. He is the principal in the romantic pursuit of Semira, for whom, with the assistance of plastic surgery and Clea's art he fashions a nose.

Maskelyne: officer in the war office, aware of Nessim's subversion, and unsympathetic towards him and his friends.

Keats: a journalist, the would-be biographer of Pursewarden.

## INTRODUCTION

### Alice in Alexandria

"Let's consider who it was that dreamed it all ...  
He was part of my dream of course - but then I was  
part of his dream too!"<sup>1</sup>

So speaks a bewildered self confronted with the possibility that its existence depends on the perceptions, the illusory perceptions at that, of another self whose view may differ from its own. No matter how much she may "consider", there is no way of knowing which view is right or partly right, or whether one or both are false. And this self cannot know the truth about its own selfhood without knowing how it appears in the dream of the other. The name of this particular self is Alice, the other is the Red King, and the setting is Looking-Glass Land. The image basic to Lewis Carroll's fantasy, together with the other images and motifs which emerge from it are remarkably similar to those in Lawrence Durrell's *Alexandrian Quartet*.<sup>2</sup>

Alice never solves the problem of the Red King's dream, the problem of her own existence in space and time. She herself is

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<sup>1</sup>Lewis Carroll. Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There. (Philadelphia, 1897), p. 209.

<sup>2</sup>In the Key Durrell quotes a letter from Lewis Carroll to a little girl, as an example of "detachment of the object from its frame of reference" and as an anticipation of surrealism: "'And I like two or three handfuls of hair, only they should always have a little girl's head beneath them to grow on, or else, whenever you open the door, they get blown all over the room, and then they get lost, you know.'" (p. 87) He links Carroll with Rimbaud, Laforgue and Nietzsche as important figures in the "Semantic Disturbance" (pp. 39 - 40) and quotes the Cambridge History of English Literature on Alice's problems with space and time. (p. 69)

a reflection in the mirror, and so is the Red King whose dream contains her existence, and who finally appears to be not a king or even a chessman, but a black kitten. Her identity is enmeshed in an involution of reflection within reflection. Her dilemma is expressed in terms of the geography of Looking-Glass Land, which bears comparison with the geography of Durrell's Alexandria. The terrain is a chessboard and the characters are chessmen; Alice herself is a pawn and thus restricted, though not paralysed in her movement, while around her reality moves in many directions and perspectives. A game of chess goes on and on through four volumes of the Alexandria Quartet. It is a game by correspondence, and, like Balthazar's philosophical researches, begins in the cabbalistic search for unity. The game, carried on by telegram and in code, becomes involved in Mountolive's uncovering of Nessim's subversion, and in Darley's penetration of the relationships in which he himself is concerned.

Dostoevsky, in his Notes from Underground, uses the chessboard to illustrate his contention that man strives for certainty, but shrinks from the realization of his goal. Conscious man

is a frivolous and incongruous creature, and perhaps, like a chess player, loves the process of the game, not the end of it. And who knows (there is no saying with certainty), perhaps the only goal on earth to which mankind is striving lies in the incessant process of attaining, in other words, in life itself, and not in the thing to be attained, which must always be expressed as a formula, as positive as twice two makes four, and such positiveness is not life, gentlemen, but the beginning of death.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>in Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York 1957), p. 77, hereafter cited as Notes. Durrell uses a quotation from Notes to head his critical essay entitled "The World Within". (Key, p. 49)

The search for the knowledge of self is desirable, but achieved knowledge of self suggests the reduction of individuality to mathematical abstraction.

Otto Rank discusses the mythological origins of chess, linking it with primitive maternity symbols and with the "primitive symbolism of death and resurrection." Its ancestor, the Egyptian snake game, was the subject of a legend in which two brothers turned the game into a duel in which one of them lost an eye.<sup>1</sup> Durrell's Leila is associated with a pet snake, and her sons engage in a struggle which results in Narouz's death and the loss of Nessim's eye.

In Looking-Glass Land, Alice can approach her object only by walking away from it, and Darley understands Alexandria only after leaving it. This reversal of spatial relations is one of the major illusions created by a mirror.

Alice finds that time too assumes this property of space; the White Queen screams before she is hurt, and Hatta is tried before he commits his crime.

Looking-Glass poetry, to be read, must be seen reflected in a mirror, and is even then not understood until subjected to Humpty Dumpty's exegesis. Similarly, Justine is puzzling until reflected

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<sup>1</sup>Art and Artist, (New York, 1932), pp. 308, 310. cf. Vladimir Nabokov, The Defense (New York, 1964), and the review by Robert J. Clements in Saturday Review, 26 September 1964, 45-46.

and revised by three other perspectives.

Besides the paradox of the Red King's dream, the reflection of the self in the other is suggested in the twinship of Tweedledum and Tweedledee, identical brothers with arms around each other's necks. One is inclined to suspect that they suffer from what Durrell's Scobie delicately refers to as "tendencies". Supposing their battle to parallel the snake-game duel, they have the problem of Nessim and Narouz, which is both incestuous and homosexual, as well as that of Liza and Pursewarden, which is merely incestuous.

Closely related to the phenomenon of reversed movement in time and space is the memory of Looking-Glass people. Remembrance is not only of things past, but of things future too; one remembers what has not yet occurred. Time, memory and identity are disarranged so as to become ridiculous concepts, and their expression is included in the major image of the mirror, an image of space.<sup>1</sup>

As early as 1936, Durrell wrote to Henry Miller:

I AM SLOWLY BUT VERY CAREFULLY AND WITHOUT CONSCIOUS THOUGHT DESTROYING TIME. I have discovered that the idea of duration is false. We have invented it as a philosophic jack-up to the idea of physical disintegration. THERE IS ONLY SPACE. A solid object has only three dimensions. Time, that old appendix, I've lopped off. So it needs a new attitude. An attitude without memory. A spatial existence in terms of the paper I'm writing on now at the moment.

(Cor. p. 19, Durrell's capitals)

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<sup>1</sup>Note the reference to Alice in My Family and Other Animals by Durrell's brother Gerald. See the Penguin edition (1962), pp. 9, 221, 225, 261.

In Alexandria, the true self is to be approached, never quite achieved, only through the juxtaposition of many memories, times, selves. There can be no solipsism. Self must find itself through other selves, and the artist is concerned with relationships; with love and friendship, where self is revealed in the other; with the identity of self with other in narcissism, incest, physical and mental inversion, and the self-obsessions of hypochondria and neuroses. To suggest these patterns, Durrell develops the image of the conventional mirror, the trick mirror and the multiple-view-mirror.

Alexandrians meet in mirrors, speak to each other in mirrors, talk to themselves in mirrors, sit naked in front of mirrors, write on mirrors, point guns at mirrors. Each mirror as it occurs in the course of the narrative is an unobtrusive piece of background furniture. As mirror after mirror is offered for mention in passing, the sum of them all is not a heap of glass, but a simultaneous crystallizing of narrative and symbol, action, consciousness and unconscious.

For the disintegrated self, Durrell prescribes unity, the focussing of images. He therefore alludes frequently to Gnosticism and its pursuit of the One, and to medicine and its healing of physical breakages. The artist wants "to combine, resolve and harmonise", and comes up with a world view which starts from Durrell's version of "relativity", the relationship of the self to everything, including its own and other selves

'a note of affirmation - the curvature of an embrace,  
the wordlessness of a lovers' code - some feeling that  
the world we live in is founded on something too simple

to be overdescribed as cosmic law, but as easy to grasp, as say, an act of tenderness in the primal relation between animal and plant, rain and soil, seed and trees, man and God. A relationship so delicate that it is all too easily broken by the inquiring mind and conscience.' (C, pp. 238 - 239)

When tenderness without deception is achieved, the artist begins to be successful.

Discussion in this paper will not be limited to the Quartet, because this very lack of limitation seems vital to Durrell's thought and art. As the letter quoted above suggests, the Quartet was not a sudden creation, despite the brief time of actual composition. These ideas of space-time, self, tenderness, and the images which suggest them appear in Durrell's early novels, his poetry and his travel books. In the tetralogy they are concentrated and developed to unity, but they have been there all along. A collection of his primary motifs occurs in the poem, "Cities, Plains and People":

the mirror:            O world of little mirrors in the light,

...

The faces of the innocents in wells.

physics and psychology:

The tidebound, tepid, causeless  
Continuum of terrors in the spirit.

...

Ego, my dear, and id  
Lie so profoundly hid  
In space-time void.

illness:            Until your pain became literature.

...

Yet here was a window  
Into the great sick-room, Europe.

...

... through introspection and disease.

love as communication:

... how sex became  
A lesser sort of speech, and the members doors.

(P, 134 - 149)



The first motif to be dealt with will be the mirror, since this image, or some notion of reflection, is continually present in conjunction with the other themes of the various forms of love, illness, landscape and philosophy.

The "hinged-mirror" view has taken various forms in the twentieth century novel, probably most impressively in Proust. Virginia Woolf's Orlando has "a great variety of selves to call upon", and is seeking "the key self, which amalgamates and controls them all".<sup>1</sup> Vladimir Nabokov's novel Pale Fire presents two autobiographies, each of which is also a commentary on the other, and one of which is by a schizophrenic to further multiply entities; and it presents them by means of such a maze of criss-cross references as to infinitely multiply the basic two views. Zemblan, the language of his mythical kingdom, is called "the tongue of the mirror".<sup>2</sup> These and other works will be mentioned where comparison seems interesting and relevant.

<sup>1</sup>(London, 1928), pp. 278, 279.

<sup>2</sup>(New York, 1962), p. 242.

CHAPTER ONE. The Mirror Image

A. Motifs related to the Mirror.

In Durrell's poem "On Mirrors", the mirrors have been turned to the wall, so the inhabitant of the house is deprived of this means of viewing himself.

You gone, the mirrors all reverted,  
Lay banging in the empty house,  
Redoubled their efforts to impede  
Waterlogged images of faces pleading.

So Fortunatus had a mirror which  
Imperilled his reason when it broke;  
The sleepers in their dormitory of glass  
Stirred once and sighed but never woke.

Time amputated so will bleed no more  
But flow like refuse now in clocks  
On clinic walls, in libraries and barracks,  
Not made to spend but kill and nothing more.

Yet mirrors abandoned drink like ponds:  
(Once they resumed the childhood of love)  
And overflowing, spreading, swallowing  
Like water light, show one averted face,

As in the capsule of the human eye  
Seen at infinity, the outer end of time,  
A man and woman lying sun-bemused  
In a blue vineyard by the Latin sea,

Steeped in each other's minds and breathing there  
Like wicks inhaling deep in golden oil.

(P, p. 27)

At the same time this inhabitant suffers another deprivation in the departure of his companion, who also served as a sort of mirror in which he could look for knowledge of himself. This double loss, of mirrors and of a loved person, is described in Mountolive. At the Coptic wake, as part of the duties to the dead, "the mirrors were shivered into a thousand fragments". (M, 313) The dead is

Narouz, the mourner is Nessim and the image of the shivered mirrors suggests their division.

The reversed mirrors of the poem become hostile to attempted reflections, "redoubled their efforts to impede/Waterlogged images of faces pleading". Water, is related to the mirror because it too can reflect; Narcissus, the prime lover of self, saw himself in the water, but water has wider connotations; especially it is symbolic of birth and rebirth in the perennial literary theme of the journey by water. The faces in the poem are "waterlogged". They have had too much water, too much searching of the self. Excessive introversion is an impediment to introspection or to a view of the self as it really is. The faces plead for an opportunity to be reflected accurately, but they are already waterlogged, and the mirrors do not help.

The poem alludes to Fortunatus' mirror which "imperilled his reason when it broke". The mirror is supposed to reveal a true image of things as they are, as reason would logically deduce them. The self reflected in this mirror is a scientifically proven self, reducible to a formula. The self revolts against this reflection, and by implication against reason, because, in the words of Dostoevsky's underground man, "Reason is nothing but reason and satisfies only the rational side of man's nature, while will is a manifestation of the whole life, that is, of the whole human life including reason and

all the impulses".<sup>1</sup> This "will" seems to be the "self" we have been discussing, or at least the preserver of the unitary existence, "what is most precious and most important - that is, our personality, our individuality". Durrell's Alexandrians have been criticised for their lack of will,<sup>2</sup> but this criticism misses the point that will is part of what they are seeking and therefore they cannot yet possess it. Also, such objections assume that will must always be manifesting itself in action, and I am not sure that this is so. Will may be contrary to reason, and to break the mirror of reason is paradoxically to achieve a better reflection. In Reflections on a Marine Venus,<sup>3</sup> Durrell alludes to the inadequacy of reason and religion as mirrors, that is, as aids to self-knowledge. One requires a degree of knowledge to recognize one's own reflection and realize its implications.

(Reason and religion) are equally suspect.  
They are both fogged mirrors, badly in need  
of cleaning. But the ignorant man can get  
nothing from either - not even a reflection  
of his own stupidity.

(MV, p. 169)

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<sup>1</sup>Notes, pp. 73, 74. See also Frederick J. Hoffman, Samuel Becket: the Language of Self (Carbondale, Ill., 1962), pp. 4, 7, 9. The underground man is "defeated by the mirror of self-will". "The power of the will ... is ... turned almost entirely inward ... a perverse interest in tortured self-analysis". The beloved "is a mirror in which the underground man sees only the effects of a closed self".

<sup>2</sup>e.g. Lionel Trilling, "The Quartet: Two Reviews", in The World of Lawrence Durrell, ed. Harry T. Moore (Carbondale, Ill., 1962), pp. 56-60. This volume will henceforth be referred to as World.

<sup>3</sup>Durrell's mirror is in non-fiction too. Note the title "Reflections". Travel, as will be seen in the discussion of landscape, is for him a form of introspection.

Reason also could insist on self-analysis beyond the point which the irrational self can bear.

Time is "amputated" in the poem because the other meaning of "reflection" involves memory, bringing past into present, and discarding the superfluous time between. Also, Durrell eliminates "time", as an impersonal means of scientific measurement and recognizes it only as one aspect of the life processes. Time, as it is shown "in clocks", is "refuse" now. It "will bleed no more", because it is no longer a part of life. The clocks in which it flows like refuse are in clinics, places of sickness; libraries, places of art, and memory; and barracks, places of regimentation and destruction; and all these places are important to Durrell's Alexandrians.

The abandoned mirrors become active and reflect the face even though it is averted, they "drink like ponds". Ponds do not drink, but are what we drink. The key to the paradox is the mirror. The pond in reflecting the face "drinks" it, takes it within the water. The mention of love is in place, for this reflection is not consciously sought by the self reflected but is a gratuitous offering, and the "mirror" often takes the form of another person through whom the self is found, or perhaps the form of one's own art. The mirror then seems to be the human eye which "sees" in various ways, "perceives", or, in the way in which a seer sees - into "infinity, the outer end of time".

The final mirror in the poem is a blend of the mirrors which Durrell most trusts. The lovers reflect each other's self, are "steeped in each other's minds", involving intellect as well as sense,

the unitary image. Their setting is "by the Latin sea", a Mediterranean landscape like the island to which Durrell sends Darley to clarify his reflection in both senses of that word. From this mirror, as from a lamp with "wicks inhaling deep in golden oil", light, illumination, new knowledge come.

Into this poem, Durrell has crowded suggestions of the various forms which the mirrors in the Quartet are to take:

reason and science, time, narcissism, sickness, art,  
destruction, seascape and landscape, and love.

The self-mirroring itself was Durrell's theme long before the Quartet was written. Gregory in the Black Book suffers from an extreme self-consciousness, and is always aware of himself "as an actor on an empty stage, his only audience the critical self". (BB, pp. 200-201). In his room, the "laboratory which I have made of my ego", Gregory rages in reverie until everything becomes intolerable; then he sobers himself by looking in the mirror.

The Black Book is a beginner's work, and the mirror symbolism is much less subtle than it is in the Alexandria Quartet, but this lack of subtlety leaves clues to some of the implications of Durrell's later uses of similar devices. Gregory aspires to involution, and the effigy which he would hex is his own. But he is unsuccessful:

"Daily I pierce the image of myself, and nothing happens". The reflecting self has no power over the acting self. There is a separation where there should be a unity: "All my life I have done this - imagined my actions. I have never taken part in them". (BB, p. 196)

Self reflecting self is spellbound and impotent, split into unconnected

parts:

'Ended. It is all ended. I realize that now, living here on the green carpet and living there in the mirror .... This is my eternal topic, I, Gregory Stylites, destroyed by the problem of personal action.' (BB, p. 228)

Gregory's statement of his problem follows mention of another separation in what should be unified, the gulf "between the people and their makers - the artists", resulting in an impotent civilization and a new Dark Age.

The problem of personal action arises when the self reflecting loses contact with the self reflected. Will cannot produce action, which leads outward, because this will is directed inward only. Victor Brombert<sup>1</sup> sees Durrell's time as "a mode of action" distinct from Proust's which is a "mode of memory", and this time is related to "the mirror-disease of thought, the solipsistic awareness of 'others', the walled-in quality of experience".<sup>2</sup> While concerned with the juxtaposition of various self-reflections and various times past, Darley cannot act and cannot create art. When he reconciles the re-

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<sup>1</sup>"Lawrence Durrell and his French Reputation, "World, pp. 174, 183.

<sup>2</sup>The distinction between Proust's and Durrell's uses of "time", "reflection", and "memory" is far from clear. In a sense memory replaces action in the process of Proustian time. As Joseph Wood Krutch explains, "The quality of a direct experience always eluded one and ... only in recollection could we grasp its real flavour". (Remembrance of Things Past, New York, 1934, vol. I, p. vii). A similar theory is suggested by the very structure of the Quartet, but for Durrell the memory "which catches sight of itself in a mirror" (B, p. 14) by that act of self-perception does become action, memory projecting beyond itself into the future of Clea - remembering the future, as in Alice's looking glass.

flections, he also moves forward in time and can begin to create. The state of non-action, which Brombert calls "exasperated and impotent desire", finds its symbol in the mirror. Brombert notes here the importance of the eye in a looking-glass world and in Durrell's visually rich Alexandria. The eye offers temptations and arouses desires which it is powerless to satisfy. Hence the prophetic eye and the blind eye are major parts of the mirror imagery.

Bombert thinks Durrell's mirror-complex resembles a game. Perhaps this is another commentary on Balthazar's chessboard.

The search for Durrell's hidden mirrors is something of a game in itself. Probably, like most investigations of literary catchwords, it can be pressed too far. But it can also lead to unsuspected and intriguing bypaths on the road to Alexandria. Consider the case of Maskelyne, the head of the War Office in Egypt while Mountolive is ambassador. He is a practical man, a man of "action", in the sense of "getting things done", and has no patience with Mountolive's unexplained delays. For him, the problem of Nessim is a matter of stark black and white, uncomplicated by the mesh of human relativity which binds Mountolive and turns his currents awry. In Time and Western Man, a book which interested Durrell and influenced him considerably, Wyndham Lewis discusses the theory that things are as they appear to one's senses (a stick seen partly in water is bent) and refers to "Maskelyne's illusions". This Maskelyne was a conjuror who mystified audiences at the turn of the century. According to the theory Lewis



is examining, an illusion "would be real - since it appeared real".

Now we return to the mirror:

As most of Maskelyne's illusions are effected by arrangements of looking glasses, they would very well illustrate this theory, which is almost entirely based on the experiences of a looking-glass world. It is a world in which the image comes to life, and the picture, under suitable conditions moves and lives inside its frame.<sup>1</sup>

The implications of this passage for the Alexandria Quartet are various. In the first place, Darley's illusions are true, despite Balthazar's proof of their falsity. The Quartet is not a detective story, discarding red herring and proceeding towards the single unarguable basic truth. Truth is relative in Alexandria; what is true for Darley is not true for Justine, but this does not make it less true for him. Many looking-glasses present many reflections of one object and of each other. The reflection becomes as real as that which it reflects. Again we are concerned with the making of images, the image of self, the creation of a work of art. The historical Maskelyne constructed automata, the most famous of which were Psycho, who played cards and may therefore bear some remote relation to the investigation of the psyche and to the Tarot symbols; and Zoe who drew pictures, an artist-robot.<sup>2</sup> Durrell's Maskelyne resembles an automaton in his scrupulous adherence to the literal law and his lack of concern for human relations. Psycho's introspective mysticism and Zoe's art are not among his strong points.

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<sup>1</sup>Time and Western Man (Boston, 1957) p. 403.

<sup>2</sup>Encyclopaedia Britannica, (1951), vol. II, p. 789b; vol. VI, p. 263b.

Maskelyne constructs automata in that his discovery of Nessim's secret renders Nessim, Mountolive and Pursewarden unable to direct the course of events by their own wills.

Still using Maskelyne's tricks as illustration, Lewis postulates a magical trick in which the psycho-conjuror cuts up the self:

Then if each piece were put into a separate glass receptacle, not only the same self, but the whole self, would be found staring at the spectator out of each of its prisons.<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps this picture of the divided but inseparable self is behind Capodistria's homunculi, who, even in an atmosphere of formaldehyde, languish with love and jealousy. These pickled people stare at the spectator as a reflection returns the gaze of the person reflected. Maskelyne performs a similar trick in his separation of his official self from his human self.

But, in the multiple mirrors of the looking-glass world, it is Maskelyne who is right, as Mountolive and Pursewarden must concede. He knows the facts, knows what should be done about them, and does it. This is one point at which one questions what Durrell means by "action" and whether he considers it desirable. The answer probably lies with the will. Maskelyne acts not according to his will, but according to rule. He is what Dostoevsky's recluse calls a "normal" man, a "man of character, an active man", and this sort of man is "pre-eminently a limited creature".<sup>2</sup> Dostoevsky explains, "To begin to act, you know, you must first have your mind completely at ease

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<sup>1</sup>Time and Western Man, p. 406

<sup>2</sup>Notes, pp. 55, 65.

and no trace of doubt left in it". To anyone who sees himself reflected in many mirrors simultaneously, such a state is impossible.

### B. The Two Meanings of "Reflection"

The two meanings of "reflection", the outer image and the inner thought, are both involved in Durrell's allusions to mirrors, since both are reflections of various aspects of the self, since the outward is continually used to suggest the inner, and since, the goal is to unite outward and inner in the unitary self.

The inner sense of "reflection", defined by Sartre as "the attempt on the part of consciousness to become its own object",<sup>1</sup> is always concerned with time and memory, looking back and ordering the past in the light of present thought. It rearranges reality without altering it, as all mirrors rearrange spatial and dimensional relationships, or the visual illusion thereof, without actually moving anything.

Memory is reflected reality - like the mirror, the crystal or the echo. The thing remembered is not quite as it was; curiously, it is the same, though changed....

Perhaps the fascination in all reflection is the essence of poetry.<sup>2</sup>

Art is a means of reflection in either sense, whether it holds the mirror up to nature in a deliberately patterned comment on present

<sup>1</sup>Being and Nothingness (New York, 1956), p. 633.

<sup>2</sup>E.A. Collard, editorial in the Montreal Gazette, January 11, 1964, p. 8.

reality, or recollects emotion in tranquillity in an equally de-liberate re-creation of past experience.

Satre's definition applies equally well to inner and outer reflection; in both cases, the subject is its own object, looking at or thinking about itself. If one is to see one's self in a mirror, one must step back several paces. Pressing his face against the glass, the subject sees only his eye, enormous and grotesque.<sup>1</sup> Alice walked away from the flowers in order to reach them, and after living away from Alexandria, Darley could say, "My sympathy had discovered a new element inside itself - detachment." (C, p. 33)

This detachment is paradoxical. From the self's point of view, it is a disintegration of unitary personality into two parts, subject and object. But from an outside view, it is a union of two separate concepts, of subject and of object. Mountolive and Maskelyne are both right and both wrong, although they are opposed. They are dealing with the same situation, but the situation as viewed by Mountolive differs radically from that viewed by Maskelyne, and the difference is in the viewer. Moreover, this relative disintegration is taking place within the individual. Jung's introvert has to deal with the exterior world, and the interior world pursues his extravert into his outer life: "If a man is fixed upon the outer reality, he must live his myth; if he is turned

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<sup>1</sup>cf. Justine and Messim, "their open eyes staring into each other with the sightlessness of inhuman objects".

(M, p. 215)

towards the inner reality, then must he dream his outer, his so-called real life".<sup>1</sup>

The question, as Alice and the Red King knew, is where to draw the line between dream and reality, truth and falsehood. Perhaps there is no line; perhaps inner and outer are the same, or images of each other. Sometimes Durrell subordinates the Alexandrians to Alexandria, but it turns out that Alexandria is part of a landscape of the mind, so that at times there is no distinction between Alexandrians and Alexandria. Groddeck contends that "man creates the world in his own image, that all his inventions and activities, his science, art, finance, literature, vocabulary, industries and philosophies are in a special sense symbolic of his nature and primitive experience".<sup>2</sup> Durrell's Clea remarks about bombing-planes: "'I've always believed that our inventions mirror our secret wishes, and we wish for the end of the city-man, don't we?'" (M, p. 145) Civilization is a mirror of our collective selves, and each artifact a mirror of its designer. Jung too defines "the world" as "how I see the world, my attitude to the world ... 'my will' and 'my presentation'". Even the differences between the outer world and the inner dream are created by "my Yes and No",<sup>3</sup> by what I accept or reject.

Groddeck speculates concerning the pre-natal existence, "It seems likely that I must then have taken everything that surrounded

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<sup>1</sup>Jung, p. 210

<sup>2</sup>Groddeck, p. 25

<sup>3</sup>Jung, p. 237

me to be part of myself, self and environment being one united whole".<sup>1</sup>  
 This primitive state endures in Alexandria, description of environment being also description of self. The recurrence of the mirror image is one of the most prevalent and subtle examples of this tendency.

Discussing philosophical idealism, Wyndham Lewis postulates a world in which all phenomena of the environment are projections from the self, which, in the exterior world, is itself a mere reflection:

The impression of reality that you receive from within has this peculiarity, namely, that the illusion in this case is yourself....

In the case of the personality, if you consider the exterior world as a mirror world, you are inside the image in the mirror (Lewis's italics)....

The 'objects' that are its originals exist merely for it... the solid projections as it were of this one, immaterial thing. Looked at in that way, to be coloured and to be extended is, conversely, in this connection to be unreal.<sup>2</sup>

Here the inner is projected into the outer so that the outer becomes dependent on the inner. There is an identity of consciousness and environment, and the distinction between the "reflection" of thought and the "reflection" of the mirror becomes blurred.

### C. The Single Image

The simplest form of the mirror image is that in which a person sees his own reflection in a single-view, non-magical common or garden mirror. In a sense, the mirror has an extra dimension. It is, in actual fact a plane surface, but usurps the quality of depth and even of time. When an Alexandrian looks in the mirror he is likely to see not only his face, but his mind and heart, past, present and

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<sup>1</sup>p. 92

<sup>2</sup>pp. 405, 406

future, returning his gaze. Justine, whose self-obsession is severe enough to have at least pretensions to neurosis, spends an inordinate amount of time before a mirror. Vanity is not her motive; most of the time she scarcely sees her present beauty at all. Arnauti, her former husband and companion in her wild goose chase after analysts, quotes her as saying, "'I always see in the mirror the image of an aging fury'". (J, p. 192) She talks to the mirror rather than to her lover, about actions performed "to invite self-discovery". What she says reveals a mirror-mind, reflecting the words and thoughts of other minds. (J, pp. 202-203) The outer mirror is usually related to an inner mirror. After a tense discussion with Nessim of intrigues political and erotic, a discussion containing many unspoken suggestions, she goes to the mirror to study "her own sorrowful, haunted face". (J, p. 212) But the revelation which follows is Nessim's, not her own. Self-discovery has something to do with the self's relationship to other selves.

Nessim encounters mirrors as often as Justine does, though less deliberately. He tries to see himself as he appears to Justine. (M, p. 195) Examining his own reflection, he is sick with self-loathing and self-contempt, stricken with the multiplicity of his own motives/ (M, p. 202) Under the strain, he too becomes preoccupied with his own mind and addresses his reflection as if it were a separate entity, but one that was, and should be again, part of himself:

Now too he noticed that he involuntarily repeated phrases aloud to which his conscious mind refused to listen. 'Good', she heard him tell one of his mirrors, 'so you are falling into a neurasthenia'. (J, p. 159)

The split in himself becomes so acute that he sees in a complete stranger "a strong yet distorted resemblance to himself as he turned in the mirror". (J, p. 194) He imagines the reflection coming out from the mirror, and the separated part of the self assuming an existence on its own.

A public official with power to command action and, supposedly, to realize his own dream image of himself, Mountolive catches several revealing glimpses in mirrors as he passes by. One of these reflections is provided through another's reflection. Sir Louis, the ambassador to Russia, discusses his own shortcomings with himself in the mirror and this banishes some of Mountolive's illusions regarding their exalted rank. (M, pp. 76, 79) But, once arrayed in his own symbolic finery, Mountolive is "quite surprised to see how handsome he looked in a mirror". (M, p. 130) This preoccupation with the superficial self obscures the real problems, his own and the state's. His condition is static, when the need is for action. As Nessim questioned his neurasthenia, Mountolive wonders, "Am I slowly becoming irresistible to myself?" (M, p. 141) After his re-encounter with Leila, which is an encounter with his own past self and with the Egypt of his past, he disguises himself and ventures into the low life of the Arab Quarter. Here he finds horrors enough to reflect the horrors of his own unconscious. Seeing his incognito self in the mirror, he is again "quite surprised", this time at the transformation. (M, p. 285) Mountolive's surprise at his reflections implies a deeper sort of surprise. The image of the handsome ambassador gives way to that of a man involved with the lives of other men, finding himself a major character in a



story of treason, suicide, fratricide, incest and adultery. The process of Mountolive's self-discovery is marked by his surprise at the unexpected character of himself and the other selves on whose relative existence his own depends.

Pursewarden's use of mirrors is a conscious one. He is an artist, whose aesthetic theories are very like those of Mr. Durrell, and he understands the nature of the symbol. He scolds himself in the mirror (B, p. 121) and mocks the reflection of "the great Pursewarden himself" (M, p. 158), casting an ever-so-slight shade of mockery onto the hundreds of pages of his pontifications which swell the Alexandria Quartet. He has a habit of writing on the mirror with his shaving stick, sometimes a quotation for contemplation or for satire (B, p. 123); sometimes a mock epitaph, which is deadly serious in its suggestion of fundamental uncertainty:

'I never knew which side my art was buttered'  
Were the Last Words that poor Pursewarden uttered!

Finally, the mirror receives his suicide message, with its warning to Nessim, the real epitaph this time. (B, p. 150; M, p. 214). Pursewarden's mirror is multiple-viewed, however, and this man who proclaims his views authoritatively throughout the book, remains an enigma, with at least three motives for suicide; his necessary betrayal of his friend Nessim to his friend Mountolive; his incestuous love for Liza, who is falling in love with Mountolive; or his awareness that he had reached the apex of his artistic accomplishment and usefulness. None of the motives is a satisfactory explanation.

Besides these continuous mirror mortifs, each reflecting a major character, there are reflecting images scattered through the four

books, always showing at least a hint of some truth not hitherto apparent. Narouz sees his crippled father pointing a pistol at his reflection and realizes the intimacy of the relationships which bind his parents and Mountolive, Nessim and Mountolive, Nessim and Narouz and their parents. (B, p. 249; M, p. 37 - 38) Darley and Melissa say good-bye in a cab and talk of the quadrilateral love which included them with Nessim and Justine, and are aware that "the driver watched us in the mirror like a spy.... He watched us as one might watch cats making love". (J, p. 225 - 226). In this simile, the tender leave-taking becomes a strange complex of love, pornography and bestiality. Pombal, the casanova, confused at finding himself in love, addresses his own reflection; he "who believed so many things about love" is seeing unsuspected truths about himself and his relationship to others. (C, p. 41) Darley and Pombal and, one gathers, most of the male characters in the Quartet, gaze at themselves and each other in the barber-shop mirrors (J, p. 36; B, p. 24). The barber's name, Mnemjian, suggests memory, time and also mimesis, a representation or image of truth. He knows everything about everyone; like the mirror, he contains hidden truth. In his shop is a group photograph, which serves as a mirror for memories. The pictured Darley is "the perfected image of a schoolteacher". (B, p.24) The threadbare ineffectual figure is not the final form of Darley, but it is Darley before he looked into the multiple mirrors.

At Carnival the whole group, disguised, anonymous, indistinguishable from one another even in sex, find in their collective reflection a perception into their collective nature and the ambiguities and deceptions which bind them all together:

They put on the velveteen capes and adjusted  
their masks like the actors they were, comparing

their identical reflections as they stood side by side in the two swollen mirrors among the palms.... The inquisitors of pleasure and pain, the Alexandrians. (B, pp.198 - 199)

The portentous glance in the mirror occurs in Durrell's lesser works also. In The Dark Labyrinth, Fearmax becomes aware of his own loneliness and lack of humor only when he focusses on his reflection in a hotel mirror and in shopwindows. (DL, pp. 115, 117) And Joanna, in Durrell's version of Royidis' Pope Joan, begins her alarming career after contemplating her own beauty mirrored in a pond. (Pope, pp. 26 - 27)

All this gazing in mirrors is not entirely accidental on the part of Durrell's people. Most of them recognize their own narcissism and comment on it, as will be seen more in the discussion of multiple mirrors. They use mirror metaphors in their own comments and perceptions. Mountolive in the embassy in Russia "had a sudden image of them all floating belly upward in a snowy lake, like bodies of trapped frogs gleaming upward through the mirror of ice", (M, p. 62) Often they recognize their problem, the static examination of self, and, as Pursewarden says, they "are incapable of thinking for ourselves; about, yes". (C, p. 134)

Durrell's Sappho, like Justine, sees the reflection of an aging fury (and like Justine is involved in a confusion of love and politics):

The moment at the mirror is the worst of the day.  
We measure our self-contempt wrinkle by wrinkle,  
Our disgust is at the stale breath, lacklustre eye,  
All the wear and tear of being without ever becoming.

(S, P. 79)

Being is static, becoming is active. Durrell does not end his tetralogy, but suffixes a number of suggested starting points for new developments. Darley has freed himself from the stagnation of being and attained

a kinetic state of becoming. What the artist creates is himself.

The self in the Black Book is frustrated by the veil of flesh which hides its own essence: "I am again standing naked in front of the mirror, puzzled by the obstructing flesh". (BB, p. 203) When he does see the reflection, it is not quite what he wished it to be: "he finds himself face to face with his anonymity, and is unable to outstare it". (BB, p. 222) There is something unknown within himself, something basic and quiescent and unreachable: "the other, the not-me, the figment, the embryo, the white something which lies behind my face in the mirror". (BB, p. 71) The germ of self is being, essence, hidden by the present flesh. Jung has defined the ego as "only the subject of my consciousness" in contrast to the self, which is "the subject of my totality".<sup>1</sup> Groddeck describes the problem of the inescapable I:

"I am I" - we cannot get away from it, and  
even while I assert that the proposition is false,  
I am obliged to act as if it were true.<sup>2</sup>

But "I am I" is a tautology; the problem is to find a meaningful substitute phrase for the second "I". "But the key to everything seems to me to be self-liberation and self-discovery - an important religious and artistic bias of mind". (A & O, p. 24) Durrell means these words to apply to Henry Miller's Sexus, but this "bias of mind", concerned with freeing the self for action by unravelling the complexities which bind it, is the bias of his own mind and of the minds of his puppets.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>p. 540

<sup>2</sup>p. 82

<sup>3</sup>John Press finds that Durrell's poetry "reveals the patterns of a mind that shifts continually like sunlit water reflected in a mirror". The Chequer'd Shade (London, 1958), p. 40. Sometimes one suspects Durrell's association with mirrors is inevitable and compulsive.

#### D. Reflection in Another Self

Frequently, the reflection of the self is not a simple I to I relationship, but proceeds through the means of another "I", whose words or person may serve as a mirror. The most obvious mirror of this sort is love, in which partners reflect each other; and this subject will warrant a chapter to itself. For the moment, let us consider the mirroring of the self in other selves. Pursewarden, with his prolific insights into everything, functions as a cruelly accurate mirror of Darley, the other artist, and, probably less cruelly, of other characters. Balthazar describes this quality, the mirror being the seeing, perceiving, reflecting eye: "His (Pursewarden's) eyes ... looked into other eyes, into other ideas, with a real candour, rather a terrifying sort of lucidity". (B, p. 111) He is not a comfortable sort of companion, even to himself, as his suicide indicates. He is conscious of the mirroring of selves by other selves, and, as usual only partly in jest, uses the idea to justify the British monarchy:

A Royal Family is a mirror image of the human,  
a legitimate idolatry.... No, they are a  
biological necessity, Kings. Perhaps they  
mirror the very constitution of the psyche?  
(M, pp. 62, 63)

For Pursewarden who works for the Foreign office, as well as for Mountolive the ambassador and Nessim the conspirator, the British imperial tradition complete with stiff upper lip is part of

vital personal problems.<sup>1</sup>

But, Pursewarden's glass could be seen only darkly. The selves which mirror one another also confuse one another with masks of superficialities and obscure the truths which might have been reflected: "we live in the shallows of one another's personalities and cannot really see into the depths beneath". (B, p. 141) Narcissus's pond is clouded over with the pale cast of thought-reflection, its waters stagnant.

Darley himself is a mirror, observing, absorbing, and reflecting all in his writing. In a ballroom with "shivering mirrors" Clea asks him, "Why do you prefer to sit apart and study us all?" (B, p. 233) The shivering mirrors are part of an effective description of setting, but they serve as a symbolic complement to Clea's question. Durrell's mirrors usually exhibit this dual nature, simultaneously tangible thing and symbol of intangible. Perhaps this is the essential characteristic of any successful symbol.

The self sees its reflection in curious places. After Narouz's impassioned oration follows "the germinal silence in which you can hear the very seeds in the human psyche stirring, trying to move towards the light of self-recognition". (M, p. 125) This again is Pursewarden's remark. Narouz is close to the basic nature of things,

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<sup>1</sup>The possibility of a political theme for the Alexandria Quartet is suggested by Charles Rolo in his review of Mountolive: "It may be that the theme of the series will turn out to be the fatal tendency of the English in the Middle East to be blinded by romanticism". (Atlantic, CCIII, No. 4 (April, 1959), p. 134). Mountolive and Leila are England and Egypt, west and east. The lighter books, Esprit de Corps and Stiff Upper Lip, are based on Durrell's experiences in the diplomatic corps. Two thousand years after Caesar, Antonies are still finding their downfalls in Egypt.

a man of the land, uncivilized. The archetypal forms are near the surface of his consciousness, and his relationships with his parents, his brother, and his vainly loved Clea are fundamental and quite simple in themselves. For him, complications arise from without. Because he is in touch with the essential things, he is a seer, and his own simple nature is capable of mirroring the truth of many sophisticated selves.

Euth Adams in The Dark Labyrinth finds the truth about life in her brother. His death is a removal into his appropriate world, a looking-glass world:

'I learned from him that death doesn't exist  
except in the imagination. Thus I was hardly  
sad when his discontent carried him through  
to the other side - like stepping into a mirror'.  
(DL, p. 249)

There is no death, only the mirror is the imagination, the mind, the self. This is suggested also in Darley's observation on Pursewarden's death:

Nor, for the purpose of this writing, has he  
ceased to exist; he has simply stepped into  
the quicksilver of a mirror as we all must -  
to leave our illnesses, our evil acts, the  
hornets' nest of our desires, still operative  
in the real world - which is the memory of our  
friends. (J, p. 118)

A few hours before his suicide, Pursewarden spits upon the mirror, and his reflection liquefies, disintegrates as he himself was soon to do, death allowing the "real" self to become identical with the mirror self.  
(J, p. 119)

In Durrell's poem "The Pilot", there is a question as to who the potter is and who the pot.

Sure a lovely day and all weather  
Leading westward to Ireland and our childhood.  
On the quarters of heaven, held by stars,  
The Hunter and Arcturus getting ready -  
The elect of heaven all burning on the wheel.

This lovely morning must the pilot leaning  
In the eye of heaven feel the island

Turning beneath him, burning soft and blue -  
 And all this mortal globe like a great lamp  
 With spines of rivers, families of cities  
 Seeming to the solitary boy so  
 Local and queer yet so much a part of him.

The enemies of silence have come nearer,  
 Turn, turn to the morning on wild elbows:  
 Look down through the five senses like stars  
 To where our lives lie small and equal like two grains  
 Before Chance - the hawk's eye or the pilot's  
 Round and shining on the open sky,  
 Reflecting back the innocent world in it.

(P, p. 9)

The world reflects the life of the pilot, and his eye in turn reflects "the innocent world". We are all mirrors together. The self mirrors another self which is mirroring it, and therefore in mirroring the other, each also mirrors itself. This crosseyed reflecting process may be elucidated by reference to Erich Kahler's essay "The Nature of the Symbol".<sup>1</sup>

Inasmuch as the human being has come to extend his existence over manifold spheres, his communication with his outer world turns into a communication with his self, of his practical work with his theoretical mind, and - since the outer expansion reflexively involved in an inner, psychic expansion - of his Ego with his Id, with the lighted depths of his unconsciousness.

The involution of reflections and communications seems to be approaching the desired reunification of the individual self.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Symbolism in Religion and Literature, ed. Rollo May (New York, 1961), p. 52.

<sup>2</sup>Rank shows how the Pythagoreans brought the numbers of man and the universe into "an inward relation", so they are "mirror-images of one another". (Art and Artist, p. 117, Rank's Italics) It is not, as in the popular song, "I see the moon, the moon sees me, but "I see me in the moon; the moon sees the moon in me" - a sort of cosmic solipsism.



### E. Reflections of Another Self

Sometimes the significant reflection is not one's own, but that of someone else. One comes to know the other better by studying his reflection. Darley likes to describe his mistresses as they pose before mirrors. We have noticed Justine's habit of holding long conversations with her reflection. Melissa's mirror, as Richard Aldington has pointed out, not only reflects but is a reflection of her: "a single poignant strip of cracked mirror". (J, p. 199)<sup>1</sup> That is Melissa, solitary, "poignant" and broken. In this mirror she sees Nessim's servant Selim appear to reflect Nessim's grief, which is in turn a reflection of her own grief. Here are mirrors within mirrors, Darley learning about Melissa, Melissa learning about Nessim. And each reflection of someone close to oneself is also a reflection of one's self, and lovers are reflections of each other. Melissa and mirrors are related, because, Darley suggests, he and she reflect each other's condition; they are "fellow-bankrupts". (J, p. 23) Seeing Melissa's old, rich, ugly lover Cohen in a mirror, Darley realizes "for the first time that he probably loved Melissa as much as I did". This reflection reveals the ambiguous and complex nature of love: the possibility of a tender relationship between the gross Cohen and the poignant Melissa, the hardness in this poignancy and the friendliness in enmity, which takes Darley to Cohen's deathbed when Melissa refuses to go.

The mirror and a sudden realization often coincide. En route to the fateful duckhunt, the culmination of the many mysteries of the

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<sup>1</sup>"A Note on Lawrence Durrell" in World, p. 7

first novel, Darley recognizes their mutual friend Capodistria as "the author of all Justine's misfortunes", the rapist of her childhood. "From time to time", he catches Nessim's eye in the driving mirror. Nessim's reflected smile contains, but does not reveal, the answers to many questions. (J, p. 210)

To know another, one must have more views of him than that presented to one's own naked eye. In Durrell's poem "Fabre" (P, p. 106), the naturalist is faultless in "exact observation", but inept in human perception. He may have mastered the thirteen scientific ways of looking at a blackbird, but not the countless ways of looking at a man or woman:

If real women were like moths he didn't notice.  
There was not a looking-glass in the whole house.

Fabre's scientific method cannot cope with human reality, because it depends totally on his own detached self, never on involvement and communication with other selves.

The mirror may be affected by its own act of reflection. Alexandria, as a mirror of these people, becomes them, a landscape of the mind, with a human character. The self revealing truth about another finds also his own truth. Again, it is an ambiguity of potter and pot. The Greek poet, C.P. Cavafy, idolized in the Quartet as the "old poet of the city", has a poem which illustrates this. A handsome boy looks briefly at himself in a large old mirror in a mansion to which he goes on business:

The old mirror was glad now  
And was proud to have received upon itself  
That entire beauty for a few minutes.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>"The mirror in the Hall", The Poems of C.P. Cavafy, trans. John Mavrogordato (London, 1951), p. 192.

Darley's attempt to reflect his fellow Alexandrians in his narrative is the determining act in his own development.

George Steiner discusses the manner in which Durrell's characters mirror each other, and finds these mirrors "dangerous" because "although they multiply vision and drive it inward, they also shut it off from the outside".<sup>1</sup> The outside becomes inside, so there is no objectivity, only an excessive subjectivity, and the main activity of mind is to "watch the mirror watching you". ("Cradle Song", P, p. 16) Cavafy's mirror returns a perception not to the boy who looks into it, but only to itself.

#### F. Multiple-View Mirrors: Prism-Sightedness

I remember her sitting before the multiple mirrors at the dressmaker's, being fitted for a sharkskin costume, and saying: "Look! five different pictures of the same subject. Now if I wrote I would try for a multi-dimensional effect in character, a sort of prism-sightedness. Why should not people show more than one profile at a time?" (J, p. 27)

Justine is advising Darley to do precisely what their creator has set out to do. This little scene is a parable of the method Durrell employs in the Quartet. He gives at least five views of Justine, for instance, not one of which shows her whole person. And this whole continues to elude condensation into the sum of its parts, but remains prism-like, complete but shattered, scintillating and refractive. We cannot look equally at all the mirrors at once, and which profile we see depends on which mirror we use and on where

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<sup>1</sup>"Lawrence Durrell: The Baroque Novel", World, p. 21.

we are standing while we use it. The prism in the poem "By the Lake", reflects a woman who is reminiscent of both Justine and Melissa:

If seen by many minds at once your image  
As in a prism falling breaks itself,  
Or looking upwards from a gleaming spoon  
Defies: a smile squeezed up and vanishing  
In roundels of diversion like the moon.

Yet there you are confirmed by the smallest  
Wish or kiss upon the rising darkness  
But rootless as a wick afloat in water,  
Fatherless as shoes walking over dead leaves;  
A patient whom no envy stirs but joy  
And what the harsh chords of experience leaves -

This dark soft eye, so liquid now and hoarse  
With pleasure: or your arms in mirrors  
Combing out softly hair  
As lovely as a planet's and remote.

How many several small forevers  
Whispered in the rind of the ear  
Melissa, by this Mediterranean sea-edge,  
Captured and told?  
How many additions to the total silence?

Surely we increased you by very little,  
But as with a net or gun to make your victims men?

(P, p. 84)

The image "defies" capture, presents a different fact to each of the "many minds". The substitution of mind for eye suggests again the two types of "reflection". The significance of any or all of the images is a question: "How many several small forevers...?/How many additions to the total silence?" The sum of the prised views makes a total which is silence, empty, incomplete and inarticulate. So although the minds viewing the woman are many, they increase the concepts of her unitary self "by very little", and the effect has been on themselves as much as on her, since they have made it possible for

her to ensnare "victims", and for these victims to be men.

The mirror-prism is multiple-viewed in two ways: it presents several views of a single object, and the object is viewed by several persons. View and viewer are both prismatic.

The intricate effect which may be achieved by using mirror-symbolism and multiple points of view is suggested by Lawrence Thompson's description of William Faulkner's The Sound and the Fury

Each of these four structural units, thus contiguous, hinged, set at a different angle from the others, might be called analogous to those hinged and contiguous haberdashery mirrors which permit us to contemplate the immediate picture reflected in any single one of those mirrors, and then to contemplate secondary or subordinate pictures which are reflections of reflections in each of the separate mirrors.<sup>1</sup>

This is like Justine's mirror and suggests a narrative principle similar to Durrell's.<sup>2</sup> Each of the four sections might conceivably be read as a separate entity, but, thus read, it is not the same story as it is in context. The reflections of reflections within reflections lead the reader deep into a world where self is enclosed on all sides by itself.

In a comment on the Underground Man, Frederick J. Hoffman speaks of "the mirror images, which multiply and fractionate the self,

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<sup>1</sup>"Mirror Analogues in The Sound and the Fury" in William Faulkner: Three Decades of Criticism, ed. F.J. Hoffman and Olga W. Vickery (New York, 1963), p. 224.

<sup>2</sup>One is unlikely to mistake Durrell's voice for Faulkner's. Nevertheless, there are resemblances: mirrors replacing time, various views eliminating the need for chronology, incest complicating the process of self-discovery; landscape made inseparable from character; Gothic elements shadowing the present.

so that one self becomes many fragments, in close-order duplications of itself".<sup>1</sup> This hints at the sinister aspect of the mirror-view, the confining and disintegrating nature of prism-sightedness.

Durrell likes to appeal to the physicists to support his prismatic theory of fiction. One might once have imagined a novel which presented various different viewpoints, the sum of which was a fully rounded picture of something or someone. But Einstein has made such a book impossible. The narrator can no longer pretend to be anonymous or disinterested, because now he himself is a factor to be considered in the analysis of anything he observes. Werner Heisenberg explains that scientific laws "deal no longer with the particles themselves but with our knowledge" of them.<sup>2</sup> The implications of this extend far beyond the bounds of applied science:

For the first time in the course of history man on earth faces only himself... The familiar classification of the world into subject and object, inner and outer world, body and soul, somehow no longer quite applies .... In science, also, the object of research is no longer nature in itself but rather nature exposed to man's questioning, and to this extent man here also meets himself.

We are back again to the idea that everything is a mirror. Heisenberg implies that all man's search for knowledge is a search for his self, at least that the two searches are inseparable. In order to come anywhere near the object, the investigator must discover which is object

<sup>1</sup>Samuel Becket, p. 43

<sup>2</sup>"The Representation of Nature in Contemporary Physics", *Mxy*, pp. 221, 226 - 227. See Durrell's Key, passim, especially Chapter 2.

and which subject and disentangle one from the other.

The disentanglement is never complete and the object in itself is unattainable. Because he cannot see beyond himself, the scientist has had to eject the word "true" from his vocabulary, as Wyndham Lewis points out.<sup>1</sup> He does not know whether or not the theory is true. Durrell makes Pursewarden, who may be partially modelled on Lewis, exclaim, "Who dares to dream of capturing the fleeting image of truth in all its gruesome multiplicity?" (C, p. 136) Discussing the impingement of the 'real' and the 'unreal', the nonself and the self upon each other, Lewis mentions the "mirror-imagery" of such post-relativity philosophers as Whitehead and Russell; subjective experience, including dreams and hallucinations, is the location of 'reality'. What is real is not the thing itself, but the image of that thing - one can see only in a glass darkly, never face to face. "The reality", says Mr. Lewis, "has definitely installed itself inside the contemporary mind".

Jung also speaks of "images", and he too warns that they are subjectively conditioned: "It is essential that the image shall not immediately be assumed to be identical with the object; it is wiser to regard it as an image of the subjective relation of the object".<sup>2</sup> The decisive reality is that of the "primordial images" or "archetypes", which "in their totality represent a psychic mirror-world". Jung's mirror represents the present contents of consciousness in a form "somewhat as a million-year old consciousness might see them", seeing becoming, being and passing together with whatever precedes becoming

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<sup>1</sup>pp. 367, 368, 453.

<sup>2</sup>pp. 600, 500.

and endures beyond passing. "To this consciousness the present moment is improbably<sup>e</sup>". It is possible to see how for a novelist the mirror view eliminates the need for strict adherence to the order of clock time; chronology is less important than the relationships among human experiences and perceptions.

These primordial images are the archetypes which Narouž finds in his own mind at Carnival, when there is a concentration of images, of "desires engendered in the forests of the mind, belonging not to themselves but to remote ancestors speaking through them". (B, p. 165) They are what Darley calls "the mythopoeic reference which underlies fact", superseding the details of data and information, "the graveyard of relative fact". (C, p. 176) If these images are reality, and if they are timeless, then reality is timeless, and Durrell, with Jung's assistance, has succeeded in "eliminating time". (Cor, p. 19. Above p. 8)

But even these images do not appear the same to everyone, and Jung declares, "The world exists not merely in itself, but also as it appears to me", and "One sees what one can best see from oneself".<sup>1</sup>

Proust, contemplating the several versions of M. Swann, agrees that "each time we see the face or hear the voice it is our own ideas of him which we recognise and to which we listen".<sup>2</sup>

Groddeck's world consists of polarities; "everything contains its opposite within itself" and can be shown to have "both an inward and an outward cause". He sees a worldwide tendency towards "thinking", conscious reflection, which is for each person an attempt to chart a

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<sup>1</sup>pp. 472, 16

<sup>2</sup>Swann's Way, p. 15



world outside himself.<sup>1</sup> The problem is to get outside the self in order to chart that world. If this cannot be done, the maps will all be different, each one charting only its cartographer's mind. Durrell describes Groddeck's system of polarities as a seeking "to free himself from the opposites of being, and to emerge into Reality .... The keynote is reintegration and acceptance of the warring opposites". (Key, p. 83) This is what occurs in Clea. The polarities, the opposite mirror-views of the first three novels are not proved incorrect or dismissed, but are accepted, assimilated into the life stream of the survivors. The acceptance of the polarities is also an escape from them, because the self is no longer distorted and tormented by them, but having accepted them for what they are, can deal with them, take them into account and not be thrown off balance by them. This is reintegration of inner and outer reality, self and not-self, and also self and self, since the principle of polarities applies also to human nature. The "reality" into which one is to emerge may be a condition in which action is desirable and possible. And it may also be Jungian Reality, since it is in Clea that Darley comes to terms with his archetypes and experiences, a death and a rebirth which are almost too Jungian to be true. In either case, the result is reintegration, the self made whole. This is "made whole" also in the sense of "healed". Durrell quotes Einstein on the goal of the searching mind which "looks on individual existence as a sort of prison and wants to experience the universe as a single significant

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<sup>1</sup>pp. 90, 81, 105.

whole". (Key, p. 34) In order to experience the whole, he must first know the part which is his "individual existence" and place it in position relative to the whole. Neither self nor universe can be lifted out of this single significant whole. The intention of the Alexandrians then seems to be repairing the disintegration brought about by prism-sightedness, bringing multiple mirrors into juxtaposition, from many and from opposites rebuilding the one.

It is no easy task which is formulated in the epigraph to Balthazar. The words are de Sade's, from Justine, his terrible farce on the ambiguities of good and evil and of human views of these. His Justine, like Durrell's, has to deal with the implications of prism-sightedness:

'The mirror sees the man as beautiful, the mirror loves the man; another mirror sees the man as frightful and hates him; and it is always the same being who produces the impressions'.

Bonamy Dobree has pointed out that in this quotation different mirrors have different emotions, as well as varying points of view".<sup>1</sup> As explained by Sade's monk Clement, himself a personification of violent polarities, the motions which the man arouses in the mirror are conditioned by the nature of the mirror, the self's response determined by the self, a response inward rather than outward as it seems. He uses the image of the multiple mirror, the trick mirror such as one finds in a Fun House at the fair, "some of which diminish objects, others of which enlarge them; some render frightful images of things, some lend

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<sup>1</sup>"Durrell's Alexandrian Series", World, p. 189.

them charm". The frightfulness or charm depends not on the object to which it is attributed but on the subject which attributes it.<sup>1</sup>

Durrell's people are very much aware of the gruesome multiplicity of truth. Balthazar speaks of the impossibility of ever attaining "truth naked and unashamed", because "we always see her as she seems, never as she is. Each man has his own interpretation". (B, p. 233) And Pursewarden writes, "There are only as many realities as you care to imagine". (B, p. 152) They are not saying quite the same thing. Balthazar is seeing each man's view as one mirror of many. Pursewarden here places the multiplicity within the imagination. The multiple-mirror is a multiple of a multiplicity. Again, inner and outer worlds mirror one another; the inner self, like the outer world, is disunified and unable to reach a single conclusion about a simple truth. Darley speculates on Balthazar's reinterpretation of his own story: "I mean that I must try and strip the opaque membrane which stands between me and the reality of their actions - and which I suppose is composed of my own limitations of vision and temperament. My envy of Pursewarden, my passion for Justine, my pity for Melissa. Distorting mirrors, all of them". (B, p. 28) He wants to strip away everything but fact, a task never to be accomplished. The various emotions which Sade also presents as distorting mirrors are all within the same self. He must deal not only with other persons whose views conflict with his but also with the clashing views within himself. The hinged mirror is an image of the self as much as of the world. The Justine of Clea has changed considerably from the Justine of the

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<sup>1</sup>D.A.F. de Sade, Justine (Paris, 1953), pp. 171 - 172.

first novel - or has she? She says, "'You see a different me ... But once again the difference lies in you, in what you imagine you see!'" (C, p. 53) Not "what you see" but "what you imagine you see". The difference between seer and seen is greater than it seems, obscured by a veil of delusion.

If the self contains conflicts and polarities, the self is not a unity. The view which presents the concept of one self is a distorted view. Dyrrell has said, outside the Quartet, "I imagine that what we call personality may be an illusion, and in thinking of it as a stable thing we are trying to put a lid on a box with no sides"<sup>1</sup> Pursewarden says, "'Personality as something with fixed attributes is an illusion - but a necessary illusion if we are to love!'" (B, pp. 14 - 15) The necessity of a unitary self arises because of our relationship to other selves: "Our view of reality is conditioned by our position in space and time - not by our personalities as we like to think". Where we are in relation to the object determines our view of it. The distorting emotions do not proceed from a unified personality; no single commanding view directs Darley to envy, desire or pity. This is a rather unsatisfactory state of affairs, especially as one becomes more aware of the other. There is a need for definition and distinction of oneself, and so one creates from "selected fictions". (B, pp. 14 - 15; C, pp. 55, 277) These are "fictions" not because they are false but because they are only relatively true. From them is constructed a self and a will, which can love and act in relation to other selves and wills.

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<sup>1</sup>"The Kneller Tape", World, p. 163

Because the self must be created, the artist is an important figure in Alexandria, and because the self is created in order to love, the Quartet can claim to be an "investigation of modern love".

The notion that the self is an illusion or a deliberate fabrication from half-truths is not a comfortable one; no one likes to think of himself as an illusion. On the other hand, as Darley recalls Balthazar's saying "Truth is what most contradicts itself in time"; he also remembers Pursewarden's "'If things were always what they seemed, how impoverished would be the imagination of man!'" (B, p. 23) The continual creation of oneself means that life is dynamic, in communication with other dynamic forces. There is multiplicity within the mind, but a prism is an attractive object, "this eternal refraction/Of the thinking mind touching reality". (Sappho, p. 134) "Touching reality" because the view of external objects is subjectively conditioned; one is creating the world as well as oneself, making a coherent sphere from the disjointed planet. Again, the process deals with relationships, correspondences, and the outer world is created by absorption into the inner:

To see and attract within myself  
The sweetest and most naked correspondences  
Of nature, described through the looking-glass I am.  
(Sappho, p. 75)

This, as Pursewarden observes, is "not only the writer's problem". (M, p. 159) Everyone can be an artist. "Growing up means separation in the interests of a better, more lucid joining up". The desirable fictions must be selected and separated out, to be refashioned into a personality which can function in "lucid joinings up" with others.

### G. The Multiple-View Plot

The structure of the Alexandria Quartet is itself analagous to the hinged mirrors. The stories of Darley's affairs with Justine and Clea, of Nessim's political intrigue, Mountolive's conflict of loyalties and duties, and Pursewarden's suicide, all intricately mixed with each other and with smaller relevant stories, are seen from different points of view, each of which contradicts something in the others and adds some new details not seen elsewhere. Where it does not contradict or add, it recasts events in new perspectives, shifting relative positions, and thus often altering the significance of a happening. The fourth book assimilates the other views and adds new light, but still does not present a complete single reflection.

There are more than four mirrors, however, because the narrators are generous in quoting others, especially Balthazar, Pursewarden and Arnauti. Events are retold, literally recreated. The episode of the brothel tent is told from Darley's viewpoint and later from Narouz's through Balthazar; in the one disgust and self-loathing is expressed, in the other a grotesque wonder. The various versions of Darley's alliance with Justine are never resolved; we are not sure how much of Justine is passion and how much is politics. The loss of Balthazar's watch-key is examined from several angles and this mystery too is not completely solved.

This retelling of episodes from various angles is a fairly simple device and could be rather artificial. What turns the Quartet into a kaleidoscope of many complexities and involutions, instead of a scenic tour which presents photographic views with only the direction changed,

is the contrapuntal occurrence and recurrence of partially remembered faces, objects, events and phrases. Recognition of one of these repetitions brings the reader up short and sends him delving into the depths of memory - his own, Darley's and the "collective" memory for the association it has awakened. Pursewarden's shaving mirror, Balthazar's watch-key, Nessim's Rolls Royce with daffodil hubcaps, the children's blue handprints on the Arab walls, the song "Jamais de la vie", the scent of Jasmine, the colour mauve in descriptions of landscape. Obviously these are not all of equal stature symbolically, but they serve a similar purpose in building up through repetitions and connections a rich-textured world. After all, life does proceed in a framework of repetitions. Darley notes that he found "Clea at the exact station in place and time where I had once found Melissa." (C, p. 76), but most of these similarities-with-a-difference are not commented on; they occur and insidiously work upon the reader's consciousness. Several times Darley and his mistress awake to the song of a blind muezzin. (J, p. 25; C, p. 99) The mistress and the place vary, and the former situation is not mentioned, but the blind muezzin is constant, and the reader knows he has been here before. The words "selected" (or "selective") fictions appear in at least three contexts, and make their point; that the whole fabric of Alexandria is composed of such fictions (B, pp. 14 - 15; C, pp. 55, 277) Twice we witness the butchering of live camels, once within the city and once in the desert (J, p. 62; M, pp. 121-122)<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Gilbert Murray reports St. Nilus' account of "the sacramental eating of a camel by an Arab tribe". "The camel was devoured on a particular day at the rising of the morning star. He was cut to pieces alive, and every fragment of him had to be consumed before the sun rose. If the life had once gone out of the flesh and blood, the sacrifice would have been spoilt; it was the spirit, the vitality of the camel that his tribesmen wanted". (Five Stages of Greek Religion (Doubleday Anchor edition), p. 20. Cf Freud, Totem and Taboo, in The Basic Writings (New York, 1938), pp. 913, 924.

Both times the horror is appropriate to the immediate scene and also to something terrible and mysterious about the butchers and the people who observe them. The repetitions are reflections in Durrell's looking-glass world; at each occurrence the repeated motif carries not only its intrinsic significance, but that of the mirror as well and directs the description back towards the memory, back within the self.

In the first novel, when Justine introduces Darley to Nessim, she is compared to a gun-dog bringing the prey to her master, and Darley observes that "whatever she had done had been done in a sense for him". (J, p. 32) In the fourth novel, she delivers Darley to Nessim as if he were a parcel (C, p. 49) and now Darley realizes that his earlier observation was truer than he had thought. The gun-dog simile is particularly appropriate now that he realizes what Justine and Nessim were doing at their spectacular duck-hunt. The triangular relationship has become immensely complicated and yet it is the same. Here, in the normal sense, Darley has proceeded onward in time, but by such means as this duplication of metaphors he achieves a connection of past and present, that is technically and theoretically almost a juxtaposition.

In the relationship of Justine and Nessim, Durrell's multiple-mirror technique is at its most intricate and effective. We never do pinpoint the essence of what is between them, and cannot expect to, since whatever it is is dynamic. Darley's first impression is of "the magnificent two-headed animal a marriage can be". (J, p. 32) This identity persists even when they are estranged; their moods and states of mind are reflections of each other. No matter how many infidelities both commit, they still seem well matched. It is Justine who speaks of



prism-sightedness, and she is seen in a prism, in fragments of love affairs which may or may not be sincere, in fragments of political intrigue, social conversation and intellectual speculation. Her appearance is sometimes beautiful, sometimes definitely unattractive and even dull, a peasant with brown paws. Nessim too is prismatic, sometimes the charming but simple cuckold, sometimes the arch-deceiver, omniscient, sinister and polished. His relationships with his brother and his land are similarly ambiguous. He is strong and weak, brilliant and stupid.

When Nessim reveals his plans to her, Justine finds that mirrors have been transcended. They are face to face, mind to mind, and the only mirror they need is one another. The surface Justine is "the Justine thrown back by polished mirrors, or engraved in expensive clothes and fards", and her body is "a pleasure-seeker, a mirror-reference to reality". (M, p. 201) But now she is reality itself, not merely a mirror-reference of it. Nessim's perception goes beyond the superficialities. They use the mirror-tricks of distortion and ambiguity, but deliberately and in the interests of their cause.

At the start of his affair with Justine, Darley thinks of "Nessim's handsome face smiling at her from every mirror in the room". (J, p. 47) This mirror reflects the truth about her liaisons with both men. Nessim watches her with Darley "as if through the wrong end of an enormous telescope; seeing our small figures away on the skyline of his own hopes and plans". (J, p. 85) At the time he writes this, Darley is unaware how much he is involved in Nessim's plan, or even that there is a plan. The telescope is something like the marvellous glass supposed to have been atop the legendary lighthouse of Pharos at Alexandria.

Darley thinking of Nessim observing them seems to be heeding Durrell's "Cradle Song" advice to "watch the mirror watching you".

Balthazar's watch-key is apparently stolen by either Justine or Nessim for any of several possible reasons connected with espionage and/or jealousy. The key becomes a symbolic means to unlocking the secret of one's various mirrors and hence of oneself. Balthazar says he could not "find the key to a relationship which failed signally", (B, p. 98) and he has failed, since the relationship in question has not, after all, failed. Darley, questioning Nessim's motives in loving Melissa, asks, "Where does one hunt for the key to such a pattern?" (B, p. 134) This love is mirror-like too, Nessim with Darley's mistress reflecting Darley with Nessim's wife, all for ambiguous motives. When Nessim does produce the lost key, he accompanies the act with words addressed to Justine in the mirror and with a bold stare at his own reflection. (J, pp. 174 - 175) This scene comes at a high point of tension when politics and passion are at their crises, and when Nessim is experiencing a peculiar self-appraisal in his concern over Justine and over Narouz. Here occur his strange dreams of his city's past. Many kinds of reflections of his self are trying to come to light at once. He appears a "vulgar double of himself, a mirror reflecting unexpected distortions". In the Key Durrell talks of the theme of the double in literature as symptomatic of a split in the psyche. (p.42) This is what he makes the metaphor mean for Nessim, his own double, living on several levels at once. (J, p. 240; M, p. 191) Mountolive's realization of their multilevel life comes with an awareness that his own friendship for Nessim had prevented his seeing the truth about him;

he is forced by his position to take a multiviewed look. The process is uncomfortable. The features of Nessim and Maskelyne are somehow merged in a "trick of double exposure", another metaphor that sees things several ways at once. He hates not Nessim but an "image" of Nessim, one of the multiple views of the man. In this confused state, Mountolive sees an unsettling reflection of himself; "Crossing the hall he caught sight of his own face in the great pier glass and was surprised to notice that it wore an expression of feeble petulance". Feeble petulance is the sorry attainment of his will to action.

Nessim too presents a problem of action, but a different one. He acts when he least appears to do so, and this is again suggested by repetition of phrase. After Capodistria's faked death and after Toto's murder, Darley notices that Nessim wears the expression of one resting after a "great expenditure of energy". (J, p. 205; B, pp. 12, 218) The reasons for the expression are not revealed until Mountolive; they are hints of another view of Nessim. Darley has unintentionally glanced in a mirror he was not intended to see.

Reading Pursewarden's letters to his sister, Darley wonders, "If two or more explanations of a single human action are as good as each other then what does action mean but an illusion?" (C, p. 176) His query is illustrated immediately as he is confronted by Keats, who has read Pursewarden's letters to his wife and received an impression opposite to Darley's. To Liza, Pursewarden is a great genius and a good man; to his wife, he is despicable. The act in question is his suicide, and there is doubt as to whether it is an action at all. It appears to be immediately motivated by Melissa's disclosure made while

"examining the cavities in her teeth with a hand mirror", a reflection of something repellent in an attractive face, as Nessim's crime is in the context of his friendship with Pursewarden. (M, p. 177) In his suicide letter to Mountolive, Pursewarden says his death "will solve other deeper problems too" (M, p. 184) and suggests there are other views of his act. He denies it is an act, and tells Mountolive, "You must act where I cannot bring myself to". Is he referring to the problem of Nessim or the problem of Liza? But to Mountolive, Pursewarden's death is an act, "the bare act of Pursewarden (this inconvenient plunge into anonymity)", because it is kinetic; it sets in motion forces which compel him too to act. (M, p. 186, Durrell's italics) It is Pursewarden's "solitary act of cowardice", (M, p. 214) a negative action on the part of one who performs it, but positive to others. It alters "all the dispositions on the chessboard", Alice's chessboard jarred suddenly so all the pieces have shifted their relative positions. For Mountolive and Nessim, this ends the delusion of "a perfect finite action, free and heedless as the directed will". The action directed by Nessim's will has been crossed by the act of another will and both are distorted beyond the point where choice is possible, caught in the flow of universal forces from the "time-spring of our acts". Nessim and Justine realize this in the mirror of each other, "their open eyes staring into each other with the sightlessness of inhuman objects, mirrors made of quartz, dead stars". (M, p. 215) Wills are deadlocked and no longer potent. In Clea, Balthazar announces to his mirror that "the most tender, the most tragic of illusions is perhaps to believe that our actions can add or subtract from the total quantity of good and evil in the world". (C, p. 71) There

are so many mirror-views that there can be no "finite action", and there is always something beyond the scope of the will.

Balthazar, commenting on Pursewarden and Justine, exclaims, "Imagine what one touch of ridicule can do to a Higher Emotion!" (B, p. 115). In its immediate context, it does a great deal. For Pursewarden, the dark sinister Venus Justine is "a tiresome old sexual turnstile through which presumably we must all pass". (B, p. 115)

The mirror of the ridiculous reflects continually in the person of Scobie, a masterpiece of a comic character, who appears in all four books and seems to have little to do with the story apart from his being a sort of mascot to all the major characters. He is in fact a mirror of every important theme in the Quartet. His job in the Secret Service is a farce, but it provides an early hint of Nessim's highly serious subversion plots. His "tendency" to dress as a little old lady and accost sailors is a wild counterpart of other inverted loves, and his struggle to control himself is a struggle of the will. He has only one eye and has "left little pieces of his flesh all over the world", matching the numerous mutilations and illnesses in the novel. His attempt at artistic creation is a bathtub full of a poisonous alcoholic brew. Finally, he is ageless, timeless, "older than the birth of tragedy, younger than the Athenian death". He is part of the legendary past and coeternal present, a "true subject of myth". (J, pp. 122, 217)

Pursewarden, who often gives clues to Durrell's intention, creates a character very like Scobie to be a meeting place for various thoughts and themes. Like Scobie, this character is to be a "sensualist Tiresias". (M, pp. 164 - 165)

Scobie's role as part of the inner lives of others is shown in the way his story is told, seldom at first hand, or even in

the direct words of Darley, but usually by Darley quoting someone else who is imitating Scobie's storytelling.

The comic mirror has its chilling aspects, as manifested in the Carnival. Here are "the feared and beloved shapes and outlines of friends and familiars now distorted into the semblance of clowns and zanies". (B, pp. 192 - 193) This distortion is a deliberate effort to make one's self part of the reflection in a multiple-mirror. Everyone dresses like everyone else, in the black domino, "which shrouds identity and sex, prevents one distinguishing between man and woman, wife and lover, friend and enemy". (B, p. 188) The multiple view cancels out identity. The domino confers "utter anonymity ... the disguise which each man in his secret heart desires above all ... a freedom which man has seldom dared to imagine for himself." This disguise, this freedom, is "from the bondage of ourselves". (B, pp. 188 - 189), from whatever bothers one, when one literally and figuratively looks in a mirror: "Only the black domino of the carnival balls permitted him (Narouz) to disguise the face he had come to loathe so much that he could no longer bear to see it even in a mirror". (B, p. 94)<sup>1</sup> Paradoxically, this renunciation of the self is a plunge into the deepest recesses of the self, to the identity of the race, since all have discarded their selves and found a reflection of themselves in every identical figure. It is as if one had to cancel the type

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<sup>1</sup>Discussing the Freudian interpretation of dreams, Durrell explains that "the unpleasant secrets which were all bricked up in the unconscious" elude the censor because "they were got up in poetical fancy-dress, they were disguised". (Key, p. 52)

to reach the archetype. Jung describes such a process:

In order to discover the uniformity of the human psyche I must descend into the very foundations of consciousness. Only there do I find wherein all are alike.<sup>1</sup>

In order to find oneself, one must literally lose it in the complexity of multiple mirrors. As Barley remarks, "I must learn to see even myself in a new context, after reading those cold cruel words of Balthazar".

(B, p. 47) The mask, the disguise, the merging in a general anonymity shows the self reflected in the disguised selves around, or provides another self to reflect the first. Justine is horrified at the thought of not having to act a part: "Then I should not know who I was". (M, pp. 232 - 233) Masked, literally or not, one has no identity, or one has two identities to clarify and qualify one another.

Durrell has used the multiple mirror before. In the Black Book, as Harry T. Moore has pointed out,<sup>2</sup> the characters are mirrored "from one abrupt angle after another in his effort to capture 'the logic of personalities ... in all its beautiful mutations'". Here too the multiplicity comes from within the self as well as from without; it is possible to "both love and hate the same woman at the same time". (BB, p. 176) The actor discovers that the "identity" of the anonymous audience is collectively his own identity, "my own face in its incessant reduplications" (BB, p. 223), multiple masks as in Alexandria's carnival. The Dark Labyrinth also is built on the multiple-view plan. No one character knows the whole story, but each reflects a particular angle of the "truth", and each uses it as a means of discovering his self.

<sup>1</sup>p. 624.

<sup>2</sup>"Durrell's Black Book" in World, p. 101

The hinged mirrors take various forms in Durrell's work and are related to several other important categories of metaphor. Groddeck's book is entitled The World of Man, as reflected in Art, in Words and in Disease. "As reflected" - there is the mirror again. Clea tells Darley, "There are only three things to be done with a woman . . . You can love her, suffer for her, or turn her into literature". Darley's problem is that he is "experiencing a failure in all these domains of feeling". (J, p. 22) The mirrors then are art (including "literature"), love and disease or suffering, to which Durrell by implication adds landscape. In the Quartet, each of these motifs is explicitly an involvement of the self with some reality external to it, whether that reality takes the form of an act of communication, a reaching towards another self, an awareness of one's own body as an object, or a reaction to the environment. They are "mirrors" in that they provide counterparts of internal reality or clues to the truth about the self. These variations of the mirror image will be examined in the subsequent chapters.



## CHAPTER II: The Mirror of Art

### A. Art in Alexandria

The Alexandria Quartet is an artistic representation of artists. Three major male characters, Darley, Pursewarden and Arnauti are writers, as is Keats, who becomes significant late in the story. The heroine of the final volume, Clea, is a painter. In connection with art, the mirror symbolism functions in various ways. A purpose of art, as everyone knows, is to reflect: "both at the first and now, was and is to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature".<sup>1</sup> Durrell, as an artist whose art is concerned with artists, creates a mirror to reflect his own theories. The artist-characters and their works reflect each other and themselves and Alexandria; Justine is reflected in the work of four artists.

Art in Alexandria is a mirror of the Alexandrians. The artistic process leads to the artist's creation of his self, as well as to a work of art. In this sense, the technically non-artists are also artists. The creation of art is a positive act, personally directed, and this kind of willed act is the Alexandrian goal.

Durrell qua Durrell frequently discourses ex cathedra upon the nature of art, and his characters discuss it continually. Moreover, those whom he acknowledges as mentors - Groddeck, Rank, Henry Miller - have written extensively on the subject. From the mass of commentary it is possible to distill a theory of art which is realized in the Quartet and

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<sup>1</sup>Ham. III.ii.

which coincides with the present problem of the self-obsessed self and the will to action.

In the Black Book, Durrell writes, in italics: "Books should be built of one's tissue or not at all. The struggle is not to record experience but to record oneself". (BB, p. 125) In the Key to Modern Poetry he remarks on the increasing subjectivity of art, spurred by the obscurity of the subject-object relationship in the Einsteinian world, and finds that "the vision of the artist seems to be gradually turning inwards upon himself". (Key, p. 22) Man can escape the bounds of the four dimensions only in his imagination or his unconscious, and only thus "inhabit the whole" of a reality indefinable by even great art. "If art has any message it must be this: to remind us that we are dying without having properly lived". (Key, p. 5) The creative imagination, while unable to completely express the One reality of the unity of self and of space-time, can at least conceive of it, indicate that it is there and that it is the reality of life.

Writing to Henry Miller about the Black Book, Durrell insisted that "the root of the struggle which on paper looks like the struggle to write is really the struggle to live. All artistic dislocations and failings go right back to the author". (Cor, p. 99) The problem with the Black Book is that it does look rather too much like both these struggles. It is a product of the artist-adolescent working off both types of problems, and written while the process was still going on; this was not the mature artist painting a portrait of his young self. Therefore, Durrell apologizes on rereading, "Let me kill the 'artist' in me and the man will appear - if there is a man". Miller had advised him: "You are a writer - at present, almost too much of a one. You need only to become more and

more yourself, in life and on paper". (Cor, p. 98) The Quartet is partly a description of this process, but not, as the Black Book is, an example of it. Miller repeated his idea in Art and Outrage, this time applying it to himself:

My intention was there - as I said, merely  
to write. Or, to be a writer, more justly.  
Well, I've been it. Now I just want to be.

(A&O, p. 32)

The highest art is the art of living ...  
writing is but a prelude or form of initiation  
for this purpose.

(A&O, p. 40)<sup>1</sup>

As Durrell realized about the Black Book, the artist who is concerned only with the machinations of his own mentality is likely to produce inferior art. He sees the tendency of modern literature as a curve inward through Lawrence, Joyce and probably Miller, and then a little more outward, "away from autobiographical form. The artist must become aware of the necessity to transcend personality". (Key, pp. 66, 87) This does not mean the artist is to exclude his own personality from the subject of his art, but include it and pass beyond it. Campion, the artist of The Dark Labyrinth, defines "the artist's job" as the presentation of "concrete findings about the unknown inside himself and other people". (DL, p. 152, 153) He is not imprisoned in his self, but reaches outward to other

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<sup>1</sup>The triple authorship of Art and Outrage - Durrell and Alfred Perles writing about Miller, and Miller replying - leads to a mixing of mirror metaphors. Durrell calls for "a portrait - not of the man, for you have done that already - but of the artist, mirrored in his work". (p. 8) Four pages later, Perles claims to have "portrayed the man and scamped his work, hoping the man would mirror his work". (p. 12) Perles admits his hope failed; possibly Durrell's succeeds.

selves. The "real artist" is "a suffering member of the world".

#### B. Art and Artist and Alexandria

It is obvious from the reading of the Quartet, without recourse to his critical statements, that Durrell is continually aware of the artistic implications of psychoanalytic theories. Proofs are Justine's interview with Freud, the archetypal images at Carnival, the rebirth by water in Clea. He has admitted to an interest in Otto Rank's Art and Artist. (Key, Chapter 4, especially p. 88; A&O, p. 16) The picture of the artist as it emerges in the Quartet, especially in Clea, is close to Rank's picture. I have suggested that Durrell's diagram of the artist's life would be a curve inward, then outward. Rank begins by placing the origin of the human creative impulse in the need to harmonize the "fundamental dualism of all life", the dualism of individual and collective, personal and social, inner and outer.<sup>1</sup> This harmonizing takes the form of a freeing of the artist's self from dependence and thus of creating oneself. (A, preface, xxiii) and the central problem in the formation of the self is the problem of willing (A, p. 9)

The relation of art and self originated in the primitive artist's effort to present "the idea of the soul in concrete form. The concrete form which he gave to the soul was the shape of a god. (A, p. 13) So when Pursewarden talks about the artist wanting to be God, he may be referring to the attempt to present the essence of the idea of the soul in the most perfect form possible. The word "genius", from "gignere", to

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<sup>1</sup>Rank, p. 13. For this chapter only, references will be given in my text, with the title abbreviated as A

beget, designates originally a part of the soul which can originate what is immortal, whether child or work of art. (A, pp. 19 - 20)<sup>1</sup>

The artist, like the neurotic, is self-obsessed, but the artist accepts the self and proceeds to its glorification. (p. 27)

The artist's first creation is himself, "the selfmaking of the personality into the artist". Subsequent creations express and justify this aim. (A, p. 28)

The life-impulse, the urge to unite the polarities of reality, in the creative personality becomes the servant of the will. When Clea is able to will and to control her own actions she is able also to create. The creative self which remains bound within itself, not subjected to the will, is a neurotic self, halted in the process of breaking down the personality and unable to build it up again. (A, pp. 39 - 41)

The dilemma for Rank's artist is that in order to make art out of life, he must sacrifice life. (A, p. 48) Instead of simply expressing, he takes the experience into himself, reshapes and recreates it, and sends forth something new, a creation. The modern author, in contrast

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<sup>1</sup>The Alexandrian Children are worth a passing glance. There are the children of Justine, Melissa, Cohen, Liza, Mountolive, Clea; the child prostitutes, the dead child in the box. Most of them are girls. Durrell's poems "For a Nursery Mirror" (B, p. 15) and "Cradle Song" (p. 16) deal with mirrors and images, the "Nonself and the Self". Compare Groddeck's emphasis on the bond between mother and child after birth (p. 145), and his theory of man's double-age, the child-adult (p. 135) and the immense age of the newborn (p. 208). Compare also the translator of Jung: "One might attempt to formulate the chief aim of the individual as the effort to create out of oneself the most significant product of which one is capable. On the biological level this is clearly the child ... Hence the budding personality with its potentialities for good or ill is frequently represented in dreams in the form of a child". (p. xx)

to the "collective creators of folk epic" makes himself the "real hero of his story". (A, p. 81) Because of the sacrifice he must make, the artist suffers from "fear of life". Fear is unreal, nebulous and uncaused, as is the religious feeling. The love-experience is real. Art is midway, "realising the unreal and rendering it concrete", seeking "to prove by objectification the emotional reality of what has never been real and can never be made real". (A, pp. 103 - 104) This is what Durrell's Alexandrians do with their selected fictions. By creating, making something from nothing, the artist at least attempts to assert his independence of that which exists. (A, p. 240) He has willed and his will has produced something; he is no longer bound by the determining forces of life. The making of a work of art is itself an act. (A, p. 207) The artist has done something and has something to show for his efforts.

The successful artist achieves a juxtaposition of inner and outer, of individual and collective, in short, a unity;

The highest type of artist is he who can use the typical conflict of humanity within himself to produce collective values, which, though akin to the traditional in form and content - because in principle they spring from the same conflict - are yet individual and new creations of the collective values, in that they present the personal ideology of the artist who is the representative of his age. (A, p. 362)

In successful art, the dualities of inner and outer experience are well blended. Art is "not a means of livelihood, but life itself", (A, p. 371). This complex blend is also the mark of a successful life. The artist absorbs the world within himself and then throws his cosmic identity outward, again to save his individual, non-cosmic identity. (A, p. 377)

Modern art is in danger from an overly "scientific" analytic

attitude. The aim is "not to express himself in his work, but to get to know himself by it". But as he succeeds in his aim, he becomes unable to create, since presumably then there is no more need for his creation, and also because illusions are necessary for art as they are for life. Similarly, once one knows oneself, there is no need to continue living - if knowing oneself is one's main purpose. This view is neglecting the outer half of the dualism. Rank poses as an artist who will renounce art, which has usurped the place of real experience in his life, and devote his creative energy to the formation of personality, thus, apparently, precipitating the millennium by eliminating art (A, pp. 430 - 431).<sup>1</sup>

Durrell's artist, Pursewarden, says that "the object of writing is to grow a personality which in the end enables man to transcend art". (B, p. 141) This is essentially what Rank says. Again, Pursewarden deliberately plans a "last" book and writes to Clea about "this new creature we artists are hunting for". His life and his art are "two problems which interconnect", but they are proceeding in opposite directions:

"Now in my life I am somewhat irresolute and shabby, but in my art I am free to be what I most desire to seem - someone who might bring resolution and harmony into the dying lives around me". (B, p. 239)

This is certainly not art for art's sake. Pursewarden uses Rank's word "harmony". Once this harmony is achieved, there is no more need for the

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<sup>1</sup>"Once you fully understand a work of art you no longer have any need of it". Durrell, Key, p. 39.

means by which it was achieved:

"In my art, indeed, through my art, I want really to achieve myself shedding the work, which is of no importance, as a snake sheds its skin". (B, p. 239, Durrell's italics)

Conversely, if one wishes to become only an artist, one sheds life, "the whole complex of egotisms which led to the choice of self-expression as the only means of growth". (C, p. 128) Pursewarden rejects this as impossible. He tells Clea that the artist's obstacle is himself, "mirror-worship". Appropriately, both artists are looking into mirrors during this conversation. Creation should be "fun, joy", he says, and the ego should not be allowed to turn this to misery. (C, p. 110) Clea knows from her own experience during her lesbian episode that the artist obsessed with personal anguish may be unable to create. Pursewarden's theory suggests that the purpose of art is to achieve a harmony of reality, at which point the artist transcends art and re-enters the realm of experience. The artistic process itself involves another transcendence, that of the self, introspection completed turning outward towards other selves.

Rank seems to want to have his art and transcend it too. The difficulty, and Pursewarden's difficulty, is the relation between art and life. Are they substitutes for each other, or complements? Does the artist have a self apart from his art? Or, as a creator, is he non-human? Rank's modern artist is in trouble, because his art is turned completely inward. He is guilt-ridden for vaguely defined reasons, most of which appear to suggest a deliberate renunciation of his collective humanity. He has usurped the role of creator. He has made a cowardly escape from the necessity for experiencing and hence from the "fear of life". If he can achieve artistic immortality, he does not need to fear



life and the implication of death: "He becomes non-human in that the impulse to create is the instigating factor, rather than the impulse to love or even to live". (A, p. 371) Wyndham Lewis speaks of the "magical quality in artistic expression". The artist is "tapping the supernatural sources and potentialities of our existence ... tampering, in a secular manner, with sacred powers".<sup>1</sup> The artist is as guilty as Faust, who traditionally loses his mirror image when he sells his soul, having adopted a distorted view of himself and his place in the Chain of Being. This guilt can no longer as in earlier ages work itself out creatively through "the counter-force of religious submissiveness", and festers on limiting the completion of both art and personality (A, p. 425) The modern artist does not want to admit this, and so he insists that art is "wholly true to life". Thus, his withdrawal from life into art is legitimate, if art and life can replace each other.

The great artist can free himself from the paralysing "parallelism between his life and work". His art is an object, whose non-identity with the subject is apparent. The lesser artist - for Rank, this is the Romantic contrasted with the superior Classical writer - puts his self, the subject into the object, and concentrates on that image. In Durrellian terms, his art is a mirror of himself alone. Since this is a false position, he has brought about the split in psyche which bothers the Alexandrians.

The artist does find his self in the process of his work, but he does not confuse the two. Durrell's Keats says that the very task of

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<sup>1</sup>Time and Western Man, p. 193

art, "the act of wrestling with an insoluble problem grows the writer up". (C, p. 184) This is what happens to Keats and to Darley and Clea, who are the artists of the future. It does not happen to Pursewarden; although Keats says Pursewarden realizes this, he does not "grow up". His self is in fragments and, knowing he cannot escape experience in art, he escapes in suicide. His is the dilemma of Rank's artist of the present.

In another sense, art and experience and self are connected. Rank traces the history of art to primitive religion's expression of the soul idea, and the motto for the artist is a religious one - he is to lose his life in order to find it:

The self-renunciation which the artist feels when creating is relieved when he finds himself again in his accomplished work, and the self-renunciation which raises the enjoyer above the limitations of his individuality becomes, though, not identification but the feeling of oneness with the soul living in the work of art, a greater and higher entity .... They (i.e. artists) have yielded up their mortal ego for a moment, fearlessly and even joyfully, to receive it back in the next, the richer for this universal feeling. (A, pp. 109 - 110; Rank's italics)

So Clea loses her "horror", her fear of life, and is able to paint.

And "joyfully" is the precise adverb for Darley's description of his artistic "coming of age":

I wrote: 'Once upon a time ...'  
And I felt as if the whole universe  
had given me a nudge! (C, p. 282)

The "feeling of oneness" results from the resolution of the dualities of inner and outer in the controlled creation of a relationship between subject and object, art and artist. The four words which begin a story are united with the four letters and four faces of the modern love which the Quartet set out to investigate. They unite the writer with the

past of his species, with "every story-teller since the world began", and with the men who listen to them. "Once upon a time" is a temporal statement expressed in spatial terms. The artist finds himself as both artist and man, "quite serene and happy, a real human being, an artist at last". (C, p. 281)

Gerald Sykes has charted the form of the Quartet as a progression culminating in the problem of the artist:

As Justine had symbolized (Darley's) education through passion, Balthazar through detachment, Mountolive through history, Clea now leads him to the most important phase of his career, for which all the rest was preparation, the practice of his own art.<sup>1</sup>

This is a fair enough cataloguing. Durrell has called Clea a "mime about rebirth on the parable plane".<sup>2</sup> Darley's reviving of the nearly drowned Clea symbolizes the love-act and also the "break-through to poetic illumination". "The achievement of 'artishood' is connected with sex and knowing", a realization of oneself in relation to another, and a realization of the direction one must take to be able to create. Sex, like art, is a human reflection of cosmic creation. Since it is her lover who revives her, Clea is not only reborn but reconceived, as artist and woman. Clea and Darley "reflect back the bisexual nature of the psyche" and "discover the fulcrum in themselves to be outside the possession of each other, but in the domain of self-possession."

Self-possession is the opposite of self-obsession; it is putting one's self in its proper place in relation to a whole, and is perhaps the

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<sup>1</sup>"One Vote for the Sun", World, p. 150

<sup>2</sup>Kneller Tape, World, pp. 166-167

"self-renunciation" which leads Rank's artist to a feeling of oneness. In presenting the achievement of artisthood in terms of love relationship, Durrell is trying to say "that life is really an artistic problem, all men being sleeping artists".<sup>1</sup> Clea awakes and solves her artistic problem. This amounts almost to an identification of art and life.

Groddeck makes some useful and relevant distinctions. The "Life" which appears in art is not equivalent to self in any narrow sense, but is the wholeness, the oneness, the reconciliation of dualities, and is "always symbolic of the human trinity - male, female, child - though the trinity may be shown incarnate in a single figure".<sup>2</sup> So Darley and Clea are the bisexual psyche in the act of creation. Oneness through self-renunciation is the essential artistic criterion: "The sole foundation of art is this power of losing one's separateness, of feeling oneself at the same time a whole and yet a part of something better." This paradox could apply to the process described by Rank, in which the artist achieves and transcends himself and then achieves and transcends his art. Like Rank, Groddeck denies that art can be concerned solely with the artist: "No man can be an artist for all time whose concern is with the human soul". Such a one "tears out a part of the truth from the web and presents it to us as the whole".<sup>3</sup> This detachment of man from his background and context is for Groddeck the peculiar disease

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<sup>1</sup>Kneller Tape, World, p. 167

<sup>2</sup>Groddeck, p. 122.

<sup>3</sup>Groddeck, pp. 51 - 54.

of modern, post-renaissance Europe. The whole is not only the whole man but the whole universe, macrocosm as well as microcosm. Groddeck's example of an artist achieving the universal oneness is Leonardo. Because of his landscapes, painting, unlike the other arts, "could never give itself up entirely to the exaltation and adoration of man's individual qualities, could never again become wholly psychological". In the work of Leonardo and Rembrandt, Groddeck finds a reverence for all of nature and a realization "that they are part of the universe and at one with it".<sup>1</sup> It is Clea, the painter, who finds the "secret landscape" of art before Darley, the writer, and it is because she is "reborn" that he too is reborn as an artist.

Durrell's poetry has been called the "record of a constructive mind working out a program for the ego in literary terms".<sup>2</sup> In the Alexandria Quartet this program is worked out and exemplified, with ego and literature in their context.

It would appear that art should not be too literally a mirror of life, at least not of immediate experience or of life now. But if the mirror objectifies the subject rather than merely duplicating it, then art as seen by Durrell and his psychoanalytic critics is a mirror. Mirrors, moreover, always reflect the background as well as the subject, that is, they put the reflected self in the context of a whole.

Philip Sherrard, discussing C.P. Cavafy, remarks that "it is in this rebirth of past experience that the meaning of experience itself would seem to lie; it is in the poem distilled years after the physical

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<sup>1</sup>Groddeck, p. 68.

<sup>2</sup>Hayden Carruth, "Nougat for the Old Bitch," World, p. 125

event that the event itself is fulfilled".<sup>1</sup> Clea's parable of rebirth gives meaning and wholeness to the events in the first three-quarters of the tetralogy. But even in Justine, Darley had known, without realizing the implications of the idea, that "only there in the silences of the painter or the writer can reality be reordered, reworked and made to show its significant side". (J, p. 17) It is the "silences" because the impulse to create and the "previous image" come to the artist who is waiting and receptive. In this reordering of reality,<sup>2</sup> which is emotion recollected in tranquillity, the pain of life becomes art. (J, p. 17)

Some of these ideas appear in the work of an older novelist, Charles Morgan, whom Durrell once placed in a list of literary notables which included Shaw and Huxley. (Cor, p. 76) In his preface to the The World of Man, Groddeck's translator quotes Morgan's description of the conception of a work of art:

In each case, his (the artist's) joy of it, ordinarily called creative, is a receptive joy; there is a close analogy in the feminine art of love, which is at once fierce and peaceful, a fulfillment and an initiation. The making of the work of art - the harvesting of the original truth - is a less intense experience than the conceiving of it, for in the moment of conception, and perhaps at no other time, the artist fully apprehends his gods and sees with their eyes their reality. This power to be impregnated, and not the writing of poems, the painting of pictures, or the composition of music, is the essence of art, the being an artist.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The Marble Threshing-Floor (London, 1956), p. 121

<sup>2</sup>Darley says it is reality which reworks us, not the other way around. (C, p. 12)

<sup>3</sup>Portrait in a Mirror (London, 1929), p. 44; Groddeck, p. 32

This quotation could be an abstraction of Darley's and Clea's "re-birth" or "reconception". There is also Pursewarden's notion of the artist attaining the level of the gods. And the whole air of passivity and receptiveness suggests the final chapter of Clea where the patiently waiting artist at least receives the "secret landscape", the "precious image". (C, p. 282)

In Reflections, an appropriately titled collection of essays, Morgan sees art as a mirror which enables man "to perceive himself as a part of Nature and perhaps, to recognize a god in himself".<sup>1</sup> Here again are the concepts of oneness and of the artist as god. The artist in Portrait in a Mirror experiences a moment of epiphany when he feels himself "absorbed in the open vastness of the universe about me"; this is accompanied by the awakening of "the courage to create", and the whole sensation is connected with rebirth and creation in nature as he is "identified with that day of sap and resurrection".<sup>2</sup>

The title Portrait in a Mirror is relevant to this discussion. In an observation which Morgan also uses as a title-page epigraph, Nigel, the protagonist, says, "It was in my mind to say that a portrait should be the image of one spirit received in the mirror of another". His portrait of Clare shows her as she is seen by him. He considers an interesting reflection problem, painting a rose as it is reflected not in an actual mirror but in the glossy whiteness of a tablecloth. The difficulty is that the reflecting surface has qualities of its own which must be conveyed: "For here it was necessary while borrowing colour from the reflected flower, to preserve the opaque whiteness of the

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<sup>1</sup>"Creative Imagination" in Reflections in a Mirror, Second Series (London, 1954), pp. 96 - 97.

<sup>2</sup>Portrait, pp. 151 - 152.

reflecting surface and to suggest beneath the stiff gloss, the texture and pliability of linen".<sup>1</sup> This is a problem Durrell has had to solve in his method. When people and events and landscapes reflect people and events and landscapes, all entities, reflected or reflecting, or both, must contain, in addition to the image of the other, a "realness" of their own.

Morgan's works contain various mirror tricks. Julie in The Fountain, waiting for her lover, recognizes in the mirror her self and, telescoping time, it is the self of past as well as present: "It is I, who wondered so often what would become of me".<sup>2</sup> Mary Terriford in the play The Burning Glass sees in a mirror the reflection of another character poisoning himself, and she does not interfere because he is free to will and act on his own.<sup>3</sup>

### C. The Artist as a Mirror of Society

The role of the artist in relation to other human beings is, in Pursewarden's view, almost entirely the role of a mirror:

'Aware of every discord, of every calamity  
in the nature of man himself, he can do nothing  
to warn his friends, to point, to cry out  
in time and to try to save them. It would  
be useless. For they are the deliberate  
factors of their own unhappiness. All the  
artist can say as an imperative is "Reflect  
and weep". (B, p. 141)

This extreme awareness of multiple facets of life, coupled with the inability to do anything about what he perceives, is Pursewarden's

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<sup>1</sup>Portrait, pp. 3, 87 - 88; p. 80.

<sup>2</sup>(New York, 1933), p. 247.

<sup>3</sup>Henry Charles Duffin. The Novels and Plays of Charles Morgan (London, 1959), p. 149.



anguish in his involvement with Nessim and Mountolive and is at least part of the reason for his suicide. The mirror is unable to bear the weight of its reflections. He uses the word "reflect" in its other sense in the imperative, in an attempt to transfer the burden of the "reflection" from the mirror-artist to the mirrored self. What has been reflected is a perverted use of free will by those who are the "deliberate factors of their own unhappiness". He resorts to the insertion of a blank page of his book in order to throw the reader "back upon his own resources", presumably with regard to his own action as well as to the reader's interpretation of the book.

(B, p. 143) Durrell has written that "poetry by an associative approach transcends its own syntax in order not to describe but to be the cause of apprehension in others".<sup>1</sup> Poetry is like Morgan's tablecloth, reflecting reality, but at the same time retaining a definite character and being of its own which demand active reaction from the reader. Pursewarden tells Clea that all real reading and writing is done "between the lines", and this is probably what Durrell means by "an associative approach" and by poetry's transcendence of its own syntax. The poetry means more than its words, and part of that meaning can be found only if the reader "reflects" within himself. The later Darley defines artists as "an uninterrupted chain of humans born to explore the inward riches of the solitary life on behalf of the unheeding unforgiving community". (C, p. 177) In this passage he is talking about time and the "heraldic universe" (of which more later). The artist reflects for the reader his self and also the collective

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<sup>1</sup>in Personal Landscape, quoted by Derek Stanford in "Lawrence Durrell: an Early View of his Poetry" in World, p. 39

self of his society. Darley's audience, like Pursewarden's is "unheeding unforgiving", unappreciative of the service done them by the artist in sparing them the anguish of being the first to explore the depths of their solitude and in showing the solitude to be part of a non-solitude, a timeless oneness.

Durrell's reader is definitely involved. It is his own self and non-action he has been investigating, and the problem of artistic creativity is surprisingly his problem, since all men are sleeping artists. "To awaken not merely the impulses of the forebrain with its limited formulations, but the sleeping beauty underneath - the poetic consciousness which lay coiled like a spring, in the heart of everyone". (M, p. 231) This is Narouz's purpose. The inner world with which he deals goes deeper than Nessim's "political chessboard". To awaken that poetic consciousness is also "to inflame the sleeping will". The artist is to awaken that part of the reader which he, as artist, reflects: the impulse to creative action. Pursewarden insisted that "it is only the artist who can make things really happen". (M, p. 216) Nessim recalls these words when he and Mountolive are deadlocked and actionless on the political chessboard, while even in death Pursewarden is making things happen, is forcing them into positions in which things must happen to them.

When he proposed to Justine, asking her to share the "monomania" which inspired his life, Nessim had himself resembled an artist. (M, p. 198) At that time, he could will and act, and was in fact setting forces in motion.

Pursewarden asserts the artist as the hope of the world. Men must will, act, fulfill their potential selves, live: "Heed me,

reader, for the artist is you, all of us - the statue which must disengage itself from the dull block of marble which houses it and start to live!". (C, p. 119) The block of marble disengages itself, and the artist in man must create himself in willed and potent action. People then will find "the unborn child in themselves, the infant Joy!" (C, p. 140) Pombal and Darley mourn the fall of France as a "failure of the human will", but they believe France will continue to live "so long as artists were being born into the world", (C, p. 36) because art is a success of the human will.

The psychiatrist Hogarth in The Dark Labyrinth sees art as "a dangerous thing to play with, since it demand self-examination and self-knowledge, and many people do not really wish for either": (DL, p. 45) Art forces its audience to active participation in art, and the first subject of their art is themselves. When Campion destroys his portrait of her, Mrs. Truman feels that he is refusing "to let her learn about herself". (p. 157) The question "how do artists happen?" occurs to her as she looks in the mirror; it is as if the work of art corresponded with her need to become both art and artist. The artist creates not only his self, but his world also; inner and outer are to reflect the truth in each other. Frank Kermode suggests that the Quartet offers "an alternative nature with another physics"<sup>1</sup> Pursewarden's plan for the "four-card trick" novel is to show the personality "across a continuum" so it becomes "prismatic", (C, p. 136), thus raising questions of causality and indeterminacy.

In the Key to Modern Poetry, Durrell offers poetry as "one dialect

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<sup>1</sup>Frank Kermode, Puzzles and Epiphanies (London, 1963), p. 223.

of a greater language comprising the whole universe of ideas". (p. xi)

Art is one way of talking about the self and will and action, but it is not the only way.

### CHAPTER III: The Mirror of Love

#### A. The Language of Love

"An investigation of modern love" - this, Durrell claims, is the central topic of the Alexandria Quartet. (B, note) Modern love, like good and evil, is relative; it depends on how one looks at it and on who looks at it. At the beginning of Justine, Durrell quotes Freud: "I am accustoming myself to the idea of regarding every sexual act as a process in which four persons are involved". There are Darley's Darley and Justine's Darley and Justine's Justine and Darley's Justine. For each of the four, there is a different perspective of the affair. It is impossible to conclude which persons and which perspectives are "true" and which are illusion.

The lover sees himself reflected in the loved. But she may be distorting the image returned to him, as Justine does. One must clarify the distortions, but somehow the distorted image is also true. Darley decides the love has been real and enriching for him, even if it was a *déception* on Justine's part. (B, p. 130) Justine says she would not know who she was if she did not have to act a part. The part she plays for Darley is not necessarily any less true than any of the other parts she plays. If all four persons are equally real, we are once more facing the problem of the split self.

Durrell has explained that he wanted "by my representation of the play of human passions to suggest that the human personality as such is an illusion". This is part of the implications of a post-Einstein universe, since, as Durrell has remarked, "raising questions like the Principle of Indeterminacy affects the whole basis of human personality". (Young, p. 64)

It is also appropriate that the setting is Alexandria. As E.M. Forster points out, it was the Alexandrians who made love the central theme of literature and who developed the various conventional accessories for the love story, the "darts and hearts, sighs and eyes, breasts and chests".<sup>1</sup> Durrell says, "Only the city is real", the characters being fictions. But the real city has a particular atmosphere, redolent of love and the illusions of love, and is therefore inseparable from the "unreal" characters.

Love, like art, is a way of expressing something about the self; it is a "means of communication". (B, p. 167) Usually the message one conveys becomes a message to the self about the self. Durrell frequently uses terms associated with language when discussing love. An instance of this is the grotesque episode when Darley sees his and Justine's act of love re-enacted, by two disgusting sub-human beings. He and Justine and Melissa are reduced to their lowest terms. (J, p. 185) There is a cracked mirror outside the brothel booth, to record the distorted reflection. The episode is retold in Balthazar from the point of view of Narouz, who is probably the sub-human lover, and now the gross love is exalted. The hideous old prostitute is a composite image of Narouz's mother, Leila, and his unattainable beloved, Clea. (B, p. 166 - 167) And Clea is eventually Darley's truest love. This intricate prism-sightedness is commented on as if it were a grammatical exercise: "Aphrodite permits every conjugation of the mind and sense in love". The incident, superficially a description of lust at its most animal level is an important clause in the self-description of several major characters.

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<sup>1</sup>Alexandria (Garden City, N.Y., 1961), pp. 32 - 38.

Melissa is discussed variously in connection with this language of love. From the detachment of the fourth volume, Darley wonders "Was she simply a nexus of literary cross-references scribbled in the margins of a minor poem?" (C, p. 41) Much earlier, he had used the ambiguities of the relationships in which she and Justine were involved to illustrate the ambiguity of the word "love":

My "love" for her, Melissa's "love" for me,  
Nessim's "love" for her, her "love" for  
Pursewarden - there should be a whole  
vocabulary of adjectives with which to  
qualify the noun - for no two contained the  
same properties; yet all contained the  
one indefinable quality, one common unknown  
in treachery. (B, p. 131)

"Love" is always liable to be "unlove", but the unlove viewed from some other perspective may then be seen as love.

"Unlove" is not the opposite of "love". Darley never "hates" Melissa, but sometimes in his contact with her he is not focusing on her. From his island he sees his "lovers and friends no longer as living people but as coloured transfers of the mind". (B, p. 14) Sometimes what is important is the reflection of one's self in the lover, but meanwhile the lover exists as a person, as a self to be reflected in turn, like Morgan's mirroring table-cloth.

#### B. Love as Knowledge

Turning a pun to a literal meaning, Clea says, "Sexual love is knowledge, both in etymology and in cold fact". (C, p. 113) The knowledge is not only carnally of the other but also mentally and spiritually of oneself. Explaining the Clea incident in which one lover revives the other, Durrell elaborates on this idea:

The sexual act becomes identified with all knowledge, all knowing; and the act (life-saving, life-giving) seems a sort of biological contagion whose object is not only the race's survival, but also the awakening of the psychic forces latent in the human being.<sup>1</sup>

From this act, both lovers are awakened to willed creativity. The knowledge probes deep and searches wide, for "love is a form of metaphysical enquiry",<sup>2</sup> It seems that to limit his topic to the investigation of modern love is not to limit it at all. Kermode has appropriately said that Quartet is a book about everything.<sup>3</sup>

It is, however, an everything which turns out to be a kaleidoscopic view of one thing, the self. Carl Bode comments, "Our only world is the world of self-exploration - love gives us the means", and the value of sex is "what it can teach us about ourselves".<sup>4</sup>

Relationship with others provides the only means of self-exploration. In his prismatic novel, Proust observed, "It is only with the passions of others that we are ever really familiar, and what we come to find out about our own can be no more than what other people have shown us".<sup>5</sup> Our own view of ourselves is disturbed by imagination, and the man who turns inward does not gain knowledge and cannot act.

<sup>1</sup>The Kneller Tape, World, p. 161

<sup>2</sup>"Lawrence Durrell Answers a Few Questions", World, p. 157

<sup>3</sup>"Durrell and Others", Puzzles and Epiphanies (London, 1963) pp. 214 - 227.

<sup>4</sup>"A Guide to Alexandria", World, pp. 206 - 207

<sup>5</sup>Swann's Way, p. 99



Eventually he can do nothing but curl up in a corner underground. If an eye is to see itself it must look at something else which sees it and in which it is reflected:

This it can do by looking in the eye of another person, in which, as in a mirror, it will see itself reflected; in other words, an eye, to see itself, must look at an eye. So in the same way, the soul, if it is to know itself, must look at a soul.<sup>1</sup>

This other, mirror soul resembles what Jung calls the "soul-image". Defining the soul as "the inner attitude of the unconscious", Jung finds it "represented by definite persons whose particular qualities correspond with those of the soul".<sup>2</sup> The "definite persons" are almost always of opposite sex to that of the soul they reflect. Just as love is the only means to self-knowledge, so the acquiring of self-knowledge is a criterion for love: "We can only love what is within ourselves, what we recognize as symbolic of ourselves".<sup>3</sup> The lover loves another because he loves himself. Narcissus appears explicitly in The Black Book: "They say we love only our own reflection in the faces of others, like cattle drinking from their own faces in a river". (BB, p. 167) Rank explores the difficulty of the artist who needs not only the soul-image, but also a muse, a "witness of his life to justify his production".<sup>4</sup> The danger is that the biological will hinder the artistic. This may be Darley's problem when he stops writing during

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<sup>1</sup>Sherrard, p. 194.

<sup>2</sup>p. 596.

<sup>3</sup>Groddeck, pp. 235, 240.

<sup>4</sup>pp. 51 - 60.

his liaison with Clea. After their "rebirth", she becomes his Muse, "the city's grey-eyed must", and leads him back to his art. (C, p. 245) There seems to be hope for the reunion of the lover and the muse. In Rank's terms, this would parallel a progression in art from the Romantic attitude to the Classical.

Clea rides with the narrative for three volumes, but, when in the last novel she becomes the heroine, it seems that she must have been so all along, if only Darley and the reader had not been too blind to realize it. She is full of depths and paradoxes which one forgets and recalls with surprise. She suffers experiences as terrible as anything Justine brings upon herself: her entanglements with Amaril, Justine and Narouz, her struggles with her art, the nightmarish attacks which she calls the "horror", the loss of her hand. Yet the impression she creates is one of light and clarity, an inner character corresponding to her outer bloneness. Although she is the intimate friend and even advisor of everyone from Justine to Scobie, she seems to be always alone and vulnerable. She is gentle and feminine, but enjoys painting accurate pictures of Balthazar's patients and their most revolting sores.

Her strange name may have several sources which appear to be related to her role in the Quartet. The Greek "Klea" means rumour, report, common fame, news, good report, fame or glory. Clea is literally a bearer of good tidings, and each of Darley's three books ends with a letter from her clarifying and restoring equilibrium. Less tangibly, this word may have something to do with the clarity which she exudes and also to herald Darley's emergence towards some degree of success. Cleia ("famous") was one of the Greek Hyades, nymphs who

supplied moisture to the earth, nursed the infant Dionysus, and were immortalised as stars. Durrell's Clea is part of the symbolism of re-birth by water and of the revivifying of sterile life and art. The Hyades' association with Dionysus reinforces this motif and relates it to the figure of the artist. The nymph, like Clea, had several facets to her character and came to be surnamed "the passionate". The stellar Hyades are situated in the forehead and eye of the constellation Taurus, in the organs of thinking and seeing, perceiving and reflecting in the double senses of both words. Clea accordingly perceives and inspires perception in others, and her clarity is a mirror for Darley. Carl Bode thinks she is meant to parallel the Star card of the Tarot. On this card a blonde female figure is pouring Water of Life from two ewers. She is "Truth unveiled, glorious in undying beauty, pouring on the waters of the soul some part and measure of her priceless possession". Like the Hyades' Cleia, she is concerned with a sort of irrigation of the mind. As the "grey-eyed Muse," she may be related to Clio, the muse of history and heroic poetry. Clio too is a rational, rather cold maiden who lapses briefly into irrational passion. Finally, Clea's severed hand and its miraculous steel replacement might be linked to the Old English "clea", a variant of "claw".<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Sources for the etymology of Clea are:  
 Bode, "A Guide to Alexandria", in World, pp. 211 ff. Robert Graves, The Greek Myths (Pelican Book), vol. I, chapters 27 and 39. The Oxford Companion to Classical Literature, ed. Sir Philip Harvey (Oxford, 1962). The Larousse Encyclopaedia of Mythology (London, 1959), pp. 178 - 185. A Lexicon, abridged from Liddell and Scott, Greek-English Lexicon (Oxford, 1958). The Oxford Universal Dictionary (Oxford, 1955). H.J. Rose, A Handbook of Greek Mythology (London, 1960). A.E. Waite, The Pictorial Key to the Tarot (New York, 1959), pp. 136 - 139.

### C. The Multiple Views of Love

In The Faerie Queene, Spenser defined three kinds of love:

The deare affection unto kindred sweete,  
Or raging fire of love to womankind,  
Or zeale of friends combynd with vertues meet:  
But of them all the band of vertuous mind,  
Me seemes, the gentle hart should most assured bind.<sup>1</sup>

Spenser's classification of the faces of love is prettier than Durrell's vision of them, and also prettier than they actually appear in Spenser's narrative, but the bases are similar. In Alexandria, the "raging fire" is liable to spread to any sort of love, producing, in place of "the deare affection unto kindred sweete", the incest of Pursewarden and Liza or the anguished and conflicting entanglement of Nessim and Narouz and their parents. The "zeale of friends" in Alexandria is often just that, the friendship which links Darley and Balthazar and Nessim and the rest of their circle, but it also becomes Balthazar's homosexuality and the lesbianism which temporarily binds Clea to Justine. Conversely, passion-love may become a marriage of true minds, as it is with Nessim and Justine at their best, or with Darley and Clea.

Whatever the category of the love, the foundation is always the same; as Durrell's Sappho phrases it, "the object is self-possession always". (S, p. 75) To "love" thy neighbour is necessarily to love him "as thyself". Pursewarden says, "There is no Other; there is only one-self facing forever the problem of one's self-discovery!" (C, pp. 98 - 99) This was also the definition of love given by the younger Durrell in The Black Book: "If I take your hand it is my own hand I am kissing". (p. 67)

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<sup>1</sup>Spenser, The Faerie Queene (Everyman Edition), IV, 9, i (vol. II, p. 102)

As Darley and Clea become each other's mirrors, he realizes "that Clea would share everything with me, withholding nothing - not even the look of complicity which women reserve only for their mirrors". (C, p. 99) The look is one of complicity because the mirror is not only where one looks for the whole truth about oneself, but also where one looks for guidance in the preparation of the disguises to be worn before the world. Nessim and Justine exemplify this better than Darley and Clea; their passion "came from complicity". (M, pp. 204 - 205) Here is another instance of Durrell's echoing of significant words. "Complicity" is an arresting word in both contexts, and is italicized in the earlier occurrence, so its reappearance resounds in the mind. Clea and Darley, like Justine and Nessim, are to go through anguish and estrangement and rebirth to a shared discovery of the meaning of their shared lives. Nessim and Justine discover "the true site of love" which is "each other's inmost weakness". They stare into each others' minds, using a sight more perceptive than that of the eye. When suspicion enters the stare, it becomes "sightless". (M, p. 209)

Justine denies that falling in love is a "correspondence of minds", and defines it as "a simultaneous firing of two spirits engaged in the autonomous act of growing up". Each loves the other as a mirror of himself; so, instead of two minds communicating, there are two selves simultaneously contemplating their respective reflections:

'The loved object is simply one that has shared  
an experience at the same moment of time,  
narcissistically; and the desire to be near

the beloved object is at first not due to the idea of possessing it, but simply to let the two experiences compare themselves, like reflections in different mirrors.'

(J, pp. 49 - 50)

This view, Darley emphasizes, may be true only of Justine herself; another view might be true for someone else. The "comparison" of shared experience becomes something more intricate than mere comparison. The comparison is a further experience, and lovers "have something to learn from each other". (J, p. 47) The sharing of experience, which is friendship, is gradually swallowed up in the mirror process; the loved one is a soul-image, and her sharing is a reflection of the lover's sharing. Then, as the lover's soul-image, she is part of himself, and friendship swells into a need for possession. Before Justine and Darley become lovers, their friendship "had ripened to a point when we had already become in a way part-owners of each other". (J, p. 48) They are victims of "a friendship so profound that we shall become bondsmen forever". (J, p. 26) The love relationship develops into a four-way struggle, each lover fighting to possess and also to escape being possessed. They "contend for the treasures of each other's personalities". (J, p. 198) In a double way, this is a contending for the lover's own personality, since he fights to possess the other who reflects himself, and also to preserve inviolate his own identity as subject.

Morgan's Nigel says of Clare at one time that she "was not then an object of desire, but a centre of revelation".<sup>1</sup> The centre of revelation, as she becomes more closely identified with the subject

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<sup>1</sup>Portrait, pp. 93 - 94.

she is revealing, becomes an object of desire.

The development from friendship to passion may be reversed in a relationship which provides neither partner with a soul-image. So Amaril, until he meets his noseless Semira, finds all his passions rapidly becoming friendships. (B, p.132) In another way, perhaps implying ~~another~~ meaning of "friendship", the reversal is beneficial. Cohen's love for Melissa is seen to "mature as all love should into a consuming and depersonalized friendship". (J, p. 110) This amounts to a transcendence of self-obsession. Cohen's love, as it is by the time Darley observes it, is one of the least selfish emotions in the Quartet. Love turned inwards is possession; turned outwards selflessly, it becomes tenderness.

Justine meets both Darley and Arnauti in a mirror, and the mirrored exchanges between her and Nessim have been noted above (J, pp. 65, 70 - 71) She is in particular association with mirrors because her loves provide a major plot line for the whole tetralogy, and the ambiguous character of her affairs illustrates the relative nature of all human "truth". The answer to the question: "Whom did Justine really love?" depends on which of the hinged mirrors the inquirer consults. She has a "mania for self-justification", a compulsive need for self-exploration. (J, pp. 132 ff.) Analysing herself, she sits in front of a mirror. (J, p. 136) Melissa, naked before a mirror, finds that the search for the other must proceed through the self in the converse of self-analysis: "Yes, I am looking at myself but it helps me to think about you". (J, p. 54) At the sight of Sveva similarly viewing herself, Pombal feels in danger of being possessed, as if she perceives his reflection through

her own.

Mountolive's first realisation of his love for Leila is described in terms of the mirror, specifically the shattering of light and image at the point where the subject touches its own reflection face to face. He is "stumbling forward like a man into a mirror". Their two images meet "like reflections on a surface of lake water". Since this is a meeting of minds as well as of bodies, the shattered images apply figuratively also: "His mind dispersed into a thousand pieces".

(M, p. 28) Later, realizing what is happening to him, Mountolive questions himself in a mirror (M, p. 27) as Arnauti had questioned himself in another time and place. (J, p. 73) The mirror that is Leila is at first a liberating force, freeing in him a "whole new range of emotions". This gradually becomes a mental relationship and then not even that; the selves are no longer reflected in each other and no longer have a common obsession to share. For a long time, while they are apart, they exist in each other's minds. This is a peculiarly Alexandrian trait. Heliodorus knew about this passion that is partly of the mind and the mysterious doings in the time-process of the mind. His Theagenes and Chariclea seem "rather to have been formerly acquainted, than to have now met for the first time, and to be returning gradually into each other's memory".<sup>1</sup> This is reminiscent of Alice's White Queen remembering the future. Arnauti's first glimpse of Justine serves as a reversed remembering of Darley's similar encounter.

Mountolive's relationship with Leila is Alexandrian in its involvement with mind, memory and time. Once he has severed both the passionate

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<sup>1</sup>"The Ethiopics" in The Greek Romance of Heliodorus, Longus and Achilles Tatius, trans. Rowland Smith (London, 1901), p. 68



and the intellectual links, Mountolive finds himself without a soul-image and, without her help, he can find no self behind his own mask, "save a terror and uncertainty which were entirely new". (M, p. 236) Apparently, self-possession had depended on possession of Leila. When they do meet again, he finds that the old soul-image, although powerless in its proper function and even ludicrous, is able to prevent the formation of any new mirror-relationship. Horribly changed herself, Leila in a sense forces time to stand still:

Sometime in the distant past they had exchanged images of one another like lockets .... She would remain forever blinded by the old love ... He was suddenly face to face with the meaning of love and time. (M, p. 281)

This meaning includes the loss of passion but also of "the power to fecundate each other's minds". Their two selves no longer liberate the springs of action in one another. This is what is important in Durrell's concept of time: mutability, a change in relationships.

In the Arab Quarter after his last rendezvous with Leila, Mountolive has the "illusion of time spread out flat ... the map of time which one could read from one end to the other, filling it in with known points of reference". (M, p. 285) The cages of the singing birds are "full of mirrors to give them the illusion of company. The love songs of birds to companions they imagined - which were only reflections of themselves!" (M, p. 285) The birds are "illustrations of human love"; they love their own image in another, since there is literally no other. The birds too are living by selected fictions.

The birds sing to non-existent lovers, and the falsity of the love does not lessen the quality of the song. Darley finds this out

when Balthazar shows him he was not Justine's most favoured lover:

And yet, even now I can hardly bring myself to feel regret for the strange enobling relationship into which she plunged me - presumably herself feeling nothing of its power - and from which I myself was to learn so much. (B, p. 130)

This independence of truth is a "really horrible thing", leading to the unanswerable question, "Are we then nourished only by fictions, by lies?" (B, p. 140) The only answer he produces at the time is Pursewarden's: "Everything is true of everybody". This implies that the quality-in-itself of an experience does not matter; the levels of value depend on one's own relative position. If one does not happen to be in love, can one morally create a sham love and play at passion in order to have a reflection of oneself?

At least a tentative answer is suggested throughout the four books. Nessim suggests "love contracts for those whose souls aren't yet up to loving". He calls this a tendresse instead of an amour-passion. (M, p. 195) Pursewarden is the major champion of this tendresse. The amour-passion is not the most important thing, not even in a love relation, because "sex is a psychic and not a physical act. The clumsy coupling of human beings is simply a biological paraphrase of this truth - a primitive method of introducing minds to each other, engaging them". (B, p. 124) An introduction demands recognition of the other person involved as well as an acknowledgement of one's own identity. The experience achieved from this initial engagement of minds seems to be only one factor in what Durrell means by "tenderness": "English has two great forgotten words, namely 'helpmeet' which is much greater than 'lover' and 'loving-kindness' which is so much greater than 'love'".

or even 'passion'". (B, p. 128) Clea sees Pursewarden as "tortured beyond endurance by the lack of tenderness in the world", (J, p. 244) and Scobie says that the difficulty with his tendencies is the "lack of tenderness". (B, p. 36) Tenderness goes outward as well as inward, gentle in sympathy and dynamic in its power to promote action. This is the sort of link that seems to exist sometimes between Nessim and Justine, for a while between Darley and Melissa and most fully between Darley and Clea. It is the type of love recommended by Spenser, based on a judicious binding of "vertuous mind" and "gentle hart".

Pursewarden, planning his last volume, speaks of his intention "to combine, resolve and harmonise". His tone now is to be not one of anguished soul-searching or passion, but of affirmation, with "the curvature of an embrace, the wordlessness of a lovers' code. It should convey some feeling that the world we live in is founded in something too simple to be over-described as cosmic law - but as easy to grasp as, say, an act of tenderness, simple tenderness in the primal relation between animal and plant, rain and soil, seed and trees, man and God". (B, pp. 238 - 239) This simplicity is not for the self-obsessed and it is too delicate for the "inquiring mind and conscience". In such primal relations, such outward turnings of the self, lie "hope for man, scope for man", the possibility of joy. The difficulty is that this is offered not as Durrell's solution, but as Pursewarden's. And Pursewarden commits suicide.

#### D. The Mirror of Incest

Narcissus should have been an Alexandrian. He will not accept the love of Echo, even though an echo is a sort of mirror to the ear,

and all his love is concentrated inward. The mirror he chooses, the pool, is not alive, and demands nothing from him. His fate has been foretold by the blind hermaphrodite seer Teiresias. In some versions of his story, the love he has rejected is that of a male friend Ameinias. It has also been said that the reason for this fascination with his own appearance is the death of his twin sister, whose features he attempts to recall in his own. For various reasons, and also to fulfill the vengeful intentions of the gods, Narcissus dies or commits suicide, and is changed into a flower.<sup>1</sup> His legend reads like a distillation of some major Alexandrian themes: the mirror and echo, the prophecy of Teiresias, homosexuality, incest, suicide, all based on the irrational passion for the self. In the rendition given here, there is a reason for Narcissus's self-love; it might also be suggested that love for self came before love for the twin.

Incest is a literal form of mirror-love, since the object of love is physically as nearly as possible identical with the self. In "western" cultures, it is generally regarded as a revolting aberration. Sade refers to "the sink of incest and infamy".<sup>2</sup> In classical and Renaissance tragedy, it provokes the most terrible punishments from whatever gods there be. In ancient Egypt and some other "eastern" civilizations, on the other hand, incest was rare because it was an exclusive privilege, rather than because it was criminal.

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<sup>1</sup>Thomas Bulfinch, The Age of Fable (London, 1919), pp. 106 - 110. Encyclopaedia Britannica (1951), vol. XVI, p. 117.

<sup>2</sup>Justine, p. 105

The Ptolemies made Alexandria a "city of incest". (J, pp. 96 - 97) They claimed to be "successive emanations of the Deity, in pairs of male and female".<sup>1</sup> Through generations, a process of sex transference seemed to develop, the men becoming softer, the women harder, interweaving the dynasty with "terrific queens".<sup>2</sup> Durrell echoes Forster's description when Darley, watching Justine, is reminded of "that race of terrific queens which left behind them the ammoniac smell of their incestuous loves to hover like a cloud over the Alexandrian subconscious". (J, p. 20) In this city of extreme inversion, self dissects itself in an unhygienic operation on itself. Pursewarden has no difficulty finding precedents for his crime, involking the legends of Osiris and Isis, the sun and moon, of Cleopatra herself, of the sister who restores the dead king to life, linking both art and incest to deity. (C; p. 191) Marie Delcourt notes that in alchemy the union of brother and sister symbolizes the return to unity, so that the artifex is assisted by his soror mystica, in a relationship associated with a series of mythical syntheses, such as that of the sun and the moon.<sup>3</sup>

Balthazar tries to show how conventional love-making causes "etiolation of the heart and reins", so one must "'turn inwards upon one's sister'". He continues: "The lover mirrors himself, like Narcissus in his own family". (J, p. 97)

There is only one literally incestuous relationship in the Quartet, that of Pursewarden and his sister, but the cloud on the Alexandrian subconscious hovers everywhere in varying degrees of intensity.

<sup>1</sup>E.M. Foster, Alexandria, p. 16.

<sup>2</sup>Alexandria, p. 23

<sup>3</sup>Hermaphrodite: Myths and Rites of the Bisexual Figure in Classical Antiquity (London, 1961), p. 81.

Mountolive invariably develops earache on his visits home and can be cured only by his mother. She is the centre of his "current of memories", of a pattern of time. (M, pp. 95, 99) To Clea's father, she is a key part of his own time processes and he is described in connection with time: he must be home by midnight, he thinks of the future only as it involves her; he waltzes with her "like a clockwork man" regulated by the machinery to time, and Darley observes, "A daughter is closer than a wife". (B, pp. 227, 234)

Mountolive and Clea are still far short of Oedipus and Electra, but anguish enters the entanglement of Nessim, Narouz and their parents. The conflict here cuts across sexes and involves the four principals in ambivalent relationships. Nessim and Narouz are like two sides of one coin: Nessim, handsome and urbane; Narouz, ugly, awkward and barbaric. They are identical not only in flesh and blood, but also in what they love most, their mother, their lands, their country. They are "like two blind people in love who can only express themselves through touch: the subject of their lands". (B, p. 72)

Both sons have a more than dutiful affection for their mother. Nessim is her favourite and Narouz is "heartsick" over this. (B, p. 75) The father is rough and unattractive, but he is loved. Narouz has a "lustful tenderness" for him, (M, p. 39), and in his "face like a mirror reflected the various feelings of (his father's) conversation". (M, p. 44) Narouz is in other ways a mirror of his father (or vice versa), in his jealous love for Leila and his zeal for the Coptic cause, especially. Nessim resembles Leila, so that Mountolive looks "through the face of Nessim and into that of Leila". (M, p. 17)

As Leila's lover, Mountolive is involved in the family situation.

Leila wonders even if he may be a sublimation of her incestuous desires:

'It was a shock, I mean, to suddenly see  
Nessim's naked body floating in the mirror ...  
I wondered suddenly whether my attachment for  
you wasn't lodged here somehow among the  
feeble incestuous desires of the inner heart'.  
(M, pp. 53 - 54)

Narouz also associates Nessim with Mountolive, at the same time identifying himself with his father's jealousy. (M, p. 227) Nessim feels that he is too much of a mirror, that some of his life is in Leila, so that he thinks he may "never be able to fall in love properly" while she lives, (M, p. 195), and when she dies, his private reaction is a feeling of new life. (C, p. 266)

The love of Pursewarden and Liza is a major key to the subtle arcana of the Quartet, but the key does not turn easily and the door does not swing wide open. Pursewarden is a strange, almost a monstrous figure. He is a successful artist, apparently a great one, and it seems reasonable to assume that the views on art and life which he pronounces at length are generally Durrell's views. But he commits suicide, while Darley, who in comparison seems inept as writer and person, survives, even triumphs. Somewhere in Pursewarden's scheme there is a flaw.

Pursewarden's artist, like Rank's, is a Faust. As creator, he usurps suprahuman powers, and he continually contends with these powers lest they control instead of obeying him. This struggle engages all men, the artist more only because he is more creative and therefore more of a threat to the gods; "I believe that Gods are men

and men Gods; they intrude on each other's lives trying to express themselves through each other - hence such apparent confusion in our human states of mind, our intimations of powers within or beyond us". (B, p. 124)

In Sade's Justine, Roland outdoes the merely Faustian in his double crime of incest and murder. He brags that he "most insolently taunts the hand of heaven and challenges Satan's own".<sup>1</sup> Roland's mistress is his sister and their union is a worse crime than her murder, because it is outside the rules of both good and evil. Studying the Osiris myths, Pursewarden would find that "the king marries his sister because he as God (star) wandering on earth, is immortal and may therefore not propagate himself in the children of a strange woman - any more than he is allowed to die a natural death".<sup>2</sup> The artist, like the god, is immortal, as artist if not as man. Pursewarden observes both rules, in loving Liza and in arranging his own death. His immortality is testified to in the volumes of quotations from his works and conversation, which occur in the speech of the other characters after his death. In fact, he very seldom appears directly in Darley's narrative; people reminisce about him or quote him, and most of the episodes in which he does appear are made to relate to his death.

The artist's suicide is an aspect of the subject-object split in the self. Rank says that "a life has to be sacrificed so that it may live on immortally in the work". This sacrifice is usually carried out figuratively as the sacrifice of immediate experience to the

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<sup>1</sup>p. 273.

<sup>2</sup>Rank; p. 145 note.



creation of experience. But the myth of the sacrifice is related to the sets of doubles in legend - for instance, Cain and Abel, Romulus and Remus. One of the mortal doubles "must be sacrificed if the immortal ego is to live on in the work".<sup>1</sup> Narouz is killed instead of Nessim. It is Pursewarden's half of the double self which is sacrificed, while Liza goes on to experience life as a whole self with her own life. If his "immortal ego", his "I", is to live on in his art, and the outer life of experience is to live in Liza and her love for Mountolive, there is no need for Pursewarden himself to continue living. Frank Kermode suggests that this incest may be "meant to indicate a narcissism of the sort that sets up an oscillation between an artist's inner and outer life that only an Empedoclean suicide can end".<sup>2</sup> The oscillation between the inner and outer life is suggested in Pursewarden's justifying his love with the myths and symbols of his art. He and Liza are so closely identified that Liza is part of his inner life. Describing their childhood, Liza says, "He converted my blindness into poetry. I saw with his brain, he with my eyes!" (C, p. 190) Liza's existence is only inner, so the world they create for themselves is the "real" world for them only. Pursewarden sees with her "eyes" which are the inner eyes, of imagination, the artist's eyes, and she "sees" through the products of his brain.

Ten thirsty fingers of my blind Muse  
 Confer upon my face their sensualspelling.  
 (C, P. 188)

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<sup>1</sup>Rank, p. 202.

<sup>2</sup>Puzzles and Epiphanies, p. 221.

These lines, supposed to be Pursewarden's, show the blending of outer and inner, sense and imagination. Her reading and her recognition of books and men depend on her sense of touch, a "sensual spelling". It is also a "sensual spelling" for him in that her touch spells out inspiration for him. She is his "blind Muse". Their interchange of parts of each other's mind and senses makes them more than mirror reflections, but the general metaphor is applicable. As twins and as soul-images, they reflect their double selves. There is an episode in which Liza seems to be looking in a mirror. Her blind face is "lucid", a clear mirror for an easily read reflection. She is in a sense actually "exploring her own blindness in the great mirror", because the fact of her in relation to a mirror has particular implications:

This caged reflection gives her nothing back  
That women drink like thirsty stags from mirrors.  
(C, p. 189)

Liza exchanges no look of complicity with her mirror as Clea, Justine and Melissa do. The extraordinary pallor of her face, possibly contributing to its lucidity, is uncamouflaged because she cannot enlist the mirror's aid in masking it. (C, p. 168) There is no mask and no self-deception. Her blindness provides a sort of clarity; her lack of a mirror makes her a better mirror of herself and others.

"Blindness" has a figurative connotation which Pursewarden implies in his wish for "someone to whom he could speak freely - but it must be someone who could not fully understand!" (M, p. 174, Durrell's italics) Melissa serves here, but she, "blind" though she is, "sees" far too much for Pursewarden's good, first reading his hand accurately and

later revealing Nessim's plot.

Kermode called the suicide "Empedoclean". Perhaps Pursewarden was trying to prove his artistic godhead and immortality. His death, however, serves several other causes; leaving Liza free to love Mountolive, and exempting himself from the results of his dutiful reporting of Nessim's subversion to Mountolive and his subsequent warning to Nessim. To both cases, his advice to Justine applies, "Lastly it is honourable if you can't win to hang yourself". (B, p. 125, Durrell's italics)

Durrell has linked his incest theme with that in Herman Melville's Pierre.<sup>1</sup> Near the end of that book is a description of a portrait of Beatrice Cenci:

So sweetly and seraphically blonde a being,  
being double-hooded as it were, by the black  
crape of the two most horrible crimes...  
possible to civilised humanity - incest and  
parricide.<sup>2</sup>

Liza is blonde, but Pursewarden makes her dye her hair black to mask their resemblance and hence their guilt, an attempt to drape the too-revealing mirror.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>in a letter to Jean Fanchette, dated 31 March 1958, printed in World, p. 223.

<sup>2</sup>(London, 1923), p. 489. Pierre also is a writer in love with his sister, who is dark. His other love is very blonde - and she is an artist. But the dark-fair dichotomy in literature is not a simple matter of black and white, bad and good. In Pierre, dark Isabel is more real, vibrant, healthily alive, than the coldly chaste, fair Lucy. See Northrup Frye, Anatomy of Criticism (Princeton 1957), p. 101.

<sup>3</sup>cf. Hawthorne's Marble Faun, which employs various motifs similar to some of Durrell's: a Mediterranean setting with Gothic details; dark Miriam and fair Hilda; artists; the historic present of Rome and Beatrice Cenci like Alexandria and Cleopatra; the climax of the carnival which sweeps up Kenyon, as the Alexandrian carnival does Darley, the artist-observer, who is at the time unaware of the significance of events; the anonymity of costumes.

Perhaps there is a connection also with the contrast between blonde Clea, who is an accurate mirror, and dark Justine, who deceives.

Durrell places two characters in the following scene from his poem "Mneiae"; both are "my selves". They are I and I.

I, the watcher, smoking at a table,  
And I, my selves, observed by human choice,

A disinherited portion of the whole:  
With you the sibling of my self-desire.  
(*"Mneiae"*, P, p.1)

The fact that there are two I's makes each a "disinherited portion of the whole", not integrated in a unity of self or of creation. The literal "sibling of my self-desire" is the object of incestuous love.

#### E. The Five-Sexed Mirror

In Alexandria one may love whom one pleases as one pleases. There are "more than five sexes" in the city which is infused with "something subtly androgynous, inverted upon itself". (J, p. 14) The very layout map of Alexandria is a map of the landscape of the mind, showing the spacing of thoughts. From the introverted place, from the desire whose object is the desirer, come "the sick men, the solitaires, the prophets" - those who like to be alone and "who have been deeply wounded in their sex". (J, p. 14) The logical fate of the self-desirers is to become "hermaphrodites of conscience, copulating with ourselves". (S, p. 81) The homosexual makes one sex do the work of two, and this apparently is an important achievement of the Alexandrians, of "a whole heaving heap/of ineffably herbaceous Alexandrian hermaphrodites". (S, p. 65) The Alexandrian god of love

is no modern upstart invoked to justify space-age immorality, but "the old, double-sexed Eros of Plato".<sup>1</sup>

In the Aegean, especially on Cyprus, Durrell encountered the legend of the double-sexed, bearded Aphrodite, whose worshippers wore the dress of the opposite sex. She was symbolic "not of licence and sensuousness, but of the dual nature of man". (BL, p. 171)<sup>2</sup> That the self-sufficient Aphrodite is not an obscure Cypriot is shown by Spenser's description of Venus:

Both male and female, both under one name:  
She syre and mother in here selfe alone,  
Begets and she conceives, we needeth other none.<sup>3</sup>

This is the unified bisexual self. Most selves are not unified and require another as soul-image to complete the self. That other is usually of the opposite sex since it is to mirror the soul which, in an attempt at balance, is likely to possess qualities opposite to those exhibited in the conscious attitude.

In the creation myths of Gnosticism, Hermetism, Orphism and Judaism, the originally created human being is androgynous and is subsequently divided into two beings of opposite sex. The primordial bisexuality remains as a force driving the psyche to seek a restoration of unity.<sup>4</sup>

In Groddeck's version of the unified self, the "It-unit" of an individual includes not only a male It plus a female It, but also

<sup>1</sup>"Lawrence Durrell Answers ...", World, p. 157. cf. Young, p. 62.

<sup>2</sup>also Delcourt, p. 27.

<sup>3</sup>Faerie Queene, IV, 10; xli (Vol. II, p. 121).

<sup>4</sup>Delcourt, pp. 68, 77, 78. Groddeck, pp. 127, 129.

"all the It-beings of the ancestral chain".<sup>1</sup> Once again the unity is one of time as well as of sex. It is a union of inner and outer, of conscious and unconscious, "to make up a balanced psyche".<sup>2</sup>

Both art and artist have hermaphroditic qualities. In art, the bisexual symbol is the subject in Greek statues of literal hermaphrodites, in renaissance romances of transvestism, and in Durrell's anonymous carnival dominoes. The concept, originating in the unconscious, is welcomed by the artist as "the figure best able to sum up his origins and to symbolise certain of his aspirations", that is, to depict his progress away from and return to unity. Delcourt describes a Pompeian painting of a hermaphrodite receiving a mirror from a bearded Eros in feminine dress. The mirror is here associated with bisexuality in a reflection of the dual nature of the psyche and the ambiguous nature of eros.<sup>3</sup>

The artist must be bisexual as the parthenogenic parent of his work. He must also establish the cosmic unit within himself and become a whole individual: "Male, female and child make up the complete human being and only when they are united within himself can man become Creator and Lord".<sup>4</sup> Delcourt compares the double being to the phoenix which fertilises and engenders itself.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>p. 75.

<sup>2</sup>Delcourt (Quoting Jung), p. xii.

<sup>3</sup>Delcourt, pp. xi, 60, 63.

<sup>4</sup>Groddeck, p. 184.

<sup>5</sup>p. 71.

Darley, like the phoenix, emerges from his own ashes, transcending his former self and becoming an artist.

The homosexual, like the hermaphrodite, is connected with the idea of the integration of personality. In an extreme effort to unify, the artist chooses the mirror which will reflect himself most closely. The likeness is based on identity of sex rather than of blood. The self, attempting to idealise itself, personifies "a portion of its own ego in another individual".<sup>1</sup> The relationship is both idealisation and humiliation of the self. The loved object is as like the self as possible, because "this glorification of a friend is fundamentally self-glorification". In his poem "Elegy on the Closing of the French Brothels", Durrell describes the "bodies of boys" as mere substitutes, "the temporary/refuge for a kiss on the silver backs of mirrors". (P, p. 196)

Balthazar exemplifies the ambiguity of the homosexual condition, perhaps of any relationship. He is a wise man and a philosopher, a doctor of mind and body, a living key to depths of Alexandria, "its Platonic daimon, mediator between its Gods and its men". (J, pp. 72, 91) At the same time, he can allow passion for a boy to drag him into the squalor in which Darley finds him in Clea. He can joke cynically about his lover falling in love with "a heavily moustached Armenian girl". (B, p. 170) But there is also a sort of philosophy behind his aberration that eliminates any "qualification of his innate

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<sup>1</sup>Rank, pp. 52, 56, 61.

masculinity of mind". (J, p. 92) The homosexual is not a criminal but merely a practitioner of a particular sort of love. Without the traumatic difference in sex, love can become a companionship or an empathy, rather than an obsession. The subject retains his own soul-image, and the reflection received from the mirror of the lover is an objective one:

'At least the invert escapes this fearful struggle to give oneself to another. Lying with one's own kind, enjoying an experience one can still keep free the part of one's mind which dwells in Plato, or gardening, or the differential calculus'. (J, pp. 96 - 97)

Balthazar does not maintain this lofty plane in his actual affairs, perhaps because his lovers are not really his "own kind" but an excessive idealization of his self in the other.

Balthazar is physically ugly, and his young men are beautiful. They are also stupid and superficial. It is as though he chose a mirror to reflect the opposite of himself. He is supposed to have been acquainted with the poet Cavafy, and Durrell's characterization of him resembles Cavafy's poems about the aging lover waiting, usually in a crowded Alexandrian cafe for the arrival of a youth whose beauty he worships.<sup>1</sup> The beauty is "exquisite", "ideal", "the beauty of unnatural attractions".<sup>2</sup> As the wise man, the interpreter of the Caballa, Balthazar is a seeker after absolutes, but in his life embodies such contrary elements as to contradict the assertion of a possible absolute.

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<sup>1</sup>Cavafy, pp. 66, 163 - 164, 133 and others.

<sup>2</sup>Cavafy, pp. 133.



Homosexual lovers might be expected to find fairly uncomplicated mirrors in one another, but such is not the case in Durrell's world. They seem to be less like each other than the heterosexual lovers are, maybe because the bisexual nature of the psyche required a soul-image of the opposite sex, and the opposite-ness must be found in some way. Balthazar and his lover are contradictions. The lesbianism of Clea and Justine is possibly even more paradoxical. Here again is the conventional contrast of the fair woman and the dark: Clea who continually tries to discover and illuminate the truth about people and life and art; and Justine who revels in deception even when she thinks she is trying to confess. But these opposites provide mirrors in which each finds vital truths about herself. Justine tells the truth, as she would not to a male lover, and is able to explore her own problems (J, pp. 227 - 228; B, p. 51) Clea finds that what is supposedly a perversion becomes a "perfectly achieved relationship", because, as Balthazar explained, there is no problem of the physical body being in the way. In this love she finds 'self-realization', 'self-love', a ground for 'health of the psyche'. (J, pp. 129 - 130) In her love for a woman, Clea discovers the truth of her own womanhood and her natural relation to men. (B, p. 54)

Among Durrell's Alexandrians, there are a number of remarkable friendships. Some mention has been made of those related to heterosexual love. There are also intimate acquaintances between members of the same sex, without connotations of sodomy. The friend perhaps more than the lover, may provide the self with a clear reflection, for here, with passion eliminated, the mirror approaches objectivity.

Balthazar does this very explicitly for Darley with his interlinear correction of Darley's story. But more or less subtly they all do this for each other, by a significant appearance, action, word, revealing a new facet of things. Modern friendship, like modern love, is depicted in terms of the relative, and each of them - Darley, Balthazar, Pursewarden, Nessim, Mountolive and those more on the fringe of the novels: Narouz, Amaril, Capodistria, Mnemjian, Keats - each has special views and hidden lights perceptible from his position only.

But these friendships are a type of love, and as such make demands upon the emotions. Tensions among the friends prove as agonising as any among lovers; for instance, the triangle of Mountolive, Pursewarden and Nessim, in which each of the three has a duty outside personal relationships. These duties are to force Pursewarden to force Mountolive to stop Nessim.

At its best, the Alexandrian friendship is that of Mountolive and Balthazar, a "communion of minds" over a chessboard, the chess a quiet parody of the political game Mountolive plays. The communion is rooted in "the fecund silences of the royal game". (M, p. 233) Sometimes the friendship becomes identity, as when Melissa bequeaths her love for Darley to Clea (B, p. 135) and Darley later finds Clea where he had found Melissa. (C, p. 76)

The carnival is the climax of Alexandrian androgyny, for in the black dominoes, everyone is bisexual, asexual or multisexual. If one wears costume instead of the domino, it is likely, like Pombal's feminine ensemble, to suggest a nature contrary to one's own (B, p. 179)

or ironically like it. Toto de Brunel, the "gentleman of the Second Declension", the sexually dispossessed", (B, pp. 25, 200) wears Justine's ring and is "turned from a man into a woman," his outward regalia corresponding to the sexual bias of his inner self. For a little while he ceases to be dispossessed. He and Scobie have their own peculiar languages, perversions of phraseology, the word made analogous to the flesh. (B, p. 25, 248) The carnival celebrants<sup>1</sup> are completely anonymous. The disguised self is free to be itself. Guilt is eliminated from acts performed in costumes resembling that of the Inquisitors, the probers of guilt. The ambiguous dark, amoral figures are "outward symbols of our own secret mind", their very obscurity making them accurate mirrors of the hidden self. (B, p. 201)

The most pleasant hermaphrodite in Alexandria is Scobie, the comic mirror discussed earlier. He is repeatedly eulogised in archetypal terms as the Ancient Mariner, the Old Man of the Sea, a sort of upside-down saint. He is Tiresias the hermaphrodite prophet. At the carnival a peculiar jazz-song plays:

Old Tiresias  
 No one half so breezy as  
 Half so free and easy as  
 Old Tiresias. (B, pp. 44, 202)

Its composer might have belonged to the school of T.S. Eliot's shakespeherian rag, and Carl Bode has suggested that Scobie comes from Greek myth via the Waste Land.<sup>2</sup>

Tiresias traditionally is very old, he is a seer, he is blind and

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<sup>1</sup>The word is appropriate; comparison is made to dark rituals such as the Brocken or Sade's account of the satyr monks. (B, pp. pp. 190 - 191, 216)

<sup>2</sup>World, p. 210

he is bisexual.<sup>1</sup> Scobie is "anybody's age" (J, p. 121), he sees Clea's episodes with Amaril and Narouz. (C, pp. 124, 207) He has one blind eye, and, to add to his qualifications, he has tendencies which inspire him to dress as a woman at full moon. (B, p. 40, C, pp. 80 ff.) After his death, he is canonized by the Arab quarter as a saint with power to cure sterility, another of Tiresias's accomplishments.

Discussing The Waste Land in his Key to Modern Poetry, Durrell quotes a Gnostic saying:

'When the Lord was asked by a certain man,  
When should his kingdom come, he saith unto  
him: When two shall be one, and the without  
and the within, and the male with the female,  
neither male or female'. (Key, pp. 152 - 153)

E.M. Forster's version of the reply begins, "Whenever ye put off the garment of shame", the elimination of guilt, as at carnival, being necessary for the purgation of desire.<sup>2</sup> Durrell goes on to offer Tiresias as a symbol "pointing toward the future integration which lies beyond the hills of science and metaphysics, anthropology, and even perhaps art itself". Scobie, joke though he is, achieves some measure of this integration. Clea points out that "He was quite successfully himself". (C, p. 120) His himself-ness includes his bisexuality. He is, as well, wise in the ways of the Sphinx's riddle of man: 'Cheer up, my boyo, it takes a lifetime to grow. People haven't the patience any more". (C, p. 33) His death is squalid, but is lost in the context of his sainthood and in the

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<sup>1</sup>Delacourt, p. 42.

<sup>2</sup>Alexandria, p. 235.

reminiscences of the Alexandrians. Besides, he is not the first martyr to die a disgusting death of his own inviting.

A less attractive double-sexed saint is the Pope Joan of Durrell's translation from Royidis. She grows a beard to escape rape, disguises herself as a monk, begins to believe she has changed sex like Tiresias, and finally bears a child during a papal procession. She has the conventional trappings of the hermaphrodite character, but unlike Scobie she fails to be herself, because, instead of escaping from her feminine state she is overcome by it.<sup>1</sup> The result is disintegration of the self she has created.

The Alexandrian, like Virginia Woolf's Orlando, is man and woman and "knew the secrets, shared the weaknesses of each".<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Delcourt, p. 90.

<sup>2</sup>Orlando, p. 145. Delcourt (p. 87) lists nine female saints who assumed masculine guise; three of these are Alexandrian.

CHAPTER IV: The Mirror of Malady: Illness and Mutilation

"I swear, gentlemen, that to be too conscious is an illness - a real thoroughgoing illness", says the underground man, who is, he claims, a "sick man".<sup>1</sup> Commenting on this passage, F.J. Hoffman writes, "What he has in mind is the sensitivity to himself in terms of his surroundings, as well as an almost absurd sensitivity to the mirror reflection of his behaviour and appearance". The Dostoevskian disease, and the Durrellian, is a self-sickness, and the major symptom is inaction.<sup>2</sup> The Alexandrians are accident-prone, disease-prone, deformity-prone. They lose hands, eyes, noses and minds. Some are inflicted with incurable diseases and some are born deformed. They are lovesick, timesick, and self-sick.

Suffering is "an acute form of self-importance". (J, p. 181) Nessim realizes this, and knows also that he is incapable of following Plotinus's command to "Look into yourself, withdraw into yourself and look". He cannot bear to see a true reflection of himself. Pombal complains of the Alexandrian "mania for dissection, for analysing the subject", the subject of one's own loves and actions (J, p. 21; Durrell's italics) This self-importance and excessive interest in self-analysis are unhealthy, because they amount to fascination with one's own disease, like picking a sore. Plotinus's intent is to diagnose and cure, not to dissect and preserve.

Justine's quest among the psychoanalysts of Europe is a deception of herself and others. Pursewarden accuses her of using neurosis as

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<sup>1</sup>Notes, pp. 53, 56.

<sup>2</sup>Beckett, pp. 30 - 31.

an excuse and suggests that her illness is "just due to an inflamed self-pity". (B, pp. 122, 125) She checks herself short of any revelation which might give the analyst a clue. On his ever-perceptive mirror, Pursewarden writes for her:

"Oh Dreadful is the check!  
Intense the agony -  
When the ear begins to hear  
And the eye begins to see!" (M, p. 174)

The real agony begins at the verge of detection, and hence of annihilation, of the truth about the self. But it is too easy to dismiss this as malingering. The agony is real because one desires the truth which one is afraid to face. Justine says, "Perhaps our only sickness is to desire a truth which we cannot bear rather than to rest content with the fictions we manufacture out of each other" (C, p. 60)

This is the greater sickness: to be discontented with the lesser sickness complained of by Pombal, and diagnosed by Clea as "to want to contain everything within the frame of reference of a psychology or a philosophy!" (J, p. 77)

Groddeck believes that a cause of any illness is "to gain pleasure" either by escaping from an intolerable reality or by expiating one's own guilt.<sup>1</sup> Mountolive's earache usually occurs only when his mother is near to cure him, but makes an exceptional appearance in time to prevent him from attending Pursewarden's cremation where he might encounter Nessim and be forced to act or decide. This is escape and also guilt for what he must do to Nessim. Like Proust's man, he prefers "his invalid's cell," with his mother ministering to him, to the give and take of human

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<sup>1</sup> pp. 81 - 82.

intercourse.<sup>1</sup> As in Justine's case, the pain is real.

In The Black Book, Durrell has written what might be a description of his Alexandria:

The problem of the personality grows like a stench in the air, infecting the town with man's essential loneliness. Rib to rib, face to face with the absolute heraldic personality which wakes in each other's eyes, even the lovers tremble, and become sick with the horror and emptiness.

(p. 175)

Feeling this infection in himself. Darley flees from the personality-plagued city to his Greek island. He too begins his book by announcing that he is a sick man. Unlike the underground man, he retreats in order to heal himself. (J, p. 13)

The psychosomatic epidemic is a modern ailment, and Durrell claims that Groddeck's "equating of mind and body does, in the medical field, roughly what Einstein has done in the realm of physics with the concepts of space and time". (Key, p. 209) The illness of body is also illness of mind. Returning to Alexandria, Darley has come "face to face with the nature of time, that ailment of the human psyche". (C, p. 12) He has been able to recognize time as an "ailment" because of his failure in writing about Justine. Events cannot be reduced to chronology; there are too many ways of seeing any one occurrence and time is subordinate to one's position relative to the occurrence. The attempt to chronologize, like the attempt to systematize, is a late symptom which is often mistaken for a cure. So "Justine surrounded by her philosophies is like an invalid surrounded by medicines", but she is a chronic invalid with quack medicines and her brain, attempting to apply philosophy,

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<sup>1</sup>Wilson, Axel's Castle, p. 184



ticks "like a cheap alarm-clock". (J, p. 133)

"To be lovesick" is a cliché which in the Quartet is a fact. Here "love" is defined as "a cancerous growth of unknown origin which may take up its site anywhere without the subject knowing or wishing it". (C, p. 106) It is a "synonym for derangement or illness". "You are in love" is equal to "you have got cancer". (C, p. 256) The heart is the "site of the carcinoma maxima", (C, p. 256) and the "aetiology of love and madness are identical except in degree". (B, p. 56) The possession of a human heart is a "disease without remedy". (M, p. 156) Pursewarden's disease is like Proust's "malady, which was Swann's love", - past operation".<sup>1</sup> Leila dies of "heartsickness like a true Alexandrian". (C, p. 266)<sup>2</sup> This has been the Alexandrian disease since Longus's Chloe complained, "I am no doubt ill, but what my malady is I know not", and is given no prescription, "for there is no mighty magic against love; no medicine, whether in food or drink: nothing, in short, save kisses and embraces, and the closest union of the naked body".<sup>3</sup>

Cavafy, writes of "an erotic intensity, unknown to health" and his young men are "sick with what love meant".<sup>4</sup>

The heart deludes itself because it is "tormented by the desire to be loved". (B, p. 240) The self, in order not to be hopelessly in-

<sup>1</sup>Swann's Way, p. 237.

<sup>2</sup>Cecily Mackworth (World, p. 26) counts "at least three deaths by 'heartsickness' which it seems is a lethal Alexandrian specialty".

<sup>3</sup>"Daphnis and Chloe" in The Greek Romances, trans. Rowland Smith (London, 1901), pp. 272, 290.

<sup>4</sup>"Imenos", p. 108. "In the Dreary Village", p. 149.

verted, demands another self as a mirror and a complement. The delusion, cancer and madness, arise when this becomes a demand for mutual possession, when the love is turned wholly inward and the loved one seen only as an image of oneself. Love-sickness is still self-sickness.

Love, when it turns outward as well as inward is a healing force, "lifesaving, life-giving". Groddeck claims that "without the arrow of Eros no wound can heal, no operation succeed, no symptom improve".<sup>1</sup> Eros is the life-force, love which gives as well as takes, which not only mirrors the self, but shows it in relation to others.

A popular disease in Alexandrian and other literary climates is tuberculosis. Melissa is dying of it, and her lovers are fascinated by "the soft bloom of phthisis", (M, p. 166) and "her blue-veined phthisic hands". (J, p. 18) Gracie, the prostitute in The Black Book, is consumptive, and the poem "A Bowl of Roses", addressed to a Melissa, speaks of flowers travelling "under glass to great sanatoria". (P, p. 28)<sup>2</sup> The explanation for the association of tuberculosis with the "good" prostitute may perhaps be found in Groddeck's theory that the "hollow chest and the hollow womb are symbolically identified", "breathing and begetting" depending on "an inward and outward rhythm".<sup>3</sup> This theory may be implicit in the episode in which Darley revives Clea with

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<sup>1</sup>p. 189.

<sup>2</sup>The director of the sanatorium in Mann's Magic Mountain exclaims, "Is it my fault if phthisis and concupiscence go together?" quoted in an anonymous article "Literary Giant" in MD of Canada IV, no. 9 (September, 1963), p. 76.

<sup>3</sup>p. 115.

artificial respiration, restoring her breath, the creative activity of them both, and a relationship which is both outward and inward.

In so visually vivid a city as Durrell's Alexandria, it is noteworthy that many of the inhabitants are blind. The day begins with the call of the blind muezzin, who is able to see the nature of the perfection of Allah, and, himself past cure, is the disseminator of healing powers. (J, p. 25; M, pp. 292 - 293; C, pp. 90, 258) Alexandrian canaries attain a song nearer to perfection if they are blinded (M, p. 255) The canaries are mentioned by Memlik, who blinds his enemies because they see too much. But blindness is also a symbol-in-reverse for the "second sight". Scobie has lost an eye. The blind sheik who presides over Memlik's Night of God has an incredible power of memory. (M, pp. 261 - 264) Liza's blindness "gives an expression of double awareness". (C, p. 114) Magzub the dervish is not blind, but possesses unusual eyes in whose gaze is mortal danger. (B, pp. 160 ff.) Narouz, the supernaturally inspired, has extraordinarily blue eyes, a feature described as an evil sign and a characteristic of the examining angels. (M, pp. 32, 118) Narouz is an examining angel, testing and investigating himself and arousing a similar anguished process in others. Hamid is blinded in one eye to evade conscription and becomes inscrutable, a possible seer. (C, p. 258; B, p. 214; J, p. 148) Nessim loses an eye and a finger when he is forced to stop action. (C, p. 18)

Those who are maimed in one eye only seem to be able to regain the power to act, to cease and begin again. Capodistria, the man with the eye-patch, is Justine's childhood ravisher and later her friend. He presumably dies in one novel, but is revived in another. There is

no consistent symbolic equation for the eye, but it is usually connected with extraordinary powers of perception and with the power for action. It is above all the mind's eye, and the unseeing eye is the unperceptive psyche.<sup>1</sup>

Liza's blindness is part of an eerie characterization of the mysterious partner of the artist's incest, hidden until well on in the story, a fair lady disguised as a dark. Her blindness is in part a mask for the "secrets of the foundling heart". (M, p. 67) Her head is compared to that of a Medusa, and both her lovers, Pursewarden and Mountolive, are turned to stone, reaching a point where action is no longer possible. Her blindness is like that of a Greek statue with "bullet holes for eyes". (M, pp. 60, 67) The holes are not meant to be blind, but represent the site of sight, the very emptiness emphasizing the impact of that sight. Liza can "see" what Pursewarden cannot, so she is not destroyed by their love, but can objectify it and place it in all its contexts. Finally she can go from it to a more "healthy" love with Mountolive. Pursewarden cannot objectify and he cannot love anyone else.

In Alexandria as elsewhere, love is blind. Darley speculates on this when he realizes Justine's deception. (B, p. 185) Discussing Clea's love for Justine, he talks of "the transforming membrane, the cataract with which Aphrodite seals up the sick eyes of lovers, the thick, opaque form of a sacred sightlessness. (B, p. 54)

The possessed lover's passions obscure his mirror view of himself

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<sup>1</sup>"Psychologists often compare consciousness to the eye: we speak of a visual-field and of a focal point of consciousness". Jung, p. 532.

and also his outward-going view of the beloved.

Nessim lost an eye and a finger, and thus suffers partially from both of the two major Alexandrian mutilations. The disembodied hand, a part of the self, become an object for comment and for horror, is one of Durrell's favourite motifs. In The Black Book, a skeleton hand wearing a wedding ring is stuck to a hotel doorknob (p. 187). Sappho receives a battle souvenir, a severed arm wearing a bracelet. Once part of a living man, it is now merely a thing "with no reference to this world/Existing there in some recess of time". (pp. 41, 43) Baird in The Dark Labyrinth looks at his hands "as if they belonged to another man" for a clue to his self.

In the Alexandrian Quartet, hands are related to the occult stream which runs through the blood of most of the characters. Melissa reads truth from Pursewarden's hand, and shortly afterwards reveals to him other truths which change, in fact, end, his whole existence. Handprints are the talisman of Alexandria - blue or black prints of children's hands, supposed to ward off the evil eye, one distorted member to exorcise another. (J, pp. 45, 61, 189; B, pp. 73, 174; M, pp. 288 ff; C, p. 146 ff.) These prints are like "blows struck by conscience" in a last desperate stand against the dark powers and the "terrors which thronged the darkness". (J, pp. 61, 189) They are frequently associated with the pitiful child prostitutes among whom Justine supposedly finds her daughter. The little hands strike for something beyond the ultimate pit of depravity. The stark encounter with evil is an encounter with the depths of themselves and an insight into those with them. For Mountolive, Pursewarden, Justine and Darley, it is an experience

not immediately understood, because of its nearness to the deep inner mysteries.

Describing Balthazar, Darley remarks that, if he had such ugly hands, he would amputate them and throw them into the sea. (J, p. 91) Later on, Balthazar attempts to do just that. (C, p. 69) The irony is almost too heavy here. It is Balthazar's story that shows Darley the relative nature of truth and changes the direction of his life and work. Balthazar is the older, wise man, learned in the lore of science and religion. Darley is the novice in life and art, but his original manuscript, which Balthazar himself had rendered invalid, inspires Balthazar to self-destruction. The sage at this time is in a state of complete mental and physical degradation, and must be brought back to life by the efforts of the lesser beings around him. Darley and Balthazar, dissimilar though they are, mirror each other's humiliation and rebirth.

Balthazar is responsible for the accident which forces Darley to cut off Clea's hand, another death and rebirth. The marvellous artificial hand leads Clea back to her self. Henry Miller remarks that this hand "resides in the psyche". (Cor, p. 363) This is the mind's hand, as the eye is the mind's eye. Groddeck says that every cell and organ of the body has a "consciousness of individuality": "I believe the human hand has its I, that it knows what it does, and knows that it knows".<sup>1</sup> Clea's new hand is not even really part of her, and so is even more marked a specimen of individuality, an image of how she, as the whole individual, is to act. With or without its secondary symbolic associations, the hand is always basically connected with the

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<sup>1</sup>p. 83.

human power to create.

Several other mutilations should be mentioned here. Amaril's search for the love that will not end in friendship brings him to "a pair of anonymous hands" and a noseless face. He is able to create Semira's face, in fact her whole character, in his own soul-image. (B, p. 196; 202; M, pp. 148 ff.) Narouz is physically deformed, with a harelip and ungainly body, and his outer form suggests inner, since deformity "confers magical powers in the East". (B, p. 161, 167, 68; M, p. 27) Leila's smallpox deprives her of both beauty and self-esteem, so that she cannot bear either literal or metaphorical mirrors. She practises expressions with her eyes, and is compared to "a man struck suddenly blind learning to spell with the only member left him, his hands". (B, p. 79) Like her later rival Liza, Leila must learn sensual spelling. The eye and the hand are ways of contacting other selves, and of expressing one's own self and receiving back the image.

This melange of illnesses and deformities is part of the obsessive preoccupation with one's self to the exclusion of the outer world and of the outer view of one's self.

## CHAPTER V: The Landscapes of the Mind

### A. Alexandria

The inner self is reflected in the outer physical environment. There are three major settings in the Alexandrian Quartet. The predominant one is Alexandria as reshaped by Durrell into what George Steiner calls "one of the major monuments of the architecture of the imagination", comparable to Proust's Paris and Joyce's Dublin.<sup>1</sup> The other settings are Darley's Aegean Island, which provides the scene for a small part of each of Darley's novels, and England, which is at centre stage only for part of Mountolive, but is always there only two small seas and a continent away.

In a prefatory note to Justine and a similar one to Balthazar, Durrell states that all the characters are imaginary and "only the city is real". This seems a straightforward explanation, but it is not the whole truth. "Real" does not mean simply "factual", and "inventions" or "imaginary" are not the same as "fiction". In these senses, Alexandria is not "real". Critics who have been there insist that it is "not, of course, the Egyptian harbor-city of our ordinary acquaintance".<sup>2</sup> This is another half-truth, for Durrell's Alexandria is certainly close to the factual city in E..M. Forster's guidebook. But perhaps Forster is a novelist's cartographer.

Past the prefatory note, but still at the beginning of Balthazar, Darley finds that "the city, half-imagined (yet wholly real), begins

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<sup>1</sup>World, p. 18.

<sup>2</sup>Steiner, World, p. 18.



and ends in us, roots lodged in our memory". (B, p. 13) The imagined includes the real, and what is real about the city is what is in the characters, their imagined and invented selves. Cecily Mackworth says Alexandria is "inflated into the Sadean dream of the unleashed subconscious".<sup>1</sup> The city is an image of the self, which is "half-imagined" because it is partly a product of the mind. It is "real" as the contents of consciousness are real.

Durrell has given the city a self and a definite personality. This must be where it parts company from the Alexandria of geography textbooks, and yet the personality is not purely Durrell's invention. Achilles Tatius, wide-eyed at the multiplicity and intricacy of Alexandria, gave up trying to fit it into categories for description.<sup>2</sup> It has always been a city of mysteries and multiplicities, and literally a city of mirrors. A great "mirror" or reflecting instrument once was placed above the Pharos lighthouse, and to it contemporary rumor and subsequent legend attributed magical powers of perception.<sup>3</sup> Alexandria is concerned with the inner lives of its inhabitants. At times it is drawn as a great extra-human force compelling their actions. Dobree quotes Groddeck, 'I am lived by the It' and suggests that Alexandria "lives" its people.<sup>4</sup> If this is so, Alexandria is their unleashed subconscious, the secret compulsions, and is appropriately described with ornaments of mystery, intrigue and magic. Therefore, also, the

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<sup>1</sup>World, p. 29

<sup>2</sup>"The Loves of Clitophon and Leucippe", Greek Romances, pp. 435 - 436.

<sup>3</sup>Alexandria, pp. 145 - 146, 150. Pharos and Parillon (London, 1961), p. 20.

<sup>4</sup>World, p. 194.

city is made a motivating factor in action: "We are the children of our landscape; it dictates behaviour and even thought in the measure to which we are responsive to it". (J, p. 41) This observation is related to the question of how actions are to be judged. If human beings are to be considered as "part of place", "members of a city", (B, p. 225) then judgement of any action involves judging the whole history of Alexandria:

The city which used us as its flora - precipitated in us conflicts which were hers and which we mistook for our own: beloved Alexandria! ... I see at last that none of us is properly to be judged for what happened in the past. It is the city which should be judged, though we, its children, must pay the price. (J, p. 13)

The city is responsible for the sins of its inhabitants. Justine is "a child of the city, which decrees that its women shall be the voluptaries not of pleasure but of pain". (J, p. 47) The human will is inadequate to contend with Alexandria and must surrender as Antony did, "surrender for ever to the city he loved". (J, p. 14) This is the Alexandria of the first novel. In Clea, it is described as "Alexandria, princess and whore". (p. 63) Antony's princess and whore was a human being, and was, moreover, himself as well as Cleopatra. He was both strong and weak, magnificent and despicable, as Alexandria is "royal city and anus mundi". This is true of all the Alexandrians, not because they are Alexandrians but because they are men and women. The heightened Gothicism of the environment with its juxtaposed polarities of pleasure and pain is not geographical; it "begins and ends in us". The "real" Alexandria is "a shabby little seaport town built upon a sand-reef, a moribund and spiritless backwater". (C, p. 103) It is

a town of "harsh circumscribed contours", not of unfathomed mystery; its inhabitants are "wicked, pleasure-loving" but they are also "unromantic". (M, p. 154) Cavafy dealt with this problem of the inner and outer Alexandria, and his crimes too are blamed on the city:

... Traveller, you will not blame,  
If Alexandrian, You know the passion  
Of our life here, the pleasure and the flame.<sup>1</sup>

But this is illusory, and in "The City", which Durrell quotes, he warns himself not to believe he can escape from the place which torments him:

. . . Ah! can you not see  
How just as your whole life you've spoiled  
In this one spot, you've ruined its worth  
Everywhere now over the whole earth?  
(J, p. 181)

Explicating this poem, Philip Sherrard finds that the poet "himself is the city from which his romanticism tempts him to flee ... All its waste and rottenness is but a reflection of (his) own condition .... his task now as a poet ... is to make a myth of that City which is his own condition".<sup>2</sup> Forster says that Cavafy, like the Elizabethans, is singing "My mind to me a kingdom is", but Dyer's conventional poetic kingdom in Cavafy has acquired the unsavoury characteristics of a "real" kingdom subject to mutinies and war.<sup>3</sup> It is the old microcosm-macrocosm concept, man and universe as mutual mirrors.

Durrell's Alexandrians have to correct their maps to relocate Alexandria in an inner kingdom. At the end of Balthazar, it is becoming evident that the possibility of "a new Alexandria" depends on the

<sup>1</sup>"Tomb of Iases", p. 82.

<sup>2</sup>The Marble Threshing-Floor, pp. 87, 89.

<sup>3</sup>Pharos, p. 93.

selves which make it, and that to understand Alexandria is to come closer to "self-possession". (B, pp. 242 - 243; 236 - 237) Pursewarden tells Darley to think of himself as a "sleeping city", and Darley comes to think that the destruction of his private Alexandria was necessary because his private city is merely an effusion of the mind. (J, p. 139; B, p. 220) Discovering the truth about the city will reveal truth about himself, "carry me a little further in what is really a search for my proper self". (B, p. 226) Like Arnauti, he "pierced the hard banausic shell of Alexandria and discovered himself", because the outward aura of Alexandria is a creation of the self. (J, p. 76) Finally, when Darley and Clea achieve artisthood, they speak of their new power to act and create as a revelation of the "secret landscape", a view of the inner self hitherto hidden.

Alexandria is a landscape of the mind as a mirror of the unconscious, and also as a telescope of time. It is several times called "the capital of memory". (J, p. 189; C, p. 11; Cor, pp. 303 - 304) Nothing in Durréll's Alexandria is allowed to become dead past. Cleopatra is a potent force still. She is the princess and whore, the city itself and hence part of the secret nature of the self of either sex. Even the most unlikely women seem to be identified with her. Justine's dark and imperious passion is continually reminiscent of the queen. But the gentler Clea and Melissa are both, in metaphor, baled up and delivered to Caesar. (J, p. 56; C, p. 253) Both instances - Darley's first meeting with Melissa and his saving of Clea's life - mark new beginnings and rebirths. The reuse of the simile underscores Darley's

feeling that he found Clea at the same time and place as he had found Melissa; two contemporary times and time long past are linked.

Men of the present feel the coexistence of the past. Darley sees his own history as part of the historical fabric of the place (J, p. 190)<sup>1</sup> He cannot at first respond to life as an individual, but seems to be subject to the nonhuman Alexandrian will. But he comes to see that this Alexandria is somewhere within "the human estate", and that is where the directing will resides; "the seeds of future events are carried within ourselves". (C, p. 223) As he comes to terms with the personal meaning of time, he talks about the "continuous present, which is the real history of that collective anecdote, the human mind". (C, p. 14) The oneness of historical time is a characteristic of the human race. The city, a habitat of memories, could accommodate the memories of Alice's looking-glass, which go forward as well as back. It "moves not only backwards into our history, studded by the great names which mark every station of recorded time, but also back and forth in the living present". (B, p. 151)

The unified self, which the Alexandrian is seeking, can be in a way paralleled by the unified history of Alexandria:

It seemed that past and present had joined again without any divisions in it, that all my memories and impressions had ordered themselves into one complete pattern, whose metaphor was always the shining city of the disinherited.

(C, p. 91)

The collective Alexandria is strangely manifested in Nessim's

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<sup>1</sup>Lionel Trilling comments: "What we of Europe and America call the past is part of Alexandria's actual present". (World, p. 61) Cf. "an environment that brought him into touch with his forbears and his successors in time". Ernest Rhys. Romance (New York, 1913), p. 5

historical dreams, a merger of "his past and the city's". (J, pp. 175, 176) Much that is not explicitly connected with setting as such is "Alexandrian" in that it is concerned with dark and timeless mysteries which seem to have always been the objects of particular study in the city. Forster speaks of the "usual Alexandrian problem - the linking up of God and man".<sup>1</sup> Durrell has remarked that "from an imaginative point of view Alexandria is the hinge of our whole Christian culture".<sup>2</sup> It has been a city where people probe into physics and metaphysics, science and introspection, in all ways the appropriate environment for Durrell's self-sick characters. It is not that the city has a malignant will which it forces upon them, but that the traditional Alexandria mental climate is a reflection of their own inner disease.

Because this has been the way of Alexandria, or of the idea of Alexandria, since its founding, a way of thinking and living in which Cleopatra and the Septuagint were not far separated, it is a setting for a novel demonstrating the relativity of psychological time. Nessim is what Wyndham Lewis dubbed a "time-tripper", analagous to "globe-trotter":

For what is the basis of these new journeys or travels in time? Where do they occur? They occur, of course, inside the head - that is where the time-tracts lie - the region of memory and imagination as opposed to 'matter'.<sup>3</sup> It is in short a mental and psychologic world.

Lewis quotes Whitehead's phrase "mental climate" which would be the

<sup>1</sup>Alexandria, p. 70

<sup>2</sup>Kneller Tape, World, p. 168

<sup>3</sup>Time and Western Man, pp. 258 - 259. Lewis's italics.

X

only climate for a landscape of the mind.<sup>1</sup>

Durrell is putting himself in the tradition of Alexandrian romance literature. Heliodorus's Ethiopics is a polyphonic narrative of intricate time sequences, narrated by various reminiscing characters all of whom are ignorant of some aspect of their narrative; and tells of the incest of Cnemon and Demaeneta, the rivalry of the brothers Thysmis and Pelorus, the contrast of a fair maid and a dark lady, and a search for a lost child; and discourses on love as a malady. Each of these points of technique or theme has a parallel in the Quartet. Achilles Tatius's Clitopho and Leucippe is another story of the love disease, including a pathetic homosexual love and a description of "the celebrated city of Alexandria".<sup>2</sup> Lucius Apuleius was Brother Ass long before Darley,<sup>3</sup> and Theocritus' Fifteenth Idyl describes life in the Greek Quarter of Alexandria.<sup>4</sup> Durrell wrote a poem

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<sup>1</sup>cf. Wallace Steven's "Crude Foyer":

That there lies at the end of thought  
A foyer of the spirit in a landscape  
Of the mind, in which we sit  
And wear humanity's bleak crown.

...

.... since we know that we use  
Only the eye as faculty, that the mind  
Is the eye, and that this landscape of the mind

Is a landscape only of the eye.

in Oscar Williams, ed. A Little Treasury of Modern Poetry, p. 184. Note also Forster's practice in his books on Alexandria of describing both past and present features of a given site, because the past features are often thought of as though still to be seen.

<sup>2</sup>Heliodorus, Tatius and Longus are in Greek Romances.

<sup>3</sup>The Golden Ass (London: Abbey Library, undated)

<sup>4</sup>Forster, Alexandria, p. 35.

about Longus's Daphnis and Chloe, and sang their praises while steering a dilapidated car around a Greek precipice in a storm, with a nervous Henry Miller by his side.<sup>1</sup> It would seem a question whether Durrell is doing something new with the novel or whether he is doing something very old indeed, a pre-novel comedy of confused identities and inbred passions.

The special character of love in Alexandria (e.g. M, p. 193) links two images of the self: the lover and the landscape. Mountolive and Leila have an especially geographical love. They are in a sense England and Egypt loving and leaving each other. But the metaphor has a wider application, or perhaps "deeper" is a more accurate word. Leila is Egypt, at first because she and the country share a romantic allure for the young Englishman; later because "she represented something like a second, almost mythical image of reality which he was experiencing, expropriating day by day". (M, pp. 147 - 148) His relation to her is the "psychic meaning" of Egypt for his own inner life. He has to break with her and hence with Egypt, to know himself and "come of age" as Darley does. It is "a puberty of the feelings which had to be outgrown". (M, pp. 274 - 275) He repeats the name "Egypt" as if it were the name of a woman. (M, p. 12) Egypt has never been separate from the women and men who have lived there: Antony too was "dying, Egypt, dying".<sup>2</sup> In a city where people search for themselves, a woman who explores and exploits the passions becomes a personification of the city. Leila is less spectacular, perhaps, than

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<sup>1</sup>Miller, The Colossus of Maroussi (New York, 1958), p. 216.

<sup>2</sup>Antony IV. ii, 42.



Justine or Cleopatra, but she performs drastic experiments with the hearts and minds of Mountolive, her sons and her husband. Even her physical features are described as if they were those of the environment and her ruined beauty resembles "a familiar landscape blown up". (M, p. 56)

Writing of Justine, Darley says, "A city becomes a world when one loves one of its inhabitants". (J, p. 63) The city and world are seen in the light of one's own passions, as an image of the self. Later, of Clea, he again writes, "When you are in love with one of its inhabitants a city can become a world. A whole new geography of Alexandria was born through Clea ... a new history ... a new biography to replace the old one". (C, pp. 228 - 229) It is a new time and a new place, but it is also the same place, and in terms of particular emotions, the same time; it is a rearrangement.

Alexandria's surroundings, apart from the archetypal sea, are the desert, a place of mirage and the lake, a place of reflections. Lake Mareotis is continually described as a mirror or as an eye (B, pp. 22, 151 - 152; "Mareotis:", P, p. 33; "Conon in Alexandria," P, p. 92). It is an image of the reflection, perceiver, perception and perceived in one. The carnival figures in the loneliness and stagnation of their anguished selves are compared to Mareotis, "a dead brackish lake surrounded by the silent unjudging, wide-eyed desert under a dead moon" (B, p. 201) Deep waters of the self are swampy and motionless in a context of uncommitted emptiness, requiring a decision and act of will.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>An irresistible but perhaps irrelevant comparison might be made with the fantastic landscape of the mind in J.R.R. Tolkien's Lord of the Rings, which concerns a war of wills, a battle against personified nightmares, a contrast of white and dark figures. In Rivendell, "Time doesn't seem to pass here: it just is". I p. 243) A similar sensation is experienced in Lorien, where Galadriel's magic mirror reflects past, present, or future without indicating which.

## B. Greece

"The bright, looking-glass world of Greece" is Gerald Durrell's description of the island to which his brother transplanted him.<sup>1</sup> When Lawrence Durrell's protagonist leaves Alexandria for Greece, he is still in Alice's world, and the reflection becomes clearer for the move away from the object. It is during his first stay on his Aegean island that Darley learns of the other views of his own story and fits them into the context of his memories. During his second stay, he finds himself as an artist and a man, who can create and act.

Durrell's three travel books and many poems about Greece are added testimony to the looking-glass quality of the country, especially the islands with the sea to clarify the image. The landscape is a "living eye" which seems to perceive itself, as the human inner eye is to perceive itself: "Nowhere else has there ever been a landscape so aware of itself, conforming so marvellously to the dimensions of human existence". (PC, p. 131)

Rank pictures the Greek standing firmly upon the ground, not under it like the Egyptian buried in his own depths, or above it like the Christian.<sup>2</sup> This clear-eyed view of things is offered to the wanderer: "Other countries may offer you discoveries in manners or lore or landscape; Greece offers you something harder - the discovery of yourself". (PC, p. 11) Miller on Rhodes found that the Greeks "brought me face to face with myself, they cleansed me of hatred and jealousy and envy."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>My Family and Other Animals, p. 18

<sup>2</sup>p. 146.

<sup>3</sup>Colossus, p. 210.

Greece puts one into right relationships with one's self and with others.

Greece completes the "elimination" of time, for the past that is present here is not only historic past, but a mythological past, somehow evident in the appearance of objects in the landscape. (PC, p. 59) Aware of the war encroaching on the island, and of its expression of man's fear of life, Darley senses the presence of the "old dark gods" in their natural habitat "forever sited in the human wish" and undaunted by mechanised man. (C, p. 274)

#### C. England

Travel, Durrell says in Bitter Lemons (p. 15) is "one of the most rewarding forms of introspection". In The Dark Labyrinth, he adds that travel is "an outward symbol of an inward march upon reality". (p. 59)

"Reality" is sought in Alexandria and found in Greece. Alexandria is a "real" city, because it deals with the depths and labyrinths of the human self. The "unreal city" is the capital of the wasteland where people deal in superficialities and lose contact with themselves and their dark gods. This is the site of the "English death", which haunts Durrell through all his writings, including his letters (e.g. BB, p. 105). Mountolive has been "educated not to wish to feel", but to believe that "to love was absurd, like being knocked off the mantelpiece". (M, pp. 18 - 19) This paralysis, which is like a death, separates western man from himself. He refuses to acknowledge the dark gods and their beauty, to "come to terms with (his) own human obscenity". (M, p. 63) In "Cities, Plains and People", Durrell goes "To the prudish

cliffs and the sad green home/Of Pudding Island o'er the Victorian foam". (P, p.136) Pursewarden puts this in political terms to explain the British weakness on Egypt as a loss of "the basic power to act", and this is true on an individual level also (M, p. 103). England is part of the selves of Durrell and his characters - Darley, Pursewarden, Mountolive - and its unrealness leaves incomplete their reconciliation with themselves. Pursewarden therefore thinks of home with regret and revulsion. (M, p. 161) England too is a "ritual landscape". (M, p. 94) Pursewarden, Liza and Mountolive celebrate Blake's birthday by walzing in Trafalgar Square, a tribute to two heroes of the real, not-dead England (M, pp. 66 - 67; see also "A Ballad of the Good Lord Nelson", in Williams's Little Treasury of Modern Poetry, p. 733).<sup>1</sup>

Between the points of Durrell's compass is the sea: Atlantic, Mediterranean, Aegean. To discuss the implications, obvious and possible, of the immersion in water, the journey by water and under-water, and rebirth from water, is beyond the scope of this paper.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>A study of Nelson as a symbol of what the English could and should be, might begin with Durrell's "Ballad", the scene in Trafalgar Square and Pursewarden's comment about Emma (M, p. 65). In "Epilogue in Alexandria", in Prospero's Cell sightless Pharos reminds Durrell of Nelson. Gerald Durrell recalls a childish vision of Nelson as a bird-watcher. (My Family, pp. 64 - 65) Compare with these: Charles Morgan's essay on Nelson in Reflections, Second Series (pp. 177 - 184); Forster's description of the Battle of the Nile (Alexandria, p. 92); references to Nelson in Melville's novels and stories; Noyes's "Admirals All". because even here it is Nelson's impudent disobedience which makes him a hero; Shaw's note to Caesar and Cleopatra; Aldous Huxley's short story "Happily Ever After", Robert Grave's poem "1805".

<sup>2</sup>There are various Alexandrian rebirths: of Darley, Clea, Balthazar, Semira, Scobie-El Scob, Nessim, Nessim's daughter, Justine, Capodistria.

I shall therefore only mention the importance of water as a symbol in its own right in the Alexandrian Quartet. It is part of the symbolic landscape, and of one version of the mirror of Narcissus. Darley travels across it to his times of revelation in Greece and plunges into it when Clea's accident forces him into action: "It was as if I were for the first time confronting myself - or perhaps an alter ego shaped after a man of action I had never realized, recognised". (C, p. 249) The self meets the self and becomes mobile, out of the "shark-infested sea of love", changed into "something rich and strange". (M, p. 172)

#### CHAPTER VII: Conclusion: Time and the Heraldic Universe

At the end of Justine, Darley wonders "whether these pages record the actions of real human beings; or whether this is not simply the story of a few inanimate objects which precipitated drama around them - I mean a black patch, a green fingerstall, a watch-key, and a couple of dispossessed wedding-rings". (J, p. 245) The objects appear and reappear at various points in the tetralogy, as part of the immediate scene and also as bearers of implication and associations not articulated but somehow conveyed by the substantial existence of the thing; Capodistria's black patch, by which Justine recognizes her ravisher and which preshadows Nessim's partial blinding; Justine's green ring which once belonged to a prehistoric prince and which Toto wears at carnival the night of his murder; Balthazar's watch-key, the lost key to the nature of time and the secret of Justine; the wedding-rings Melissa never used. Each suggests also more truths and possibilities attached to the object.

These four objects reduce to its simplest terms Durrell's system

of what must be called "symbolism" for want of a better name, a multiplicity of connotations. The mirror becomes a metaphor for all the objects, including, as well as the tangible things, the links between persons, the attitudes of persons to things. No matter what the Alexandrian looks at, he sees himself and an image of his relation to himself, to the object and to the world around him.

Durrell and Pursewarden talk about the "Heraldic Universe", a concept which describes the interaction in unfolding a simultaneously inner and outer narrative held together by these recurrent objects and events. Durrell's use of the word "heraldic" is essentially the usual one, and he is not far from lions rampant and bars sinister:

. . . in Heraldry the object is used in an emotive and affective sense - statically to body forth or utter: not as a victim of description.

The Heraldic Universe is that territory of experience in which the symbol exists - as opposed to the emblem or badge, which are the children of algebra and substitution.<sup>1</sup>

The heraldic device is not just a sign of something; it is the organic embodiment of something, a way of expressing an ideal, an intent, an awareness of past and future. The lion prowling about the jungle is the heraldic lion long before he appears on a royal standard. The majesty and the power are in him, the real lion. He embodies his heraldic meaning; he does not arbitrarily "stand for" something as an emblem may.

Objects, places and persons are not merely described in the Alexandrian Quartet. Emotively, suggestively and even intellectually

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<sup>1</sup>Durrell in Personal Landscape, quoted by Stanford, World, p. 40.

they "utter" something. Hence, as we have seen, a street scene in Alexandria is also a scene in the inner lives of the people on the street. Hence also, the purple passages of description are functional, and their richness testifies to the texture of psychic and physical experience. Pursewarden exclaims, "Symbolism! the abbreviation of the language into poem. The heraldic aspect of reality!" (C, p. 137) Scattered instances of people gazing into mirrors suggest as much as many pages of tortured didacticism about the inversion of the modern self; thus, the symbol abbreviates language. But these are also real, not metaphorical mirrors in the context of the narrative, and this reality is heraldic. Durrell is not doing anything radically new in this respect. The scholastic insisted that the "symbol" was the thing itself and not the artist's representation of it. The real lamb baa-ing out in the field was a symbol of Christ; God made his own symbolism. As Groddeck says, "Symbols are not invented; they are there and hence belong to the inalienable estate of man".<sup>1</sup> Again, as if to support Durrell on the abbreviation of language, he explains:

It is impossible for anyone to express truth of this sort in words, for it is imagery, symbol, and the symbol cannot be spoken. It lives and we are lived by it, one can only use words that are indeterminate and vague.<sup>2</sup>

Gerald Sykes points out that when Durrell employs realistic details, which he does everywhere, "he is always looking beneath them for the archetypal beauty they conceal".<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>p. 89.

<sup>2</sup>p. 242.

<sup>3</sup>World, p. 153.

The heraldic approach becomes a way of life, as well as a way of art, for it directs Durrell's non-fiction as much as it does his fiction and poetry. Describing the personal meaning of Greece, he speaks of "the symbol married to the object prime", another way of meaning that the real thing is the symbol, and goes on to illustrate: "a cypress tree, a mask, an orange, a plough were extended beyond themselves into an eternality they enjoyed only with the furniture of all good poetry". (MV, p. 179) Reflections on a Marine Venus is a factual description of Rhodes, yet here he is talking about symbolism and poetry, finding, in fact, books in the running brooks. Art makes "sudden raids on the inarticulate", shaping "a preserving Heraldic structure". (Cor, p. 203) The artist makes a little heraldic universe, the real-symbolic structure of which is a real symbol of the outer Heraldic Universe. As a creator and an active exerciser of the will, the artist creates himself in the image of the Creator and his art in his own image, and then is open to the charge of cosmic presumption.

The Heraldic Universe is a system of hinged mirrors, in which inner self and outer world reflect each other, and one self and another self, creator and creation, microcosm and macrocosm. The resulting multiplicity of viewpoint is bewildering. Clea says, "You have to be faithful to your angle of vision, and at the same time fully recognize its partiality". (C, p. 120) One must find or create one's own self in relation to other selves and to a whole. In everything, one can see reflected truths about oneself, clues to its nature, but to see only that and look for only that is to find only a partial symbol and ignore the object in its reality. Clea's statement implies the necessity of reali-



zing the possibility of other angles of vision. The thing to do, as Norman Douglas's *Caloveglia* advises, is "externalize yourself".<sup>1</sup>

Balthazar, preaching from the Cabbala, urges the Alexandrians to look outward in order to find what is inward, to "discover harmonies in space and time which corresponded to the inner structure of their own psyches". The perception of self is not the final end; it is to be placed in the context of the one, a unified self reflecting a unified all, and this includes everything in the symbolic world. "We are enlisting everything in order to make man's wholeness match the wholeness of the universe". (*J*, p. 100) Because "everything" includes "the destructive granulation of the mind in pleasure", the sinister side of Alexandria is also a reflection of the self, the Sadean subconscious, and the "pleasure" is not always "pleasant", as Balthazar's own degradation shows. Evil is included, is perhaps necessary, as the epigraph to *Clea* insists: "The primary and most beautiful of Nature's qualities is motion, which ... is conserved by means of crimes alone".<sup>2</sup>

This oneness of self and nonself and universe and object and pleasure and pain and good and evil is also implicit in Durrell's treatment of time. In the *Key to Modern Poetry*, he wrote: "Time and the ego are the two determinants of style for the twentieth century". (p. 117) The two determinants are two ways of looking at the drive towards "the symbolic act of joining what is separated", an act encouraged by two of Durrell's textbooks, the theory of relati-

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<sup>1</sup>*South Wind* (New York, 1925), p. 174

<sup>2</sup>quoted from Sade, cf.: "I have discovered myself, while thinking of crime, while surrendering to it, or just after having executed it". Crime is compared with sexual pleasure as an affective and revelatory force. Sade, *Justine*, p. 261.

vity and the Cabballa: "It is important to realize that Einstein's theory joined up subject and object, in very much the same way as it joined up space and time". (Key, p. 26) Heraldry expressed the symbolism of ages in a spatial arrangement of objects, and this is akin to Durrell's arrangement of events in the Quartet. Early in his career, he explained:

But what I am trying to isolate is the exact moment of creation, in which the maker seems to exist heraldically. That is to say, time as a concept does not exist, but only as an attribute of matter - decay, growth, etc. In that sense then, it must be memoryless.

(Cor, p. 23)

Durrell remarks that this does not seem clear even to himself, but it does hint at the nature of time as it evolves in the Quartet. This is time as it is for the creator, whether he is creating art or creating a self. It is the "order of the imagination" which is "not that of memory" because the imagination is timeless. (B, p. 225; BB, p. 59) To call again upon paradox: the imagination is timeless because it includes all time in an archetypal moment. The artist as myth-maker is part of the mythmaking imagination of the race. His time is "memoryless" because it is simultaneous rather than chronological. Time as decay, growth, mutability, "an attribute of matter" does exist, and the Alexandrians change with age, but this time is not a cosmological force. It is simply part of the functioning of living things on this planet. So the Trumans in The Dark Labyrinth lose all sense of time, and also find their life regulated by the change of season. The only time which exists is a cyclic process, returning always "in a single unlaboured continuum". ("At Strati's", B, p. 22)

The universe, like a heraldic pattern, is a spatial arrangement and disarrangement. Pursewarden says: "The symbolism contained in form and pattern is only a frame of reference through which, as in a mirror, one may glimpse the idea of a universe at rest, a universe-in love with itself". (C, p. 143) The work of art is a heraldic design, reflecting the universal heraldic pattern, and the individual self finds in the universe a reflection of its own self-love and disinclination to action. But the self has to exist in relation to other selves and as a part of a totality, whereas the "universe" (in the sense which would include all particular "universes".) is the totality, complete in itself and not relative to any other equivalent being. The love of the One must therefore be a self-love, but this self-love is fruitful and from it emanates all creation.<sup>1</sup> Individual love, on the other hand, to be fruitful must turn outward, to join with other selves in a cosmic addition, the sum of which is One.

The universe is relative not to equals but to its components. It reflects itself in a macrocosmic system of mirrors, some of them trick mirrors, some distorted, each giving the image in a glass darkly, because only partially. At the end of Clea, after the major problems of the Quartet have apparently been resolved, Durrell hands us a list of "workpoints", suggesting new developments of the story and new angles of reflection. One can never quite assimilate all the facets of the universal prism. Durrell's Alexandria is a mirror of this prism and the Alexandrians a mirror of ourselves within it.

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<sup>1</sup>Forster, Alexandria, pp. 70 - 73.

APPENDIXAlexandria and Arcadia: Durrell as an Elizabethan

I admit to having 'Elizabethanized'; I deliberately selected crude material for the job. And tried to say that life is really an artistic problem, all men being sleeping artists.<sup>1</sup>

The concept of the "Elizabethan" has a particular significance for Durrell and for the form and the content of his work. He finds in the literature of that period an "enormous range of feeling ... from the utmost vulgarity and bawdy to the greatest delicacy, sophistication, and refinement", a coalition of bawdry and tenderness, and attempts to produce a similar range of feeling in his Quartet. (Young, p. 66)

The Black Book frequently exploits the Elizabethan allusion (e.g. p. 48) and Gregory likes to compare his dark soul to that of a character from Tourneur or Marston. (pp. 40 - 41, 53. "Elizabethan" includes "Jacobean".) The title suggests Robert Greene's The Black Bookes Messenger, in which Greene promises a "Black Book" which apparently does not materialize, remaining a possible catalogue of possible crimes. In Gregory's library, the narrator seeks another such mysterious volume: "But where is the Black Book - that repository for all the uncut gems of creation?" (p. 197)

Pursewarden in Durrell's Justine mentions the Elizabethan capacity for "rude health, ordure, the natural and the funny". (J, p. 116) This and Tourneur's darkness suggest a willingness to look

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<sup>1</sup>Kneller Tape, World, p. 167.

at various facets of human nature, to come to terms with one's own obscenity. Durrell's latest work, The Irish Faustus, is again Elizabethan-minded and makes important use of Marlowe's Doctor Faustus.

Groddeck claims that the Renaissance marked the beginning in art of an excessive interest in the exploration of the personality.<sup>1</sup> Rank sees in the same age the emergence of the individual artist type, the genius as a self, freed from the collective Christianity of the Middle Ages.<sup>2</sup> The Elizabethan begins to be interested in the polarities of human nature and in the analysis of the self, both Alexandrian pre-occupations.

Sidney's Arcadia, from which I shall draw most of my examples, frequently resembles Durrell's Quartet in structure and motif.<sup>3</sup> The narrative does not proceed along a straight line, but doubles back, jumps ahead, becomes entangled. Plots, subplots and counterplots interrupt each other. There are a number of narrators, whose reminiscences bring past events to the present; each of these has a different viewpoint and sometimes the stories are contradictory. The story, even if told chronologically, is immensely complicated. Like the Alexandria Quartet, it deals with relationships, and the lines of attachment cross and recross in a great multiple love affair including all kinds of love, respectable and illicit.

The point of view shifts, and what seems to be true is not necessarily so. Euarchus's decision and solemn speech near the end of the book

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<sup>1</sup>pp. 61, 65.

<sup>2</sup>pp. 19, 24.

<sup>3</sup>The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia (London, 1907), hereafter abbreviated as A. (All references will be given in my text).

appear to be authoritative and conclusive, but turn out to be mistaken. How is one to view Amphialus, who is a villain in that he opposes the heroes, but is almost a tragic figure in his vain love and fruitless victories?

Sidney and Durrell both mix motives, so that there is sometimes little distinction between such apparently distant forces as love and politics. Euarchus urges Basilius to resume action, because his paralysis is bad for the state. But for Basilius, as for Mountolive, the need for political action is inextricably bound up with the possibility of action inward among his own emotions.

Both the Quartet and the Arcadia end with suggestions for possible new developments, threads of the story that might be picked up and woven into something. Commenting on the Arcadia, J.J. Jusserand finds "no reason why it should ever end".<sup>1</sup> In the Black Book, Durrell describes the novel he plans to write as "something without beginning, something which will never end, but conclude only when it has reached its own genesis again: very, well, a piece of literary perpetual motion". (p. 69)

John Untermecker, in a review of The Irish Faustus says of Durrell's technique that he "drives his hero through melodramatic adventures, spectacular confrontations, and desperate emotional crises - all of which in the long run reduce to nothing more nor less than the painful process of self-discovery".<sup>2</sup> This is what he has done in the Alexandria Quartet, and it is what Sidney does in the Arcadia.

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<sup>1</sup>The English Novel in the Time of Shakespeare, (London, 1901) p. 254.

<sup>2</sup>Saturday Review, (March 21, 1964) p. 43.

The mirror image is important, especially the reflection in water with its reminder of Narcissus. (e.g. A, pp. 11, 211, 178, 179) This image is a decoration more conventional than symbolic. Yet the whole Arcadia is a contrapuntal treatment of Narcissus's problems, the Alexandrian fascination with the composition of one's self. The Arcadians (the characters of the book, not merely the citizens of that state) play dangerous games with their identities. The two heroes are in disguise, or rather, disguise-within-disguise, most of the book and the sham character often seems to have a being of its own. Dorus the shepherd, and, even more, Zelmane the Amazon, do not always seem the same as Musidorus and Pyrocles. Besides these internal multiple-mirrors, the two friends mirror each other. The best of their relationship is "the coupling of souls in this mutuality .. from whence he shall be sure to receive a sweet reflection of the same joy, and, as in a clear mirror of sincere goodness, see a lively picture of his own gladness". (p. 452. cf. "the glass of her own misery", p. 92)

Musidorus says they were made "more like than the likeness of all other virtues, and ... more near one to the other than the nearness of their blood could aspire into". (p. 157) Their friendship is mirrored in the closeness of the two sisters whom they love. The sibling relationship, as in Durrell, is another way of reflecting. The other as a mirror of oneself is therefore a significant motif: for instance, "his kindness is a glass even to my blind eyes of my naughtiness". (p. 173) Note also the phenomenon of sightless sight. Dorus sings of the self reduced to the status of a mere reflection of something which belongs to others:

Such weight it hath; which once is full possess'd,  
 That I become a vision,  
 Which hath in others held his only being,  
 And lives in fancy seeing,  
 O wretched state of man in self-division!<sup>1</sup>

(p. 102)

The word "mirror" has a double denotation. Besides the "looking-glass", it may refer to a "pattern", a reflection of the ideal. Philoclea calls Pyrocles the "mirror of mankind", not because he is merely typical or a reflection of all men, but because he is the pattern of what men ought to be. (p. 481) In this sense, "mirror" suggests the reflection not only of the present self but also of the self which one is striving to become.

Perhaps partly for this reason, Arcadians and most characters in Elizabethan fiction are very conscious of art and poetry and of themselves as works of art; hence the many occasional songs and eclogues in the Arcadia, and also the self-satire in Mopsa's tale of romance (p. 199) and the conventional love song "My true love hath my heart", followed by the burlesque "O words which fall". (p. 466) In this spirit, Lodge's Rosalynde and Alinda criticise their lovers' poems.<sup>2</sup> Durrell is continually concerned with the problems of art and artist and deliberately comments on his own style (B, p. 44) He too injects poetry into the body of his novel: Pursewarden's poem to Liza and his shaving-mirror doggrell, quotations from Cavafy, Scobie's jazz tune.

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<sup>1</sup>For the lover as a mirror of his beloved cf. Gascoigne:  
 "behold my wan cheeks washed in woe, that therein my salt teares  
 may be a myrrour to represent youre own shadow, and that like unto  
 Narcissus you may bee constraind to kisse the cold waves wherein  
 your counterfeit is so lively portrayed". A Hundreth Sundrie  
 Flowres (University of Missouri Studies, 1942) p. 54.

So <sup>2</sup>Rosalynde (London, 1902).



Durrell has made some comments on the relation of the Elizabethan artist to the hero of his creation, a relation which turns out to be another mirror of the self. His example is Hamlet,<sup>1</sup> which evidently follows its own advice in holding a mirror up to nature. Durrell sees the play as "a perfect picture of the inner struggle, done in terms of the outer one. . . a marvellous picture of psychic and social disorganization in an individual". This disorganization of microcosm and macrocosm is also Sidney's subject; his conclusion is not tragic because it is the correct happy ending for a romantic comedy, but the conclusion which logically arises from his picture of human nature is a cynical one. Durrell suggests that Hamlet's problem is the problem of modern England, especially as presented by Lawrence. Mistaken idealism causes a recoil from the real. Since Marlowe, artists have been trying to turn the wheel back to "the pre-glacial age when dung was dung and angels were angels". (Cor, pp. 26 - 27) Arcadia and Elsinore, as well as Alexandria, are maps of what the artist finds in the landscape of his mind. Otto Rank sees Hamlet as the type of the modern hero who is not a hero in the classical sense, but a representation of the poet as a type, who has rejected the heroic role and is checked in his willed action so that his words achieve nothing. Hamlet is the "godfather of the thought-obstructed neurotic".<sup>2</sup> Perhaps Prufrock is Prince Hamlet, after all. Durrell's artists also are checked by an inner entanglement, but they break through, and turn art and artist outward.

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<sup>1</sup>Cecily Mackworth observes that "Elsinore has a good deal in common with Mr. Durrell's Alexandria". World, p. 27.

<sup>2</sup>Art and Artist, pp. 296, 333.

Elizabethan love does violence to the identities of the lovers. Musidorus accused, "But O love, it is thou that does it; thou changest name upon name; thou disguisest our bodies, and disfigurist our minds". (p. 91) The love relationship is a complex of paradoxes, as it is in Alexandria, where the lover sees himself in his loved one, but must also realise that she sees herself in him. The result must be both increased knowledge of oneself and increased turning outward, away from the self. Sidney's description of the bliss of Argalus and Parthenia contains sufficient paradoxes for illustration:

a happy couple, he joying in her, she joying in herself, but in herself, because she enjoyed him: both increased their rules by giving to each other; each making one life double, because they made a double life one; where desire never wanted satisfaction, nor satisfaction ever bred satiety; he ruling, because she would obey, or rather because she would obey, he therein ruling.  
(p. 352)

There is danger in the mirror of love, that the identity of reflector and reflected be excessive and become possession. Love has the power to "transform the very essence of the lover into the thing loved, uniting, and, as it were, incorporating it with a secret and inward working". The danger is that love of a woman may "womanize" a man. (p. 60) This is in fact what happens to Pyrocles, and the womanization has to be overcome before he can finally win the woman he loves.

The conventions of Elizabethan and pre-Elizabethan romance have their place in Durrell's world.

Nessim, for instance, is referred to as a knight, a "chevalier sans peur", "Prince Nessim" (B, pp. 58 - 59; M, p. 194), but in the

anti-romantic contexts of an indictment of the idea of love ("formed in the fragmented psyche of European man ... a literature of affectation". B, p. 56) or of Clea's cool common sense. Pombal considers "love" a "petrarchan obscenity" until he meets Fosca. The reality for him is paradoxical and also Petrarchan - "Perhaps this very freedom keeps me in prison?" is almost Wyatt's contrarious passion "that locks nor looseth, holdeth me in prison".<sup>1</sup> Liza and Pursewarden have their incestuous forerunners in Webster's Duchess and Ferdinand, Ford's Annabella and Giovanni, or even in Isabella and Claudia or the twins Viola and Sebastian.

In Arcadia, as in Alexandria, there are at least five sexes. Pyrocles=~~Zelmanor~~, a man disguised as a woman, is loved by a man, the man's daughter and the man's wife. Philoclea asks him if he has not "some third sex left you, to transform yourself into". (p. 501) The disguise as a member of the opposite sex is an ubiquitous device in Elizabethan comedy, with Viola and Portia as notable examples, and Logde's Rosalynde, like Shakespeare's Rosalind, is an "amorous girl-boy".<sup>2</sup> The disguise is somehow inward as well as outward, the anonymous sex of the Alexandrian domino, "transform'd in shew, but more transform'd in mind". (Arc, p. 58) Pyrocles and Musidorus must discard their disguises of both mind and body before they can act according to their own wills, a rediscovery of themselves which is to be effected through love. Philoclea explains:

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<sup>1</sup>C, pp. 41 - 42. Thomas Wyatt, "Description of the Contrarious Passions," in The Concise Treasury of Great Poems, ed. Louis Untermeyer (New York, 1953), p. 38.

<sup>2</sup>p. 140.

'One God hath metamorphosed both, the one  
in a shepherd, the other in a woman; and  
we only can restore them to themselves, and  
themselves to the world that they may grace  
it with the glory of their actions as they  
were wont to do'. (p. 444)

Durrell's Balthazar says that the Alexandrians pass around a  
poisoned loving-cup, (C, pp. 266 - 267) and in Arcadia there is a  
"cup of poison (which was deeply tasted of the whole company)". (p. 121)  
Sickness and mutilation provide metaphors for the Elizabethans as they  
do for Durrell. Durrell refers to the Elizabethans themselves as a  
disease and says "Nash's prose is one long dysentery of delight", but  
he seems to feel this is a disease to be inoculated with, rather than  
against.<sup>1</sup>

The Arcadians are frequently dismembered and dismembering, in  
bizarre ways. A painter who is not even participating in the battle  
loses both hands (p. 256), a tailor loses his nose and then his head  
(p. 255), Parthenia is disfigured by disease, but, unlike Leila,  
recovers her beauty. (pp. 25, 37)

But here too the worst disease is love. Condemned most savagely  
in Shakespeare's Sonnet 129, it fares little better in Sidney's hands.  
It is the "price of mangled mind", a loathsome disease which infects  
body and brain.<sup>2</sup> Pyrocles claims that love "hath a sport sometimes  
to poison me with roses, sometimes to heal me with wormwood". (p. 230)  
It is a disease which turns sufferers into hypochondriacs, intent on  
their own feelings and unwilling to be healed. The depths to which

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<sup>1</sup>Wyndham Lewis compares Nash's style with that of Joyce in  
Finnegans Wake. (Time and Western Man, pp. 106, 107)

<sup>2</sup>Sonnet "Thou blind man's mark", Renaissance Poetry, ed.  
Leonard Dean (New York, 1953), p. 51.

Basilius and Gynecia sink in their pursuits of Zelmane-Pyrocles equal Balthazar's infatuation and prove that, as Vladimir Nabokov reminds us, Dementia, as well as Death, is even in Arcady.<sup>1</sup> Lodge's Rosader complains of "a restless sore, that hath no ease; a canker that still frets; a dream that taketh away all hope of sleep".<sup>2</sup>

Arcadia, like Alexandria, is explicitly spoken of as a map of the inner condition, the habitat of beauty. (p. 400) But it is the whole climate and geography of Arcadia as it unfolds throughout the book which is truly the landscape of the mind. It is the conventional Arcady of romance, with shepherds and shepherdesses galore, but with a particular charm and an illusion of timelessness. The shepherd's boy pipes "as though he should never be old". (p. 8) Darley in his Greek Arcady hears a "shepherd's dry flute among the rocks". (B, p. 16) It is an idyllic pastoral place of light and health. (Arc, pp. 42 - 43) But it becomes the scene of political upheaval, terrible passions and dark, unnatural deeds. In analogy, Pyrocles and Musidorus, and their Philoclea and Pamela are young, strong and virtuous, and their loves are good, healthy loves which are darkened by the passions and perversions which seem to be set ablaze by this very goodness. A map of their "little world" shows it troubled with "unhabitable climes of cold despairs and hot rages". (p. 127)

The Italy of Nash's Unfortunate Traveller, with its secret violence and fatal loves, might be like Alexandria, a place of the unleashed subconscious. It too is a place of evil and fascination into which the

<sup>1</sup>Pale Fire, p. 237. Also "Even in Arcady am I, says/Death in the bombal scripture. (p. 124)

<sup>2</sup>Rosalynde. p. 94.

traveller dives and from which he emerges into the light of a healthy love. The inevitable shipwreck brings Pyrocles and Musidorus to the shores of Arcadia, with new identities for a new land. Water is a frequent symbol here, especially as Narcissus's mirror. Philoclea is described as "environed with sweet rivers of clear virtue". (p. 392) There is something still and clear about her, gentle and patient and iron-willed as she resists enemies and unwanted lovers. Durrell characterizes Clea as "still waters of pain", and gives her half of Philoclea's name. The two epigraphs could almost be interchanged and each would apply to both heroines. Despite their adversities, Philoclea and Clea by their very presence in their books, seem to guarantee the restoration of order and clarity.

The landscape is connected with memory; a place reminds men of an event, but it also is the present embodiment of what seemed to be past: "and here we find that as our remembrance came overclothed unto using the form of this place, so this place gives new heat to the fever of our languishing remembrance". (p. 2) The remembrance of things past is not an enjoyable experience for the Elizabethans. It is an awareness of time, of "my dear times' waste", Shakespeare's Sonnet 30 laments, and Sidney labels it "over-busy remembrance, remembrance, restless remembrance". (p. 1) Time here, as in Alexandria, is cyclic time, mutability, a personal problem. Basilius has to come to times with mutability; it is useless to plead: "Let not old age disgrace my high desire". (p. 124) Durrell makes his Conon say of Arcadia: "'There is no feeling of 'therefore' in it. Origin, reason, meaning it has none in the sense of recognizable past'". ("Conon the Critic on the

Six Landscape Painters of Greece". P, p. 108) Sidney's Strephon says, "But cause, effect, beginning, and the end/Are all in me". (p. 285)

Time as progress of cause-to-effect, beginning-to-end, is relative and subjective. Both Sidney and Durrell convey this in their system of different narrators telling the same story and making it therefore into several different stories. The divergence in viewpoint can be internal, so Musidorus because of his split self has to take two different positions as narrator. In one of these he can speak in the first person and be the subject of narration; in the other he must use the third person and be object. Something like this occurs in Balthazar when Darley has to retell Balthazar's version of the story in which he, Darley, is an object of observation.

Durrell has not written an updated Arcadia, but neither is the resemblance a superficial one. He deliberately "elizabethanizes", employing devices important to the renaissance writers to deal with matters which troubled them and which trouble him: the problem of one's identity in relation to others, the bisexual nature of the psyche, man's relation to time and place or space, the nature of art and artist. His enthusiasm for the Marlowe-to-Ford period is evident in his work, his letters and his spoken comments. And Gerald Durrell reports that the artist as a young man sang "Elizabethan love-songs in a meek tenor voice".<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>My Family, pp. 83, 125.

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